

CD 1

ACT ONE

Scene 1

The breakfast room at Lady Billows' house in Loxford

(Florence, the housekeeper, is clearing away breakfast things for one on to a tray. She takes the tray out into the kitchen and comes back with a feather duster.)

Lady Billows (off)

1 Flo—rence!...

(The text of her instruction is inaudible save for the last three words.)

... tell the midwife!

Florence *(who has stopped work to listen, shouting in reply)*

Very good, milady!

Lady Billows (off)

She's NOT to...!

(Florence continues dusting and tidying.)

Lady Billows (off)

Floren—ce!

(no reply)

FLO—ence!!

Florence

Here, milady!

Lady Billows

(another indistinct instruction, ending:-)

... Make him tear it up! Make him tear it up!

Florence

Yes, milady!

Lady Billows

DUST—bin!

Florence

Just on half-past ten.

(She gets her small household book and pencil and notes her latest instructions.)

2 Doctor Jessop's midwife... mustn't touch illegitimates...

advert in chemist's window indecent...
tear it up!

Call at Primrose Cottage...

Must stop William making *such*... rude noises,
or else...

Buy a breakfast cup...

(checking back on earlier notes)

Load of logs for Number Six, the Mount...

Mittens for Mr. Pilgrim... Did they say

how many from the almshouse

wanted copies of the Bishop's sermon?

... No more poppies in altar vases...

looks too Roman... Vicar must warn

choirboys... make responses quicker...

One lifetime,

one brain,

one pair of hands,

are all too few

for Lady B.

Each day some

new idea

makes new demands

upon her sense

of charity.

But oh!... But oh!... But oh!...

Sometimes I wish...

(As she is about to expand freely, she is interrupted by a knock at the door.)

She straightens her cap and apron and goes

to open it, admitting Miss Wordsworth, Mr.

Gedge, Mr. Upfold, and Police Superintendent

Budd.)

Miss Wordsworth

3 I hope we're not too early, Florence?

Florence

Oh no, miss. Her Ladyship's expecting you...

Vicar

Why, this looks almost like a deputation, eh?

Florence

Let me take your hats and sticks.

I'll say you've come.

(Florence takes their things and goes out)

Mayor

It's just on half-past ten.

We're very punctual by that clock.

Vicar

Come and sit here, Miss Wordsworth.

Miss Wordsworth

Let me stand till we're ready to begin.

Vicar

As you will —

(The clock chimes the half-hour.)

Superintendent Budd *(checking it by his watch)*

Ten seconds fast, I make that.

Mayor

No, you're slow! Exactly right by mine.

Miss Wordsworth *(going to the window)*

Oh I find it so refreshing to escape from school on a sunny day like this —

Vicar

Playing truant—?

Superintendent Budd *(shaking his watch)*

Funny being slow! Never known it...

Miss Wordsworth

... Free for a perfect hour or two of liberty...

Mayor

Wonderful weather for April, Mr. Gedge!

Superintendent Budd

(continuing his ruminations)

Wants oiling, I expect.

Miss Wordsworth

Look!...

Superintendent Budd

Dust in the works.

Miss Wordsworth

That hedge of rosemary is humming...

Vicar *(continuing his conversation with the Mayor)*

Quite perfect,...

Miss Wordsworth

... with bumble-bees!

Vicar

... Mr. Mayor! Promises a splendid May and June.

Superintendent Budd

In...

Mayor

That it does.

Superintendent Budd

... like a lion, out like a lamb!

That was true of March this year!

Mayor

It was!

Miss Wordsworth

And lo! the winter is past, the rain...

Vicar *(joining in)*

The rain...

Both *(variously)*

... is over and gone.

(in unison)

The flowers appear on the earth!

Vicar

Solomon's Song, you know!

Mayor *(impatiently)*

Well, since we're here...

Superintendent Budd

Her Ladyship was very distressed when she heard about Curtis's daughter...

Vicar

They...

[... tell me that's...

Miss Wordsworth

Appalling!

Vicar

... her third!

Superintendent Budd

She won't confess the father, silly girl!

Mayor

It's happening far too often!

Miss Wordsworth

Lily Jarvis is another problem!

Superintendent Budd

Twins, if you please!

Vicar

Drunken father, mother a slattern — these things breed...

[... immorality in the young.

Miss Wordsworth

[Their poor children!

Mayor

Something must be done!

Superintendent Budd

Hear, hear!

Vicar

A firm stand now before the evil spreads!...

Miss Wordsworth

Her Ladyship is all for that!

Superintendent Budd

Tho' she exaggerates occasionally!

Mayor

Strong measures are essential *now!*

Vicar

Of course they are!

Miss Wordsworth

Most essential!

Superintendent Budd

Hear, hear!

Vicar

This festival idea...

Mayor

Certainly!

Miss Wordsworth

Oh yes!

Vicar

... may help!

Miss Wordsworth

I have great...

[... hopes.

Superintendent Budd

Hear, hear! Hear, hear!

Mayor

Practical measures!

Vicar

[I'm all for that!

Florence (*bustling in*)

HUSH! She's *here...*!

Mayor

Careful now!

Miss Wordsworth

Oh! Her Ladyship —!

Superintendent Budd

Here she comes —

Vicar

Ah — Lady Billows!

(Lady Billows appears at the top of the stairs and walks heavily and deliberately down. She crosses unexpectedly to the window and pushes it open.)

Lady Billows

4 Stuff!

Tobacco stink!

Nasty masculine smell!

(As she comes back into the room to greet her visitors, her eye flickers accusingly across the Mayor and Superintendent Budd.)

Vicar

Good morning!

Lady Billows

Good morning!

Miss Wordsworth

Good morning!

Lady Billows

Good morning!

Mayor

Good morning!

Lady Billows

Good morning!

Superintendent Budd, Lady Billows

(practically simultaneously)

Good morning!

**Miss Wordsworth, Mayor, Vicar,
Superintendent Budd**

My lady, good morning!

**Miss Wordsworth, Florence,
Mayor, Superintendent Budd, Vicar**

This is the tenth of April,
the day your Ladyship planned
for our second and final meeting...
We're here to see how we stand;
for a Queen of the May
must be appointed by us to-day.

Lady Billows

All very punctual! Glad to see it. Early worms!

**Miss Wordsworth, Florence, Mayor,
Superintendent Budd, Vicar**

We've made our own investigations
and bring you our nominees
and we're ready whenever you please.

Lady Billows

- 5 Now then! Notebook, Florence! All know
why we're here. Only one item
on to-day's agenda — to choose
a Queen of the May.

May Queen! May Queen!
There's a lot of simple wisdom
in these old traditions —
Like Hallowe'en, Harvest Home,
chasing the Old Year out of the town,
and so on. Competition to be
May Queen,
when I was a girl, was amazingly keen!
Among the village girls, I mean.

All dressed in white
met on the Green
at noon on May the first to parade
before the Squire.
Squire picked the winner
and sat beside her during dinner.
Oh! you're too young to remember
How these things were done!

I'm putting up a prize this year.
Twenty-five sovereigns — twenty-five!
Consider it my duty. Must make
virtue attractive, exciting, *desirable*
for young people.
Too many goings-on!
Dirty things, ugh!

Our birth-rate rises every week:
poor Doctor Jessop is run off his feet,
delivering new babies to
mothers of whom excessively few
have taken the trouble of visiting *you*, Vicar!

Shocking business! No! I won't have it!
Town's in a state of complete moral chaos.
Well, then, all in favour signify, usual
manner...

*(All raise their hands. The clock strikes the
three quarters.)*

Unanimous! Good...
Let's have the suggestions.
I'm waiting! FIRST?...

Vicar

- 6 The first suggestion on my list
is a charming local girl
who takes Communion and never missed
a Sunday — Jennifer Searl.

Florence (*consulting her notebook*)

... had an affair
with young Tom O'Dair,
last Christmas...

Lady Billows

Case *dismissed!*

Miss Wordsworth

Of all the pupils from the school
it gives me particular pleasure
to recommend Elizabeth Newell
whose Botany notes are a treasure.

Florence

... was seen in the woods
after dusk with Tom Hood
last Tuesday...

Lady Billows

Cross her name off! No good!

Mayor

There's Winifred Brown who works in the town
as assistant to Mrs. Bell.
I've asked about her, and people concur
she behaves on the average quite well.

Florence

Except she went
with her cousin from Kent
for a trip in a dogcart one Sunday in Lent!

Superintendent Budd (*clearing his throat*)

Er-humph! Er-humph!

Lady Billows

Speak up, Budd!

Superintendent Budd

I've little to say, my Lady,
 so I'll make it short and sweet —
 the girl in my mind is a treasure, you'll find.
 — Her name is Amelia Keats.

Florence

Exposes her ankles
 and legs bold as brass.
 Her skirt's far too short
 for a girl of her class.
 None of these four...

[... seems to me more
 than half up to scratch
 as a Queen of the May!
Lady Billows (*interjecting irritably*)
 Won't accept one of 'em!
 Cross 'em all out!
 Can't waste time buttering parsnips...

... Want virgins, not trollops...
 More names?

Vicar

I have another name or two
 I brought with me in case
 the first was not acceptable.
 — What about Edith Chase?

Lady Billows (*to Florence*)

Well, what about her?

Florence

Much too flighty...

Vicar

She attends my Bible group...

Florence

When the postman called one day,
 she opened the door in her nightie!

Miss Wordsworth

Has anyone thought of the shoemaker's
 twins?...
 Joyce Mary and her sister?
 Most practical girls at Handicrafts...

Florence

I've heard of things from Mr. Budd about
 them both...

Lady Billows

Both of them?

Superintendent Budd

Take my Bible oath!...

Florence

He can't repeat what he caught them at...
 You'll pardon him, milady...

Superintendent Budd

There's that girl who works at Piper's farm...

Florence

Was lost one night and then found in a barn!

Miss Wordsworth

Oh...

Mayor

[The girl from the dairy?

Miss Wordsworth

[... surely...

[... there must be one to choose!

Florence

She won't refuse,
 though not ideal by a long chalk!

Lady Billows

Then don't suggest her!

Superintendent Budd

People talk of Nancy Waters, but I'm not sure...

Florence

The baker's daughter?
 No!... no! no! no! no! no! no! no! no!...

[... Couldn't have her for Queen of the May!

Vicar

[My mind has scoured...

... the parish through,...

Mayor

She runs after Sid,...

Vicar

... our lists are finished!

Mayor

[... who's my assistant,...

Miss Wordsworth

[What can we do?

Mayor

... and him after her,...

Miss Wordsworth

Not even one girl...

Mayor

... both very persistent.

Miss Wordsworth

... whom we can trust?

Superintendent Budd

I reckon that's true!

Mayor

It is!

Vicar

And must we cast our hopeful glances down?

Miss Wordsworth

Not even one in all the town?

Superintendent Budd

I reckon that's true!

Vicar

Unhappy?

Mayor

Unhappy?

Miss Wordsworth

Sad?

Superintendent Budd

Sad?

Vicar

Defeated?

Mayor

Sad?

Miss Wordsworth

Defeated?

Superintendent Budd

Defeated?

Miss Wordsworth, Mayor, Vicar

Before our...

[... project is completed?

Superintendent Budd

Sad!

Florence

You've none of you succeeded!

Vicar

Oh, bitter, bitter...

[... is the fruit...

Miss Wordsworth

I teach my...

Vicar

... sprung from the seed of sin.

Miss Wordsworth

... pupils they must strive...

Mayor

How sad to see...

[... a decent town

lose its good name and sink

slowly, slowly, slowly down

and hover on the brink!

Miss Wordsworth

... for moral grace and truth,

but they care little for advice

in headstrong days of youth.

Vicar

It feeds on poison at the root

and cankers all within.

Superintendent Budd

Policemen have a ticklish task

in stamping out abuses,

for human flesh is only grass

and darkness...

has its uses!

Lady Billows

7 Is this all you can bring?

Each single name

reeking impurities,

exuding moral blame?

Is there no more than this

to offer?

Not one thing but stinks

of sensual shame?

Florence (*echoing*)

... but stinks of sensual shame?

Lady Billows

Are Loxford girls all whores?

None clean, none sure?

Lascivious nanny-goats

each one, each one impure?

I'll curb their passions;

show them with a whip that laws
of morals must endure!

Florence (*echoing*)

... that morals must endure!

Lady Billows

Is this the town where I have lived and toiled?
A Sodom and Gomorrah,
ripe to be despoiled?
O spawning-ground of horror!
Shame to Loxford:
sty the female sex has soiled!

Florence (*echoing*)

... sty the female sex has soiled!

Lady Billows

Sty the...

*(The clock strikes four quarters and then the
hour of eleven.)*

Lady Billows and Florence

... female sex has soiled!

*(Lady Billows subsides, exhausted by her own
vehemence. The unhappy committee is pretty
exhausted too.)*

Superintendent Budd (*has a sudden
brainwave*)

- 8 Beggin' your pardon
I'd like to say —
Has anyone heard
of a *King of the May*?

Florence

King of the May?

Lady Billows

Fantastic!

Miss Wordsworth

I never did...

Vicar

Not in East Suffolk...

Mayor

I suppose you'd crown Sid?

Superintendent Budd

Maybe it seems a

rum sort of notion
but it might help us out
of the present commotion...

Lady Billows

"Rum" it may be; "helpful" no.
Mere red herring, Budd —

Superintendent Budd

Just so!
Herring's the name and Herring's the lad!
Fellow we're wanting is there to be had.
Albert Herring!...

All (*in surprise*)

Albert Herring...?

Superintendent Budd

... Works for his mother...
has a greengrocer's shop... strong as a
horse...
works till he drops... bit simple, of course...
but we won't find another...
Albert Herring's clean as
new-mown hay;
honest, truthful, keen as
Colman's mustard,
as they say!
Never kicks up rough as
most boys do —
Albert's real good stuff,
as good as gold, right
through and through!

Vicar

I know the boy you mean, but is he quite...?

Mayor

I've seen him since he was a kid. He's always
lived next door to me...

Miss Wordsworth

When he attended school poor Albert
was not bright at lessons, tho' quite
exceptional for conduct...

Vicar

An inoffensive lad — simple, of course...

Mayor

A splendid son to Mrs. Herring...

Lady Billows

What precisely has a grocer's lad to do
with this discussion?

Ridiculous proposal! I'm certain
there are girls —
farmer's daughters, maybe —
suitable for us. Florence?...

Florence

Hopeless, milady. I've been round all
the farms and smallholdings.
Shocking results!
Country virgins,
if there be such,
think too little
and see too much.

Lady Billows

I am a very disappointed woman!
Either we abandon the Festival, or...

Superintendent Budd

Albert Herring!

Lady Billows (*with angry distaste*)

Albert Herring!
(*turning to the Vicar for advice*)
Vicar...?

Vicar

Virtue,
says Holy Writ,
Is... *Virtue*.
Grace abounding
whensoever,
wheresoever,
howsoever
it exists.
Rarer than
pearls...
rubies...
amethyst,
richer than
wealth,
wisdom,
righteousness!
Is Albert virtuous?
Yes? Or no?
That is all we
need to know.

Miss Wordsworth

Albert is virtuous.
Yes, I know,...

Florence

They say he's virtuous,
as boys go,...

Mayor

He's very virtuous,
don't you know,...

Superintendent Budd

What, Albert virtuous?
That I know,...

Vicar

Is Albert virtuous? Albert virtuous?
Yes or no? Yes...

... or no? That...

Miss Wordsworth

He is truly, truly so!

Florence

... everybody tells me so.

Mayor

... everybody thinks him so.

Superintendent Budd

Certainly he must be so.

Vicar

... is all we need to know,
that is all we need...

... to know,
that is all we need to know.

Lady Billows

Albert... What's his name?

All

Herring.

Lady Billows

9 Herring.
Right! We'll have him! May King!
That'll teach the girls a lesson!
May King! May King!
Remarkable position.
Cause a great sensation
on the First of May.

Florence

Let's go and tell him
announcing our decision;
warn him to be ready...

Lady Billows

... on the First of May...

Florence

... on the First of May...

Lady Billows

... on the First of May...

Florence, Lady Billows (*variously*)
... on the First of May!

Vicar

Most satisfactory!
Magnificent solution
for the Coronation
on the First of May! *etc.*

Florence

On the First of May!
Announcing our decision,
warn him to be ready,
announcing our decision,
for the First of May! *etc.*

Lady Billows

On the First of May!
Remarkable position,
cause a great sensation
on the First of May! *etc.*

Miss Wordsworth

So encouraging
for all our dear young people.
Virtue is rewarded
on the First of May! *etc.*

Mayor

Urban District Councillors
all over Eastern Suffolk,
envy little Loxford
on the First of May! *etc.*

Superintendent Budd

Er-humph! Er-humph!
All the police force
will have to be on duty,
keeping things in order,
on the First of May! *etc.*

Lady Billows

Rejoice, my friends, and be exceeding glad!

The rest

Virtue has signal'd forth
her champion and defender!

Lady Billows

A village lad, a village lad!

The rest

Humble in looks, lowly birth,
beneath whose apron beats a heart...

Lady Billows

... to conquer sin,...

The rest

... repel temptation...

Lady Billows

... to conquer sin,...

The rest

... render back to virtue
what she entrusts to him...

Lady Billows

... without respect of gender...

The rest

... her crown of simple and refulgent
splendour!

Lady Billows

... without respect of gender...

The rest

... her crown of simple splendour!

Lady Billows

... without respect of gender...

The rest

... of gender!

Lady Billows

... without respect of gender!

10 Interlude

Scene 2

Mrs. Herring's grocery shop. Emmie, Cis, and Harry are outside the shop, playing ball against the lower half of the door. The upper half of the door is open.

Emmie, Cis, Harry

11 Bounce me high,
bounce me low,
bounce me up to Jericho!
Bounce me slow,
bounce me quick,
bounce me to arithmetick!
(They clap their hands.)
Bounce me high,
bounce me low,
bounce me up to Jericho!
Bounce me slow...

(The ball misses, flies through the door, and rolls across the shop.)

Emmie

Go on, Harry, the old girl's out!

Cis

She's out! —

EmmieWe'll help you up. Hold tight!
Watch the bell don't ring...**Harry** *(as the girls shove him over the door)*Mind my trousers!
Ow! —**Emmie, Cis**

All right?

*(Harry looks round the shop.)***Emmie** *(whispers)*

There it is... by that old box!

Harry *(throwing the ball to them)*Catch!
(catching sight of a box of apples)
Ooh! apples!
*(He pinches one.)***Cis**

Give us some too, Harry!

(He passes some out to the girls.)

Ta!

Emmie

Look out! S'pose Albert came —?

Harry

Silly old fool! Can't catch me!

Emmie

Ooh! What lovely apples!

Cis

Lovely apples!

Harry

Some more?

Cis

Some more?

Emmie

Some more?

Harry

Here's some more!

Sid *(arriving unexpectedly: to Harry)*

Come out of that, my lad!

Emmie, Cis

Look out! It's Sid!

Sid *(going in pursuit of Harry)*

I'll teach you to pinch apples!

Emmie, Cis

Big bully, you!

Sid *(grabbing hold of Harry)*

Little beggar!

Harry

Ow! Leggo!

Sid

Damn good hiding's what you need!

Emmie

Nosey Parker, too!

Cis

Nosey Parker!

Sid

Empty your pockets!

Harry

Leggo of me!

Emmie

[Leave him be!

Sid

]Is that the lot?

Cis

Leave him be!

Emmie

[Leave him be!

Sid

]Well then...

Cis

[Leave him be!

Sid

]... get...

(throwing Harry out of the door)

[... out!

Harry

Ow!

Emmie, Cis

Ah!...

(as they scamper away)

... We'll tell his dad

Sid from the butcher's knock'd Harry about!

Sid...

Emmie

... from the butcher's knock'd Harry about!

Emmie, Cis

Sid...

Cis

... from the butcher's knock'd Harry about!

Emmie, Cis

Sid!

Sid *(shouting)*

12 Shop! Hi! Albert!

(catching sight of the rifled box of apples)

Ooh! Apples!

(having helped himself)

Shop! Hi! Albert!

(There is a dull thud against the inner door and Albert comes slowly in backwards shouldering a large sack of vegetables.)

There you are! —

Just caught young Harry pinching things —
How d'you carry a weight like that alone? —

Cor —

Must be twenty stone or more!

Albert

It's a hundredweight of turnips.

Sid

I see!

Strong man act! Can I have three
boxes of mixed herbs, please, chum?

Albert

Yes —

Sid

Got any sage? —

Albert *(going behind the counter to serve)*

We've some

at threepence a box, same as the mixed.

Sid

I'll take three then. That makes six
boxes at threepence — one and a kick.

Albert

That's right.

Sid

Toss you — double or quits!

Albert

Oh no, Sid, gambling's not in my line.

Mum wouldn't like it...

Sid

Never you mind!

Heads or tails? — Come on — you call!

Albert

No, really I won't, thanks all
the same.

Sid

But why? Because of Mum?

Won't she let you have any fun?

Did you ever have a pint at the local?

Albert

Mum's teetotal...

Sid

Or go out with a whippet after rabbits?

Albert

Strict in her habits...

Sid

Did you never try taking a girl for a walk?

Albert

Do stop this talk!...

Sid

Or dance to the band at the Jubilee Hall?

Albert

... I don't like it at all!

Sid

Or dance to the band?

Albert

I just don't like it at all!

Sid!

Or dance to the band at the Jubilee Hall?

Albert

Not at all!

Sid

You will, once you've broke the apron-strings!

- 13 Tickling a trout,
poaching a hare,
flighting wild geese
is pretty good sport
for a chap to enjoy.
Living without
a regular share
of pleasures like these
is hard to support
for your kind of a boy.
But courting a girl is the King of all sports
in a class of its own,
where there aren't any rules so long as
she's caught
and you catch her alone.

Girls mean:

Spring six days a week
and twice on Sundays,
the whole year round
the winter through.

Girls mean:

Games of hide-and-peek
on summer evenings,
when someone's bound
to fall for you!

Girls mean:

Prowling round in bleak
and wintry weather
whispering, whispering, whispering
"I love you, I love you, I love you,
love you!"

Albert (*who has been going about his work, embarrassed*)

Sid, I'm sorry
but I've got
a lot to do...

Sid

Oh, don't you worry!
I'm just off.
I'm busy too.

Nancy (*looking in through the top half of the door*)

Good morning, you two!

Sid

Why, look who's here!
(*opening the door for Nancy to enter*)
Good morning, good morning, good morning!

Albert

Good morning.

Sid

You've just come in time —
We were talking of you.

Nancy

Talking of me —?
You have got a sauce!

Sid

It was Albert who started the subject, of course.
You want to watch Albert — he's a very dark horse!

Nancy

You ought to have something better to do than gossiping here. Aren't you working today?

Sid

I've been spinning around like a humming top since I opened the shop at eight o'clock, — and you know what they say about work and no play!

Nancy

Well, come and serve me. I'm in a hurry — I've come for a piece of best English beef.

Sid

There's no need to worry! Have a nice peach?

Nancy

Ooh! May I really?

Albert

Those are sixpence each! —

Sid

Take two — I'll stand the damage.

Albert

Two peaches at sixpence — that's a shilling, please.

Sid

I think I can just about manage to squeeze out a bob from the firm's petty cash.

Nancy

I won't eat them now.
They're so ripe they might splash.

Sid

You can bring them tonight
and we'll each take a bite,
to flavour our kisses
with a dash of peach bitters.

Nancy

That sounds just delicious!

Sid

- 14 Meet me at quarter past eight
in the street,
don't be late
or I'll whistle
under your window.

Nancy

Yes! If you promise to wait
in the street, if I'm late
and not whistle under my window.
For Mum will be curious and Dad will be
furious
to hear whistling under our window...

[... I'll try to...

Sid

Do try to...

Both

[... be there
If you (I) possibly can
for the night will be fine and clear.

Albert (*to himself, uncomfortably*)

I wish they would clear
right away from our shop
for it's hard not to overhear!
There'll be trouble, I fear,
should my Mother appear
and discover them flirting,
flirting here!

Sid, Nancy

We'll walk to the spinney
up over the Common
arm in arm,
Your (my) hand in my (your) pocket,
refreshing ourselves in the pleasures of love!
The moon will be shining
the sky will be starry
as we walk,
your (my) hand in my (your) pocket,

refreshing ourselves in the pleasures of love!
And if it is raining
we'll share an umbrella
as we walk,
your (my) hand in my (your) pocket,
refreshing ourselves in the pleasures of love!

Albert

And I shall be sleeping
alone in my attic
as they walk,
her hand in his pocket,
refreshing themselves in the pleasures of
love!
Excuse me...!

Sid

Give us a kiss, Nancy!

Nancy

No, no! Shopping first — kisses afterwards!

Sid (*impatient*)

Come on, then!
So long, Albert!

Nancy

Goodbye, Albert!

(*They go out. Albert runs after them to the door.*)

Albert

Hi! Sid!... You forgot to pay for the herbs!
(*No answer. Albert comes back into the shop.*)

- 15 He's much too busy
even to listen
much less to care
with Nancy there.
I wonder is he
right when he says
I miss all the fun
because of Mum?
Yes, Mum's uncommon keen
about the need
of living chaste and clean
in word and deed.
For what?
Each morning I get up at six
and tidy up the stock,
enthusiastically fix
price labels round the shop.
For what? For what? For what?
It's not very thrilling to live among boxes
and baskets
of vegetables, flowers and seasonal fruits:

I'm expert at jobs like weighing up punnets of raspberries and knowing when root-crops are likely to shoot.

For what? For what? For what?
(meditatively)

It seems as clear as clear can be, that Sid's ideas are very much too crude for Mother to approve. And yet I'd really like to try that kind of life, and see how it compares with serving customers.

(Emmie rushes in, breathless and in a great hurry.)

Emmie

Mum wants twopennorth of pot-herbs to make a stew in a hurry, Mister!

Albert

Where's your basket?

Emmie

Haven't got one, bust it! My sister went and lost it!

Albert

I'll put 'em in paper —

Emmie

Taa! That'll be safer than taking 'em loose.

Albert

No school to-day?

Emmie

Got extra holiday.

Albert

What ever for?

Emmie

On account of Miss Weaver our Botany teacher went camping at Easter, got scarlet-fever. She was sharing our tent when she came out all spotty, so they sent us all home with a letter explaining they wouldn't expect us at school for a week in case we're infectious.

It sounds a bit potty, but we're not complaining!

Albert *(handing her the parcel)*

Tuppence, please! There you are.

Emmie

Don't mind farthings, do you? Thanks, Mister! Taa!
(She dashes off again.)

Albert

Oh, maybe soon I'll have the chance to get away...

and golly! Golly! It's about time — Golly, it's about time, about time...

Florence *(entering the shop)*

16 Good morning, young man.

Albert

Good morning, Miss Pike.

Florence

I want if I can to talk to your Mum.

Albert

I'll call her at once — but she's washing the clothes.

Florence

The reason I've come is more urgent than those!

Albert *(calling through the inner door.)*

Mum! you're wanted!

Mum

What? Who is it?

Albert

Miss Florence Pike is here on a visit!
(to Florence)
Just drying her hands —
Would you care to sit down?

Florence

No thank you, I'll stand — I mustn't stay long.

Mum *(entering drying her arms on a towel)*

I'm sorry to keep you and how do you do?
Nice sunny day
for the time of year, too!

Florence

Her Ladyship is on her way
with Miss Wordsworth and the Vicar,
Messrs. Budd and Upfold, too
to visit you here...

Mum

What did you say?
Visiting *us*? But they can't come in here!
A shop's not the place for people like them!

Florence

We shall get on...
(*carrying through Mrs. Herring's explanations*)

[... much quicker
if you will be...

Mum

[And I can't have them into the parlour today...

Florence

... silent...

Mum

I'm airing the washing,...

Florence

... and listen...

Florence

[... to me!

Mum

[airing it there!

Florence

The decision
they bring concerns Albert, as they
will explain...

[... for themselves.

Mum

[Concerns Albert?

Albert

Concerns *me*, do you say?

Mum

Oh! don't say that Albert's in trouble
some way!

Florence

Be quiet now! Are you ready?
(*as Lady Billows, accompanied by the Vicar,
Mayor, Superintendent Budd and Miss
Wordsworth, crosses the window*)
Here they come!

Lady Billows (*having entered*)

[17] We bring great news to you
upon this happy day!
Patronage and fame
applaud your name!

**Miss Wordsworth, Florence, Mayor,
Vicar, Superintendent Budd**

Declaring you
Loxford King of the May!

Mum

They're talking to you, Albert!...

Albert

I don't quite get their meaning —

Florence

You've been chosen as May King.

Albert

Chosen as what?

Florence

As May King!

Albert

What! Me?

Florence

Yes, you!

Mum

Oh, Albert! Oh, Albert!

Florence

Hush!

Lady Billows

We plan to celebrate
by crowning you upon
May Day afternoon:
that's fairly soon —

**Miss Wordsworth, Florence, Mayor,
Vicar, Superintendent Budd**

Not long to wait!
Just till April's gone!

Mum

Excuse my asking — what's this crowning for?

Albert

I'd like to know that too.

Vicar

In honour of your
pure, virtuous life —

Miss Wordsworth

Reward for chastity!

Mayor

Official recognition of your modesty! —

Albert

Well, I'll be blowed!

Superintendent Budd

What costume will he wear?

Florence

White like a swan!

Vicar

A royal crown!

Mum

And where will *that* come from?

Albert

Me dressed in white?
Oh no!

Lady Billows

We'll see to that all right.

Florence

Bring me his size in shoes and hats tonight
to give the tailor —

Mum

Seems ridiculous to me! —

Albert

The whole thing's *daft!*

Lady Billows

Now, Herring, don't be hasty!

Vicar

But before we part
should we not mention?...

Miss Wordsworth

But of course!

Mayor

Of course, the prize!

**Florence, Mayor, Superintendent Budd,
Miss Wordsworth, Vicar** (*variously, entering
the ensemble in above order*)

Of course! The prize!
The prize, the prize, the prize!

Lady Billows

When this great day arrives,
Albert will receive, besides his crown,
a prize in golden coins...
five-and-twenty pounds,
yes, five-and-twenty pounds!

Mum

Twenty-five pounds all of his own!
Albert, say "Thank you!" — as well as
a crown?

Lady Billows

In offering this prize,
our aim is to ensure
virtue has its just
reward from us!

**Miss Wordsworth, Florence, Mayor,
Vicar, Superintendent Budd**

And so goodbye,
Albert! No!...
(*with Lady Billows*)
Au revoir!

Mum (*escorting them to the door and leading
them out*)

Good morning to you all! Good morning to
you all!
(*returning*)

Well, think of that, my lad,
being King of the May and all
and the envy of everyone,
King of the May!
And twenty-five quid in addition!

Albert

But I don't want that kind of position
and I don't think I'm going to accept.

Mum

You won't accept? Why ever not?
You can't refuse!

Albert

Oh yes, I can!

Mum

Not while you live with me, young man!
You'll do as you're told!

Albert

Now listen, Mum!

Mum

Don't *listen* me!

Albert

Why should they come
and dress me up like a blinking swan,
make speeches at me
like I was stuffed
instead of flesh and blood?

Mum

Stop shouting at me and fetch my tape
from the box on the kitchen safe.
I'll measure you up!

Albert

Oh no,...

[... you won't!

Mum

I'll measure...

... you up!

Albert

Oh no, you won't!

Mum

You heard what I said!

Albert

I did, and don't
you think I'm willing, 'cos I'm not.

Mum

I'll take a strap to you, that's what!

Albert

You try it then!

Mum

Young devil!

Albert

I'm old enough
to choose for myself!

Mum

I brought you up!

Albert

You *shut* me up in the shop all day!

Mum

Oh!...

The wicked ingratitude of it! You'll pay
for this, my boy.

Albert

I'm sick and tired
of being ordered about —

Mum (*getting a firm grim on Albert and
propelling him towards the inner door*)
You little liar! You little liar!

Albert

I'm sick and tired...

Mum

I won't stand here and be attacked
by a kid who wants his bottom smacked!
Go up to bed! Go up to bed! Shut the door
and don't you dare to come down before
you're ready to say sorry.

Emmie, Cis, Harry (*who have been watching
the quarrel through the shop door*)
Albert's Mum took a stick,...

Mum (*to her rebellious son*)

Go on!

Emmie, Cis, Harry

... whacked him on the thingmijig!

Mum (*still to poor Albert*)

You devil!

Emmie, Cis, Harry

Albert hopped...

Mum

You devil!

Emmie, Cis, Harry

... round the shop,
squeaking like a tillypig!

Mum

I'll teach you!

Emmie, Cis, Harry

Albert's Mum
took a stick,
whacked him on the thingmijig!

Mum

Go on!

Emmie, Cis, Harry

Albert hopped
round the shop,
squeaking like a tillypig!

Mum (*suddenly conscious of the kids' presence, slams the shop door in their faces*)
Shoo!

Emmie, Cis, Harry (*running off, laughing*)
Ha!... ha! ha! ha! ha!

Mum

Twenty-five quid! Twenty-five quid!
Bloody little fool!... Bloody little fool!

ACT TWO**Scene 1**

Inside a marquee set up in the Vicarage garden. There is a trestle-table loaded with jellies, cakes, and other goodies. When the curtain rises, Nancy is bringing in plates of sandwiches. Florence comes in from outside, dressed in her Sunday-best, and considerably fussed.

Florence

18 Isn't he here?

Nancy

Not yet.

Florence

Oh, drat the lad!

Nancy

He promised to come by three...

Florence

I'm astonished at him,
today of all days!...

Nancy

Don't trouble to wait...

Florence

I should hate to miss them.

Nancy

There's only the meat to unpack and
put out on the plates. I can easily
do that alone.

Florence

The Vicar especially asked me to be there
at half-past, to be took
in the photograph group for
The Ipswich and District Gazette.

Nancy

*(as Sid arrives outside the tent on his bicycle,
and proceeds to unload a large box of food.)*
Here he is at last!

Florence

And high time too!

Nancy

Hurry up, Sid!

Sid (*entering the tent*)
Am I late?

Florence
Everything's ready but *you!*

Sid
Sorry, Miss Pike!
Punctured my bike!...

Florence
Punctured your bike! Punctured your bike!
19 For three precious weeks
we've been toiling and scraping,
bustling, hurrying,
hurrying, scurrying,
with one aim in sight —
and now at the eleventh hour
you... you... *you*
keep everything waiting
because of your bike!
I think you're lazy and most reprehensible!
Surely you know that the meat's
indispensable?
Lateness on May Day is quite indefensible!

Nancy
It's twenty-past...

Florence (*hurrying away*)
Then I must fly, or they'll leave me out!

Sid (*shouting after her as she goes*)
You bumble off! That'll be much more
sensible!
(*examining the display of entables*)
That's a fine sight for sore eyes!

Nancy
Don't you think it's a splendid surprise?

Sid
And they make all this fuss,
'cos Albert's too shy to go out on a bust...!

Nancy
What were things like down in the town?

Sid
Churchyard's agog with a crowd of folk
who couldn't get in for the service.
Seats have been kept for the Band of Hope,
and each choirboy has got a new surplice.
The Vicar is preaching on "Living Chaste
for the Hereafter" —

some of his listeners are solemn-faced,
some near to laughter.
And Albert! — sitting there in his pew,
the poor kid looks on tenterhooks.
He's in the mood to escape if he could.
I'd like to see him go for good!

Nancy
Sid, tell me the truth about why you were late.

Sid
What do you mean?

Nancy
You've got some scheme!

Sid
How did you guess?

Nancy
I know by the grin
on your face and the gleam
in your eye... Confess!

Sid
Can you keep a secret?

Nancy
Mum as an oyster.

Sid
Then I'll tell you the plot
while we empty this box.

(*They go out, carrying the box between them.*
Miss Wordsworth leads in Emmie, Cis and
Harry in their party best.)

Miss Wordsworth
20 Quickly, quickly, come along, come along!
Time to try our festive song
last time through before they come!

Emmie (*whispering*)
Blimey! Jelly!

Cis (*likewise*)
Pink blancmange!

Harry
Seedy cake! Seedy cake!

All three
With icing on!

Miss Wordsworth

All stand neatly in a row,
head back! Fingers so!
One deep breath and off we go!

Emmie (*as before*)

Treacle tart!

Cis

Sausagey rolls!

Harry

Trifle! Trifle!

All three

In a big bowl!

Miss Wordsworth

Food comes later — first we sing
“*Glory to our new May King!*”
Try to make the welkin ring!
Attention now! No fidgeting.
(*She sounds her pitch-pipe.*)
There is Doh!
One and two and...
(*She beats one.*)
No! When I reach two
you have to be
agog to start
on the beat of three!

Emmie

Chicken and ham!

Cis

Cheesey straws!

Harry

And marzipan!

Miss Wordsworth

(*having again sounded the pipe*)
One and two and...

Emmie, Cis, Harry (*singing*)

Glory to our new May King!

Miss Wordsworth

Oh! Oh, what a noise! Oh, what a noise!
That’s much too shrill,
and Harry, you should
just try to keep still!
(*She sounds her pitch pipe again*)
One and two and...

Children (*singing*)

Glory to our new May King!
Albert, ‘ail, all...

Miss Wordsworth

Not ‘ail, my dears!
The word is *Hail!*
A clean, crisp note
from an open throat.
Hail!
Insert your aitches
in their proper places.
Albert, Hail! All Hail! We Sing...

Children

Halbert, Hail! Hall Hail!

Miss Wordsworth

Too many now,
but that must do!
Try the next lines
fervently through.
Sing with fire!
Beginning on Fah.
You, Emmie, higher —
your note is Lah.
Doh... Ray... Mi... Fah!... Soh... Lah!

Children

Each single voice
cries out “rejoice!”
(*Harry’s voice can be distinguished, out of time.*)
in happy song
both loud...

Miss Wordsworth

Oh, Harry! This is where you always go
wrong!
Just follow Cis, she’ll help you along.

Harry (*raising his hand*)

Please, teacher?
(*Urgent whispering in which the words:
Excuse me! can be heard.*)

Miss Wordsworth

Don’t take too long!
Our song must begin
exactly on their coming in!

(*She shepherds the children out. Sid and
Nancy come in with jugs of lemonade.*)

Nancy

I don’t think you ought!

Sid

Stop spoiling the fun! Is this where he's sitting?

Nancy

The right-handed one!

Sid

Then you begin filling the glasses all up, while I add a drop to His Majesty's cup.

(Nancy begins pouring lemonade into the glasses all round the table. Taking the glass from Albert's place, Sid produces a hip-flask from his pocket.)

Nancy

Don't give him too much! He mustn't get tight...

Sid

Just loosen him up, and make him feel bright. *(having poured some rum into the glass)* I think that's all right. Now add lemonade —

Nancy *(as she fills the glass up with lemonade)*

It's much the same shade —

Sid

Now no-one can smell there's rum in as well.

Nancy

Excepting for Albert —

Both

And he'll never tell!

Nancy *(catching sight of the procession approaching)*

Quick, here they are! Fill up the rest.

Sid

We'll stand at the side — that'll be best.

(They finish filling all the glasses, just as Miss Wordsworth ushers in the children again, each carrying a bunch of country flowers.)

Miss Wordsworth

21 Here they are, dears! Quickly, come along! Do remember! Do remember... Nice neat curtsies! Deep breaths!

Superintendent Budd

(escorting Mrs. Herring into the tent) It's a great day for your son, Mrs. Herring.

Mum

Yes, he does look a treat in his white suit. I couldn't help feeling proud of him too.

Mayor *(entering with Florence)*

Today's a big affair for you, Miss Pike!

Florence

For three weeks at least we've been planning this feast, your Worship!

Vicar

See Virtue...

[... triumphs in Albert here... Albert here.

Lady Billows

Is this the town which I have cherished and loved!

Emmie, Cis, Harry

Cor! Look at Albert!

Miss Wordsworth *(sounding her pipe)*

One and two and...

Emmie, Cis, Harry

Glory to our new May King! Albert, hail! All hail! we sing! *(At this point, Miss Wordsworth adds her voice: variously.)*

Every voice cries out "rejoice!" in happy song both loud and long! *(Miss Wordsworth, feeling they are safely past the awkward point, ceases to sing.)* Hail, Albert! Albert! we cry. Welcome to Your Majesty. Hail! Albert! Hail! we cry. Welcome to Your Majesty.

Miss Wordsworth, Emmie, Cis, Harry

Hail!

(There is an outburst of applause tempered by some expressions of disappointment.)

Sid

Crikey! What an awful noise!

Nancy

Do be quiet, Sid, they were doing their best.

Florence

Thank you, dears, I hope you sang
rightly what teacher intended.

Mayor

Tuneful and interesting! Very good, I'm sure!

Mum

That was splendid, splendid, quite appropriate!

Superintendent Budd

Bravo, Bravo! A fine effort!

Vicar

Very harmonious. Did Miss Wordsworth write it?

Lady Billows

Quite nicely sung, but rather modern, wasn't it?

Miss Wordsworth (*shushing everyone*)

Husssh!...

Harold Wood! Harold Wood!

*(Harry is pushed forward to present his
flowers to Lady Billows.)*

Harry

- 22 My flowers are few
and tender my years
but they are for you
whom Loxford reveres.
(He shoves his flowers at Lady Billows.)

Lady Billows

Quite delightful!

Miss Wordsworth

Emmie Spatchett!

Emmie (*kneeling at Albert's feet, to his
confusion*)

Simple song
country flowers
wish you long
and happy hours.
(She gives Albert the flowers she is carrying.)

Miss Wordsworth

Now, Cissie Woodger!

Cis (*nervously going forward to present Mrs.
Herring with a bouquet*)
Hooray for the...

Miss Wordsworth (*sotto voce*)

Mother...

Cis

... the mother of...

Miss Wordsworth

... Albert...

Cis

... of Albert the...

Miss Wordsworth

... King...

Cis

... the King.

Miss Wordsworth (*encouragingly*)

Go on, dear!

Cis

Hooray for the...

Miss Wordsworth (*driven to resume her
prompting*)

'Twas yours to dis-...

Cis

Hooray...

Miss Wordsworth

'Twas yours...

Cis (*growing more desperate every moment*)

Hooray...

Miss Wordsworth (*ditto*)

'Twas yours...

Cis

Hooray,...

[... hooray, hooray...

Miss Wordsworth

'Twas your to dis-

Cis (*bursting into tears*)

Boo! hoo! hoo! hoo! hoo! hoo! hoo!

Mum (*taking the flowers*)

Well done, dearie! Very nice, I'm sure...

Lady Billows

Thank you, children!
And thank you, Miss Wordsworth!
Come, let's sit down.

(chatting, as they search for their places at the table and finally sit)

Miss Wordsworth

That was excellent, children.

Sit down quietly.

Emmie, Cis, Harry

Coo! I'm jolly hungry!

Lady Billows

Albert, come on my right hand.

Albert *(dreadfully embarrassed by the bouquet he is holding)*

Won't somebody take this for me?

I don't know what to do with it!

Mum *(searching for her place)*

Where d'you think I'd be? I'm the King's Mum.

Superintendent Budd

Over here, Mrs Herring! Next to me!

Sid

Chinwagging! What an awful lot of rot!

Nancy

Oh, I must stay and listen. This'll be fun!

Mayor *(also searching for his place)*

This me? Where d'you think his Worship sits?

Florence

Food comes after speeches. Vicar, you start!

Vicar

Just a few words of introduction.

That will be most suitable!

(rising and rapping the table for silence)

... Your Ladyship!... Ladies and gentlemen...

Girls and boys!

I shall not trespass on your time... I rise —

Ex officio —

To introduce Her Ladyship,

and ask her if she will

consent to make a little speech

before we take our fill?

Lady Billows

Thank you, thank you, Mister Gedge!

CD 2

- 1 I'm full of happiness
to be here in your midst
on such a day as this,
as honoured guest and patroness
of the Loxford Urban District May-Day Feast.

(Applause)

Seated upon my right is Albert Herring...

a young man chosen, marked out, set apart

for honest worth and purity of heart.

You see that in the costume he is wearing —

virgin white and orange blossom crown.

Dear children!

You, you, the rising generation!

Never forget the meaning of this day!

Treasure its example! Think, oh think

of Albert! Scorn the sweetmeats of temptation

seducing you from straight and narrow ways...

Carnal indulgence! Gambling! Playing cards!

Irreligion! Patriotism is not enough!...

and drink!

The havoc wrought by gin! Oh, never start

that dreadful habit, or you're lost forever!

King and Country! Cleanliness is next to —

God for England and Saint — Keep

your powder dry and leave the rest to

nature!... Britons!...

(winding up, to the enthusiastic acclamations of the assembled company)

... Britons rule the deep, rule the deep, rule!

The rest *(severally and in varying combinations)*

Hooray! Hooray! Hooray!

Lady Billows

(when the acclamations have subsided)

Albert! Arise! Stand to receive

this purse of otterskin — my father shot

the brute in 'fifty-six on Christmas Eve —

with five and twenty sovereigns inside!

Take it, my boy! Take it with joyful pride!

All this is yours, and you deserve the lot!

(Applause as Albert takes the purse and raises his hat.)

Vicar *(rising again, as Her Ladyship sits)*

Magnificent, your Ladyship!

Our best thanks to you!

A splendid speech, a splendid prize

and splendidly deserved!

Now, Mister Mayor, will you please rise

and add another word?

Mayor (*reading mechanically*)

- 2 As representing our Local Council,
I'm very happy to declare
ourselves in full agreement with Her
Ladyship,
thanking her most hearty — heartily —
for the ideal
she sets our town in moral leadership.
The repercussions of this Festival
will travel far, wide, deep and strong...
like when my Council, acting for the best of all
its citizens, laid the twelve-inch water-main...
costing six pounds ten the yard... that runs
along
thro' Balacava Avenue...
regardless of objections!...
to guarantee pure water filtered
from infections.
Now Loxford leads again by being first, yes!
First in crowning a May King.
"Well done!" I hear you cry...
"Well done!" I hear you cry...?

Mayor, Vicar (*giving a lead*)

Well done!

Mum, Miss Wordsworth

Well done!

**Lady Billows, Emmie, Cis, Harry, Nancy,
Florence, Sid, Superintendent Budd**

Well done!...

All save the Mayor

We...

Mayor (*cutting their appropriate, if somewhat
laggard, plaudits short*)

My Council wishes me to mark to-day
by offering this prize to Albert, which they
have voted from the Entertainment Fund —
this Savings Book in which
he'll find five pounds.

(*More applause as he hands Albert the
Savings Book.*)

Vicar

Fascinating, Mister Mayor!
A fitting gift indeed
to store away
for a rainy day
and keep in case of need.

And now, Miss Wordsworth,
you will not disappoint us? Oh!

(*as Emmie, who had left the table, reappears
with two large tomes which she places before
Miss Wordsworth*)

You have a surprise, I see!...

Miss Wordsworth

- 3 My heart leaps up with joy to see
virtue and simplicity
applauded, rewarded and glorified
with heartfelt warmth on every side!
Albert! Albert! the teachers from the school,
Miss Podd, Miss Turtle,
dear Miss Butler and Miss Toole,
are proud of you, proud of you,
as I am too,
and profoundly stirred by your renown.
Albert! Albert! Albert!
They send this little gift to you
for rainy afternoons —
Foxe's Book of Martyrs —
in two fine volumes, illustrated,
inscribed to you appropriately,
and dated.

(*Applause as Albert receives the books from
Miss Wordsworth.*)

Vicar

*The Bible, Shakespeare, Foxe's Book of
Martyrs...*

Three cornerstones of our national heritage!
Thank you, Miss Wordsworth, very much.
To make our thanks complete, one voice
is missing!
Yes, Mister Budd's,
last, but hardly *least*!

Superintendent Budd (*rising*)

- 4 Er-humph! Er-humph! I'm no great shakes as a
speechifier,
but my heart's warm enough, if you know
what I mean!
It's chaps like young Albert keep the
British Empire
on top of the world where it has always
been.
Good old Albert! Good old Albert! that's my
opinion...
Good luck, good luck, good luck to you, my
boy!...
Er-humph! Er-humph!

Before I wind up,
I mustn't forget to thank Mrs. Williams
for the loan of her flagpole and two dozen cups.

(He sits abruptly. Applause just too late for comfort)

Vicar

Thank you! Thank you!
Now I'm certain Albert feels the need
of speaking in his turn...
returning thanks for gifts received,
before the feast's begun?

Mum

Go on, Albert!

Florence

Say "Thank you."

Vicar

Don't be shy!

Miss Wordsworth

Say a word or two!

Mayor

It's just polite.

Superintendent Budd

Don't be scared, old boy.

Nancy, Sid

Poor Albert.

Lady Billows

Come along now!

Albert *(experiencing the tortures of the damned in his efforts to reply)*

Er... er... Thank you very much.

Lady Billows, Miss Wordsworth, Florence, Mayor, Superintendent Budd

Oh, Albert!

Emmie, Cis, Harry, Nancy, Mum, Sid

Albert!

Lady Billows, Miss Wordsworth, Florence, Mayor, Superintendent Budd

Poor Albert!

Emmie, Cis, Harry, Nancy, Mum, Sid

Albert!

Lady Billows, Miss Wordsworth, Florence, Mayor, Superintendent Budd

Bit short, wasn't it?

Emmie, Cis, Harry, Nancy, Mum, Sid

That didn't take long!

Lady Billows, Miss Wordsworth, Florence, Mayor, Superintendent Budd

Try again!

Emmie, Cis, Harry, Nancy, Mum, Sid

Try again!

Lady Billows, Miss Wordsworth, Florence, Mayor, Superintendent Budd

Better luck next time!

Emmie, Cis, Harry, Nancy, Mum, Sid

Try again!

Lady Billows, Miss Wordsworth, Florence, Mayor, Superintendent Budd

Short and sweet!

Emmie, Cis, Harry, Nancy, Mum, Sid

He's scared!

Lady Billows, Miss Wordsworth, Florence, Mayor, Superintendent Budd

That didn't take long...

[... he's scared, poor Albert!]

Emmie, Cis, Harry, Nancy, Mum, Sid

[That didn't take long! Short and sweet!]

Vicar *(stopping them and rapping on the table)*

5 Well tried, Albert! We understand —

That modest phrase betrays a heart
too full to prate or boast.

Now lift your glasses, everyone,
and join me in a toast!

Albert the Good!

Long may he reign!

To be re-elected
again and again.

All *(rising and repeating)*

Albert the Good!

Long may he reign!

To be re-elected
again and again,
and again and again and again, etc.

Florence

Go on, Albert!

Albert

And three cheers for Her Ladyship!

Hip, hip...

All

Hooray!

Albert

Hip, hip...

All

Hooray!

Albert

Hip, hip...

All

Hooray!

Albert (*after having drained his glass, had it refilled by Nancy and once more emptied it*)
That's better! Thirsty! More please! Hic!

Mum

Hiccups!

Harry

Albert's got willups!

Emmie, Cis

Willups!

Lady Billows

Shall I...

[... pat your back?

Emmie, Cis, Harry (*in hoots*)

[Tee! hee! hee! hee!...

...hee! hee!

Albert

Beg par... Hic!

Miss Wordsworth

Most distressing!

Florence

Too much excitement!

Superintendent Budd

Count twenty!

Mayor

Hold your breath!

Albert

I'm trying. Hic!

Mum

Pat him harder!

Vicar

Glass of water!

Florence

Lump of sugar!

Mayor

Soaked in vinegar!

Albert

It's almost gone... Hic!

Nancy

Do you think it's the rum?

Sid

It's...

[... got...

Albert

[Hic!

Sid

... a kick like a gun!

Albert

Please don't both...

Nancy

Oh,

[what...

Albert

[Hic!

Nancy

... have we done?

Sid

It was only in fun!

Albert

Wate... Hic! Hic! Hic!

**Miss Wordsworth, Mum, Mayor, Vicar
Superintendent Budd**

(one after another in quick succession)
Lemonade!

Florence *(as a glass of lemonade is forthcoming)*
From the wrong side!

Lady Billows *(as Albert bends double in his efforts to drink from the wrong side of the glass)*
Sip it!

Vicar
Slowly!

Mum
Slowly!

Miss Wordsworth
Drop by drop.

Emmie, Cis, Harry
He'll go off pop!

Mum *(as Albert straightens up)*
Better, son?

Albert *(nodding)*
... mm!...

Vicar
None too soon!

Miss Wordsworth
Oh, well done!

Lady Billows
Well, then, let's begin...

(Complete babel ensues as everyone settles down at table and the feast begins in earnest.)

Sid
Bring the plates!

Nancy
Here you are!

Sid
Quickly now!

Nancy *(serving)*
Pass it down!

Sid *(carving)*
Will that do?

Nancy *(answering a summons)*
Coming now!

Sid
Plenty more.

Nancy
This is yours!
(Whilst Nancy and Sid are occupied serving, the following is going on.)

Emmie, Cis, Harry *(in canon)*
Cor blimey! I'm aching
to get down to eating.
My tummy is rumbling.
Don't 'arf keep you waiting!

Miss Wordsworth
It's coming now, Harry.
They all look so merry!
Sit still and be good, dear,
there's a mountain of food here.

Albert
I feel brisk like a rocket,
going up with a whoosh!
Oh! How lucky I am!
Shall I take off my hat?

Lady Billows *(to Albert)*
Put the purse in your pocket
and remove all those books.
Here's a plate of sliced ham
you can tuck into that.

Mum
I wasn't expecting
such a wonderful do.
(apologising to her neighbour, as she grabs)

Excuse me for stretching!
Yes, I seem to have two!

Florence *(managing and dictatorial)*
Will you pass up the plates?
Give that to the Vicar.
If you help in that way,
we shall all get served quicker!

Vicar
It's a splendid display!
Quite a banquet, I'd say!
A magnificent spread,
will the children take bread?

Superintendent Budd
Beginning with beef, eh.

Mayor *(in reply)*
Off the sirloin, I'd say.

Superintendent Budd
There's lashings of food.

Mayor
My, does that ham look good!

(The curtain falls and makes way for the orchestral linking interlude.)

6 Interlude

Scene 2

Inside the shop later that evening. Dusk has fallen, and light streams through the shop-window from the street-lamp outside. After a few moments, a white shape looms past the window, and there is a fumbling with the latch of the door. Albert lurches through it, humming a version of the toast. He is not exactly drunk, but in a hilarious mixture of excitement and cheerfulness, stimulated by the rum. He punctuates his little song by banging the door backwards and forwards, and tingling the bell.)

Albert

- 7 Albert the Good!
 Long may he reign.
 To be re-elected,
 and re-selected,
 and re-expected,
 and resurrected
 again and again and again and again and again,
 again, again!
(shouting)
 Mum! Mum! Yoo-hoo!
 It's your little Albert!
 Your sugar-plum
 of a prodigal son...
 clean as a whistle,
 sound as a drum,
 From his Coronat-i-um!
 Mum!!!
 Stupid! Stupid!
 She's gone to call on Auntie Eth
 for a cup of tea and a chat.
 Left me coming straight home to bed,
 but I'm blown if I'm ready for that!
 Dark in here! — must find a match —
 and after that we'll light the gas,
 with enormous care not to break the mantle,
 set fire to the shop... or cause a scandal!
 Matches — matches — matches!
(calling)
 Swan Vestas!...
 Swan Vestas...? Ah...?
*(He finds the matches, goes to the gas
 bracket and fiddles with it.)*
 That's the chap —
 turn the tap —
 Strike the match
 like this — oh drat!
*(He drops the matches on the floor, and
 grovels for them, leaving the gas-jet on.)*
 Butterfingers!... Ooopsadaisy!
*(He prepares to strike the match with great
 deliberation and slowness.)*

Open your mouth,
 shut your eyes,
 strike the match
 for a nice surprise...

*(There is a loud bang and swoosh of flame
 from the gas-jet.)*

*Blast!... Dangerous stuff, gas.
 Smelly, tricky, noisy, dangerous stuff!...
 (He turns the gas off hurriedly.)*
 Leave well alone...!
 Phew... it's hot!
 Belt's too tight for tum.
 Loosen it out a notch,
 relieve my poor old abdom-um.
 Golly! What a party!
 What a party!
 Talk of eating hearty...!
 Dish after dish they brought us:
 cakes, different-flavoured jellies,
 custard, chocolate dates,
 fruit salad, trifle... and they gave us
 pastries freshly made
 with cream in, followed by almond favours!
 But oh! the taste of that lemonade...
 wonder how it's made?
 Nancy knows, I suppose.
 Nancy will know...
 Pretty name, Nancy, pretty name!
 Why did she stare
 each time I looked
 up at her?
 Why was she watching
 whenever I turned
 of a sudden?
 Nancy! What made her blush
 catching my eye
 as she passed?
 What made her stammer
 when speaking to me
 in that manner?
 Nancy? Nancy?
 No! She belongs to Sid, not me:
 we never talked
 or walked lightheartedly
 through the woods,
 nor shall that I can see.
 Girls don't care for chaps like me:
 I'm too shy
 to reply
 entertainingly
 when they speak,
 I lose my nerve and fly!

(There is a throbbing and inviting whistle down the street.)

Sounds like Sid serenading
under her window,
impatient at waiting,
impatiently aching
to take Nancy chasing
love and adventure.
Sid doesn't suffer from shyness, timidity,
gets what he wants
with directness, simplicity,
aims at his target
with shameless audacity,
trades on the fact of his ruthless tenacity.

*(Nancy and Sid appear outside the shop-
window, under the lamp-post. Albert retreats
into shadow.)*

Nancy

8 You oughtn't to whistle. I told you that, Sid!

Sid (*aggrieved*)

It's perishing cold standing
here in the street!
Twenty-five minutes! I'm frozen stiff!

Nancy

I slipped down the stairs as quick as I could...

Sid

Let's call at the pub for a couple of ports.

Nancy

Sid, we mustn't!

Sid

Warm us up quick...

Nancy

Oh, no! People will talk!...

Sid

They've enough food for chatter
in Albert tonight, so us two won't matter.

Nancy

Poor kid! It does seem wrong
to show him off to everyone
like a sort of plaster giant
or the village simpleton.

Sid

Oh, he's all right... once he's sown
a few wild oats, he'll live that down.

Nancy

But how can he sow them, tied to his Mum?

Sid

I've done my share providing the rum!
Are you volunteering to cheer him
along the agreeable primrose path?

Nancy

Of course not! Still, I'd like to help.

Sid

Heaven helps those who help themselves!

Nancy

It's getting terribly chilly. It'll be terrible cold
up there on the Common.

Sid

You needn't be frightened with me!
Come along, darling, come follow me quick!
Time is racing us round the clock, —
ticking and tocking our evening away
which we've hoped for
and longed for all day.

Both

Hurry to work, hurry to play,
youth must hurry at headlong pace,
seizing and squeezing the pleasures of life
in a cheerful, cheerful, a cheerful, cheerful and
a fearful, fearful embrace.

Sid

Nancy!

Nancy

Hurry to work,...

Sid

Nancy!

Nancy

... hurry to play,...

Sid

Nancy!

Nancy

... youth must hurry,...

Sid

Nancy!

Nancy

... hurry!

Sid (*urgently*)

Give us a kiss, Nancy!...

Nancy

Not here in the light!

Sid

Kiss me!

Nancy

Windows have eyes!

Sid

Kiss me!

(A long passionate kiss)

Both

Time is a glutton, time is a thief,
youth must challenge him as he flies,
daring and sharing its dreams of delight
*(tailing off, as the two go away down
the street)*
between eight and eleven...

Nancy

... at night!

Sid

... at night!

Nancy

Night!

Sid

Night!

Albert (*to himself*)

9 "Heaven helps those who help themselves!"

Nancy

Ah!

Sid

Ah!

Albert (*emerging from the shadows in horror
and embarrassment*)

"Help myself!" Oh go, go, go away!

And leave me here alone

with doubts and terrors

you have never known...!

Enjoy your evening as you will!

Kiss and hug your fill! Embrace until

the stars spin round like Catherine wheels

against the rainbow-coloured hills.

Then hurry home at dawn,
proud of what you've done,
smile, smile, smile to think

I slept alone!

Nancy pities me, Sid laughs, others snigger
at my simplicity... offer me buns

to stay in my cage... parade

me around as their whiteheaded boy.

Albert the Good! Albert who Should!

Who Hasn't and Wouldn't if he Could!

Albert the Meek! Albert the Sheep!

Mrs. Herring's Guinea-Pig!

Mrs. Herring's Tilly-Pig!

Mrs. Herring's... *prig!*

But when, but when,

shall I dare and dare again?

How shall I screw

my courage up to do

what must be done by everyone?

The tide will turn, the sun will set

while I stand here and hesitate.

The clock begins its rusty whirr,

catches its breath to strike the hour

and offers me a final choice

that must be answered no or yes.

(A clinking in his pocket reminds him of

his purse. He takes it out.)

Forgotten those! —

My virgin ransom! —

I'll toss for it — and damn the risk!

(taking a sovereign out the purse)

Eeny, meeney, miney mo,

heads for Yes and tails for No,

tails for No and heads for Yes...

Spin it up!...

*(He tosses the coin and puts his foot on it
where it falls.)*

Heads!

(grimly)

Well, you've gone and done it now!

It's very plain

you've burnt your boats

and can't go back again.

(in sudden fear)

Oh golly!

(considering)

But how... But how...

*(Far, far down the street there is an echo of
Sid's particular whistle. Albert whistles in
imitation. With sudden resolve, he stuffs the
purse in his pocket, snatches his hat, puts on
an old mac, slips out through the door and
away down the street. Presently, Mrs. Herring
enters wearily through the street door.)*

Mum

Albert!... A/bert?

(no reply)

Fast asleep, poor kid!

Worn out by all this fuss.

Sleeping the sleep of the just
and richer by twenty-five quid!

(yawning)

Oooooaah! I shan't need rocking myself!

(Still yawning, she proceeds to lock up the shop, pull down the blinds, and goes wearily upstairs to bed.)

ACT THREE**10** Introduction

(The following afternoon, in the shop. Nancy is alone, occupying herself by miserably polishing the scales. Emmie dashes past the window and into the shop. Nancy silences her.)

Emmie *(whispering)*

11 Is she asleep?

Nancy

How could she sleep?

She's lying upstairs on her bed for a while.

Emmie

They've been phoning around to
Ufford and Orford, Iken and Snape!

Nancy

Where can he be —?

Emmie

Someone was saying

It's *felo-de-se*.

Nancy

Felo-de-what?

Emmie

Done himself in...!

Unless he's been murdered!

Nancy

Oh no —! *No* —!

Cis *(appearing at the window)*

Come on, Emmie! Got your compass?

(She runs past the shop excitedly.)

Emmie *(dashing off in pursuit)*

I'm running off now

To join in the hunt

Round Hasketon Hall

With the Peewit Patrol.

Ta-ta!

Nancy *(unhappily to herself)*

What would Mrs. Herring say?

What would everybody think —

if they knew the trick we played
giving Albert rum to drink?

We did it for fun:
oh, we shouldn't have done!

(Piercing blast on a whistle.)

Mayor's voice *(shouting)*
Don't forget the *splints* —!

Nancy

Now he's vanished overnight,
disappeared without a trace,
and I bitterly regret
what I did in thoughtlessness.
We did it for fun:
oh, we shouldn't have done!

Harry *(shouting through the window)*
They're dragging the millpond with ropes
and ruddy great hooks! —

Nancy

Bring him back! Oh, bring him back!
Safe and sound in life and limb.
Mrs. Herring's heart will break
losing him, losing him!
We did it for fun:
oh, we shouldn't have done!

(Sid arrives, shouting back to someone as he comes in.)

Sid

What the hell d'you think I am?
A human bloodhound?

Nancy

Sid! Thank goodness you've come!

Sid

I've spent the whole blooming day
splashing around,
up to the neck in water and clay
and for all that I found...

Nancy

Not...?

Sid

... one maggotty sheep
lying dead on the ground!

Nancy

Thank Heavens!

Superintendent Budd *(shouting off)*
Any more news about Albert?

Mayor *(off)*

No...!

Sid

12 I'm hungry, I'm tired,
I'm sick of the sound
Of *Albert! Albert! Albert! Albert!* all round!

Nancy *(angry)*

You're heartless and selfish and thoughtless
and cruel!
No conscience or feelings of kindness at all!

Sid

He isn't the first and he won't be the last
to throw up his heels and kick over the mark.

Nancy

You've ruined poor Albert, you've ruined his
Mum...

Sid

He isn't...

[... the first and he won't be the last...

Nancy

and I hope you're contented,...

Sid

... to throw up his heels...

[... and kick over the mark!

Nancy

[... I hope you're contented!

Sid

But why carry on as if...

[... Albert had gone, as if Albert had gone, as if
Albert had gone
on a one-way excursion to Kingdom Come?
etc.

Nancy

You've ruined poor Albert *etc.*
and I hope you're contented with what...

... you've done!

Sid

You're talking as though I'd done all I could...

Nancy (*interrupting*)
Excuses are useless...

Sid
... to wipe out the family of Herrings for good!

Nancy
... so don't try them on!

Sid
But all I...

[... intended and all that I planned
was giving young Albert a brotherly hand,
was giving Albert, Albert, Albert, Albert a hand!

Nancy
I'm sorry we did it, I'm sorry I helped you,
in future, I'll leave you to yourself!

Superintendent Budd
(*entering to break up the quarrel*)
Missus Herring about?

Nancy
She's resting.

Superintendent Budd
Ask her down... official business...
won't keep her long.

(*Nancy goes to fetch Mrs. Herring*)

Sid
How's the manhunt?

Superintendent Budd
13 Give me a decent murder with a corpse!
Give me a clear-cut case of arson!
Give me a robbery with force,
or a criminal case of rape!
But God preserve me from these
disappearing cases,
where everyone from the baker to the
Nonconformist parson
turns Sherlock Holmes
and pokes around finding evidence in the
most unlikely places!

Harry (*yelling through the door*)
Super! Lady Billows wants you up at her house!
Immediate!

Superintendent Budd
My Lady Billows...!
Self-appointed Chief Constable!

(*Nancy comes back, supporting Mrs. Herring,
who is dressed in deep black.*)

Mum
14 Have you found him?

Superintendent Budd
Not yet —

Mum
He's dead... and gone... poor Albert's dead
and gone...

Nancy
Don't say that!

Mum
It's the living truth! —
Dead and gone! Dead and gone!
In the pride of his youth, the pride of his
youth!

Superintendent Budd
I've come to ask
for a photograph
to send round the stations
for identification.

Mum
There's one in a frame
on the whatsisname —
above the Bible
on the tulipwood table.

(*Nancy goes out to fetch it.*)

It was took on the pier at Felixstowe
when his Dad was alive, in a studio —
we paid three-and-six to have it enlarged,
and another three bob for the frame and
the glass.

(*Nancy brings in the photo; Mum clutches it to
her.*)

It is all that I have to remember him by! —
All, all, all that remains of my darling boy!
All, all, all that remains
of the baby I bore with such pains!
All...

(*Unremarked by Mum, the Mayor appears at
the window*)

Mayor (*in an excited whisper*)

Sid! Budd! Come out, we need you!
Sid! Budd!

Mum (*proceeding undisturbed*)

... that remains,
all, all, all, all!
All, all that I did, all that I did,
all that I planned
was building in sand,
for Albert, my boy, is dead!

[... Where did he go? Where did he go?
Why was he took? Wherever I look
the world's full of bitter woe.

Nancy

He'll come back again, my dear.
He'll come back to you, I swear.
Trust in that and never fear,

Miss Wordsworth, Vicar

(*who have tiptoed onto the scene*)

A grievous torment for a mother's heart,
a bitter blow to bear alone.
We come to comfort you and ease the smart
with crumbs of Christian consolation, *etc.*

Mum

Life's become bleak, life's become bleak,
life's become bare
without Albert here to ease and relieve my grief.
Where did he go? *etc.*
All that I did, *etc.*

Nancy

He'll come back before tonight,
he'll repent his sudden flight,
he'll return, you'll see, I'm right.
He'll come back again, my dear, *etc.*

Harry (*shouting loudly through the window*)

Hi! Hi! Heard the news?
There's a Big White Something
in Mrs. William's well!!

Mum

Oh God! It's him!

Nancy

No, no, I'm sure it isn't him,
I'm sure it isn't him, no, I'm sure it isn't him!

Miss Wordsworth, Vicar

In such an hour...

Nancy (*so faintly as almost to be inaudible*)

No!

Miss Wordsworth, Vicar

... we scarcely dare pretend...

Nancy (*as before*)

No!

Miss Wordsworth, Vicar

... we have the power
to...

[... help our friend!

Nancy

[No, I'm sure it isn't him!

Lady Billows

- 15 Fools! Fools! Blundering fools!
(*as she enters, followed by Florence*)
Budd's the worst!
I'll ring up Scotland Yard myself!
We must have experts down to help.
A detective-inspector — won't accept less —
dispatch'd by the Liverpool Street Express.

Nancy

The Saxmundham Police are out...

Lady Billows

Yokels...!

Vicar

And the Wickham Market Militia...

Lady Billows

Bumpkins —!

Miss Wordsworth

If only they could *find* him.

Lady Billows

Find him! Find him! Find him!
I'd soon find the wretched boy!

Florence (*who has followed her mistress in*)

The whole of the district from Loxford to...

[... Ipswich is seeking...

Lady Billows

[Modern methods!

(*Lady Billows's explosive ejaculations do not
make for easy distinguishing of Florence's
remarks.*)

Florence

... and searching in vain.

Lady Billows

... that's what we need!

Florence

... and running around...

[... without...

Lady Billows

Bloodhounds!

Florence

... reason or rhyme...

Lady Billows

Fingerprints!

Florence

... wasting their energy...

Lady Billows

Electromagnets!

Florence

[... money and time...

... poking their...

[... noses into each other's houses,...

Lady Billows

Water diviners!

Florence

... snatching at...

[... clues that simply confuse
and starting new rumours to keep up the game
etc.

Lady Billows

Call in Conan Doyle, telegraph the
Strand Magazine...

He'll bring him back, dead or alive!

Lady Billows, Florence

A crisis like this can't be left
to the locals...

We must call on expert advice!

*(A small and solemn procession comes down
the street — Sid, Superintendent Budd and
the Mayor, bringing a tray covered with a
white cloth. They enter the shop. Mum
fearfully approaches the tray, lifts the cloth and
sees Albert's orange-blossom crown lying
there crushed and muddied.)*

Emmie, Cis, Harry *(looking through the window)*

What they got there on that tray?

Mum

My Albert's wreath!

Mayor

Found on the road to Campsey Ash...

Superintendent Budd

... crushed by a cart!

*(Mrs. Herring faints. All gather around the
wreath. Nancy shuts the door and pulls down
the shop-blinds.)*

Threnody

All

[16] In the midst of life is death.
death awaits us one and all:
death attends our smallest step,
silent, swift and merciful.

Vicar

Sigh for youth that scorns to die
and leaps into eternity
with innocent simplicity.

Nancy

Why was he born who had to run
so short a race and die so young —?
Foredoomed to fall before begun?

Mayor

He died too soon: Death came before
his bud had blossomed into flower —
and we shall see his like no more.

Lady Billows

Weep for him, O weep for him,
whose simple fame
shone clearly like a candle-flame
blown bright by the wind, then out again.

Superintendent Budd

Heavy-hearted, we ask why
he was chosen for to die?
But Death's not given to reply.

Florence

These flowers were a joyful sight
and shone with purity and light,
till Death struck at them overnight.

Miss Wordsworth

Yesterday these flowers were fresh

with gaiety and loveliness —
today they fade to ugliness.

Sid

The grave's a fine and private place
but horribly cold and horribly chaste,
and not attractive to my taste.

Mum

Albert, Albert, my only son!
Flesh of my flesh, bone of my bone,
let me die too, now you are gone!

All save Mum

Death awaits us one and all,
he beckons us with every breath
we take, and does not hesitate
to strike the humble or the great.

(Singing all at once, but not in unison, the characters repeat their various contributions almost as before, but without the accompanying threnody.)

Florence

These flowers were a joyful sight, *etc.*

Nancy

Why was he born, *etc.*

Vicar

Sigh, sigh for youth, *etc.*

Sid

The grave's a fine and private place, *etc.*

Miss Wordsworth

These flowers were fresh with gaiety, *etc.*

Mum

Albert, Albert, my only son, *etc.*

Mayor

He died too soon, *etc.*

Lady Billows

Weep for him, *etc.*

Superintendent Budd

(adding his voice last of all)

Heavy hearted, we ask why, *etc.*

All

Grief is silent, Pity dumb, —
Despair exclaims in endless pain —
that one so fine should live in vain
and die so young, die so young, die, die,
die so young.

(as Albert's head pops through the top of the door)

17 Albert!

Albert *(entering dusty and dishevelled)*
What's going on?

All *(in furious and righteous indignation)*

Albert!

Where have you come from? Where have
you been?

Wrecking the whole of our daily routine!

Tearing the town from its regular labours
to run up and down and around with
the neighbours —

looking for clues, longing for news,
inspecting, accepting, rejecting reports
that you had been kidnapped, or murdered —
or worse —

for the twenty-five sovereigns you had in
your purse!

Albert

18 I'm sorry about that.

(His remark is the spark to a powder-magazine.)

Lady Billows

Sorry!?? Sorry!?? He says he's *Sorry!!!*

As if a *Sorry* could repay
the agony and worry
he's caused us all today!

Albert

Well...

Miss Wordsworth, Nancy, Florence

Where exactly have you been?

Mayor, Sid, Vicar

Tell us that!

Superintendent Budd

Where have you been?

Mum *(balefully)*

Wait till I'm alone with you!

Vicar *(stepping forward, in the face of Albert's silence, to question him)*

You left this house at eight last night?

(Albert nods assent.)

Lady Billows

Where exactly did you go?

(No reply)

Florence

Slipped through the streets and out of sight?

(Nod — Yes)

Mayor

Were you alone?

Miss Wordsworth

Say Yes or No.

Albert

Yes.

Lady Billows

Did you remain alone for long?

(Nod — No)

Vicar

You met some friends?

(Nod — No)

Miss Wordsworth

Acquaintances?

(Nod — Yes)

Florence

Male?

(Nod — Yes)

Mayor

And female?

(Nod — Yes)

Nancy

Oh don't go on!

Superintendent Budd

And did you stay with them? —

Albert

Well, yes!

Lady Billows

When you left home, you took with you twenty-five sovereigns —

Florence

In gold —?

(Nod — Yes)

Mum

How many's left?

Albert

I've twenty-two.

Mayor

So three have disappeared all told!

Albert

Yes.

Miss Wordsworth

Were they stolen from you?

(Nod — No)

Superintendent Budd

Lost, d'you think?

(Nod — No)

Mum

Did you spend three pounds yourself?

(Nod — Yes)

Vicar

At a shop?

(Nod — No)

Lady Billows

At a public house?

(Nod — Yes)

Florence

All that on *drink*?

(Nod — No)

Mayor

How *did* you spend it?

Nancy, Sid

For goodness' sake, stop!
Stop prying and poking and probing at him
with your pious old faces delighting in Sin!

All, save Albert, Nancy and Sid

We must persist
and insist
on the truth —
however bad it is.

Lady Billows

Where did that three pounds go?
Tell us the truth!

Mum, Mayor, Vicar

The truth!

**Miss Wordsworth, Florence,
Superintendent Budd**

At once!

Lady Billows, Mum, Mayor, Vicar

Tell us...

All save Albert, Nanny and Sid

...the whole truth
and nothing but the truth!

Albert

- 19 I can't remember everything, but what I can
I'll tell you plain and straight. — It all began
'cos I suddenly thought it was time I ought
to try a taste of certain things
the Prayer Book catalogues among its sins.
Curiosity killed the cat, they say!
Well, if you like,
it was curiosity made me pinch a bike
and pedal away to town last night!
Drink was my first experiment: I found a pub,
ordered some old-and-mild, and drank it up.
Beer tasted queer, so my next idea was rum —
A tumblerful of naval rum, with whisky and gin
to wash it down!
Before very long, I was pretty far gone —
reeling about, beginning to shout,
disgustingly drunk — a nuisance to everyone!
So they threw me out of *The Dog and Duck*
to lie in the gutter and sober up!

All save Albert, Nancy and Sid

Impossible! Drunk and disorderly?
Our May King?

Albert

Then I staggered along to the four-ale bar
of The Horse and Groom, which isn't far —
started a fight 'cos they said I was tight,
buted the publican, fell on the floor —
and ended up in the gutter once more!

All save Albert, Nancy and Sid

Horrible! Stop him! This is revolting!
Stop, stop, stop, stop!

Albert

You wanted the truth! Do you want some
more?

Or will that do as a general sample
of a night that was a nightmare example
of drunkenness, dirt, and worse?

Mum

But how could you do it? How *could* you?

Albert (turning on Mum)

You know what drove me,
you know how I could.
It was all because
you squashed me down and reined me in,
did up my instincts with safety pins,
kept me wrapped in cotton-wool,
measured my life by a twelve-inch rule, —
protected me with such devotion
my only way out was a wild explosion!

All save Albert, Nancy and Sid (variously)

Monstrous!

Albert

I've done it now — it wasn't much fun —

All save Albert, Nancy and Sid (variously)

Monstrous!

Albert

But sooner or later it had to come.

Superintendent Budd

Monstrous!

Nancy, Sid (cutting in)

Good old Albert!

Albert

And I'm more than grateful to you all
for kindly providing the wherewithal!

Mayor, Vicar, Superintendent Budd

Preposterous!

Miss Wordsworth, Mum, Florence

Wicked boy!

Mayor, Vicar, Superintendent Budd

He needs a good thrashing!

Miss Wordsworth, Mum, Florence

Fancy! Turning against his mother!

Mayor, Vicar, Superintendent Budd

Young oaf!

Miss Wordsworth, Mum, Florence

Turning against his mother!

Mayor, Vicar, Superintendent Budd

Young oaf!

Albert

And now...

... I shall take it extremely kind
if you'll let me get on!

Lady Billows

You will pay! You will pay
for your night's holiday!
You will pay for your sins of the flesh!
You will creep to the shade
of a profligate's grave —
a disgrace to your name and your sex!

Albert

Good day, your Ladyship,
please let me get on, for I'm all behind.

Lady Billows (*stalking out, followed by Miss
Wordsworth, Florence, the Vicar, the Mayor,
and Superintendent Budd*)
Faugh!

Mum

I'll never forgive you! Never!
Not till my dying day!

Albert

That'll do, Mum!
(*when Mum has gone upstairs in a condition
of near-hysterics; to Sid and Nancy*)
I didn't lay it on too thick, did I?

Sid (*as Nancy dives Sid a big kiss*)

Hi! that's my girl!

(*Going to the window to let up the blinds,
Albert sees Emmie, Harry and Cis standing
outside.*)

Emmie, Cis, Harry (*piping up*)

Albert's Mum took a stick,
whacked him on the thingmijig!

Albert (*beckoning them in*)

Alright! Come on in! Come on in!

(*as the kids, hardly knowing what to think,
creep cautiously nearer*)

Emmie... come on! Cis... come on!

Come on, Harry!

Sid (*finally, after further whispered persuasion*)

Come on!

(*The three kids sidle in.*)

Albert

Have a nice peach?

(*They accept joyfully.*)

Nancy, Sid, Emmie, Cis, Harry

20 Albert's come back to stay,
better for his holiday!

Albert

Help yourselves!

Nancy, Sid, Emmie, Cis, Harry

Let's all say hip-hip-hooray!
Good luck to him, anyway!

Albert

There's plenty for everyone!

Nancy, Sid, Emmie, Cis, Harry

Albert's come back to stay,
better for...

Albert

Put some more...

Nancy, Sid, Emmie, Cis, Harry

[... his holiday!

Albert

... in your pockets!

Nancy, Sid, Emmie, Cis, Harry

Let's all say hip-hip-hooray!

Albert

It's nice to be...

Nancy, Sid, Emmie, Cis, Harry

[Good luck to him anyway!

Albert

... home again.

Sid (*picking up the wreath of orange blossom*)

Hi! The orange-blossom!

Albert

Chuck it over!

All (*as Albert tosses wreath away*)

Jolly good riddance!

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