

EXCERPT:

*The church grounds. We hear the cheerful toll of bells. The atmosphere is festive and the weather is pristine. Bridget is followed by William and Katharin.*

BRIDGET: ...beyond Fiddler's Bridge is the Bull Ring. There you'll find the Foresters' Arms... Hold on...that's not right... The *Miners' Arms* – *that's* the tavern. Heathersage road takes thee west – no, east – to Bakewell, our principal market town. Tideswell has a market also, but 'tis quite a ways off...or could be closer...'tis one or 'tother. Thro' that copse lies the Salt Pan, entrance to Cucklett Dell – a lovely little dingle, where Eyam's young lads and lasses knot up in all manner of mischief!

KATHARIN: What of the house on yonder hill?

BRIDGET: Bradshaw Hall, still in the building. Francis Bradshaw – himself highborn – was married to our Anne – not so highborn, tho' she plays the part with relish. Not long after the wedding, Francis was beset by a terrible tragedy.

KATHARIN: What manner of tragedy?

BRIDGET: He died. Tho' 'tween that and marryin' Anne, 'tis hard to say which tragedy was the greater of the two. And here we have the Village Cross.

KATHARIN: Surely the most splendid cross in all of England.

BRIDGET: Oh – I'm not so sure. The grounds were once enclosed by a ring of linden trees, but Parson Furness deemed the trees a nuisance and had them felled.

KATHARIN: Once we've settled, I intend to plant a garden in back of the rectory.

BRIDGET: Show me those hands... My yes – you don't scruple to toil, now do you?  
*To William:*  
Have you made acquaintance with Parson Furness?

WILLIAM: He has thus far declined my requests for a meeting.

KATHARIN: He has yet to clear out of the cottage.

WILLIAM: We mustn't rush the man upon his leaving.

BRIDGET: We're all a bit baffled, methinks. First we were Catholics, then we were Protestants – but a Catholic sort of Protestant – then we were a very Catholic Catholic. Then scrap an' tittle of each, depending on your preference. Now Puritans for twenty-odd years, since fallen out of fashion.

WILLIAM: England's faithful are as passengers on a ship tempest-tossed. I aspire to calm the waters and right the vessel so that we might continue on our journey unmolested.

BRIDGET: I know 'tis heresy to vouch for Roman ritual, but between us three, I think priests look smart in a surplice. This festival is what we call the Wakes – an annual commemoration of the dedication of our cathedral.

WILLIAM: St. Lawrence was one of the seven deacons of ancient Rome. He's charged with alms and care for the poor.

BRIDGET: Oh, Parson! You could charm the crust off bread!

*Mary enters with Viccars.*

BRIDGET: Here comes Missus Cooper! Mary – come meet the Mompessons!

WILLIAM: Good day, Missus Cooper.

MARY: Hadfield, that is. Mister Cooper passed a year ago, bless his soul.

BRIDGET: So he did.

WILLIAM: Mister Hadfield?

VICCARS: George Viccars – no tailor in England can show a neater seam.

MARY: Mister Viccars is lodging with us for the fall.

VICCARS: My goodness, Mary, look! Lace cuffs!

MARY: Nice, e'nt they?

VICCARS: Has Parson Furness laid eyes on these cuffs?

WILLIAM: We've yet to make our acquaintance.

VICCARS: Poor old bugger – clung to his parish like a flea to a drowning rat. I reckon he'd find your frills right sinful. After I arrived, Furness preached fire and brimstone 'gainst tucks and dyestuffs. Who made these seams?

WILLIAM: My wife, Katharin.

VICCARS: Missus Mompesson – you stitch a marvel! Nimble fingers, I can tell.

KATHARIN: Mister Viccars, you are too kind.

VICCARS: The ladies in Eyam are frantic for colour. Lady Bradshaw herself won't do with but the latest London fashions.

WILLIAM: Do you come from London, sir?

VICCARS: I was in attendance at the king's coronation. Most jolly...as if all of England were yearning to let the air out. The Merry Monarch himself led the way with a riot of parties, dancing, games and all manner of gaiety.

*Bradshaw enters with daughter in tow.*

BRAD.: Mister Viccars – fancy finding you out of doors, and with a surfeit of orders as of yet unfulfilled.

VICCARS: Begging your patience, Madame. I wrote to my brother on Thames Street for the fabrics, but they're not yet arrived. Shortly, I assure you.

BRAD.: I see. You must enjoy your leisure hours, while they last.

VICCARS: Mary – to the tavern!

MARY: Good day, t'ye.

VICCARS: Lace cuffs!

*Viccars and Mary exit.*

BRAD.: This must be the new Parson. Mompesson, is it not?

WILLIAM: It is indeed. My wife, Katharin.

BRAD.: Missus Mompesson – a pleasure. Miss Talbot.

BRIDGET: Good day, Lady Bradshaw.

BRAD.: *Widow* Bradshaw. You have been instructed to refer to me thus in my mourning.

BRIDGET: So I have.

BRAD.: May I present my daughter – Cecily. Cecily – make introduction.

CECILY: Pleased to meet you, Parson. Missus Parson.  
*Gives a kind of curtsy.*

KATHARIN: Hello, Cecily. My – isn't that a lovely dress you're wearing!

CECILY: Yes.

BRAD.: T'was the only suitable attire we had on hand, otherwise I'd quite set the sorry rags aflame. The bulk of our belongings are in storage as our new Hall is presently in the building.

WILLIAM: A most magnificent home it will be, Lady Bradshaw.

BRAD.: High time we had a lodging worthy of our rank. Cecily – cease that unseemly preening this instant!

KATHARIN: Are you enjoying the Wakes, Cecily?

CECILY: Yes.

BRAD.: Her behaviour has been most appalling.

CECILY: Mother, look! Those children!

WILLIAM: Katharin – our George hath played this game...

KATHARIN: Knuckle-bones.

WILLIAM: Knuckle-bones! Good fun is food for the soul.

CECILY: May I join them, mother?

BRAD.: You may not. You'd soil yourself to the bone. Do excuse us. We must return to the Hall to ensure the entire enterprise isn't scuppered by the shortfalls of local labour. Cecily! Stop squirming!

*Bradshaw exits, dragging Cecily behind her.*

KATHARIN: *(Softly, to William)* I feel as an insect stuck on a pin.

WILLIAM: Gird yourself, darling butterfly. The less you squirm the less you suffer.

*Elinor enters.*

BRIDGET: Ah! Here's Missus Thorpe! Elinor – come meet the Mompessons!

ELINOR: I've met the Parson prior.

BRIDGET: Have you?

ELINOR: At Catherine's confinement.

BRIDGET: So you did! The Parson huffing and puffing over the license, Elinor hissing like a cat in a fit. Cursed his name indignant for days thereafter...  
*Pause.*  
Begging your pardon. Too much sunlight sets me most disordered.

WILLIAM: Please meet my wife – Katharin.

ELINOR: Good day to you.

KATHARIN: And you. How fares the child?

ELINOR: Fair and hale. Her mother hath a fortnight left for lying-in. The father made some show of despair – two boys only out of a sum brood of nine – but he took one look now loves her dear. I bid ye both enjoy the Wakes.

WILLIAM: Missus Thorpe, I pray you forgive my dreadful manners at the confinement. T'was neither time nor place to raise the matter of a license.

ELINOR: Don't think on't.

WILLIAM: You'll be pleased to know I made an inquiry, on your behalf, as to a reduction in your fee. The bishop has agreed to partial payment now with promise of the balance at a later date, provided you submit your testimonials post-haste.

ELINOR: Let you look to your own needs 'fore you tend to mine.

WILLIAM: Ah, yes, well...we'll speak on it anon.

ELINOR: Best enjoy your day 'fore the storm shows.

KATHARIN: But Missus Thorpe, the weather is pristine.

ELINOR: I sense a tincture to the air...

KATHARIN: I mark no tincture.

ELINOR: *(Beat)* Perhaps I'm mistaken.  
*Exits.*

KATHARIN: Did you press her for a license in the midst of a confinement?

WILLIAM: An error in judgement for which I've just now apologized.

KATHARIN: But William – what interest have you in licensing midwives?

WILLIAM: I've a responsibility to ensure the proper spiritual conduct of my parish.

KATHARIN: The midwife who delivered our George had no license.

WILLIAM: Perchance she should have done.

BRIDGET: Here's Parson Furness now!

*Parson Furness ascends a pulpit. A hush falls over the crowd. He waits for total silence.*

FURNESS: God sees us, and He is ashamed.

*A rumble of thunder, off in the distance.*

FURNESS: God sees the race of Adam wallowing in the mire of manifold vice. God sees us deceived by heretical trades and ungodly groups, sees women corrupt public morals with provocative dress and lewd necklines. God sees us indulge in the most sordid behaviour – idleness, gluttony, lust and pride – crimes that defile the land with their filth! God sees, and He is ashamed.

*More thunder now, much closer.*

FURNESS: God disdains the corrupt and power-hungry papacy and all who cling to popish superstition. And lo – the wolves do roam amongst the sheep, preserving rituals that place our mortal souls in peril. God would not look, and yet He must.

*The sky darkens. Flashes of lightning. More thunder.*

FURNESS: Our sins put all of God's creation in peril. He built His mighty kingdom here on earth, and our sins are cracks in its foundation. Left to spread, the very brick and mortar crumble, leaving us exposed to Satan's purpose.

*Shouting to be heard over the heavenly racket:*

God hath but one decree: obedience! Those who will not submit shall mightily be punished! God said I will send upon you pestilence such as has never been seen; convert the light into darkness, and smother your souls in smoke! And lo – I see a flaming sword, held in a great hand, pointing from the clouds, as precise as God's voice bellowing *I will forsake thee!*

*The thunder, lightning and wind reaches a fever-pitch. All scatter and flee.*