# **The Stick House**

Raucous

January 2016

Final draft

*An ice cream van chimes out.*

*The song is The Song of the Beast.*

*On presenting their tickets the audience is stamped on the wrist.*

*There is no mark.*

*They are presented with a board to put around their necks.*

*The boards have a name on. Not their name.*

*The audience is led into pitch black space by torchlight.*

 *A gauze screen descends that straddles and fills the space.*

*Projection of a young girl running through a sun-dappled landscape.*

*The sunlight blinds us*

*The scale is huge and fills the space.*

*Twenty feet high.*

*She is bare-foot, filthy, thin and unkempt.*

*But she is laughing.*

*Music fills the space - longing nostalgia with a slightly bitter aftertaste of what is to come.*

*The young girl runs from the screen, across the walls where she becomes her true size.*

*She looks at us and then urges us forward.*

*She runs ahead – we have to follow.*

*She finally comes to rest by a large round gaming table*

*Images appear on the gaming table.*

*Shot from POV looking down.*

*Sergei is sat at the table playing cards with the Beast.*

*All we can see are two pairs of hands.*

*One set filthy and gnawed.*

*One set beastly.*

*The atmosphere is tense.*

*The projection of the young girl on the wall stands to the side of the players.*

*She is bored.*

*Soundscape is of horses on a cobbled street, women’s shrill laughter and the repetitious sound of scales being poorly played.*

Sergei Monsieur… please…

Beast The call is with you.

Sergei All I have left is my coat. It is fur. I bought it in St Petersburg. It is worth…

Beast Precisely nothing. I have no need of a fur coat. Especially one that crawls with wildlife.

Sergei You would beggar me?

Beast By the state of you Sergei that is something you have achieved without my assistance.

Sergei But I have here in these cards… I know I have Monsieur…

Beast Ah, the winning hand. After three days at the gaming table you feel fortune calling at long last?

Sergei My card is good. My card is better than good.

Beast Without a stake Sergei it is worthless.

Sergei Wait. I beg you. I must have something in my bag that…

Beast You have nothing left. Go home Russian. The gaming table is no place for you.

Sergei I have one thing left.

Beast I do not need your coat or your boots or whatever it is that lurks in that sack.

Sergei It is precious. You will want it.

Beast I have everything I need.

Sergei My daughter. I wager my daughter.

Beast It is a heavy price Russian.

Sergei And I don’t see how I can lose.

Beast Leave the table. Walk away. Save yourself further pain.

Sergei But what you have laid on the table is…

Beast A fortune.

Sergei On one card. One turn of the card. I could have…

Beast More money than you have seen in a lifetime.

Sergei My card is unbeatable.

Beast I warn you for the last time. Don’t make this bet.

Sergei I wager the only thing left that I care about.

Beast Yet you drag her through the shithouses of Europe like you would a dog on a leash. When you win she eats. When you lose she forages through bins and begs for pennies.

Sergei She could be of more use to you than to me.

Beast I have no use for a child with an empty stomach.

Sergei But she is on the cusp of…. older things.

Beast Ah and now we come to it.

Sergei At some point monsieur you will need sons. And with your….

Beast And with my appearance no sane woman would lie with me.

Sergei I only speak the truth. No insult is intended.

Beast None taken. After all I can see you are a man of… honour.

Sergei Take the bet. I will not lose her. This card I hold will ensure I keep my daughter and win my fortune.

Beast How can I deny you Sergei? You have your wager. Lay your winning card.

*There is a moment. Sergei then lays his card on the table. The beast takes a moment and then lays his.*

 *He has won.*

Sergei Marietta.

*There is the sound of howling in victory.*

*It is ear-splitting*

Projected

Marietta When I was 12 my father lost me to the Beast at a game of cards.

*The audience is tipped into blackness and there is the sound of howling but distant this time.*

*We walk through a stony, storm-lamp lit wasteland.*

*Faint music and warm, soft lighting emanate from the windows of a house rough hewn from jagged sticks and old chairs.*

*There are lilies, some fresh, many dead, woven into the walls.*

*The lighting grows warmer and brighter.*

*It invites.*

*The music is fragile and scratched – think 1920’s/30’s, German, Bavarian.*

*Inside Marietta and The Woodcutter are dancing together to the music that comes out of the radio.*

*Slowly, languidly, sensuously.*

*The Woodcutter’s shirt front is splashed with blood.*

*Marietta is in her underwear.*

*Marietta wears a monstrous metal cage around her head, with her face just visible.*

*The Woodcutter takes Marietta by the shoulders and kisses her on the mouth.*

*He is leaving.*

*When they speak their voices are not contained in the house but fill the space where the audience stand – over amplified as if we are underwater.*

Marietta Just a few more minutes.

Woodcutter It’s late.

Marietta A moment longer.

Woodcutter I need to get back.

Marietta To the village.

Woodcutter Yes.

Marietta But they mustn’t know.

That you spend your nights with the mad woman in the stick house.

Woodcutter They do not think you mad.

Marietta No?

Woodcutter No. They think you’re a witch.

Marietta My reputation grows then.

 *He kisses her and she moves into him with her hips.*

Woodcutter Jesus Marietta you’re killing me.

Marietta So. Stay.

Woodcutter In a few hours I am expected at the Assembly.

Marietta Ah. The Assembly.

Woodcutter As head of the village Assembly I have to finalise certain plans.

Marietta Born a woodcutter.

Woodcutter Yes.

Marietta Grew into a blacksmith.

Woodcutter Yes.

Marietta And now head of the assembly.

Woodcutter Yes.

Marietta You have become a powerful man.

Woodcutter No, just a very tired one.

Marietta A powerful man who keeps me secret.

Woodcutter What we do here Marietta is private. It is mine. It is none of their business.

Marietta You are ashamed?

Woodcutter No, but…

Marietta And the but gives you away.

Woodcutter I don’t want to argue.

 *Beat*

Marietta So what is it like lying with a witch?

What’s it like rolling and sweating in her sheets, in her house on the edge of the forest.

Where the bogey man lives.

Where the Beast roams.

Where the devil plays.

Woodcutter They don’t know what to fear the most. The witch who sells wicker, the forest that never ends or the beast that howls in the night. They are foolish.

 *He caresses her*

Marietta I only have two more days.

Woodcutter I made you a promise. I will take care of it.

Marietta But you have gone into the forest so many times and so many times…

Woodcutter I have failed but he leaves lilies on your doorstep every dawn now. He is coming. He is close.

Marietta Their stench makes me retch.

Woodcutter I will find him and when I do…

*The sound of their voices suddenly rings clear and true*

Marietta You will kill him?

Woodcutter Yes.

Marietta You promise me.

Woodcutter Of course.

Marietta I will be safe?

Woodcutter Yes.

Marietta And we will be together?

Woodcutter When we can.

Marietta With no shame?

Woodcutter I’m not ashamed.

Marietta As long as the village doesn’t find out.

Woodcutter Please. Not again.

Marietta They hate me.

Woodcutter They are fearful.

Marietta They are oxen. Chained to the plough.

*Pause*

Woodcutter Have you seen the boy?

Marietta Not for the last two days.

Woodcutter He’s probably lying in a puddle of his own piss somewhere.

Marietta Don’t do that.

Woodcutter Or stealing food from the bins.

Marietta And how else is he supposed to eat?

Woodcutter He is fed. Don’t let him tell you any different.

Marietta I know how the village treat him.

Woodcutter You don’t need the company of… such a creature.

Marietta He is not a creature….

Woodcutter He is not a man.

Marietta I am lonely.

Woodcutter Then get a dog.

Marietta …

Woodcutter I am tired.

So many nights.

Out there.

Looking.

Without even know what I am looking for.

Whatever moves I slaughter.

This shadow might be him.

Or this.

Not knowing what form he takes I wield my axe against anything with a pelt.

Marietta I will feel it when you find him.

S*he raises her hand to the cage around her head*

Woodcutter Tighter again?

 *Marietta nods. A faint trickle of blood runs down her cheek.*

Woodcutter It is the devil’s work.

Marietta He is simply protecting what is his.

*Marietta goes to the table and takes out a small corn dolly. She tries to put it puts it in the Woodcutter’s jacket pocket.*

Woodcutter No. Jesus Christ Marietta.

Marietta It will watch over you and keep you safe.

Woodcutter It’s bloody ridiculous.

Marietta Do they frighten you?

Woodcutter Sell them to the ignorant if you must but for God’s sake don’t bring them near me.

Marietta Wicker people.

To protect you.

Woodcutter Don’t do that.

Marietta Do what?

Woodcutter Behave like the witch the village claims you to be.

*Pause*

Marietta Don’t leave me angry.

Look at me.

Look at me smile.

Look at me smile and listen to me telling you that I love you.

Woodcutter. I… I have to go.

*The woodcutter goes towards the door and picks up an axe which he puts in his belt.*

*They come to the door but are unaware of the audience.*

*By the side of the house he picks up a sack and throws it over his shoulder.*

 *It sprays blood in an arc.*

*Some of it hits Marietta but she pays no mind to it.*

*They kiss at the door and she tries to hold on longer than he will allow.*

*He exits into the darkness trailing blood behind him.*

*The smell of lilies starts to filter through the walls of the house*

*Marietta shivers and hurriedly locks the door.*

*She bolts it and puts a chair under the handle.*

 *She checks the windows – but cannot see the audience.*

*She takes a wicker doll hanging from a chair and holds it tight.*

*Due to the cage she cannot lie down to sleep but sits in a chair and wraps a blanket around herself.*

*The radio plays on but has distorted since that first fragile moment*

*Lights in the house slowly fade to darkness apart from one oil lamp flickering*

*The Hobbledehoy appears from the ladder.*

*He is… startling.*

Hobbledehoy Well well friend

Here you are.

Spying on her, the krassavitseh.

Peeky boo through the winders at what she do.

Your jaws wide open, your tongues all a loll, your eyes all a bulge and liking it, no?

That bloke was cupping his baitsim.

They all does do this.

From the village made of brick.

Sneak up here they does and spies her.

All them bulvan.

And they likes what they see sure enough.

Her and the woodcutter roll in her sheets.

Just roll and krechts.

Getting all farschvitst with the effort of it all.

I watches too.

Through the glass in the wall I watches him try to spear her like a hog. But she won’t lay beneath him. She won’t let him above her pulke or below her pupik.

Not until his axe gives her the head of what he promised.

Farshtaist?

When I comes here, when I can get away, she do give this mossik cinnamon buns. Hot and crumbling from her oven.

Other days a whole bunch of piss the beds. Yellow-headed piss the beds that stain my fingers with greens leaves that you can pop in your cakehole.

And if she been on a wander I gets Jew’s Ears that she cut from the tree. In a dish with butter, fills me belly and makes me greps. Geshmak.

And sometimes… sometimes oh gelibbteh she just let me smell her hair.

Shain vi der lavoone.

For this the house of Marietta.

A house made of twigs and bullock shit.

A house far from the village but near to the druchus.

So that wild bulvan can keep his amber eye on she.

When she was first come to this place she used to go wandering.

Down to the village she wanders.

Don’t care me tell her no.

There is a hollybaloo and much much tumel cos when she go down there the milk turned to stringy stink, woman’s titty loo las gave nothing for their ugly babbies, the well goes drier than my papa’s heart and men’s matkes stick out all on their own.

So they takes their wooden sticks and beat her red and purple til back here she comes. And now back here she stays.

The she-devil.

The nafkeh.

The witch.

The Russian.

In two nights she one and twenty.

She marks down the nights with a scribbler on these twiggy walls.

And every time she weeps.

Each owl hoot, more tears are loosened.

Cause something shlect and shvartz this way comes, something out of the darkling woods, something that makes her bite her tongue and claw at her black hair.

She farfolen.

I knows me. The hobbledehoy. I knows, for when the nights is long and there is just herself and this here umglick she tells fables of her time before.

Her tateh, useless as a puddle of horse piss, lost her when she was just ten plus two to the animal that lives in them woods.

This fet animal, this bloody humped backed bastard beast, needs her to make him his very own monster babbies. But she were wee then, too wee for birthing hairy gremlins so he buildy for she a cage. A cage for her bonce.

Tightly and tightly every day until she walks into the woods and gives herself all over to he.

She gives herself, cage falls off.

He ain’t so stupid that.

He know she may just trot away, especially now she got the woodcutter under her skirts.

Need to keep her close.

Need to claim what is his.

Then when ding dong ding dong, one and twenty she become, ding dong ding dong, Beast’s whore she become.

And fuck me missus – who wants that?

Der mensch trakht un Gott lahkt.

*The door to the stick house suddenly opens and it begins to glow.*

*Marietta remains asleep in her chair.*

*There is music box music playing.*

*Rough and raw and scratchy and utterly heart-breaking.*

Go on in – you won’t wake she.

Because for she you don’t even exist.

*The audience enter.*

*There is a large mirror above the chair.*

*A woman appears in the mirror.*

*She is beautiful but older than her years.*

*It is Marietta’s mother.*

Mother He’s right.

The imp.

You don’t exist.

She sleeps in the stick house.

On the verge of a woman’s life.

I pace in a tiny room far away.

At the end of mine.

I long ago served my purpose.

My money spent.

My estate sold.

A turn of the card and another and another and another.

Until there is nothing left but to unburden himself of me.

Into a sanatorium where loneliness has claimed me and madness surrounds me.

My husband.

Marietta’s father.

Sergei.

The Russian.

When she sleeps.

I visit the stick house and I sit with her.

She smiles.

Her eyes flutter.

It is enough.

And though the village want to destroy her and the beast in the wood wants to claim her, we find time, she and I, to be at peace with other.

Whilst she sleeps.

Whilst she dreams.

I taught her how to weave.

Before she could hardly walk I took her nimble little fingers and introduced them to the wicker.

I taught her how to create these little people.

And from that early age she understood them and they understood her.

They whisper in her ear and she listens.

They point in a direction and she follows.

And they will call to you.

You may not hear them, but they call all the same.

And when they find you, for they surely will, keep them close.

Wicker touching skin.

Outside there is the village and the wood and beyond that marching boots and displaced people.

But here.

A daughter sleeps.

My Marietta.

My only child.

My beloved.

*Three large scrapbooks fly open.*

*An invisible hand is writing.*

*Once upon a time…*

*Once upon a time…*

*Once upon a time…*

*God save us….*

*Drawings appear of a cold child in the frost*

*Of a mother*

*Of a man*

*The rocking chair starts to rock in the room.*

*From the roof of the stick house drop fifty wicker dolls.*

*Each with a brown name tag attached to them.*

*They match the names on the boards hung around the audience’s necks.*

*The audience finds their own wicker.*

*They hold them firm.*

*Outside the Stick House a path is lit.*

*It leads the audience to a place where they can see the exterior of the house.*

*Burnt tree stumps litter the space.*

*Bark under foot.*

*The smell of fungus, wet earth.*

*The lights violently plunge out.*

*As the audience watch, words start to scrawl themselves on the side of the house.*

***Witch***

***Bitch***

***Whore***

***Child killer***

  *The lights twitch and we are in the village.*

*An emergency meeting of the Assembly*

Woodcutter Please.

Just a moment.

We need to discuss this with calm.

Please.

Please.

You have known me since I was a child. Most of you men knew my father and his father. Some of you women played hoop-la with my mother when she was a girl. It was you who handed me the honour of leading the Assembly. At first I refused. It was not something I asked for you know that. I consider myself just a man who cuts the wood and shoes your horses. That is what I was made for.

My father before me cleared parts of that forest so we could plant crops. My grandfather worked the anvil so we could build out homes. We were one of the first families to lay down our roots in this valley and if you broke us in half, this land, this village would be stamped through us to our core.

We all know how difficult things have been for us these past nine years. The harvest has failed three years out of four, families have lost babies before they took their first suck, two summers ago the wind took our topsoil and the fire in the grain store last winter left many of us hungry at a time when the snow was deepest.

And so we grow afraid. I hear the fear every day in the market and I see it etched in your faces as you listened to the radio and scour the newspapers.

What has cursed this village needs to be eradicated. I am with you on that.

But what we do not agree on is where the source of our grief lies.

The Beast in the forest?

The girl with a cage on her head?

Or certain… groups within our own walls who wish to do us harm?

Carl, I see you shaking your head. I know which way your mind is made, after all was it not your boys who visited the girl’s stick house last night to remind her of just what kind of wench she is?

This village will only be able to break free of this curse if we work together. All I ask is that you consider that there are other forces working against us. Believe me I take no pleasure in saying this Jacob.

You want to chase shadows in the woods or take arms against a girl who is no more than a child then you’ve made your choice and I will not stop you. All I ask is that you consider there may be another answer to our malaise. One that comes from within these village walls…

*There is singing. It is the Hobbledehoy.*

*It is beautiful.*

*Lights rise for morning – LED lights in smoke balloons*

*Marietta comes out of the house.*

*She sits with her back to the Stick House and starts to plait together the wicker to make new dolls.*

*She still has blood in her hair.*

*There is the scent of damp fur.*

*The hobbledehoy enters he carries a jug with him.*

*He is not sober but not falling down drunk.*

*He is cheery in his cups.*

*He has something in his coat.*

Marietta You started early I see.

Hobbledehoy A gesheft hob ich. (*I don’t care*)

Marietta And then one of the red-faced frauleins from the village, screaming her head off for you, will find you passed out in the latrine.

Hobbledehoy Deigsh nisht (*Don’t worry*).

Marietta And so up my path you’ll weave, covered in piss with a hangover and black eye.

Hobbledehoy A kick up my bohmer and a klop on my noodle.

So I drinks a drop.

Just a drop to make a song.

Marietta And there’ll be no girl safe for the nearest three miles.

Hobbledehoy Aha. Them froys in that village? They’re all just kurvehs.

Marietta What’s that in your coat?

Hobbledehoy …

Marietta I don’t suppose it would be for me?

Hobbledehoy Maybe. Maybe not for you. Maybe for one of my kurvehs.

Marietta Let me see.

Hobbledehoy Catch me.

Marietta Really? Why can’t you just give me something for a change without me having to tussle for it.

Hobbledehoy Kitsel.

Marietta There’s a surprise.

Hobbledehoy Oh yes. Yes indeedy you. Kitsel. Then gift.

*Marietta rises slowly as if exhausted and then suddenly makes a grab for him.*

*He shrieks with laughter.*

*His laughter is a roar and other worldly.*

*He runs round the house and up and over the house and as he passes the audiences he winks at them.*

*They chase.*

*This way and that.*

*Marietta enjoys the game too.*

*She grabs him and begins to tickle.*

*It is an old game.*

*Smashing through - far off - a wail of grief is heard.*

*Marietta stops suddenly.*

Marietta Did you hear that?

Did you hear?

Hobbledehoy This kitsel not done yet.

Marietta From the village.

Hobbledehoy Chase. Chase. Come on Maz. Noch a mool (*one more time*).

*He starts to run and then stops.*

*He keeps trying to get her to chase him but she is distracted.*

*He goes to face her and taps his jacket knowingly.*

*She won’t be drawn.*

*Frustrated and with some flourish he produces what was in his pocket.*

*There is the distant sound of howling from the wood in reply.*

Hobbledehoy Krolik.

Marietta A rabbit.

Hobbledehoy It’s dead.

Marietta For the pot?

Hobbledehoy I was thinking this could be he. The darkling from the wood.

Marietta Oh so you think what follows me, what has cursed me, is a rabbit.

Hobbledehoy (*Miffed*) Perhaps.

Marietta A two foot long rabbit.

Hobbledehoy Ruf mich k’na (*So call me a nut*)

Marietta That howls in the night and leaves me lillies.

Hobbledehoy Perhaps. You know. Perhaps.

Marietta And wants me to have babies with him. You know how they happen eh? Babies? So how do you think me and this rabbit would make that work?

Hobbledehoy You lies down and he hops on.

Marietta The saddest looking rabbit I ever seen.

Hobbledehoy (*under his breath and looking at the audience*) Vemen barestu Prietzteh? (*Who are you screwing princess*)

Marietta I know now you’re cursing me. But no bloody idea. You know that? I have no bloody idea what you say. But this… this…

Hobbledehoy Krolik.

Marietta This krolik is no beast so he can make acquaintance with my pot.

 *The Hobbledehoy takes his jug and goes to leave.*

Marietta And where do you think you are going? The jug monsieur.

*The Hobbledehoy gives Marietta the jug and she sits by the house with it.*

*She drinks.*

*He moves and sits next to her.*

*He drinks.*

Marietta And this I know.

*She holds up the jug*

Bronven.

Hobbledehoy Bron**fen**. Bronfen.

Marietta Whiskey. To make us forget eh?

Hobbledehoy Woodcutter?

Marietta No need to look over your shoulder. He’s not here. It’s daylight. He never comes in the daylight.

Hobbledehoy When the sun lies down.

Marietta Just when the sun lies down. Maybe I look better in the dark.

Hobbledehoy I reckons you might.

Marietta Did you see him? In the village this morning.

Hobbledehoy Naw. This boychik in the lavvy. With me jug. Hear the ching ker ching through.

Marietta Working the anvil.

Hobbledehoy Banging horses boots. Ching ker ching. A farbrecher with a fierce face.

Marietta He’s tired.

Hobbledehoy We all fucking tired lady.

 *The music box starts up in the house – disjointed and melancholic.*

Marietta Last night?

Hobbledehoy …

Marietta Tell me.

*The hobbledehoy looks away.*

*He holds up six fingers.*

Marietta Six?

Hobbledehoy I knows me numbers. I ain’t no chamoole.

Marietta And they all were….

 *Hobbledehoy nods and mimes a branding.*

Hobbledehoy You can smell it and hear ‘em howl. Like babbies with no tit.

Marietta And then?

Hobbledehoy In the crate on wheels and…. Pfuuff .

Marietta And the men who came?

Hobbledehoy Same same. Grobers that talk wrong. Big boots. Big guns. (*beat*) But youse alright. Here. Out of that village, that hell hole, that hefkar.

Hob nit kain deiges (*don’t worry*)

You safe safe cos looky here what I got these sticky hands on.

*He draws a huge knife from his belt*

A messer. My messer. The biggest I ever did see. You be safe now.

*Marietta smiles and puts her arm around the Hobbledehoy.*

*He lays his head in her lap.*

*They hold this for some time.*

*The lights dim.*

*The music box music rises slowly at first and then more rapidly as it becomes nerve shatteringly distorted.*

*Laying underneath the music is the unremitting thud of marching boots – unrecognisable at first.*

*There is a smell of smoke.*

*It becomes stronger.*

*From the village comes the rumble of shouting and chanting.*

*It swells.*

*From beyond the stick house burning torches light the horizon.*

*The Stick House lights fizz and crackle.*

 *A primitive shriek is heard.*

*A mob is forming.*

*Anger hits the air.*

*The wicker dolls in the audiences’ hands start to vibrate*

*It is a heartbeat.*

*Slow at first but gaining pace as the jeopardy draws near.*

*Their hearts beating glow red through their clothes.*

*Their limbs twitch and spasm.*

*Marietta comes out of the house wiping her hands on her skirt. Her apron is bloodied from the rabbit whose pelt she holds in her hand.*

*The woodcutter has arrived, unseen, behind the audience.*

Woodcutter Get your things.

Marietta What?

Woodcutter Just take what is easiest to carry.

Marietta Slow down. What is…/

Woodcutter The men have lit torches and the women have grabbed anything with a blade.

Marietta The village?

Woodcutter In the lower field. They will be here in no time.

Marietta And why are they tramping through my field?

Woodcutter A child. Found in the well this morning. Drowned.

Marietta Oh God.

Woodcutter A girl. The cooper’s daughter. His only child.

Marietta I am sorry.

Woodcutter It is one plague too many.

People disappearing into trucks, crops failing, summers that bring snow, winters that bring drought and a child dead.

After all that has happened you must realise whose door they would come to?

Marietta I haven’t been to the village for years. I have nothing to do with them. Their lives. Their children.

Woodcutter You know you’re a witch? You do know that don’t you?

Marietta This is not the time….

Woodcutter A witch who makes their lives unbearable.

Marietta Enough.

Woodcutter A witch that carries the mark of the beast.

 *The cage tightens.*

Woodcutter And now enough is enough. So they march.

Marietta And when they get here?

Woodcutter Some are in favour of a burning others propose hanging.

Marietta ….

Woodcutter You need to move Marietta. Into the forest. We need to go into the forest.

Marietta No. I can’t. He will be waiting.

Woodcutter So we pray he won’t find us. But there is no other choice.

Marietta Where is the hobbledehoy?

Woodcutter Grab a coat. A warm coat.

Marietta We can’t leave without him. They will hurt him.

Woodcutter And any food you can carry.

Marietta The hobbledehoy….

Woodcutter Has been dealing with sticks and fists all his life. He will know what to do to take care of himself.

Marietta You must speak to them. Stop them and speak to them. They will listen to you.

Woodcutter Believe me I tried but when a man has a scythe in his hand and a real itch to use it

Marietta You failed.

Woodcutter I am not God.

Marietta No? (*beat*) Speak to them.

Woodcutter I can’t stop what has already started. What has been festering for years. They will leave when your house is burnt and your face stripped away.

 *The lights get brighter and the shouts of rage shriller.*

*Sound moves and swirls around the audience.*

Marietta I need to…/

Woodcutter …/ We have to go…/

Marietta …/ I can’t leave him…./

Woodcutter …/ Don’t be foolish. Not now…./

Marietta …./ No…/

Woodcutter …./ Run…/

Marietta …/ I won’t go in there.

Woodcutter The world outside groans and shifts and tilts and so we are faced with only one direction.

Marietta Jesus Christ, fine. Let them just come. It was always going to be that the village or the beast would take me. No point in dragging it out.

Woodcutter Stop it.

Marietta The village gets me first eh?

Woodcutter Don’t act like a child.

Marietta Maybe that’s the better option than having the beast thrust between my legs.

Woodcutter Stop it. We have no time for your self pity. Look at the situation. Look at the situation and make a fucking decision Marietta.

 *Pause.*

*They regard each other.*

*After an age – she nods*

*It is done.*

*They step through what seems to the audience to be a wall.*

*They step from the light into the dark and are swallowed up.*

*There is a moment of silence as a music box sounds out.*

*A sound of fury roars in, swirling, deafening.*

*The glow of fire is moving closer.*

*The stick house is alight.*

*It spits and moans and shrieks and keens.*

*The sound of marching boots is unbearably loud.*

*Voices fill the air shrieking in rage.*

*The anger has arrived at its destination.*

*The wicker people’s heartbeat is frenzied.*

*Then suddenly.*

*Silence.*

*Music fades in slowly - disjointed but recognisable, it warps and segues into something more sinister.*

*And from somewhere emerges the Hobbledehoy.*

*He is clutching an arm that has been burnt and he is in pain.*

*He goes into the Stick House.*

*The walls tumble and cave in.*

*The stick house falls.*

*Inside the contents have been wrecked.*

*He picks up Marietta’s wicker dolly from on her bed and stuffs it in his shirt.*

Hobbledehoy She gone?

 She gone?

 (*beat*)

 She gone.

 Into that place that is going to eat her up.

 Into that place with that plyoot.

 That ligner who take his axe and makes everything fall down.

She pick up her skirt and with her lally’s she run slapbang missus, slap bang into what make her scaredy for too long.

 She not a fool.

 She not a shlocche.

 (*beat*)

 A child dead.

 The village comes.

 And the witch vanishes.

There is death. I have seen it trot along after she.

Lallygogging about like a puppster.

Tangled up in her skirts.

Woven into her hair.

 And she can try to outrun it chochem

 But the future is ripped.

 (*Beat*)

 Nothing for it boys.

 *He looks into the darkness.*

 *Before he steps across he looks at the audience*

 Nor Got vaist (*God help us*)

 *There is a sound. A chord.*

 *Out of the darkness crawl nine insects*

*They face the audience.*

 *They are clunky and ill-formed but nonetheless oddly iridescent and beautiful.*

*As if Heath Robinson made them.*

*Half machine, half insect*

*They are also a light source that lead.*

 *They wait for the audience. Then move back into the dark.*

 *Music emanates from the wood, and sticks start to glow on the ground.*

 *The audience follow the insects into the darkness.*

 *It is dark.*

 *There is utter silence.*

 *There is the smell of decaying leaves.*

*The wicker awake in their hands. They can feel and hear the beating heart of their wicker doll.*

 *The music picks up on this and plays off it.*

*Quietly, hauntingly.*

 *The bugs can be seen again, flickering and moving.*

 *There is a mound of grass*

 *They sit.*

 *The wicker are silent.*

*Out of the ground rises a slowly spinning orb of stars.*

*It is our star system.*

*It hangs, rotating, as the noise of the wood slowly builds and fills the space.*

*The music, based on the rhythms of nature, moves in and builds to be beautiful.*

*The wicker are silenced.*

*There is a moment for the audience to rest.*

*Then.*

*From beneath them.*

*Under the mound.*

*There is a scratching, a scrabbling, a weird movement.*

*The Hobbledehoy rises through the earth.*

*He should startle them… again*

Hobbledehoy He took her.

She think she go, but me knows he took her.

Because that’s what is tick tocking in his noodle

And I fear.

I live in a shithouse. I drinks from puddles. I eats squirrel meat.

I knows what I am.

I knows where I come from.

I am not farbissener.

We all ‘as our stories.

But to him I says… I says…

Gai tren zich

Gai tren zich

Gai tren zich

Go fuck yourself

*As he continues miniature images appear.*

*They are rich and horrible, poignant and terrible.*

*They tell the tale with him.*

There was once a froy.

As beautiful as the seven worlds

Shain vi di zibben velten.

And she was good.

She was var good.

A calm sea.

A warm day.

A truth told.

She was as beautiful as the seven worlds and their seven moons.

Her people were people who came here long long ago oh beloved.

From another place that had taken their homes and barred their borders to them.

Shvertz azayan Yid (*It’s hard to be a Jew*).

*As he continues his voice changes and he begins to mature in his demeanour, he grows before us.*

Before there was me.

Before there was Marietta.

There was a baker’s daughter.

She could make whatever your heart desired because she had lightness sewn in her fingertips.

People walked for miles for a loaf of her bread or kapatka or babka.

Sometimes they walked for miles just to watch her smile.

She was a child on the edge of other things.

A child woman with flour in her hair and dough in her fingernails.

And people saw and wondered who would claim her.

Because someone would.

Someone would.

Someone.

Would.

It was winter and the snow lay higher than a man’s thigh and the frost curled itself around children’s hair when the smile went out.

Some say she mislaid it.

Some say it was stolen.

I know she murdered it.

The lightness of her touch grew heavy and dull and her eyes, brown almonds in a pastry white face, drew themselves always to the floor.

The dough no longer rose for her.

But her belly did.

A huge, ripe belly that showed, for all to see, that she had lain on her back.

And that someone had claimed her.

That one of them had laid her down on her back and… claimed her.

*Pause*

A few kind words on Monday.

Primroses on Tuesday

A kiss on Wednesday

A hand on her breast on Thursday

Told no on Friday

On Saturday, when the shadows were longest, he picked her up and took her into the darkest part of this forest.

Where the animals live.

Where the beasts gather.

And when she said No No No.

He said Yes Yes Yes.

He pushed her face into the dirt.

And like a hog, he rode her.

And she called out.

Crying.

Begging.

Snarling.

Fighting.

But he paid her no mind.

Because he needed to claim her.

*Beat*

The baker’s daughter.

The woman with flour in her hair.

The woman with almond eyes.

My mother.

*Projection shows the face of the woodcutter.*

The woodcutter, my papa, has a place in him, a space in him, where humanity withers.

And after I was born in shame and loathing.

After I came slithering out, bloodied and bruised.

After he saw what a creature he had sired.

She disappeared.

They burnt the mark onto her arm.

And put her into the truck.

She was the first.

I live in a latrine and drink water from puddles.

I get beaten when I get it wrong and kicked when I get it right.

Such is my lot.

This morning, as day broke and the rooster sang out, I was hauled out of my shit pit, and held down.

My father pumped the fire high, heated up his iron and gave me the mark.

The truck is coming in the morning.

*He holds out his arm and shows them the mark.*

*Then holding his lamp high he shows the audience that they have the same mark on their arms too.*

*It is a tattoo of seven numbers.*

And we will be on it.

*Lights flash and fuse.*

*The projections splutter out.*

*The world starts to tilt and the darkness starts to draw down.*

*The wicker dolls start to rap out heartbeats.*

*The audience sees a glow not far off.*

*The light flickers*

*The glow comes to life and we see The Woodcutter with Marietta*

*Marietta has her head in his lap.*

*He is speaking to her and she is drifting off towards sleep.*

*The audience cannot hear what he is saying but they are obviously soothing words.*

*Marietta and the Woodcutter cut in and out of the light, half in shadow.*

*There is an large projection of a beautifully drawn crow that dominates the space.*

Woodcutter You have beautiful hair. Do you know that?

Marietta The same colour as my mothers.

Woodcutter She died?

Marietta She… disappeared.

Woodcutter And your father?

Marietta Dead.

Woodcutter I am sorry.

Marietta An ace up the sleeve bought him more trouble than he ever imagined.

Woodcutter Someone killed him?

Marietta In an alleyway. With a knife. It was no surprise.

*There is a movement. Out of the corner of the eye.*

*A smell of damp fur pervades the space.*

*Marietta shivers.*

Woodcutter It’s nothing. They won’t follow us in here. They are too afraid.

Marietta And I am ashamed to say so am I.

Woodcutter I have been hunting him for years and never caught so much as a glimpse.

Marietta Some nights I feel him. Outside the stick house. At my window.

Woodcutter When you are undressing?

Marietta No. Late in the night.

Woodcutter Maybe he likes to come and look at you.

Maybe he likes to think about you.

Maybe in that fine house they say he has, in the evenings when it is cold and he is alone, he likes to think of you.

In a certain way.

Marietta I don’t know what you mean.

 *The woodcutter’s hands start to stroke the waist of Marietta.*

Woodcutter Is he as big as they say?

Marietta Much much bigger.

Woodcutter And as strong as they say?

Marietta Much much stronger.

Woodcutter But is he as powerful?

Marietta More powerful than you could imagine.

Woodcutter More powerful than the cooper?

Marietta Bigger and more powerful than the cooper.

Woodcutter I think he is just a man.

Marietta He stands like a man but that is all. The rest of him….

Woodcutter Some say he looks more wolf than man and others that he is more mountain lion.

Marietta He is like no animal I have seen before.

Woodcutter You say he stands?

Marietta Yes, though to run he crouches down like a dog.

Woodcutter And is he clothed?

Marietta The last time I saw him I was twelve. And yes then he was clothed.

Woodcutter Completely?

Marietta I don’t understand.

 *He slips his hand under her skirts.*

Woodcutter Is his clothing modest?

Marietta What are you doing?

Woodcutter A man that big, that powerful, built like an animal. If he was unclothed and standing then just how mighty a beast he is would be apparent to all.

Marietta Take your hand away.

Woodcutter Tell me. Just how big is he.

Marietta I said take your hand away.

Woodcutter Would you say bigger than an average man? Longer? Thicker? You must have seen. Something.

Marietta Stop it. Now.

Woodcutter Ah but how would you know, you would never let me show you what a man looks like.

Marietta I know what a man looks like.

 *He begins to move his hand under her skirt.*

*The crow starts to move, nervous*

Woodcutter Clothed yes, but as nature made him. Have you ever seen that?

Marietta You know I have not.

Woodcutter And if the beast is in… proportion. Well that must be a sight indeed…/

Marietta …/Enough…/

Woodcutter I have waited a long time Marietta.

Marietta I am grateful for your patience…/

Woodcutter …/And now it is time.

Marietta When the beast is dead. When the beast is dead and I am free. Then we can marry.

Woodcutter Tomorrow you are 21 and you will be claimed by him.

Marietta No

Woodcutter There is little point in marrying what will shortly be no more.

Marietta But we will fight him.

Woodcutter I fear that is no longer an option.

Marietta I said take your hand away.

Woodcutter And I would be a widower before the bed was even fully warmed.

Marietta Take me back. I said…

Woodcutter So the best thing is if I claim you first.

Marietta That is not going to happen.

Woodcutter I am going to take the first taste of what he has waited nine years for.

Marietta I said no.

Woodcutter I am going to spoil his prize.

 *The woodcutter launches at her.*

*The wicker heartbeats grow louder and faster.*

*Crows, high in the trees, start to make a ruckus.*

*The animated crow grows agitated*

*He tries to get her skirts up.*

 *She fights.*

*They are silent apart from laboured their breathing amplified and distorted – as if they are under water.*

*Sound torch bouncing off surfaces so the sound comes from different places.*

*She fights. Long and hard.*

*He punches her in the stomach.*

*She is winded but still tries to run.*

*He pulls her back to him and as he does so she reaches out and grabs the axe.*

*She swings the axe.*

*And with one blow she cuts off his hands at the wrist.*

*The bird takes flight.*

*There is a terrible howling.*

*The lights snap out.*

*The wicker stop.*

*We hear the hobbledehoy singing.*

*It is far off and wavering*

*There is a glow in the distance.*

*A music box starts up.*

*Then another.*

*Then another.*

*The boxes segue into a melody.*

*Gates begins to build.*

*Out of air.*

*They are huge and imposing, removed from reality.*

*When they build, the lights rise to reveal the hobbledehoy.*

*He has changed.*

*He looks more like a man than he has ever done before.*

*In his hands he holds a box.*

*It is beautiful.*

*Marietta stands at the gates.*

Marietta Are you hurt?

 *A voice comes from the darkness.*

*It is the Beast.*

Beast He is safe.

Marietta So.

Beast So.

Marietta You found me.

Beast You arrived at my door.

Marietta I was not looking for it.

Beast But you found it anyway.

Marietta Shall we just get on with this?

The debt has come to rest and now you force me to pay.

So let’s just do it shall we?

Beast Your viewpoint of the situation is somewhat… harsh.

Marietta You put my face in a cage. And then you tighten it.

Beast Would you like the cage removed?

Marietta You know the answer to that.

Beast Then ask me to.

Marietta …

Beast Ask me and I shall remove it.

Marietta …

Beast Ask me.

Marietta …

Beast I need you to say the words Marietta

Marietta …

Beast I see we are going to play this your way.

So tell me something.

Marietta You want a story?

Beast Were you happy?

Marietta …

Beast In the Stick House. Were you happy?

Marietta Yes.

Beast And with the woodcutter. Were you happy?

Marietta I thought… At the time…

Beast And the village made you happy?

Marietta You know otherwise.

Beast And the world outside.

Does it make you feel safe?

Marietta People disappear.

Beast Yes.

Marietta And an army advances.

Beast And as the child grew. She found out things she wished she hadn’t.

 *Long pause.*

Marietta Are you still there?

 *The wicker start to beat.*

Marietta Are you there?

 What am I suppose to do now?

 Speak to me.

 Tell me what I am supposed to do now?

 *Pause*

Hobbledehoy Take off the cage Marietta.

Marietta I have worn it for nine years and I have tried before.

It remains firm.

Hobbledehoy But now it is time.

 *She touches the back of the cage and it falls off.*

Beast You can go.

Marietta I can leave?

Beast Yes.

Marietta I can just… leave?

Beast If that’s what you choose.

Marietta Why would I choose anything else?

 *He lets her consider this.*

Marietta So I can leave and the debt is no more?

Beast The world outside is spewing hatred and death.

Take a moment and consider how it would treat you.

 *Beat*

Hobbledehoy I found this place whilst I was out looking for you.

It rose to meet me and I made a decision.

And I made it with ease.

I decided.

To stay here.

With him.

Marietta He forced you?

Hobbledehoy No.

I asked him if I could stay.

Behind these walls.

 And here I have finally found a place where there are no bruises or curses, no living in a sewer, no having to face the wasteland that has been promised us.

 Here I have food and warmth.

Books and music.

Marietta And for this you will serve him?

Beast He has served enough don’t you think?

 All I request in return is his company.

 Your father once called me an animal and to the outside world so it might appear, but I am not base.

 Simply tired of being alone.

Marietta Show yourself.

Beast …

Marietta Let me see all of you.

Beast Walk through the gates.

 Once you have made that decision then we will face each other.

Marietta I need to see what I am considering giving the rest of my life over to.

Beast That is not an option I am offering.

 *The box in the Hobbledehoy hands starts to pulsate.*

 *And blood begins to drip from it.*

*He is unfazed.*

Marietta There is blood. From the box.

Beast It bleeds yes.

Marietta What… is it?

Beast A heart.

 *Hobbledehoy opens the box to reveal a beating heart nestling in silk.*

 That once belonged to a woodcutter.

Marietta That is….

Beast Taking one life to save many.

Marietta And if I displease you will the hobbledehoy hold my heart in a box too?

Beast No Marietta.

Marietta And what about my… company?

Beast What of it?

Marietta Do you desire it?

Beast The thought of it does not displease me.

Marietta And I would have to keep yours?

Beast I will not force you.

 *The gates creak and groan,*

*They start to crumble, slowly, inexorably.*

 *There is no going back.*

Marietta Wait.

Beast You need to decide.

Marietta I don’t know… I can’t think….

Beast Yes you can.

 *The gates crumbling begins to quicken*

Marietta Hobbledehoy….

*Marietta falters.*

*The gates disintegration increases.*

*She takes a step towards the gates.*

*And then another*

*And another*

*And another.*

*They swallow her whole in a blinding white light.*

*She is gone.*

*The wicker go silent.*

*There is a terrible howling.*

*And the hymnal begins.*

*The audience is left in darkness.*

*There is a smell of wet fur.*

 *The audience are led past the Stick House.*

 *Embers flutter around it.*

*End*