

# A PLAGUE ON LOVE

BALLET IN A PROLOGUE AND THREE  
ACTS

*SYNOPSIS* by PHILIP STOTT

# CAST

## **The Lovers**

Emmott, a young woman of Eyam Village, Derbyshire  
Rowland, son of a flour miller in Stoney Middleton

## **Emmott's Friends**

Anne, a baker's daughter  
Alice, a cooper's daughter  
Edytha, a blacksmith's daughter  
Margaret, a brewer's daughter  
Martha, a weaver's daughter  
Mary, a farmer's daughter

## **Rowland's Friends**

James  
Matthew  
Robert  
Samuel  
Thomas  
William

## **Villagers of Eyam**

John, Emmott's father  
Elizabeth, Emmott's mother  
William, Rector of Eyam  
Catherine, his wife  
George, a tailor  
Elizabeth, a farmer  
Marshall, a 'gravedigger'  
Village men and women, boys and girls

## **Villagers of Stoney Middleton**

Village men and women, boys and girls

## **London Town**

A cloth merchant  
A delivery boy  
A plague doctor  
A young woman  
Two 'gravediggers'

## **Morris Dancers**

## **Black Rats**

## **21st Century Hikers**

## PROLOGUE

### LONDON 1665: A NARROW STREET OF JETTIED HOUSES

It is dusk. All is darkening in the narrow, dirty street. The house doors are closed. One door is painted with a large, rough, red cross. There is the shop of a cloth merchant.

[N.B. *Throughout, key dances are highlighted in purple*]

1. One by one, **Black Rats** enter, prowling the street for scraps, and ominously scratching the doors of the houses. Eventually, one **Big Rat** goes into a house where the door opens freely, creaking on its hinges, while the other rats scuttle off stage;
2. **The Cloth Merchant** appears from his shop bearing a bolt of material, which he carefully wraps in brown paper and string. He summons a **Delivery Boy** who appears from the wings;
3. They mime and dance together as the merchant explains about the delivery to the boy. The boy departs with the packet, while the merchant returns into his shop;
4. As night begins to fall, a **Rat** scabbles along the sides of the houses;
5. A **Young Woman** appears from the door of the house into which the big rat had entered. She exhibits the terrible symptoms of the plague ...
6. **The Dance of Death** by the doomed woman;
7. The **Young Woman** lies dead on the street. Two '**Gravediggers**' arrive with a makeshift cart, into which they bundle her corpse. They wearily drag the cart off the stage;
8. **The Dance of Dread**: a **Plague Doctor** enters with his conical face mask. He views the street, dances in fear and despair, then closes the open door of the young woman's house, and marks it with a large red cross. He departs, looking around warily;
9. Night falls as a London church bell tolls. All is silent.

[END OF PROLOGUE]

## ACT 1

### EYAM VILLAGE, 1665: THE WELL-DRESSING FESTIVAL

Small Derbyshire-stone cottages, and an inn, are set around a village green, with a church in the background. At the centre, there is the Town Well, already bedecked with flowers and prepared for the annual Well-Dressing Ceremony.

1. Excited **Villagers** enter with their **Children**, pointing to the Well, greeting their friends and neighbours, and exchanging posies of flowers. They nod respectfully to the **Rector** and his **Wife**, to whom they also offer a posy;
2. **Emmott and Her Six Friends** enter carrying the the 'jig-saw' pieces that will complete the 'picture' on the wooden Well-Dressing frame [the 'pieces' are made of flowers, leaves, moss, seeds, and cones, and they reflect the occupations of the girls' fathers. **Emmott** herself carries a cross of flowers];
3. **Pas de Six** by the **Young Women**, as the **Villagers** look on;
4. **Solo** by **Emmott**, as she bears the cross of flowers to show to the **Rector**, who displays his approval;
5. **Rowland and his Six Friends** emerge from the inn, with foaming tankards in their hands. They tease the **Young Women**;
6. **Pas de Six**: vigorous **Drinking Dance** by the **Young Men**;
7. All is now ready for the **Well-Dressing Ceremony**, as the **Six Young Women** line up, while **Rowland** joins **Emmott** on a bench. **Six Variations follow**, each partially simulating, in dance, the trade of the **Young Woman's** father;
  - Variation 1: Baker: Anne**: ends placing the loaf of bread symbol on the frame;
  - Variation 2: Cooper: Alice**: ends placing the barrel symbol on the frame;
  - Variation 3: Blacksmith: Edytha**: ends placing the horseshoe on the frame;
  - Variation 4: Brewer: Margaret**: ends placing the tankard symbol on the frame;
  - Variation 5: Weaver: Martha**: ends placing the shuttlecock symbol on the frame;
  - Variation 6: Farmer: Mary**: ends placing the wheat sheaf symbol on the frame.
8. **Pas de Deux, 1. Adagio**: **Emmott** dances with **Rowland** as she prepares to place the cross of flowers in the centre of the wooden frame. The dance ends with **Rowland** holding **Emmott**, who bends over on point to place the cross of flowers in the heart of the 'picture'. She turns, gently kisses **Rowland** on the cheek, and then curtsies to the **Rector** and to all **the Villagers**, who smile and applaud;
9. **The Rector** comes forward to bless the newly-dressed Well. He summons the **Children** of the village;
10. **Children's Dance**: amid scenes of general happiness, the **Village Children** form a circle around the Well, about which they dance in ever-more intricate and lively patterns, each child carrying a different toy, which they finally place around the Well;

11. **Pas de Deux, 2. Rowland's Variation:** encouraged by the young men, **Rowland** dances with great panache, like the children, around the Well, all the time showing off a little to **Emmott** and to the other **Young Women**;
12. **Pas de Deux, 3. Emmott's Variation:** now, cajoled by her own friends, **Emmott** responds, and she also dances around the Well, casting flower petals from a posy as she does so;
13. **Pas de Deux, 4. Allegro:** as **Emmott** is finishing her variation, she is picked up by **Rowland**, and they dance ever-more joyously together. As their dance quickens, they are joined by their friends, the **Six Young Women** partnered by the **Six Young Men**, in celebration of the Well-Dressing Ceremony, and of the obvious love growing between **Emmott** and **Rowland**. The lively dance concludes with **Rowland** holding **Emmott** high above the Well, which is surrounded by all the other couples, the **Young Women** on their knees;
14. **Derbyshire Morris:** a troupe of local **Morris Dancers** enters and performs, to a traditional tune, a Derbyshire Morris. After the dance, the performers enter the inn, indicating an urgent need to staunch their thirst;
15. **The Villagers** now also begin to leave the scene, the **Young Men** returning to the inn with **Rowland**, who gives a fond farewell to **Emmott**. She in turn departs with **Her Friends**;
16. A **Delivery Boy** from London arrives carrying with him a parcel of cloth. He asks the way of one of the villagers to **George, the Tailor**, and he is directed to the tailor's cottage. The **Boy** knocks on the door, and the **Tailor** comes out to look at the parcel. He removes the brown paper to inspect the bolt of cloth. After tipping the **Boy**, he takes the cloth indoors, leaving his door open;
17. Slowly the scene empties, with one or two **Villagers** taking a last look at the Well. A storm is brewing. When all have gone, a **Small Black Rat** emerges from behind the Well, sniffing the air and scurrying around the walls of the inn and about the village green. Eventually, it enters the Tailor's cottage through the open door ...
18. The church clock strikes the hour, as night descends. Thunder sounds dully in the distance ...

[END OF ACT ONE]

## ACT 2

### THE BOUNDARY STONE

In a grassy glade surrounded by trees, there stands a large Boundary Stone set between the village of Eyam and the hamlet of Stoney Middleton. Sheep graze on the far, stone-walled hills, and the small hamlet can be seen below. The Boundary Marker has a worn hollow on its top, and it is surrounded by rough wicker baskets containing food - bread, meat, and wine - left there for the plague-stricken villagers of Eyam, gifts from the people of Stoney Middleton. Before the full scene is revealed, the Act opens with the men and women of Eyam, led by the Rector and his wife, taking a rough, grassy path to the Boundary Stone, to collect the offerings of food.

#### ***ACT 2: Scene 1: The Path to the Stone*** [Stage Front Only]

1. Led by the **Rector** and his **Wife**, **Emmott's Mother and Father**, along with the rest of the **Eyam Villagers**, take the grassy path towards the Boundary Stone. They gesture sadly to one another as they make their way;
2. The crowd are met, coming in the opposite direction, by **Elizabeth**, a farmer, and the 'gravedigger', **Marshall**, who are hauling a heavy cart holding two shrouded bodies, Elizabeth's dead husband and son;
3. The **Villagers** scatter in horror, bowing their heads and covering their mouths, while **Elizabeth** drops to the ground in unconsolable grief;
4. The **Rector** slowly approaches the cart, and falls to his knees in prayer. **His Wife** urgently begs him to draw back. Reluctantly he does so, looking all the time at the desolate **Elizabeth**;
5. **Marshall** wipes his brow, while **Elizabeth** rises painfully. They take hold of the cart handles, and they wearily continue hauling their dread burden along the path, away from the Boundary Stone to a burial field nearby;
6. Meanwhile, **the despairing Villagers** re-group, and, encouraged by the **Rector**, continue their walk to the Stone ...

#### ***ACT 2: Scene 2: The Stone*** [Full Stage]

7. The **Rector** and **the Villagers** enter, making their way to the Boundary Stone, where they begin to collect up the wicker baskets, waving gestures of gratitude to the small hamlet they can see at the foot of the hills. **None cross the boundary marker**;
8. They place the baskets together on the grass, and the **Rector** blesses the food, before placing a number of coins in the hollow of the Boundary Stone to pay the villagers of Stoney Middleton for their generous gifts;

9. **Emmott** suddenly enters, running breathlessly, and she is greeted by **Her Parents**. She makes passionate gestures of love across the Boundary Stone towards the hamlet of Stoney Middleton;
10. **Her Parents**, along with the **Rector** and all **the Villagers**, make dramatic signs of warning and rejection, stressing earnestly that **Emmott** must not cross the Boundary Marker. **Emmott** reluctantly concedes, and she goes to sit, weeping, on a grassy knoll;
11. **Her Mother** tries to comfort her, while the **Rector** leads the villagers, carrying their baskets of food, back to the village. **Emmott's Father** calls for his wife and daughter to join them, but **Emmott** indicates that she will linger a while longer;
12. Stressing once again that **Emmott** must not cross the Boundary Stone, **Her Mother** departs, along with **the Villagers**. **Emmott** is left in solitary silence;
13. **Pas de Deux, 1. Solo: The Dance of Longing**: **Emmott** rises from the grassy knoll, and, with deep longing, dances a dramatic solo, gesturing constantly towards the forbidden hamlet;
14. As **Emmott** concludes her solo, **Rowland** appears along the steep path from Stoney Middleton. **Emmott** is both full of joy and horror, and she gestures wildly that **Rowland** must not cross the Boundary Stone;
15. **Rowland** resists, but finally accepts that he must neither cross the Boundary Stone nor touch **Emmott**;
16. **Pas de Deux, 2. Solo: The Dance of Desire**: **Rowland** dances with all his passion, expressing a deep desire to be united with **Emmott**;
17. As he concludes his solo, **Rowland** gently kneels on the Stoney Middleton side of the Boundary Stone, while **Emmott** moves close to the Eyam side. They stretch out their hands so that their fingers barely brush against each other;
18. **Pas de Deux: 3. The Dance of Separated Love**: in what must be a choreographic *tour de force*, moving from *Adagio* to *Presto*, they dance 'together' in a great **Pas de Deux**, neither crossing the Boundary Stone, nor one touching the other, ending with both sinking to the ground, staring at each other across the Stone;
19. As the two rise, **the Villagers of Stoney Middleton** arrive to collect the coins left for them by the villagers of Eyam. They are shocked to find **Rowland** so close to **Emmott**, and they drag him away from the Boundary Stone, signing furiously to **Emmott** to go back at once to Eyam. **Emmott** recoils, cowed. **The Villagers** quickly collect the coins, and force Rowland down the path with them. He looks back desperately for **Emmott**;
20. **Emmott** waves to him, indicating her undying love. The air turns chill, and cold breezes rustle the leaves of the trees. **Emmott** turns reluctantly to return to Eyam, leaving the Boundary Stone deserted beneath a greying landscape. Sheep bleat. Stillness descends.

[END OF ACT TWO]

## ACT 3 THE LEGEND

The Act opens with a lonely and worried **Rowland** waiting by the Boundary Stone. No other soul is in sight. Sheep bleat in the far distance, while a cold wind scours the grassy knoll and shakes the leaves of the trees.

### ***ACT 3: Scene 1: Dread News***

1. **Rowland** stands by the Boundary Stone waiting for **Emmott** to appear along the path from Eyam village. He searches the horizon for any sign of his beloved;
2. Suddenly, he becomes animated, as he clearly observes a figure approaching. He seeks desperately to see who it is;
3. **Emmott's Father** enters, dressed darkly, and seemingly carrying a mighty burden. He slowly approaches the Boundary Stone and warns **Rowland** not to approach him;
4. **Rowland** urgently begs for news of **Emmott**;
5. Through mime, **Emmott's Father** tells **Rowland** of the death of his **Daughter** from the plague, ending with a despairing gesture that all is lost, and warning **Rowland** again that he must not attempt to cross the Boundary Stone, for **Emmott** is already buried;
6. In his anguish, **Rowland** rushes towards the Boundary Stone, but **Emmott's Father** again urgently tells him to stop for the sake of his own life, and for the protection of the hamlet of Stoney Middleton below. **Rowland** collapses by the Stone;
7. Head bowed, **Emmott's Father** leaves, returning back along the pathway to Eyam;
8. **Rowland** remains prostrate as if dead himself.....

**ALL GOES DARK. CENTURIES PASS .....**

### ***ACT 3: Scene 2: The Boundary Stone Today***

The Boundary Stone is now partly covered by rough grass. The sound of cows lowing is heard. Across the far hills, there are some modern houses, and a tractor can be seen in a field. The tall chimney of an old factory stands in the valley. A jet plane sounds overhead. The weather is a perfect English summer's day, with flowers in the grass and the trees in full leaf.

9. A group of **Young Hikers** enter, joshing and laughing, the **Boys** pretending to push the **Girls** along the path;



10. The **Hikers** notice the Boundary Stone, and, knowing the well-known 'Legend of the Separated Lovers of Eyam', they 'play act' the final fateful meeting of Emmott and Rowland, also placing some coins in the hollow on the top of the Stone;
11. The **Hikers** then take out a picnic from their rucksacks, and settle on the grassy knoll nearby. One turns on a portable radio playing modern dance music;
12. The **Girls** remove their walking boots, and **begin to Dance barefoot in the grass**, while the **Boys** continue chatting and drinking;
13. The day is warm, and, eventually, they all settle on the grassy bank for an afternoon nap in the sun. The radio is turned off, and, soon, they appear to be sleeping soundly;
14. Despite the warmth, a gentle mist creeps from the trees, and the bright light seems to fade into shadows. The **Hikers** doze on, only stirring slightly;
15. As if in a dream, the **Shade of Emmott, accompanied by the Six Shades of Her Friends**, appears from the trees, beckoning to the hamlet below;
16. The **Shade of Rowland and his Six Friends** enter; he takes **Emmott** in his arms, the two reunited, at last, in deaths from long ago;
17. **Pas de Deux: the Dance of Everlasting Love**: this demands a second choreographic *tour de force*, now, in death, a **Grand Pas de Deux**, in full contact with each other, no longer separated by the Stone, and supported by their Friends:
  1. **Largo**;
  2. **Pas de Six** by the **Shades of Emmott's Friends**;
  3. **Variation 1: Emmott's Solo**;
  4. **Pas de Six** by the **Shades of Rowland's Friends**;
  5. **Variation 2: Rowland's Solo**;
  6. **Allegro Appassionata: Emmott, Rowland**, supported by **the Friends**.
18. As the dance ends, the two **Shades of Emmott and Rowland** stand on opposite sides of the Stone, their fingers barely touching, as in life. The **Shades** fade away gently into the thickening mist and the darkening trees;
19. The **Hikers** wake up, startled by the chilly air, and shivering a little as the warmth of the day has vanished. The **Girls** quickly replace their walking boots, while the **Boys** pack up the remains of the picnic. **They All** set off together down the path to Stoney Middleton. Now they are subdued, and they stare at the Boundary Stone sadly and in some thought. They leave;
20. The mist swirls more strongly. From behind the Boundary Stone, there appears a small **Black Rat**, which scuttles to the very front of the stage, where it stares at the audience threateningly with bright, sharp eyes, moving slowly from left to right, to take in the whole auditorium. It runs off in the direction of Eyam. Stillness and darkness descend. The curtain falls.

[END OF ACT THREE AND OF THE BALLET]