

CATHERINE CALLED BIRDY

Written by

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Based on the book by Karen Cushman

**EXT. STONEBRIDGE VILLAGE- DAY**

A sunny day for a cottage-raising! All the villagers are helping, mixing daub (mud + straw) to construct a peasant's house. Children play. Baby hogs run amok as they are chased by a pig farmer.

It's all business as usual, a well oiled machine, until one irascible GIRL hurls a bunch of daub at a BOY. In turn, the boy hurls some daub at the girl, who responds by dumping a bucket of the stuff over his head. Soon all the other kids are hurling daub too. Now the adults. It's a daub fight! More villagers join in and soon they all look like clay figurines, covered in mud, a gleeful abstraction.

**INT. STONEBRIDGE MANOR- GREAT HALL- MOMENTS LATER- MORNING**

The year: 1290. The place: a manor house- not the nicest but not the worst either, the 13th Century equivalent of a large suburban home that hasn't been painted since the 1980s. Light shines through the windows onto glinting gold goblets. Tapestries hang luxuriously. Harp music wafts through like a gentle dream. Barry Lyndon would fucking love this place.

Suddenly a crash and a boom as a mutt barks and runs through the hall, followed by a goat, a pig, another goat, a sheep and the muddy BOY and then behind them the muddy GIRL, her mousy hair streaming behind her. Even as she bolts we can tell she's a mess, all elbows and knees and reckless energy, like an Olde English Eloise/Matilda combo. This is Catherine, also known as Little Bird, but to us she's BIRDY.

Birdy: our protagonist, a playful 14-year-old with a sharp bite of disdain for the conventions of her time. She shrieks past animals and servants and the boy and up the stairs, calling for MORWENNA, her nurse (an inward sparkplug, never smiling but always amused. She is carrying a fire poker and her apron is covered in soot.)

BIRDY

Morwenna! MORWENNA! I NEED  
MORWENNA!

**INT. STONEBRIDGE MANOR- BIRDY'S HALLWAY- MOMENTS LATER- MORNING**

The boy, PERKIN, a goatherd with a limp and a pubescent emerging mustache, knocks at Birdy's chamber door.

PERKIN

Birdy, the game's not through!  
You're always quitting, you piddle-  
pie!

BIRDY (O.S.)

GO AWAY, PERKIN!

**INT. STONEBRIDGE MANOR- BIRDY'S CHAMBER- MOMENTS LATER-  
MORNING**

A lady-like room adorned with tapestries, a canopy bed, a birdcage full of colorful little cockatiels imported from exotic lands. Inks, paints and vellum on the massive, carved mahogany desk. Abandoned spinning at the base of her bed, yarn tumbling to the floor. Bottles of stolen ale, half a loaf of bread, evidence of her laziness (she is doing everything she can to distress her surroundings.)

MORWENNA

And to think I just bathed you a fortnight ago! What a waste. Cottage-raisings are not for young ladies.

BIRDY

Morwenna, I did it! I released the pigs and I am not ashamed! They are only headed to slaughter and I will not allow other animals to live lives of captivity like mine!

MORWENNA

Like yours? Birdy, you are the most well fed captive I know.

BIRDY

And anyhow, I have a matter more pressing.

(she leans in to whisper)

Perkin has just told me how babies are made and I am afraid I shall perish with revulsion.

Morwenna shakes her head, starts to fold some scattered clothing items- she is used to her young charge's outbursts.

MORWENNA

You had to learn sooner or later, Birdy. You're fourteen, there's no need to spin your head.

BIRDY

Morwenna, am I to move on calmly  
with what I know now? A man is  
going to take a heated iron poker  
and stick it up my nose until  
there's a space big enough for his  
whole thumb, after which he will  
PRESS seeds into my BRAIN!?

Morwenna starts to laugh.

BIRDY (CONT'D)

And then they trickle down my  
throat to my guts where they take  
root for nine months before popping  
out my bum!? NO! NO!

Morwenna is laughing even harder, unable to contain her  
desperate amusement, until Birdy understands she's been had.

BIRDY (CONT'D)

Oh, I shall murder Perkin! He will  
bleed worse than if I stuck a spike  
up his--

Over Birdy's raging, her VO rises.

BIRDY (V.O.)

Corpus bones! It is I, Birdy.

OVER THE IMAGE, A HAND WRITES, AS IF ON AN ILLUMINATED  
MANUSCRIPT:

CATHERINE CALLED BIRDY.

**INT. STONEBRIDGE MANOR- SOLAR- SAME TIME- MORNING**

This is Birdy's father, LORD ROLLO'S man cave, hung with  
variously sized antlers and evidence of violent past times.

BIRDY (V.O.)

I am the Daughter of Lord Rollo.

TEXT ON SCREEN:

*Lord Rollo*  
- 41 years of age  
- often vain  
- usually drunk  
- always greedy (says me)

He takes a drink. Then another.

BIRDY (V.O.)  
And the Lady Aislinn.

**INT. STONEBRIDGE MANOR- AISLINN'S CHAMBERS- SAME TIME- MORNING**

Her mother LADY AISLINN (early 30s, frail and stunning, obedient but not broken) peers from a window with a spyglass; a small wooden telescope device. Her eyes are trained on the sky until she whip pans to her child- she is always watching.

TEXT ON SCREEN:

*Lady Aislinn*  
- 36 years of age  
- wise of spirit and fair of face (says everyone)

BIRDY (V.O.)  
In charge of Morwenna, the nursemaid.

**EXT. STONEBRIDGE MANOR- YARD- SAME TIME- MORNING**

Outside, Morwenna hangs sheets on a line while spying on Birdy.

TEXT ON SCREEN:

*Morwenna*  
- nobody knows her age!  
- expert at sneaking

BIRDY (V.O.)  
Sister to Edward the monk...

**INT. ABBEY BEDROOM - SAME TIME- MORNING**

EDWARD (21, a handsome dark-haired monk) sits in his robe at his desk, intently reading (not the Bible).

TEXT ON SCREEN:

*Edward the Monk*  
- 21 years of age  
- more fun than most monks.

BIRDY (V.O.)  
... And to the abominable Robert.

**EXT. STONEBRIDGE MANOR- YARD- SAME TIME- MORNING**

Birdy runs past the gate house, where she gags at the sight of her brother ROBERT (18, a mini-me of his pops, who is himself fencing the air ineffectually.)

ROBERT

Birdy, leave me be please.

Birdy grabs Robert's sword from him, unwieldy and massive in her hand, and does big bold moves at the sky. Her father, sweaty and exhausted, passes her, grabbing it back in one easy motion.

BIRDY (V.O.)

Of the village of Stonebridge in  
the shire of Lincoln, in the  
country of England, in the hands of  
God.

Birdy greets Perkin, the goat boy with a limp who she chased earlier. He is cheerful and determined despite the challenge of running with a disability.

PERKIN

(singing in old English)

Put your clothes on; don't refuse  
Breeches, gloves, and also shoes;

Birdy joins him singing and they hold hands and spin.

BIRDY AND PERKIN

Hat on head for rain or sun;  
Buttons - do up every one.

They collapse laughing.

BIRDY (V.O.)

And friend of Perkin, my heart's  
brother. Although he is just a goat  
boy, he is kind of heart and wise  
of spirit.

He sticks his butt out and farts at her.

BIRDY (V.O.)

Though he is sorely afflicted with  
wind in his bowls.

**INT. STONEBRIDGE MANOR- BIRDY'S CHAMBER- MORNING**

Birdy toils over her spinning, tangling it.

BIRDY (V.O.)  
14th Day of August.

The date loops across the screen in the same wobbly cursive as the title.

BIRDY (V.O.)  
Tangled my spinning again. What a torture. I would rather be fed to a stropky dragon than try and spin like a lady.

She is corrected by Morwenna, who has clearly surrendered her own life in service of raising a good young noblewoman.

**INT./EXT. STONEBRIDGE MANOR- PRIVY- AFTERNOON**

Birdy runs, her tangled spinning in her hands, and deposits it in the toilet.

BIRDY (V.O.)  
I am, thank the lord, very cunning. Most girls are, though we are not given due credit for it.

Using a long stick, Birdy stuffs the spinning deeper into the actual hole that the people of the manor, ahem, piss and shit in.

BIRDY (V.O.)  
But I have a fantastic update. I have made a bargain with my mother. I may forego spinning, my greatest agitation of all, as long as I write this account of my days for my brother, Edward the monk.

**INT. STONEBRIDGE MANOR- BIRDY'S CHAMBER- NIGHT**

Birdy, wearing her nightdress, sits at her desk and writes in her little book.

BIRDY (V.O.)  
In his letters, he tells me he believes it will help me grow less childish and more learned.

**EXT. STONEBRIDGE FIELD- AFTERNOON**

Birdy runs, overjoyed.

BIRDY (V.O.)  
 So what follows will be my book-  
 the book of Catherine, called  
 Little Bird or Birdy.

She moves toward camera and then just past it.

**INT./EXT. STONEBRIDGE MANOR- GOAT BARN- DAY**

Birdy sits on the hay, looking through a bound book of Latin phrases. Next to her sits Perkin.

Nearby MEG (lovely, a little older than Birdy, in modern parlance a ditz) is braiding something. She shyly ties it around Birdy's wrist.

MEG  
 A golden braid for my golden lady.

TEXT ON SCREEN:

*Meg*  
 - 18 years of age  
 - comely dancer  
 - snorty laughter

BIRDY (V.O.)  
 Meg the dairy maid is a dear  
 friend, when I can stop her from  
 curtsying and my lady-ing me.

BIRDY  
 This is hay but I do love the  
 sentiment. It's beautiful.  
 (back to her book)  
 Est pater meus animalis!  
 (she smiles)  
 It means my father is a beast. The  
 best words I've learned. You are so  
 lucky your father is dead.

PERKIN  
 Birdy, I'm still actually quite  
 upset about that...

**INT. STONEBRIDGE MANOR- BIRDY'S CHAMBER- DAY**

Birdy continues to mindlessly spin yarn with Morwenna.

BIRDY (V.O.)  
 My truest passions are avoiding my  
 chores.

Outside the window she watches...

**EXT. STONEBRIDGE MANOR- MORNING**

On the grass in front of the manor, Birdy's father Lord Rollo passes, drunkenly fencing a peasant. This is a man who was, at one point, beautiful and naughty, playful and present. But the cost of running a village, of trying to win at Lordship, is that you must fight to maintain convention. And he is fighting.

ROLLO  
Fight harder!

The peasant fights back.

ROLLO (CONT'D)  
Now, less hard! I want to win!

BIRDY (V.O.)  
Critiquing my father's horrible swordplay.

Birdy walks through their flower garden.

ROLLO  
Birdy, walk upon the paths! What are you, a milkmaid?

BIRDY  
I didn't see a path!

Her father drops his sword to tend to the flowers.

**EXT. STONEBRIDGE VILLAGE- DAY**

BIRDY (V.O.)  
Disrupting cottage-raises.

Birdy runs through the village with a chicken in her arms. A villager chases after her.

BIRDY (V.O.)  
Causing mischief in the village.

VILLAGER  
Hey! You stole my chicken!

**INT. STONEBRIDGE MANOR- HALL OUTSIDE SOLAR- DAY**

Birdy lies on the ground, listening through the crack under the door.

BIRDY (V.O.)  
And listening thru doors I should  
not listen thru.

**INT. STONEBRIDGE MANOR- SOLAR- SAME TIME- DAY**

Rollo speaks to a nerdy, uptight STEWARD, who looks way too young for the job and is clearly panicked.

ROLLO  
How has this happened, Finneas!?  
You were hired to prevent this!

The Steward paces, concerned.

STEWARD  
In essence, sir? You have ignored  
me. You have spent profligately, my  
lord, and without censure.

ROLLO  
I cannot have spent so much.  
(considering)  
Give me one example of an expense  
that was not strictly necessary for  
my family to survive!

STEWARD  
Really?

**EXT. STONEBRIDGE MANOR- DAY (FLASHBACK)**

A cart approaches, driven by a swarthy TIGER SALESMAN. Rollo, Robert and Birdy await, thrilled.

ROLLO  
My tiger has arrived!!!

The back of the cart opens and Rollo peers inside.

ROLLO (CONT'D)  
It is dead!

TIGER SALESMAN  
The travel was harsh from Siberia,  
lord.

Beat.

ROBERT  
Mayhap it is just sleeping father?

BIRDY  
Tis not breathing, you fool.

ROLLO  
(unfazed)  
How soon may I have another?

Watching through her spyglass, Aislinn shakes her head.

**INT. STONEBRIDGE MANOR- SOLAR- PRESENT MOMENT- DAY**

Rollo moans.

ROLLO  
Am I to live like a peasant, on  
bread and water and chat alone?

**EXT. STONEBRIDGE MANOR- HALL OUTSIDE SOLAR- SAME TIME- DAY**

Birdy is still spying when a hunting dog (the same one from the first scene) comes bounding down the hall. It notices Birdy and begins to bark.

BIRDY  
Shhh!

It growls, tugging at her skirt. She tries to crawl away but it keeps on tugging. She stands, dragging the dog down the hall with its jaw firm around her skirts.

BIRDY (CONT'D)  
(muttering)  
Untooth me, hound!

**INT. STONEBRIDGE MANOR- SOLAR- DAY**

Disrupted by the dog, Birdy misses what is next:

STEWARD  
If, sir, you can secure a  
profitable union for your only  
daughter, there is your opportunity  
to relieve yourself of this  
accumulated debt.

ROLLO  
A profitable union? For Birdy?

STEWARD  
Yes.

ROLLO  
With a man?

STEWARD  
Yes.

ROLLO  
No, no, no. She's disgusting! She's  
one step away from a leper.

Awkward beat.

STEWARD  
You may not have coins, but your  
wife has a title, and she has given  
it to you--

ROLLO  
I earned it!

STEWARD  
(ignoring this)  
There are plenty of men foolish  
enough to trade their fortune for  
the prefix of Lord. Now, it is your  
job to find one.

ROLLO  
(quieter)  
Sir, there must be another  
answer... She is my only daughter.

STEWARD  
And this is your only manor.

The steward bows and exits.

STEWARD (CONT'D)  
My lord.

Rollo lets the shame of his failure wash over his face for a  
beat, then reaches for the flask in his waist belt.

**INT. STONEBRIDGE MANOR- KITCHEN- DAY**

Birdy is gnawing on an apple, avoiding the wormhole, when she feels a pair of eyes on her back. It is her father, regarding her studiously.

BIRDY (V.O.)  
Something is astir.

She takes another cautious bite.

BIRDY (V.O.)  
I can feel my father's eyes  
following me wherever I go.

Birdy takes a step to the left. Her father, behind her, does the same- an odd waltz.

BIRDY (V.O.)  
He is regarding me as he would a  
bull bought for breeding.

He circles her, looking her up and down.

ROLLO  
Exactly how old are you?

Beat.

BIRDY  
I am fourteen years.

Beat.

BIRDY (V.O.)  
I am surprised that he has not  
asked to examine my hooves.

ROLLO  
Have you all your teeth?

BIRDY  
All but one.

ROLLO  
And you are certainly a good eater.  
What color is your hair when it is  
clean?

BIRDY  
When it's clean? Blue?

ROLLO  
 (giving up)  
 Very good. Nice to see you. Go and  
 see your little goat friend now.

BIRDY (V.O.)  
 What is brewing here?

Rollo walks away down the hall.

ROLLO  
 (sotto, convincing  
 himself)  
 Fourteen. That isn't that young...

**INT. STONEBRIDGE MANOR- PRIVY- AFTERNOON**

Birdy opens the door, clutching her guts, and slams it shut.

She settles onto the toilet, holding up her skirts, when she catches sight of her petticoat. Her eyes grow wide.

**INT. STONEBRIDGE MANOR- BIRDY'S CHAMBER- MOMENTS LATER- AFTERNOON**

Birdy paces, inconsolable, while Morwenna tries to understand.

BIRDY  
 I am dying. It is plain to see.

MORWENNA  
 Oh, what did Perkin tell you this  
 time?

Birdy brandishes her bloody petticoat from behind her back.

MORWENNA (CONT'D)  
 In the name of the father, Birdy!

BIRDY  
 I must say my goodbyes and get on  
 with good humor. I will go bravely,  
 and with God in my heart. Please  
 give my brooch to my future sister  
 and my bible to my brother Edward  
 and tell him I am sorry I got  
 pudding upon the pages.  
 (beat)  
 You see, the blood came from my  
 bum.

MORWENNA  
 (skeptical)  
 Your bum?

Birdy spreads her skirts and her spindly legs. Morwenna shakes her head then looks (despite her inherent prudishness, keeping this child alive is her job.)

MORWENNA (CONT'D)  
 Oh, for the love of a God greater than I. Birdy, it comes from the other hole.

BIRDY  
 What other hole?

MORWENNA  
 It is your monthly tiding. The lady in red. So, you will do your duty to bear your husband children.

On Birdy's face, a look of alarm as she shakes her head furiously: no, no, no.

BIRDY  
 Then I shall run away. Far. I shall steal a suit of armor and become a knight, and I shall take a horse and carriage and I shall ride at midnight--

MORWENNA  
 Dress as a knight or dress as a lady, the blood will come. You are a woman now, Birdy.

BIRDY  
 A woman?

Morwenna snaps to.

MORWENNA  
 First of all we are going to make a pad. Rag gets wrapped around hand.

She does.

MORWENNA (CONT'D)  
 Make it good and thick.

She hands it to Birdy.

MORWENNA (CONT'D)

That is a nice wee pad that sits in your pants.

Morwenna holds up a piece of fabric.

BIRDY

Are they my father's?

MORWENNA

No. These are your pants.

BIRDY

My pants?

MORWENNA

Give me the pad.

Birdy hands it over and Morwenna places the pad in the pants.

MORWENNA (CONT'D)

This goes up between your legs and it's going to get all the blood and keep it away from your clothes. Can you manage that?

BIRDY

Yes I can, Morwenna.

Morwenna bends down. Birdy roughly steps through the pants.

MORWENNA

Don't do that! Just be careful.

BIRDY

I am!

**EXT. STONEBRIDGE MANOR- HERB GARDEN- DAY**

Morwenna shows Birdy how to gather medicinal herbs.

MORWENNA

Now get some mint, cause that makes the whole thing taste nice. Dandelion, but not the flower, obviously, is perfect for those cramps.

Birdy looks past the bushes and spies Perkin and villagers GERD and ALF, running with a lamb they have dressed in clothes.

BIRDY

Alf! Do you have your mom's knickers on Wendy's head?

MORWENNA

Oh Perkin... what's he up to now? Dressing up farm animals. A lamb should be dressed in mint sauce, not a hat!

**INT. STONEBRIDGE MANOR- BIRDY'S CHAMBER- LATE AFTERNOON**

Morwenna stands over Birdy, who sits on the bed, tying the rags around herself.

MORWENNA

All those herbs that we picked? We're going to make tea into your favorite cup.

BIRDY

It is my favorite cup.

MORWENNA

I know.

Morwenna mixes the tea.

MORWENNA (CONT'D)

And swirl and dip.

She hands the cup to Birdy.

MORWENNA (CONT'D)

Take a sip and the pain will be gone.

Birdy chugs the tea that Morwenna brewed, nearly spitting up.

**INT. STONEBRIDGE MANOR- BIRDY'S CHAMBER- NIGHT**

Morwenna snores, while Birdy clutches her tummy, resigned to this horrible feeling but unaware of what it truly means for her future.

**INT. STONEBRIDGE MANOR- AISLINN'S CHAMBER- MORNING**

The nicest room in the house, with tapestries and carved ivory animals from foreign lands. On a bed as vast as the sea sits Aislinn, who we can now see is heavily pregnant and visibly uncomfortable.

Up close we can also see she has a burn scar on her neck, ropey and thick, the only blemish to her beauty. Birdy busts through the door.

From under the bedsheets, her father emerges, dressing himself undergarments first. Aislinn giggles. Her husband giggles back. Birdy is horrified- her parents GIGGLE TOGETHER in the morning!?

BIRDY  
(looking away)  
What were you doing?

ROLLO  
Birdy, knocking is a bit customary, though I know not in the public houses you frequent.

BIRDY  
I have never been to a public house. Mumma, he lies!

ROLLO  
I am not lying, I am jesting. But in all seriousness I did see Bird in a public house. She was knocking back glasses of ale, swearing, jousting peasants--

BIRDY  
Mumma!

AISLINN  
Well I, for one, should like my room free of jesters for the moment. I should like to rest and do my puzzles.

ROLLO  
But I have more jests. What did the Pope say to the ale rat?

BIRDY  
What?

Rollo kisses his wife.

BIRDY (CONT'D)  
Wait, but what did the Pope say to the ale rat!?

ROLLO  
What did the Pope say to the ale rat? What are you talking about?

BIRDY  
The jest!

ROLLO  
Has she gone mad?

Rollo heads for the exit.

ROLLO (CONT'D)  
What Pope?

BIRDY  
(calling after)  
Father!

He stops in the doorway, smiles, and turns to face her.

ROLLO  
Oh yes. Ummm...

Rollo closes the door and escapes without answering, Aislinn laughs. Birdy waits a beat then approaches her mother. We can tell she is planning to tell her something...

BIRDY  
Mumma?

AISLINN  
Yes, Bird?

BIRDY  
I have something to tell you. It is rather serious and I hope...

Aislinn lets out a little cry, clutching her stomach.

BIRDY (CONT'D)  
Mumma? Are you alright!?

AISLINN  
Yes, Bird, just a little kick...  
What was it you wanted to say?

Birdy regards her mother's growing stomach, huge against the bed sheets, with terror. Reminded of what periods lead to, Birdy suddenly thinks much better of it.

BIRDY (V.O.)  
Maybe now is not a good time and perhaps I shall wait... forever.

Birdy changes topic.

BIRDY

Mother, there is a hanging today in  
Rutherford--

AISLINN

A hanging?

BIRDY

An ever so small one! Can I maybe  
just...

AISLINN

(amused)

Absolutely forbidden.

BIRDY

But Robert goes to all the  
hangings!

AISLINN

Robert is Robert. And you are not.  
Anyhow, today the Sidebottoms will  
join us. Your favorite day of the  
month.

Birdy shrugs.

AISLINN (CONT'D)

Come here to me child!

Aislinn pulls Birdy to her side.

AISLINN (CONT'D)

Rest with your weary mother.

**INT. STONEBRIDGE MANOR- AISLINN'S CHAMBER- LATER- DAY**

Birdy and Aislinn take turns with the spyglass to watch a carriage containing AELIS, LADY BERENICE, and LORD SIDEBOTTOM pull up to Stonebridge Manor. We see through the spyglass, a distant and distorted bird's eye view, a shot we will return to again and again to explain Aislinn's view of the manor and the world- distant and removed, yet all-seeing and knowing. Birdy eagerly waves to her best friend, Aelis.

BIRDY (V.O.)

Today Aelis comes. She is a dearest  
friend to me.

TEXT ON SCREEN:

*Aelis*  
- 16 years of age

- *prettiest girl in the shire and MY BEST FRIEND*

BIRDY (V.O.)

And when I see her face I hear  
birds and whistles, I see ribbons  
and flowers. Oh, Aelis!

**EXT. STONEBRIDGE MANOR ROAD- SIDEBOTTOM FAMILY CART- DAY**

Aelis, Berenice, and Lord Sidebottom are packed into the cart as tight as sardines, and jostle into each other uncomfortably as it bumps down the road.

Aelis is everything Birdy is not. If they had proms in, she would be prom queen. If they had Instagram, six million followers would wait for her makeup tutorials. Face like a heart, mahogany curls, and kind to boot.

LORD SIDEBOTTOM, Aelis's father, is nearing seventy but still clanking his old bones together in a push chair that rolls between the two seats.

TEXT ON SCREEN:

*LORD GIDEON SIDEBOTTOM*

- *81 years of age*
- *oldest man in his province*
- *oldest father in England*
- *wears his armour to sleep*

BERENICE, Aelis's gorgeous young stepmum, looks a thousand times more bored than AISLINN. She is rife with the ennui of entrapment.

Aelis leans over the cart's edge and shyly returns Birdy's joyful wave.

**EXT. STONEBRIDGE MANOR- COURTYARD- MOMENTS LATER- DAY**

Birdy and Aelis have sequestered themselves gleefully from the grownups on a bench. Aelis bends down behind Birdy, playing with her hair.

AELIS

Your hair is so long Birdy. You need to brush it.

BIRDY

I'm going to grow it all the way down to my feet.

They are ambushed by Robert as he exits the Great Hall while munching on a stolen meat pie. He doesn't notice Aelis.

ROBERT  
(groaning)  
Birdy, you must give me some kind  
of warning...otherwise the sight of  
your countenance...

He pretends to vomit and drops chewed-up meat pie into his hand.

AELIS  
Hello, Robert.

Robert, not having noticed Aelis, turns scarlet and tries to hide his chewed-up meat pie in his other hand. Gross. He chucks it aside.

ROBERT  
(flustered)  
Lady Sidebottom! Aelis! How goodly  
to see you! You are looking  
rather... pinkened.

AELIS  
(giggling)  
Robert, you are ever so pink  
yourself.

BIRDY ROBERT  
Leave us be! Do you ladies need an  
escort round the garden? It can be  
very dangerous...

BIRDY  
Please go, you death monger!

Robert exits into the Great Hall.

**EXT. STONEBRIDGE MANOR- GARDEN- MOMENTS LATER- DAY**

Rollo and Aislinn stand awkwardly with Lord Sidebottom and Berenice, like parents at the playground with nothing in common.

AISLINN  
The roses have been exceptional  
this season. And of course, the  
butterflies.

LORD SIDEBOTTOM  
I hate butterflies.

Berenice walks away from the group in distaste. Aislinn walks away to the end of the garden to escape the uncomfortable conversation and smells some flowers. She looks out in thought. Rollo and Lord Sidebottom are left alone.

LORD SIDEBOTTOM (CONT'D)

We have already had five or six serious inquiries.

ROLLO

Oh, is that so?

LORD SIDEBOTTOM

And some of these letter are florid in the extreme. But I don't care if they're poets, Rollo- I care if they can pay for my daughter in gold brick.

Rollo laughs nervously.

**EXT. STONEBRIDGE MANOR- COURTYARD- DAY**

Birdy pulls a bun out of her pocket and hands it to Aelis.

BIRDY

Welcome to Stonebridge, Lady Aelis.

AELIS

You have buns!

BIRDY

We used to have more buns. Cakes too!

(whispered)

I think we may be poor now.

AELIS

Oh. Well, we are not poor but there is nothing to eat at our manor. Papa banished the baker a fortnight ago. He said that he and stepmother were... exchanging wistful glances.

They start to munch but are surprised by Berenice walking straight past them and sitting on the bench.

Aelis hides her bun behind her back.

AELIS (CONT'D)

My lady. I promise I'm not spoiling my supper.

BERENICE

I do not give a goat's arse what  
you spoil, Aelis. I am not your  
mother, do not cower before me.

Lord Sidebottom directs Rollo to push him toward her, clearly  
unaware of his waning powers.

LORD SIDEBOTTOM

Berenice, never again will you  
leave a convivial grouping when I  
am speaking. I was about to make a  
point of great import--

TEXT ON SCREEN:

*Lady Berenice Side Bottom*

- 25 years of age
- devoted writer of passionate sonnets
- devoted hater of her husband

BERENICE

Well, I go where I want and I say  
what I please.

AELIS

(whispering to Birdy)  
She's been writing the most tragic  
poetry.

Birdy and Aelis giggle.

**EXT. STONEBRIDGE MANOR- HERB GARDEN- AFTERNOON**

The girls sit on a stone bench in a picturesque garden of  
flowers and medicinal herbs.

AELIS

Do you know that my stepmother was  
brought to our manor from Gascony?  
First by boat, then by carriage. It  
took many nights and nobody told  
her where she was going. She was  
only in her seventeenth year. Then  
father was waiting.

(beat)

He sent away for a wife the day  
after my mother died.

BIRDY

(knowingly)  
Men are horribly duplicitous  
creatures.

(MORE)

BIRDY (CONT'D)

I should like to take a carriage.  
With you, Aelis! And we would have  
adventures. Grand ones.

AELIS

How will we escape?

BIRDY

I will steal a knight's armor. Or a  
monk's robes.

AELIS

And where will you go?

BIRDY

Well, Uncle George writes to me of  
the crusades-

AELIS

(teasing voice)

Uncle George, Uncle George, Uncle  
George. All you speak about is  
Uncle George!

BIRDY

He comes soon, Aelis! He does! You  
know he is my best uncle!

AELIS

He is your only uncle!

The girls giggle. Birdy pinches Aelis's cheek.

**INT. STONEBRIDGE MANOR- GREAT HALL- MORNING**

CORNETHIA, a pretty young nun, helps Aelis and Birdy play a  
tune on a recorder. Aelis sounds lovely. Birdy's screeches.

In the background, several men carry away valuable items-  
panes of glass, sculptures, a few nice vases- as Rollo and  
Aislinn look on, Rollo tortured and Aislinn running to and  
fro to ensure that the items are being handled with care.

BIRDY (V.O.)

As the time approaches when I must  
wed, I must undertake lady lessons.  
My two least favorite words.  
Together. In one terrible phrase.

CORNETHIA

Gently, young ladies. A gentle hand  
plays a soothing tune.

BIRDY (V.O.)

Sister Cornethia attempts to make me musical, pious, and full of grace for any suitor who may court.

Cornethia turns around and two hand prints of dirt are on the bum of her habit. The girls giggle.

CORNETHIA

Do we find our lessons ever so funny? Seems to me a joke is astir.

Birdy raises her hands, covered in charcoal dust, then quickly hides them behind her back.

BIRDY (V.O.)

But she will find she has no easy job.

Birdy giggles to herself. When Aelis then giggles too, she stops, icing Aelis out. She is being petty.

**INT. STONEBRIDGE MANOR- AISLINN'S CHAMBER- MIDNIGHT**

A single candle burns as NAN the midwife, Aislinn's chambermaid and women from the kitchen labor over Aislinn's body, as Aislinn labors in birth. Aislinn sits on a birthing stool by her bed, Nan below her, Morwenna at her side.

AISLINN

Ahhhh. Ahhhh.

MORWENNA

(whispered)

O God, the Protector of all that trust in Thee, increase and multiply upon us Thy mercy; Amen.

In the hall, Birdy, Rollo and Robert watch. Morwenna comes to the door and exchanges a look with Rollo that says "It's time." He heads inside.

BIRDY

No, I want to meet the baby!

AISLINN

Birdy, please. Go for Mumma.

BIRDY

Why does he get to meet the baby!?

MORWENNA  
(harsh whisper)  
Only God shall meet this baby.

She ushers the kids down the hall.

BIRDY (V.O.)  
I will never get used to babies  
becoming dead and my heart will  
never stop aching for them to live.

**INT. STONEBRIDGE MANOR- PRIVY- AFTERNOON**

Birdy, squatting, pulls the bloody rags from her skirt, then hides them between two floor boards, using a stick to push them deeper still.

BIRDY (V.O.)  
I continue to hide my rags so that  
my father will not make me a wife  
and a mother. I will keep hiding  
them over and over, forever.

**EXT. ABBEY- COURTYARD- DAY**

Birdy enters through a pair of large French doors, into an open courtyard of corridors surrounding a garden.

BIRDY (V.O.)  
My mother usually visits Edward at  
the Abbey this time of year, but  
she still loses blood from the  
birth, so my father insists I go in  
her place. We are too poor to offer  
the monks any pies anymore. I  
simply bring myself.

We hear humming. Birdy notices the centerpiece of the courtyard, a sculpture of a truly ripped Jesus on the cross. Birdy stares at him. His abs are a LOT. The humming grows closer and a group of monks round the corner. The camera is high, so we see their shuffling slippers and the tops of their tonsure haircuts. The leader, a handsome salt and pepper haired monk, bows his head and they all do the same.

BIRDY (V.O.)  
I always imagined that Edward lived  
among God fearing nutters and rusty  
old men who clutched their Bibles  
to their chests.

As the camera pans down, we see they are not, in fact, old nutters but young virile men. Birdy gasps. They grow closer, singing more prayers as they walk.

BIRDY (V.O.)  
 Ooo lala! These are monks?? Why has  
 no one told me? I am ever so  
 confused what God is getting out  
 here.

She walks around looking for a place to tuck away and settles on darting into the garden and sitting down by the Jesus sculpture.

As the monks pass, one especially handsome dark-haired one notices her- this is EDWARD.

EDWARD  
 Catherine!?

He nods an apology to an irritated monk and rushes over.

EDWARD (CONT'D)  
 (hissed)  
 Whatever are you doing?

Panicked, Birdy pats the bum of the Jesus sculpture.

BIRDY  
 Just visiting an old friend!

EDWARD  
 Get off Jesus!

**INT. ABBEY CLOISTERS- MOMENTS LATER- DAY**

Birdy shuffles along under Edward's robe, hugging him from behind. Edward looks ultra-serious in an attempt to hide his stowaway. He nods at another MONK.

EDWARD  
 Deus sit apud vos.

MONK  
 Deus sit apud vos.

**INT. ABBEY BEDROOM- MOMENTS LATER- DAY**

Birdy emerges from her brother's robe, panting, and looks around.

BIRDY

How was I to know that comely young women are a spiritual danger to monks!?

EDWARD

You are no danger to anyone but yourself. Does mother heal?

BIRDY

In body, if not in spirit. Our brute of a father is no help.

(beat)

Do you know what I find even worse than the pains she bears? That she must worry about us, always. Forever. She can never stop. Being a mother is a terrible job.

She picks up a wooden cross and begins to joust with it.

EDWARD

Birdy, please do not joust with our crucified savior.

BIRDY

Are there no better amusements here? Perhaps a sacred sword used to slay a pagan?

EDWARD

Not a sword in sight.

BIRDY

I do not believe you. If I were a boy you would let me see. Everyone lets boys do everything. Boring, Edward.

EDWARD

Boredom is for the dull-witted, Bird. You're not dull, are you?

BIRDY

Of course I'm not dull.

EDWARD

How comes your reading? And the diary I have tasked you with?

BIRDY

I write in my diary everyday and read the Bible over and over again.

(MORE)

BIRDY (CONT'D)

I know all the important prayers by heart.

EDWARD

Bird, there is so much more to read than the bible. Even devoted monks tire of that tome. Here, I've a gift for you.

He pulls a small gold book from his pocket.

BIRDY

(disappointed)

Oh good. A book?

EDWARD

Well, now that I have captured your attention mayhap you will actually read it. It is a book of the saints. Every day, a different saint.

Beat, as she inspects the book.

EDWARD (CONT'D)

Promise me you shall read, read and read some more. Write too. Knowing your own story will be your salvation.

BIRDY

Promise?

**INT. STONEBRIDGE MANOR- BIRDY'S CHAMBER- NIGHT**

Morwenna repairs the hem of Birdy's torn dress as she writes in her little book.

BIRDY

Mayhap I could be a Saint?

MORWENNA

Well, for starters, I believe Saints help their nursemaids with the washing.

BIRDY (V.O.)

Why does Edward want me to read this book? So full of strangers and their woes. Saints are just dinguses I will never actually meet.

Birdy continues to write.

BIRDY (V.O.)

At the very least, I will become an expert on their gruesome deaths, which are so displeasing that they please me terribly.

(beat)

What does "defenestration" mean?

Birdy rests her face in her hands, staring practically down the barrel of the camera as she contemplates what to write next.

**EXT. STONEBRIDGE MANOR- HERB GARDEN- DAY**

Birdy walks back and forth, extremely focused, wincing. We pan down and see she has set up a line of pointy stones and she is barefoot.

BIRDY (V.O.)

16th day of October. A mission towards glory.

Whenever Birdy states the date, it loops across the scene in her signature script.

BIRDY (V.O.)

I don't want to be a lady, so perhaps a Saint?

Morwenna, hanging wash, looks at her crookedly.

MORWENNA

Birdy? Bird, put on your shoes for heaven's sake!

BIRDY

I cannot. If I am to be a saint, I must practice- ouch! I must practice self-sacrifice!

MORWENNA

(amused)

Any other jolly plans for this afternoon?

BIRDY

Why yes. I am denying myself buns. Then I am sleeping with a comb beneath my back.

(MORE)

## BIRDY (CONT'D)

For I must emulate Saint Blandina,  
 who was scourged, placed on a red-  
 hot grate, enclosed in a net and  
 thrown before a wild steer who  
 tossed her into the air with his  
 horns.

(gravely)

Tragically, she was killed with a  
 dagger.

## MORWENNA

You'll meet a dagger if you don't  
 put your bloody shoes on.

**INT. STONEBRIDGE MANOR- PRIVY- AFTERNOON**

More rags, more stuffing of them in the deepest cracks in the  
 floor using the stick. We see only Birdy's hands pulling the  
 rags from her skirts, pushing the rags down with her stick.

## BIRDY (V.O.)

I cannot believe I must bear this  
 with good humor month after month.  
 I would prefer a monthly bath in  
 poo or to wrestle a lion. Ah, to  
 wrestle a lion!

**EXT. STONEBRIDGE MANOR- PRIVY- SAME TIME- AFTERNOON**

Morwenna keeps watch like a sentinel.

**INT. STONEBRIDGE MANOR- HALLWAY OUTSIDE AISLINN'S CHAMBER-  
LATE MORNING**

Birdy walks down the hall, holding the recorder she has been  
 given for her lessons. She looks at it hatefully. She is  
 passing her mother's quarters, focused with a quaking rage on  
 the instrument, and is about to crack it over her knee when  
 she hears voices in the room- her parents. The recorder  
 avoids its fate as she stops to listen.

**INT. STONEBRIDGE MANOR- AISLINN'S CHAMBER- SAME TIME- LATE  
MORNING**

Rollo paces, already drunk despite the early hour.

## AISLINN

Rollo, why did you not tell me we  
 had nought to spend?

(MORE)

## AISLINN (CONT'D)

I want only to be your partner, to stand beside you as lady of this manor--

## ROLLO

But lady had to have her garlands. And her silver twine. She had to have apples in her roast and I had to keep this family from descending into utter poverty! And now Birdy is our only currency! So we're in real trouble.

**INT. STONEBRIDGE MANOR- HALLWAY OUTSIDE AISLINN'S CHAMBER-  
SAME TIME- LATE MORNING**

Hearing this, Birdy does attempt destruction of the instrument. It's stronger than she thought and she lets out a yelp of pain, then runs.

**EXT. STONEBRIDGE VILLAGE- DAY**

From the high point on the road, we see Birdy watching a wat and daub fight like the one she participated in early on. We don't see it, just the sounds of glee and play and Birdy, alone, clean, listening.

**EXT. STONEBRIDGE FIELD- STREAM- LATER- DAY**

Birdy sits on the bank while Perkin washes off in the water, alongside young village girls with varied, natural bodies of all shapes, sizes and shades.

They play and splash at each other. Birdy stares, confused by seeing slightly more mature female bodies.

## BIRDY

Perkin...

## PERKIN

(suspiciously)

Yes, Bird?

## BIRDY

What do you suppose about kissing?

## PERKIN

Suppose how?

BIRDY

Might it not be so foul as we once  
thought?

Perkin pauses, considering, then throws his soaking, still  
muddy shirt at her. It lands on her face.

BIRDY (CONT'D)

God's Thumb, it's slimy!

A MAN ON HORSEBACK approaches as they giggle. He is fancy  
seeming (in modern parlance, a metrosexual) with flowing hair  
and an obsequious manner.

MAN ON HORSEBACK

Good tidings I bring from Kent,  
where the weather has been finer  
than a silk from Kashmir laid out  
upon a table for twenty! Might I  
ask where your mistress is?

PERKIN

Our mistress?

MAN ON HORSEBACK

Lady Catherine of the manor. The  
fair cherub I have ridden so far to  
see...

Birdy swallows, takes a beat.

BIRDY

And what are your intentions with  
our mistress, sir?

MAN ON HORSEBACK

Indeed, if she is as fair and as  
decent, as goodly as they tell me,  
then I...

(coily)

I suppose I shall marry her  
forthwith.

Beat, as Birdy processes what is happening.

BIRDY

Marry her? Lady Catherine? Surely  
you cannot mean our Lady Catherine.

MAN ON HORSEBACK

I do and as I said I have ridden  
from Kent to see her for myself.

(MORE)

## MAN ON HORSEBACK (CONT'D)

With no carriage and no manservant,  
so urgent was it that I see this  
phantom beauty for myself.

(beat, to himself)

Sorely beating my inner thighs en  
route.

## BIRDY

You needn't bother. Lady Catherine  
is... well, she is...

(beat)

A creature. A vile creature of  
vomit and hair and snot!

It takes Perkin a beat to understand, but when he does he  
joins with gusto, nodding vigorously.

## PERKIN

And some say she has a third ear!

## BIRDY

She does.

## MAN ON HORSEBACK

Have you seen this third ear?  
Where?

## BIRDY

(no hesitation)

Back of her neck.

## MAN ON HORSEBACK

Is it functional?

## BIRDY / PERKIN

Spare.

## MAN ON HORSEBACK

But what of the Catherine I have  
heard about. With ebony trusses  
that tumble like waterfalls. The  
Lady Catherine with curves like an  
archipelago.

## BIRDY

Archipelago?

## PERKIN

What is an archipelago?

## MAN ON HORSEBACK

A small series of little islands I  
believe.

BIRDY

You've been tricked, sir. It would seem.

MAN ON HORSEBACK

(crestfallen)

Quite cruelly so... To dash a man's dreams as such...

PERKIN

Sir you best be off before Lady Catherine comes and bares her ugly head.

MAN ON HORSEBACK

I want to thank you actually.

(to Perkin)

You're very dashing.

(to Birdy)

You on the other hand, have been a little churlish if I must say so.

Birdy curtsies.

BIRDY

Thank you very much, sir.

**INT. STONEBRIDGE MANOR- ALE CELLAR- AFTERNOON**

Birdy storms in on her father meandering about the ale cellar inspecting bottles, one already open in his bloated hand.

ROLLO

I will not sneak you a jug of ale so do not ask it of me.

BIRDY

I demand to know the meaning of this!

Now he knows it's serious.

ROLLO

The meaning of what?

BIRDY

A man has come and asked for me by name.

ROLLO

Sounds improbable.

BIRDY  
He hails from Kent.

ROLLO  
Oh, yes! Oh, yeeesssss.  
(beat)  
You must get washed up then.

BIRDY  
I've sent him away.

Rollo looks at her, the fate of his home and his reputation lying in her hands.

ROLLO  
You sent him away?

BIRDY  
I sent him away. I am not interested in meeting him nor any man with his intentions.

ROLLO  
No! Go to the high road and get him back?

BIRDY  
I am afraid he is quite gone. In fact, he galloped away.

Rollo starts to grow red imagining his own future humiliation. He reaches for a long wooden object.

ROLLO  
Hand.

He grabs Birdy's hand and begins to slap her across the palm with it.

On Birdy's face: she doesn't wail but instead grimaces, refusing to concede any power to her father.

BIRDY (V.O.)  
Things girls cannot do.

As Birdy lists the following activities we see her wince, once for each impossible dream.

BIRDY (V.O.)  
Go on crusades. Cut their hair. Be horse trainers. Laugh very loud. Marry whom they will. Be monks. Drink in ale houses. Go to hangings.

Now, back to her father's attempt at justice.

ROLLO

You will behave like a lady when the suitors come or we will all be living in the cooper's cellar. Do you understand me!?

Hearing his bellowing, Aislinn enters.

AISLINN

Oh, Rollo! Rollo, please stop! I can't bear it!

He stops and looks at his wife.

ROLLO

Do you know your daughter has sent away a perfectly good suitor?

AISLINN

Do not rage, Rollo, over that man. My fathers were kings in Britain long ago. And he is just a simple wool merchant from Kent.

ROLLO

Sweet Judas, lady, think you we can eat your royal ancestors or plant your family name? The man stinks of gold!

AISLINN

Rollo, please. She is young yet. She cannot even bear children.

BIRDY

(too emphatic)

No, I certainly CANNOT!

AISLINN

Just give her some time. Give her some time.

**INT. STONEBRIDGE MANOR- BIRDY'S CHAMBER- LATE EVENING**

Birdy is writing in her diary.

BIRDY (V.O.)

(beat)

Just one more day until Uncle George...

**EXT. STONEBRIDGE MANOR- DAY**

A VERY SEXY entrance cue for GEORGE, Birdy's much-hyped uncle! He is returning from the crusades and he is gorgeous- a 24 year old Robert Redford, charming and golden.

BIRDY (V.O.)

After one man brought doom on  
horseback, another brings divine  
hope.

He approaches the manor in chain mail on an actual white horse. Aislinn stands at her window with her spyglass, waving a greeting to her brother.

Birdy stands outside the castle, wind blowing her hair, beaming at her incoming uncle.

BIRDY (V.O.)

My uncle is so unlike any other man  
I know; he has a twinkle in his  
holy green eyes, a song on his lips  
and all his teeth.

It's. Too. Perfect.

**INT. STONEBRIDGE MANOR- GREAT HALL- EVENING**

Birdy sits across from George, having combed her hair and worn a clean dress, as they whisper over dinner.

GEORGE

I cannot believe my only sister's  
only daughter is now up to my  
shoulder.

She practically blushes.

TEXT ON SCREEN:

*Uncle George*

- 28 years of age
- Mumma's littlest brother
- Fought bravely in the crusades
- SO. HANDSOME.

GEORGE (CONT'D)

When I left, you were wearing a  
diaper with a big wooden pin. A  
tiny barbarian the size of a  
toadstool.

She actually blushes.

BIRDY

My mother tells us you were in the Holy Land, wearing a red cross sewn on a white tunic. Nobly fighting for God and Christ and our King.

GEORGE

The truth I'm afraid was much less picturesque. My tunic was covered in mud and briars.

BIRDY

But there was a line of crusaders, Uncle George? Reaching from Jerusalem all the way back to London?

GEORGE

There was a line indeed.  
 (his eyes grow distant,  
 the hush of trauma  
 descends)  
 But it was a line of my injured brothers, waiting to have their wounds dressed. Some of them died standing there waiting.

He, too, sips from a waist flask, then tucks into a leg of fowl. Meat juice glistens on his lips, but it's not repulsive like when her father eats: it's sexy as fuck.

It's magic. It's euphoria. It's first love.

**INT. STONEBRIDGE MANOR- BIRDY'S CHAMBER- NIGHT**

Birdy lies horizontal across her bed in her night clothes while Morwenna turns down her covers. Birdy is playing with a small wooden bear with moving arms and legs.

MORWENNA

Will you ever put that little stick away?

BIRDY

It is not a stick! It is a little bear!  
 (under her breath)  
 A gift from George.

MORWENNA

Ooohhh, a gift from Geeeoorgie.

BIRDY

Quiet!

MORWENNA

Georgieeee.

BIRDY

You are just mad because no one has ever whittled you a gift, most especially not a bear.

MORWENNA

(winking)

No gifts for poor Morwenna. To bed!

Birdy crawls between the sheets, tucking the bear into her dress as Morwenna blows out the candle.

BIRDY (V.O.)

If I cannot be a hero, I will love a hero instead. He will tell my father he cannot sell me off this way, and he will fight for me.

**EXT. STONEBRIDGE MANOR- COURTYARD- DAY**

George and Birdy fence playfully, as George teaches Birdy swordplay tricks and they each attempt to get the best of the other. The scene is shot with the camera operating as the opposing Cc, so that George and Birdy each play with the lens as if it is their comrade/foe/buddy. The energy is that of playful home movies as they enter and exit each other's frames, collapse on the ground in defeat and generally relax in a way neither can around other adults.

**EXT. STONEBRIDGE HIGH MEADOW- LATER- DAY**

Aelis, visiting again, and Birdy sit together on Birdy's cloak, talking and talking.

AELIS

I am trying to picture him. Does he look much like the archangel Michael?

BIRDY

No dead saint could be as beautiful as he.

AELIS

I must see him for myself then!

BIRDY

If I were to marry, Aelis, I should choose him. If only he were my cousin and not my uncle, true love could prevail.

(beat)

Aelis, there's a cottage raising this afternoon!

AELIS

Birdy, you know we'd be whipped.

BIRDY

You get whipped? My father only beats me across the hand.

Birdy hugs Aelis.

AELIS

Cottage-raising is not for girls with suitors calling.

**EXT. STONEBRIDGE VILLAGE- HILL- DAY**

Half-hidden behind a wall, Birdy watches the villagers in silence.

BIRDY (V.O.)

And so I watch the cottage-raising from the hill. Clean for my suitors but full of dirty rage. I shall never smear myself with mud again and shove Perkin into the ground, I shall never get to see a hanging, I shall never get to have anything like fun, and just because my birthright is to bleed!

**EXT. STONEBRIDGE VILLAGE- ALL HALLOWS' EVE- NIGHT**

It's a full on EVENT! The manor is abuzz with holiday spirit as the town is filled with masked dancers and bonfires.

The camera follows her in an epic shot as she walks through the crowd—a guy in a devil costume chasing some giggling kids, Robert bobbing for apples from a bucket held by a pretty milk maid.

ROBERT

I hate this game! What need have I to catch an apple with my mouth!?

BIRDY  
You are so pathetic!

ROBERT  
Shut up!

She walks on, smiling and laughing.

BIRDY (V.O.)  
Many people are afeared of All  
Hallow's Eve, of the dead who come  
back to visit the earth. But the  
only dead I know are my tiny  
brothers and sisters who died  
before they were born.

Birdy walks alone past excited villagers in wild costumes,  
dressed as bears and tigers and ghouls. She does not have an  
elaborate costume except a unicorn horn sewn of burlap  
fastened to her head with golden braid.

BIRDY (V.O.)  
And how could I be afeared of them?  
I wish they would come visit. It  
would ease my mother's grieving.

Birdy wanders the graveyard behind the house, gently touching  
the tiny tombstones of the lost children: Margaret, Edwin,  
William, Rhys, Rosemary. Behind is the soundtrack of people  
singing and cheering, growling and playing drums.

Her reverie is interrupted when she hears a voice calling to  
her from over the fence:

AELIS  
Birdy! Birdy!

Birdy turns to see Aelis, dressed in silk with her hair  
covered by an ermine-lined hood.

BIRDY  
Aelis! Do you like my horn?

AELIS  
It's so lovely.

BIRDY  
Morwenna sewed it herself!

AELIS  
That's so sweet.

Behind Aelis, Uncle George appears as her escort, much to  
Birdy's surprise.

BIRDY

George...

GEORGE

Hello Bird, that's a nice looking crown.

BIRDY

It's a horn!

Off Birdy's surprise,

AELIS

I saw a man with gloves like devil's claws and became frightened! I was hiding behind the hen house when this kind gentleman found me.

BIRDY

That is my Uncle George, Aelis!

AELIS

The one of whom you have so often spoken?

Birdy blushes.

AELIS (CONT'D)

Yes it must be he. For you said he was kind, and handsome too. A saint.

Aelis smiles. George bows.

GEORGE

I too was a bit shaken by that clawed man- and the mummer with the odd lump upon his face- was that a costume or a terrible natural affliction?

(shaking his head)

We may never know. In any case.

(beat)

Let me get you both safely back to your chambers.

BIRDY

No, George! We won't go home! We want to see all the mummies and the dancing!

They start to walk back to the manor, each taking one of George's arms. Perkin approaches, covered head to toe in flour.

PERKIN

BOO!

George lets out a little yell, shocked by Perkin.

BIRDY

Perkin!

PERKIN

I am not Perkin! I have died,  
Birdy! And now I am just a ghost  
sent to haunt you until the eeend  
of your liiife. I am the ghost of  
Perkin!

He starts to make ghost sounds.

BIRDY

(stiffening)

I will have none of this silliness,  
goat boy.

Perkin looks bruised.

BIRDY (CONT'D)

(showing off for George)

I am simply trying to get back to  
my chamber to read some lovely  
verse before falling to peaceful  
sleep and entering dream-land.

Perkin is shocked and starts to back away.

PERKIN

(cold)

I'll leave you to your friends  
then, Lady Catherine.

He runs off, his limping gait exaggerated in the shadowy darkness of the graveyard. Guilt flashes across Birdy's face, but she brushes it away, trying to catch up with George and Aelis.

**INT. STONEBRIDGE MANOR- BIRDY'S CHAMBER- NIGHT**

Birdy and Aelis lie beside each other in bed, their hair spreading on the pillow. Morwenna is asleep and snoring on Birdy's other side, and serving maids sleep on a trundle bed below.

AELIS

My father has agreed that I might stay for a fortnight or even two!

BIRDY

(glumly)

I wish you had written to ask. How did you know it was convenient for me? I have a great many chores.

Aelis looks bruised. Birdy rolls away.

BIRDY (V.O.)

Why am I being so unkind? I feel unsettled. Was it the eel pie?

**EXT. STONEBRIDGE MANOR- GARDENS- AFTERNOON**

A marmalade cat is darting through the gardens. Right behind it is Birdy, reaching for it desperately.

BIRDY

Here, crazy orange man! Come with me! I have a lovely home for you!

Coming around a corner Birdy reaches again for the cat, getting close, but it escapes her grasp.

When she looks up she sees Aelis and George, partially concealed by the trellised platform, kissing passionately. This is no amateur kiss. They are IN IT, what we would call in modern parlance HOOKING UP. WHAT THE HECK!!!

BIRDY (V.O.)

It is definitely not the eel pie.

Aelis pulls back and George smiles dreamily into her eyes, lovesick and almost dorky with passion. Aelis turns away coyly (she's good at this!)

Birdy gasps and runs in the other direction. They don't notice because they are loved up and horny, so they won't see Birdy's face crumple into tears and her first heartbreak happen in real time.

**INT. STONEBRIDGE MANOR- BIRDY'S CHAMBER- MOMENTS LATER- AFTERNOON**

Birdy bursts through the doors, weeping, to find Morwenna and her mother waiting for her with a bucket of bloody rags. Morwenna has a foreboding, guilty look.

AISLINN

Catherine, your father has found your monthly rags. Stuffed inside the privy. They were peeking from the cracks, Bird.

BIRDY

They were not mine!

Morwenna stares at her, apologetic.

BIRDY (CONT'D)

(defeated)

How did you know?

AISLINN

Catherine, I am your mother, and the lady of this manor. There is naught I do not see and naught I do not know. It is useless to stuff your rags, no matter how deep.

(beat)

I have tried to protect you as best I can. But your father has been waiting for his chance to make you a wife, and to bring propriety to this manor. I can deny him no more.

BIRDY

Do I not have a say?

AISLINN

(understanding but firm)

Everything has its time, its season. Birdy, it is your season, my love.

Birdy stares at both women, the rage growing in her stomach so her shoulders shake. She takes a moment, deciding who to lambaste, and settles on Morwenna.

BIRDY

Traitor! Liar! Fiend!

MORWENNA

Birdy.

BIRDY

Devil! Pauper! Scum!

AISLINN

Catherine, stop.

BIRDY

I hate you! I HATE YOU!

Birdy charges the full weight of her body at Morwenna, who can take it. Morwenna fairly but firmly throws Birdy back on the bed, where she collapses weeping.

MORWENNA

That is enough!

The two adult women share a look as they exit. The exterior lock clicks shut, and Birdy is alone, trapped. She sits at her writing table and begins to scribble furiously.

BIRDY (V.O.)

I have not a friend in the world. I have been cruel to Perkin. Morwenna has betrayed me. Uncle George, who brought gaiety and wonder into my life, loves Aelis, who is a weasel. And now my time is here. I ripen like a peach for plucking.

She weeps more and more, then stiffens with resolve, looking at her cage full of chirping birds. Birdy opens her book of Saints and places her head in her hands to think...

**INT. STONEBRIDGE MANOR- BIRDY'S CHAMBER- DAY**

A wooden bathtub is set up. Morwenna bathes a cold and distant, quietly rageful Birdy in anticipation of her first suitor.

BIRDY (V.O.)

25th day of November. I feel as though no part of me is my own.

MORWENNA

(clucking, ignoring Catherine's icy demeanor)  
Your father told me to scrub every cranny of you before the guests arrive.

Birdy shivers in the cold bath water, refusing to answer.

BIRDY (V.O.)

Would I choose to die rather than be forced to marry? I do not think either option appealing.

(beat)

Nor fair.

A beat. Birdy dips her fingers in the black soap and makes a stripe across her face. Her eyes light up with an idea.

**INT. STONEBRIDGE MANOR- GREAT HALL- DAY**

The family is eating with a suitor- Robert, Aislinn, Rollo, George. SIR JOHN from Normandy, a sad bloated man in a bad wig made of fox fur, enjoys a Cornish hen.

SIR JOHN  
Where is the girl?

TEXT ON SCREEN:

*John of Normandy*  
- whale fat titan  
*Offering:*  
- many gold ducats  
- lavender fields  
- a curly-haired cow

ROLLO  
My lord, she is just making herself beautiful for you.

Birdy appears at the top of the stairs, smeared with streaks of black soap, wearing twigs in her hair like a bog witch. George cannot help but let out a guffaw when he sees her.

SIR JOHN  
Wow I like this!

Surprised, Rollo and the family start clapping. Sir John joins them.

SIR JOHN (CONT'D)  
Entertainment! For me?

ROLLO  
Yes.

SIR JOHN  
Bravo! Very nice.  
(beat)  
Now where is the girl?

ROBERT  
(pointing)  
That *is* the girl!

**INT. STONEBRIDGE MANOR- ALE CELLAR- AFTERNOON**

Rollo slaps an emotionless Birdy's palm.

**EXT. STONEBRIDGE MANOR- GARDENS- DAY**

Birdy sits across from a suitor on a bench (ROLF, blond and proper. Not so ugly and well fed.) She looks lovely and composed.

BIRDY

Now may I ask something of you, my Lord?

ROLF

(shyly)

Anything, Lady Catherine.

She pulls her bird cage from under the bench.

BIRDY

Will you prove your love to me by wearing my birds upon your face and arms?

ROLF

To wear them?

She opens the door to the cage and places a pigeon on his head. Then another. A third poops down her hand as she passes it to him and she wipes the shit across his garment.

**INT. STONEBRIDGE MANOR- ALE CELLAR- AFTERNOON**

Another suitor gone. Another beating across the hands from her father. There is a grim routine to these, and that's how she receives them. Rollo looks into her eyes as he strikes her palm.

BIRDY (V.O.)

If I still had Aelis to speak to, I might be less lonely in my beatings. But she has George, and I have smarting palms.

**EXT. STONEBRIDGE MANOR- GARDENS- DAY**

Sitting beside another suitor, GODFREY, this guy is close to her age with flowing dark hair and a forest green velvet coat.

CUTE ONE

Might you share some of your  
passions? Hobbies? Your soul's  
deepest inclination?

TEXT ON SCREEN:

*Godfrey of Glardenmere*  
- *Son of some other lord (WHO CARES)*  
*Offering:*  
- *a cellar of finely aged cheeses*  
- *ruby comb*  
- *smelly armpits!*

BIRDY

Alright then. I listen to God when  
he speaks to me.

CUTE ONE

A pious girl.

BIRDY

(smiling widely)  
Usually he tells me to form an army  
five thousand women strong that  
will gut all men, and leave their  
entrails as offerings.

She smiles demonically. She has blacked out her front teeth.

**INT. STONEBRIDGE MANOR- ALE CELLAR- AFTERNOON**

Another suitor gone. Rollo watches as Birdy washes the floors  
with Lye on a rag. She gasps- it burns her hands.

BIRDY (V.O.)

Dirty devil. Snail's guts. Fanny in  
a hat. No purse is good enough for  
these vile suitors or my viler  
father.

Rollo walks away. Birdy throws her rag after him.

BIRDY (V.O.)

Farting drumsticks!

**INT. STONEBRIDGE MANOR- GREAT HALL- EVENING**

Rollo and Aislinn sit with another suitor.

TEXT ON SCREEN:

*Balthasar of the Low Country*  
 - *Silk Merchant*  
*Offering:*  
 - *SO. MUCH. SILK.*

ROLLO  
 Our beautiful daughter is going to  
 sing for you.

AISLINN  
 (beaming with pride)  
 It's her own composition. She wrote  
 it herself.

Birdy appears and sings terribly for the suitor, smiling  
 beatifically as she squeaks out hideous.

BIRDY  
*There's a dragon in the privy. He  
 looks at me with pity and tells me  
 that he wants to eat my eyebrows!*

Birdy puts her hands right in the suitor's face.

ROLLO  
 Birdy. Don't touch!

Balthasar shakes his head at Rollo: "No, not this one. Not  
 for me, sir."

**INT. STONEBRIDGE MANOR- ALE CELLAR- MOMENTS LATER- EVENING**

Rollo locks the door, leaving Birdy in the cellar alone. She  
 shakes the handle, but she is trapped.

BIRDY  
 You can't!

ROLLO (O.S.)  
 I can.

She slams the walls, kicks a cask of ale, shrieks at the top  
 of her lungs but no one hears her.

TIMECUT:

**INT. STONEBRIDGE MANOR- ALE CELLAR- MORNING**

Birdy is bored, sipping some ale. She hates it.

BIRDY  
 Blech. Rotten.

Birdy tries to put the cork back in but can't. She's trying all kinds of ways and has resorted to trying to sit on the cork to get it into the bottle when the door creaks open- she jumps back but it is MEG, our dear dairymaid, holding a large ring of keys and a plate of bread and butter.

BIRDY (CONT'D)

Oh, MEG!

MEG

Shhh.

(exaggerated whisper)

I have stolen the keys off a sleeping Ferth the gate man! Here, the heel of the bread and some butter!

BIRDY

Oh, Meg, I knew it. You have always been a rebel.

(beat)

And a true friend. Perhaps the only one I have left in the world.

MEG

Oh, m'lady.

BIRDY

(loudly)

Not m'lady! Never m'lady!

MEG

Alright, m'lady.

(catching herself)

I am sorry. I am sorry.

BIRDY

Birdy. Just Birdy.

**INT. STONEBRIDGE MANOR- GREAT HALL- MORNING**

IT'S THE MOST WONDERFUL TIME OF THE YEAR! We pan along the mantle: it is decorated with small fir trees and home-made wreaths.

Panning along the table: What would once have been a massive Christmas feast is now a single roast duck, some loaves of bread, boiled eggs, roast carrots and mashed beets. Rollo's hound runs through frame.

BIRDY (V.O.)

Christ's day. When I was young,  
father had a Golden Jesus that  
pissed wine. Now, we just cut the  
brown parts from the carrots.

Aislinn adjusts the decorations and hangs glass ornaments  
carefully according to Rollo's instructions.

ROLLO

We want the stars to really sparkle  
as if the heavens have opened up  
right here in the great hall, so if  
we can get them at an angle... just  
so.

AISLINN

My love, does this strike your  
fancy?

ROLLO

My angel, when you see the light  
hit the glass and twinkle you will  
know.

**INT. STONEBRIDGE MANOR- GREAT HALL- EVENING**

A Christmas play is being mounted. The townspeople have  
worked for months on the show and Perkin can be seen as one  
of the three wise men, along with ALF and GERD fidgeting,  
with a straw beard tied under his chin. MEG is the angel  
Gabriel, and someone else is dressed as a star.

The LAUNDRESS, not a virgin by any means, her breasts  
dangling, is the Virgin Mary. The cook is Joseph.

COOK

Fear not! I bring great news. To  
you a savior is born.

LAUNDRESS

A child?! It cannot be, for I am  
just a simple young virgin!

The audience roars with laughter. Morwenna finds it intensely  
hilarious.

BIRDY

Why is it so funny?

MORWENNA

She's no more a virgin than I am a  
princess.

Birdy surreptitiously pulls her diary out and scribbles:  
 IMPORTANT: FIND OUT EXACTLY WHAT A VIRGIN MIGHT BE.

As the angel Gabriel, Meg sings a sweet song of blessing over the couple and their baby. It sounds lovely, resounding through the great hall.

Rollo sits beside Aislinn, Robert behind them, and he sways to the music, transfixed. He bobs along, conducting a bit with one finger, utterly involved, emotional even. Birdy sees a couple of PEASANT MEN watch him from a corner. One nudges the other and points at Rollo. They laugh at his expression of emotion, one does a small impression.

Birdy registers this and stiffens up, oddly protective and humiliated on his behalf. She looks back to the stage.

As Perkin helps to carry a large wreath of golden stars to the manger, Birdy tears up. She smiles at Perkin, clapping just for him. He sees her briefly.

BIRDY (V.O.)

My eyes prick and water. Perhaps I am allergic to cheer. After all, a diary is no substitute for a friend.

Perkin smiles, for the first time in a while. Birdy mouths:

BIRDY

I'm sorry.

He looks cross.

BIRDY (CONT'D)

(louder)

I am sorry.

He shakes his head, no.

BIRDY (CONT'D)

(full volume)

Perkin, I AM SORRY!

He laughs out loud. In his distracted excitement, he does a little happy dance for Birdy and lets go of his goat. The goat aggressively approaches the baby Jesus, which is just a little black dog in swaddling. Seeing the other animal, the goat bolts. Whining, the little black dog follows. Perkin runs behind them, dropping his staff with a clatter and his beard falling to the ground, still smiling and waving at a happy Birdy.

LAUNDRESS  
 (looking at empty stage)  
 Me best line was coming!

**INT. STONEBRIDGE MANOR- GREAT HALL- AFTERNOON**

Birdy and Aelis sit in their winter cloaks near a burning fire, doing their embroidery, Cornethia watching them coolly. They whisper back and forth.

AELIS  
 (whisper)  
 Will you be angry with me forever?

BIRDY  
 (bitter whisper)  
 Perhaps I shall be, Aelis.

CORNETHIA  
 Ladies, we learn best when we close our mouths and open our ears.

They pause, then Aelis whispers more quietly yet more urgently.

AELIS  
 But I have done nothing wrong!

Birdy ignores her, focusing on her tangled embroidery.

BIRDY  
 Except for stealing the man I loved with all my heart. And behind my back, no less! To my mind, you are a deceitful coward!

Aelis bursts into tears, loud and intense. Cornethia offers the hem of her habit for Aelis to cry into.

BIRDY (CONT'D)  
 Aelis, please.  
 (beat)  
 I disavow my terrible mouth. She's a beast, my mouth, and she acted without my consent!

Birdy slaps herself across the face.

BIRDY (CONT'D)  
 Bad Birdy! Bad.

Aelis grabs her hand, stopping her.

AELIS

Birdy, I am to be married.

BIRDY

(stricken)

To George?

AELIS

No, to a boy of only nine. George has to marry some horrid old widow named Ethelfritha. And now you will not even be my friend!

Aelis rushes out. Birdy looks at the nun wearily.

BIRDY (V.O.)

For the first time in my life, I am choking on my words. My heart has been shaved and boiled like a parsnip. George is to be married. George is to be married. George. Is. To. Be. Married.

Birdy looks at the nun wearily.

BIRDY

I suppose you're not taking joiners at the convent.

CORNETHIA

No.

BIRDY

Pity.

**INT. STONEBRIDGE MANOR- BIRDY'S CHAMBER- MORNING**

Birdy wakes early, opening the shutters dutifully and struggling to put her dress on with care.

BIRDY (V.O.)

6th day of January. Twelve-ninety-one is upon us, I have seen the consequences of my horrid temperament: friendlessness, boredom, purgatory. So, I embrace a new resolve. I will try my best to be a lady, to act and speak as beautifully as my mother does, to make my parents and god divinely happy.

MORWENNA

Let me help you, Bird.

BIRDY

I will dress myself, I am a woman  
now! Stand back!

She continues to struggle. Morwenna watches, amused.

MORWENNA

It's back to front...

BIRDY

It's not! Is it?

**EXT. STONEBRIDGE VILLAGE- DAY**

Birdy passes the dreaded Robert, who is drinking a mug of ale and watching his horse be re-shod. She kisses his cheek sweetly. He is confounded.

BIRDY (V.O.)

Disobedience has gotten me nowhere.

ROBERT

(sotto)

What in God's name?

**EXT. GARDEN- DAY**

Birdy strolls through the garden in one of her better dresses, posed in a lady-like way that doesn't suit her, with a badly- attempted fancy hairdo falling around her face. She is fanning herself with a small fan of her mother's.

BIRDY (V.O.)

And who can fight an inevitable  
fate, anyhow?

She shivers against the winter air, collapsing back into regular Birdy posture, but when a young male gardener passes she stiffens up and starts again.

BIRDY (V.O.)

I resisted marriage and was dealt  
only pain. If I embrace it, mayhap  
there is even... pleasure?

**INT. STONEBRIDGE MANOR- GREAT HALL- EVENING**

Birdy sits beside FULK, a grotty loser with a bowl cut who at least has all his teeth. His father, FULK THE ELDER, is helping orchestrate it all.

FULK THE ELDER  
Lady Catherine, do you enjoy riding?

BIRDY  
(genuinely trying)  
I do, my lord.

FULK THE ELDER  
Perhaps you and my son might ride together whilst we are here? Will your horses get along?

BIRDY  
My horse has a lovely and even temperament. Uh... yours sir?

As the adults talk, Birdy and young Fulk start whispering, like the only two teenagers at a grownup party.

FULK  
Do you not hate having to dress up for these meetings?

TEXT ON SCREEN:

*Fulk the Younger*  
- *Son of Fulk the Elder*  
*Offering:*  
- *plot of healthy farmland*  
- *6 hound puppies*  
- *a sweaty handshake*

BIRDY  
(sign of relief)  
Lord, yes. This dress is so tight I can barely breathe. Is yours tight?

FULK  
I suppose this ones not so bad.

Rollo clinks a tin cup, disrupting the teen convo.

ROLLO  
(oddly composed)  
It is a tremendous occasion to have you here, Lord Fulk and Elder Fulk.  
(MORE)

ROLLO (CONT'D)

Especially as we have just learned  
the joyful news that my wife is  
expecting.

Aislinn smiles. Birdy goes pale.

ROBERT

This is tremendous!

BIRDY

What did you say, father?

ROLLO

Catherine, are you excited to  
welcome your brother?

BIRDY

But the midwife has said it may  
bleed her out this time!

AISLINN

Birdy, not now.

ROBERT

(hissed)

It's not the time. It's never the  
time.

BIRDY

Are you trying to kill her!? Do you  
want to prove yourself a man that  
much? It is going to die. THEY ALL  
DIE!

AISLINN

You didn't die.

BIRDY

I didn't die but the rest do!

Birdy slams the table and leaves.

ROLLO

(embarrassed)

Lord Fulk.

(beat)

Other Fulk, she must have come down  
with a fever this eve, a light pox  
has been going 'round Stonebridge.

ELDER FULK

Pox? We best depart.

The Fulks stand to exit.

ROBERT  
It's not a big pox!

AISLINN  
Only a small pox!

**EXT. STONEBRIDGE MANOR- PRIVY- NIGHT**

Birdy, weeping, rushes to the privy, holding a candle to light her way. When she arrives, Fulk the younger is waiting as well, holding his travel lantern aloft. They look at each other awkwardly, like teenagers waiting for the bathroom at a concert, which they basically are.

FULK  
Hello.

BIRDY  
I despise you.

FULK  
(confused)  
I thought we got on quite well.

She bangs on the privy.

ELDER FULK (O.S.)  
Let me pass my meal in peace!

Beat.

BIRDY  
I'll leave you in peace.

Birdy walks behind the back of the privy, chucks her candle at the straw rushes around the base, and runs.

**EXT. STONEBRIDGE MANOR- NIGHT**

Birdy watches the privy burn as Lord Fulk and Elder Fulk gallop away. The light from the burning privy illuminates her rage.

BIRDY (V.O.)  
My new leaf was short-lived. But my  
rebellion will be forever.

The villagers run toward the burning privy with buckets of water. Rollo stands uselessly behind them, shrieking.

ROLLO  
 For the sake of all that is holy,  
 run! Help! Do something!

He turns to a peasant slopping water ineffectually on the privy.

ROLLO (CONT'D)  
 What are you trying to do, baptize  
 it? Drown it! Are you familiar at  
 all with the element of fire?  
 Famously the enemy of water? It  
 needs to be EXTINGUISHED, not  
 drooled upon like a gumming infant!

Rollo sees the Fulks gallop away.

ROLLO (CONT'D)  
 FULKS!!!  
 (beat, to peasants)  
 Why is that bucket so small?!

The villagers continue to battle the flames as the fire rages on. Birdy watches, stone-faced.

**INT. STONEBRIDGE MANOR- ALE CELLAR- NIGHT**

Rollo shakes Birdy by the shoulders of her dress, practically lifting Birdy her off the ground in a rage. She hides her fear and lets her body go limp as he shakes.

ROLLO  
 Do you not understand the danger  
 you have placed us in? For once,  
 Catherine, you could attempt to set  
 an example for our tenants, for our  
 villagers! To show them what a lady  
 can be when she sets her heart to  
 it! Perhaps you might try that,  
 rather than bringing shame and  
 mockery upon our home!

BIRDY  
 I am not a lady, sir, thus cannot  
 mimic one.

ROLLO  
 Sit down.

She does.

ROLLO (CONT'D)

(angry, close-talking)

When I was a year younger than you, I inherited a town in shambles. My father had gambled away every pane of glass, every brick, every sack of grain. And I have used every ounce of my cunning and strength to bring prosperity back to Stonebridge.

BIRDY

Your cunning and strength, sir?

ROLLO

And other qualities, yes.

BIRDY

Is that why I saw the tapestries going to auction? The finest cups being packed up and shipped away because of your cunning and strength?

He is hot with rage as he pounds the wall, hurting his hand.

ROLLO

I your father. I am your father.

(beat, soft)

And if I say you shall be married, then married you shall be.

**INT. STONEBRIDGE MANOR- GREAT HALL- DAY**

The servants deck the hall for a massive festivity- there are floral garlands and wreathes with golden angels perched on top of them. It's a level of opulence this home hasn't seen in seasons, but the taste is too wild and feminine to be Rollo's. Birdy sullenly watches the decorations go up, sulking and popping the halo off an angel.

BIRDY (V.O.)

Fifth day of February. George weds today. Some marry for love, some marry for money, some for duty, and some, like George, seem not to know why they marry.

**INT. STONEBRIDGE MANOR- GREAT HALL- DAY**

Birdy and her family watch George get married to ETHELFRITHA, a messy, manic but beguiling woman in her early fifties.

It is a Christian wedding and FATHER HUY, the village priest, officiates. In traditional fashion, Father Huy meets the couple at the door of the great hall. The crowd follows behind them, forming a semi-circle around them.

Pregnant Aislinn dabs her eyes, emotional. Rollo is less moved. Robert is basically picking his nose and inspecting it, and basically means literally.

FATHER HUY

Does anyone present know any reason  
why this man and woman should NOT  
be joined in holy matrimony?

Rollo lets out a cough. Father Huy looks at him.

FATHER HUY (CONT'D)

Since there are no objections, will  
you take this man to be your  
husband?

TEXT ON SCREEN:

*Ethelfritha Rose Splinter of Devon.*

- 48 years of age
- widow who whittles
- eats sugar with her fingers
- richer than my father

ETHELFRITHA

(looking around happily)

I... I will?

FATHER HUY

And will you take this woman to be  
your wife?

GEORGE

(tired)

I will.

George pulls some gold coins from his pocket and places them on Father Huy's open liturgy book, along with the ring, which Father Huy blesses under his breath. George takes the rings and touches it to Ethelfritha's thumb.

FATHER HUY

In nomine Patris.

GEORGE

In nomine Patris.

George touches it to her first finger.

FATHER HUY  
Et filli.

GEORGE  
Et filli.

Goerge touches it to her second finger.

FATHER HUY  
Et spiritus sancti.

GEORGE  
Et spiritus sancti.

And he places it on her third finger.

FATHER HUY  
Amen.

GEORGE  
Amen.

As Father Huy blesses them, Aislinn whispers to Birdy.

AISLINN  
Does your uncle not look dashing,  
Bird? And I remember when he was  
crawling about the floor in his  
christening gown!

Birdy sulks in her pew, despite having a stunning new green dress with ermine accents. She looks, for the very first time, like a rose-bitten WOMAN but her frown says otherwise.

Aelis watches from a separate pew. Her parents are bickering over her head. She tries to cover her weeping eyes with her hood but there isn't enough hood to do the job.

LORD SIDEBOTTOM  
You tell your daughter no crying.  
She should get used to it. She has  
a fine young man there who is going  
to grow up into a fine specimen.

BEATRICE  
She has a nine year old boy.

Standing next to Aelis is a little boy (her husband), staring absently ahead and holding her hand.

TEXT ON SCREEN:

*Lord Suncerk of Dunkerk*  
*- 9 years of age*

- loves hide and seek, naps, and soft foods  
 - Aelis's new husband

Birdy looks at Aelis, then back at sad George. She cannot bear to watch any of this and darts out while her father is taking a secret swig from a flask, grinning absently.

**EXT. STONEBRIDGE VILLAGE- NIGHT**

Birdy walks the village. It is cold and misty- warmth glows from inside houses but she is all alone. Her sombre contemplation is interrupted when she steps on something squishy.

BIRDY

Corpus Bones! Must my world always  
 be peppered with shit?

A GUY of about eighteen, who is pushing a wheelbarrow full of leather mittens, hears her.

MITTEN SELLER

A mouth to shame a pirate!

She notices (any of us would notice) that he is cute and she bows her head, gathering her bravery.

BIRDY

I am endeavoring to find the best  
 curse of them all. Is it Corpus  
 Bones? God's Thumbs? Or just a  
 simple "Satan and all his minions!"

MITTEN SELLER

I personally go in for "death by  
 frying pan!"

Birdy giggles.

BIRDY

You are selling mittens?

MITTEN SELLER

It grows colder and colder and so I  
 travel from town to town, looking  
 for people whose fingers shiver.

BIRDY

I have not a coin to my own name,  
 sir.

(beat)

I am but a servant.

Beat.

MITTEN SELLER

A servant in fancy dress, though.

(beat)

If you have no funds, then a kiss  
will do.

BIRDY

Death by frying pan!

(beat)

I cannot kiss you, sir, for... I  
have never kissed anyone before. I  
would be beat with the rod.

He laughs sweetly.

MITTEN SELLER

Than can I kiss you and take all  
the blame?

He grins. She looks down at the mass of mittens. She takes a  
step forward, closes her eyes and waits. He takes a long time  
to lean in- wha feels like years- and she opens one eye as  
she receives a kiss lightly on the lips. Not too long but not  
so short as to mean nothing.

BIRDY (V.O.)

That was it? That was what made  
George and Aelis go so mad?

He grins, hands her the mittens and is off, humming to  
himself.

BIRDY (V.O.)

Well. He looks rather pleased with  
himself.

She shrugs, slipping one mitten on to see if they fit.

**INT. STONEBRIDGE MANOR- GREAT HALL- LATER- NIGHT**

A group of women are dancing an ornate dance in a ring, their  
dresses contrasting shades of silk so that they resemble a  
sort of Mondrian painting by way of Coachella.

This is our modern unisex version of the Carole dance, a  
dance done at Medieval weddings. We move through them to  
Birdy, at a long table, playing with her new mittens.

BIRDY (V.O.)

Might I really count that as my  
first kiss?

(MORE)

BIRDY (V.O.) (CONT'D)

I suppose I would like to,  
especially if it's the only one  
I'll ever choose to have myself.

Birdy is seated beside Ethelfritha, who eats a fish clean off the bones while keeping one hand linked through George's arm. Birdy watches Ethelfritha with disdain- the food bits on her cheek, the frizz of her hair, her wrinkled sleeves. Ethelfritha notices Birdy noticing her and leans over.

ETHELFRITHA

I paid for the festivities out of  
my own pocket, you know.

Birdy doesn't speak.

ETHELFRITHA (CONT'D)

That's one thing husbands are good  
for. Well, dead husbands anyway.  
It's very convenient when they die  
wealthier than when you wed them,  
though still rather sad, I suppose.

BIRDY

We haven't had a party like this in  
months.

ETHELFRITHA

Oh dear.

BIRDY

We have no money left, unlike you.  
There's so much food tonight that  
I've lost my appetite.

(beat)

Or maybe love just makes me ill.

ETHELFRITHA

Who said anything of love?

Birdy looks intrigued.

ETHELFRITHA (CONT'D)

Do I believe your uncle George  
loves me? No, I do not. But he will  
protect me, as only a husband can  
protect a wife. I inherit his title  
and I hear he's good with a sword.  
And in turn, he has land to call  
his own, something his family could  
not provide despite their title. It  
is a perfect trade. Plus, he's  
gorgeous. You know, in a childish  
way.

BIRDY

But do you not want to love  
somebody?

ETHELFRITHA

I have other fish to fry.

Uncle George is Rollo-style wasted and it's sad to watch. He gets up and wanders down the table, picking up bottles of wine to check for remaining drops. When he finds a half-full bottle, he chugs. Birdy watches him.

ETHELFRITHA (CONT'D)

(eerily tuned in)

You are lucky, little bird, for you  
have wings. But you must learn to  
harness them, not to flap all about  
and crash to the floor.

Birdy pauses and reflects on this. Down the table Birdy notices Aelis, sitting with her nine year old husband.

BIRDY

Might I excuse myself a moment?  
(beat)  
Aunt Ethelfritha?

ETHELFRITHA

But of course, little Bird. Just  
don't try and fly the coop.

Birdy walks purposefully toward Aelis, watching the adults who are not acting very adult. When she reaches her friend, she stops, standing vulnerably straight.

BIRDY

I wish you the same things you wish  
for yourself.

AELIS

(loud, above the din)  
What?

BIRDY

(hesitant, shy)  
I... I wish your happiness, Aelis.  
I am so sorry that I ever said  
otherwise.  
(quiet)  
Since we quarreled, I have only  
missed you.  
(even quieter)  
And now, there is so much to tell.  
I hath only two words: mitten man!

A long, agonizing beat. Aelis considers, then throws her arms around Birdy. The two girls rock in each other's arms.

BIRDY (CONT'D)

Ever since you moved away I have been so lonely and unlucky!

AELIS

And ever since I moved away I have wondered why nobody is as funny as my Bird!

The nine year old smiles at them and interjects, clueless.

NINE YEAR OLD HUSBAND

Would you like to see my doll? He has a turnip for a head.

BIRDY

No, thank you.

NINE YEAR OLD HUSBAND

(to himself)  
How silly.

BIRDY

Who are you?

NINE YEAR OLD HUSBAND

Why, I am her husband of course!

The girls burst into hysterics, as if they're making fun of a kid who is a few years behind them in school, only it's Aelis's husband.

**INT. STONEBRIDGE MANOR- GREAT HALL- LATER- NIGHT**

After the party is the after party! The event is raging, everyone drunk on Ethelfritha's rich lady wine.

At their wedding seats, Ethelfritha slides her head onto George's shoulder. He chugs his wine. She stares at him, pouring him some more. He chugs that. She giggles. A beat.

GEORGE

(drunk)  
What do you want from me?

ETHELFRITHA

What do you want for yourself?

A truly disgusting MALE GUEST (SHAGGY BEARD) starts making waves: he's a bearded, troll-like nightmare, belching, chasing serving maids with his tongue wagging, giving a wet willy to a girl who is tidying the flowers. He notices Robert's lurcher dog, which is excitable and jumping, and he delivers a swift kick to its gut. The dog whimpers, shocked, and wanders off. Shaggy Beard stands on the table...

SHAGGY BEARD  
Quiet! Silence!

Then bends over and loudly FARTS.

SHAGGY BEARD (CONT'D)  
I'll blow this shit-hole down! I'm  
the seventh richest man in  
Yorkshire and I want to fornicate!

He chases after female guests.

BIRDY (V.O.)  
Adults call me insolent, but have  
they ever met their own drunken  
friends? Bleh!

**EXT. STONEBRIDGE MANOR- NIGHT**

George and Ethelfritha ride off in a cart with colorful ribbons hanging, as the servants and peasants wave goodbye from the road, banging pots and pans. Birdy watches, waving, not so sad as she once seemed.

MORWENNA  
Do you not love a wedding with  
every beat of your heart?

BIRDY  
(crinkling her nose)  
I do not. But how strange, that I  
should like the woman who has taken  
George from us!

MORWENNA  
Life is quite a shock, Bird.

Ethelfritha smiles and pats his back, utterly free, an example to Birdy and to them all. George waves meekly then vomits off the side of the cart.

BIRDY (V.O.)  
That vomit was yet another shock.

**INT. STONEBRIDGE MANOR- GREAT HALL- MORNING**

Birdy, her hair in fresh plaits, sits at breakfast across from her father, mother, the maybe, possibly, not-so-abominable Robert and... that awful male guest? The man glares at Robert. Robert glares back.

ROLLO

Good morning, little bird.

She doesn't respond.

BIRDY (V.O.)

Perplexingly pleasant.

(beat)

Why does this shaggy-bearded cretin remain?

The man chews a boiled egg, bits hanging from his sagging jaw and sparse hairs. He must be a Medieval age , aka a age 52.

ROLLO

Lord Murgaw, do you know that Catherine spins the finest yarn in Stonebridge?

SHAGGY BEARD

I do not care much for fabrics. No, I would dance in the nude if it were not a sin.

ROLLO

(confused)

And what is it you like to do, my Lord? The bit where you follow an animal using a sort of pointed... ahem...

ROBERT

Arrow? As in hunting?

ROLLO

I know about hunting. I was thinking more along the lines of when men use their bodies to, er...

ROBERT

Climb trees? That's one I'm excellent at, father.

ROLLO

No.

SHAGGY BEARD

I collect rare lizard skins and  
play puzzles, one piece a night.  
Moderation in every area except the  
carnal.

The guest stares at Birdy, who is unaware of any tension.  
Rollo, meanwhile, is horrified.

BIRDY

What's carnal? Car-nal. It is a  
funny word.

ROLLO

A funny word. That's all.

ROBERT

Something you should talk about  
with mom, she might know...

**INT. STONEBRIDGE MANOR- SOLAR- DAY**

Rollo relaxing in a throne-like chair. It's clear Birdy,  
despite all her spying, has hardly ever entered this room and  
regards it with a hushed reverie.

BIRDY

Yes father?

ROLLO

My beloved daughter. My sweetest  
girl. My only raven-haired lass.

BIRDY

Who do you speak of? I am your  
daughter, God help me, but hardly  
beloved. So who is it you address?

Her father smiles.

ROLLO

My lady of Lithgow. Your bridegroom  
awaits you and none of your tricks  
will profit you this time. You've  
reached the end of the charade and  
you will move forward and out.

BIRDY

The guest? The man they call Shaggy  
Beard? Is my betrothed?

ROLLO

Be respectful, Catherine- his name is Lord John Murgaw the Eighth, and he is the last, and blessedly most wealthy, suitor.

Birdy gasps.

ROLLO (CONT'D)

Is that all sounding satisfactory?

Birdy tries to speak but can only stutter. Unable to summon words, Birdy runs from the room and into the hall, panting.

BIRDY (V.O.)

He is not a man. He is a mottled troll and should live in a cave. A murderer does not deserve such punishment. It cannot... it will not be!

**INT. STONEBRIDGE MANOR- GREAT HALL- AFTERNOON**

The family is gathered around an elegant lunch spread, with Shaggy Beard present. They are eating meat pie and courgettes shaved into flowers- fancy foods for their fancy guest.

Birdy eats in silence.

BIRDY (V.O.)

Luckily, I am most experienced at outwitting suitors.

She stares at her food glumly.

ROLLO

So, Catherine can be prone to fits of silence. Right, my lady?

AISLINN

(curt)

She speaks when she wishes and is a great deal of fun most of the time.

SHAGGY BEARD

I can only imagine how delightful you were when your husband first procured you. Bold, playful, but dutiful. Exactly my sort of woman.

Rollo laughs uncomfortably. Aislinn winces- she will tolerate this only because she has to.

SHAGGY BEARD (CONT'D)

The only women I cannot abide by:  
criers and those with liver spots.

Just then the cook brings out a large cooked pig with an apple in its mouth.

ROLLO

Ah, the prize pig.

AISLINN

Made with my good mother's recipe.

Birdy looks at it and after a beat of scheming...

BIRDY (V.O.)

Oh, criers? I am an expert crier,  
since the day I was born.

Birdy begins to wail and flail over the pig's corpse.

BIRDY

Nooo, not Jiminy. They've killed  
Jiminy.

(louder wailing)

THE ONLY FRIEND I HAD. JIMINNNY.  
AND PIGS CANNOT GO TO HEAVEN!

Rollo and Robert look shocked.

ROBERT

(laughing, confounded)

Who in God's name is Jiminy?

Shaggy Beard looks at Catherine.

SHAGGY BEARD

(through bites of newly  
cut meat)

So, Catherine, am I to believe the  
pig was a good friend of yours?

Birdy flashes him a demonic smile then oinks at him, hoping this display will do the job.

SHAGGY BEARD (CONT'D)

(about the pig and Birdy)

Spicy. I like it!

TEXT ON SCREEN:

*Sir John Henry Murgaw aka Shaggy Beard*  
*- wheat salesman*  
*-landlord*

- *hideous mottled troll*  
*Offering:*  
 - *filthy stinking riches*

**EXT. STONEBRIDGE FIELD- MORNING**

Birdy wanders the high grass looking carefully for something. When she finds it, she grins and scoops it into a tin mug.

**INT. STONEBRIDGE MANOR- SOLAR - MORNING**

In Rollo's man cave, where guests are put up, Shaggy Beard is being dressed by his MANSERVANT. He is in his undergarments, coughing vociferously, when there is a knock at the door.

SHAGGY BEARD  
 Who goes there?

BIRDY  
 (sweetly)  
 Tis I, Lady Catherine.

MANSERVANT  
 Ahhh. Your sweet wench, sir.

SHAGGY BEARD  
 Do not call my sweet future wife a wench, you fool.

MANSERVANT  
 So sorry, sir. I was simply... I was only... I was just...

Shaggy Beard laughs, as if delighted to have put the fear of god in the guy. The manservant laughs too, half relief and half terror.

The Manservant opens the door. Birdy bows.

SHAGGY BEARD  
 I was not expecting to reveal my skivvies to you until our wedding day.

BIRDY  
 And why must we dabble in formality, m'lord, when we all know that very soon what's mine is yours and yours is mine?

SHAGGY BEARD  
 (looking her up and down)  
 Indeed it is and indeed it will be.

MANSERVANT  
 Indeed, it is and--

SHAGGY BEARD  
 (sharply)  
 Too many bloody voices in this  
 room!

MANSERVANT  
 Yes. Mine being the problem.

BIRDY  
 I hear your joints ache, and so I  
 have prepared you a traditional  
 Stonebridge poultice.

She extends the plate.

BIRDY (CONT'D)  
 Simply cake it over your elbows and  
 knees and let it absorb beneath the  
 layers of your clothing, and let it  
 soak into your bones.

SHAGGY BEARD  
 You are even more considerate than  
 you are beautiful.

BIRDY  
 Good day, my Lords.

SHAGGY BEARD  
 Good day, my Lady.

Birdy curtsies and exits.

MANSERVANT  
 Considerate, beautiful, and she  
 curtsies! The whole package.

The Manservant picks up and smells Birdy's poultice and  
 cannot hide his disgust.

BIRDY (V.O.)  
 Ah, my finest work yet! I can taste  
 my freedom.

**EXT. STONEBRIDGE FIELD- DAY**

Birdy, Perkin, Gerd, Alf and Meg do a medieval version of the limbo. Meg and Alf, making eyes at each other, hold a stick as Gerd sings and Perkin attempts to shimmy under it.

ALF

Don't touch the devil's toothpick!

BIRDY (V.O.)

Perkin truly is my heart's brother, and so we managed to resolve our troubles with a good old fashioned arm wrestle which I won fair and square.

Meg calls to Birdy to hold the other end of the stick and she obliges.

BIRDY

Meg?

MEG

Yes, Birdy?

BIRDY

What really is a virgin?

Meg laughs, shyly, and drops the stick mid-limbo, causing Gerd to fall on his ass. As the boys all wrestle, Meg whispers the answer to Birdy. We hear selected words: his man-sword... push... in and out... smush... done...

BIRDY (CONT'D)

I thought a virgin was when God made you pregnant?

MEG

Oh no, that was only that one virgin.

Birdy looks horrified.

**EXT. STONEBRIDGE MANOR- HERB GARDEN- DAY**

Birdy walks alone in one of the nice capes her parents had made in order to make her seem like hot property. She is breathing the cool air in big gulps.

BIRDY (V.O.)

That is what a virgin is? I had no idea what I was asking.

She stops and closes her eyes, trying to ignore her problems, when one comes up behind her: Shaggy Beard.

SHAGGY BEARD

Lady Catherine...

He quickens his pace to catch her.

SHAGGY BEARD (CONT'D)

(slowing)

Lady Catherine, might I join you?

(lowering his tone)

You are the reason that I stink of shit.

BIRDY

(smiling)

If the shoe fits...

SHAGGY BEARD

You thought you could outsmart me with tomfoolery, right? But what you didn't bargain for is that I. Like. The. Chase.

Catherine looks confused and scared as Shaggy Beard leans in.

SHAGGY BEARD (CONT'D)

Tomorrow I shall give your father the marriage purse, a large sum of gold for him. But this is for you.

He hands her a pouch of silver coins.

SHAGGY BEARD (CONT'D)

And when you spend that first piece of silver on something pretty, remember that it is you finally saying yes to me.

Birdy, totally without recourse, pops Shaggy Beard in the nose and runs.

BIRDY (V.O.)

He will not be able to marry me for I will not spend the coins, just angrily hoard them.

He touches his smarting nose- a thin trickle of blood- and grins. He's got a feisty one on the line.

**EXT. STONEBRIDGE MANOR- DAY**

Birdy is running, her fancy cape flapping, the camera close on her face and pulling her. Rollo and Robert follow, shouting. They all run the same way, their limbs flailing, more related than they want to be. Birdy pauses, catches her breath, her eyes fiery with angry disbelief. Eyeing her father, Birdy simply holds her hands out, asking for her palms to be whipped. But instead, Rollo just stands there.

BIRDY

Why don't you whack me? That's what you'd really like, is it not?

Rollo is shocked- he hates hearing this from his daughter. Does she not understand that he punishes her to make her a more successful member of society?

ROLLO

Put your hands behind your back.  
Stand up straight.  
(cold)  
You must pack your things at once.  
The lord has officially proposed.

ROBERT

You need to leave here.

BIRDY

No.

ROLLO

Yes.

BIRDY

No. No. No.

ROLLO

YES! Birdy, I cannot play these games! I am tired. I AM TIRED!

ROBERT

Respect your father!

BIRDY

(begging)  
Please. Just let me stay to meet the baby.

ROLLO

The baby does not come for months yet.

BIRDY

Please.

(she is weeping)

I just want to meet the baby. I must meet the baby. I have to meet the baby.

A beat.

ROLLO

Fine. I will tell Lord Lithgow you are finishing lessons in keeping the home. But the moment-

ROBERT

The moment!

Rollo pushes Robert's head away. Enough.

ROLLO

The moment the babe is here, then you are not.

The men walk away as if they haven't just ruined her life.

**EXT. STONEBRIDGE FIELD- AFTERNOON**

Birdy flees up the hill, where Perkin is tending his goats.

BIRDY

Perkin! PERKIN!

He turns to her.

PERKIN

Birdy? Why are you wailing so? Are you possessed by a demon?

She grabs him around the neck, weeping. He's taken aback by the rough physical affection and pats her awkwardly.

BIRDY

Perkin. We must marry.

PERKIN

You'd make a sorry bride in this state, Birdy.

Birdy pulls away, her mind racing with plans.

BIRDY

All we have to do is get married tomorrow in the village and only Morwenna and Meg and the pigs have to be there. I shall be Lady Perkin and your goats shall be our children--

PERKIN

Birdy! Birdy, stop! I do not want to marry you!

BIRDY

You have to marry me! My life hangs in the balance and you refuse me?

PERKIN

And what of my life Birdy? My plans? Have you ever asked what I dream of when I lay my head down at night? No!

BIRDY

If I was fair of face like Aelis, you'd marry me.

PERKIN

No, Birdy! It's not about being fair-faced!

BIRDY

What's it about then?

PERKIN

I don't know. I just don't want to marry you or Aelis or Meg or Morwenna or any other woman God has or shall put on this earth.

BIRDY

What, would you marry a MAN instead!?

Perkin looks stunned. She has taken him by such surprise that his ability to hide the truth is rendered obsolete. It's clear on his face that yes, what she's said is true. In a profound and nameless way, Birdy understands.

She hurls herself at Perkin and hugs him tight. After a moment of resistance, he hugs back. They cling to each other desperately, each caught in their own tiny hell. Birdy cradles his face.

BIRDY (CONT'D)

We must run away, Perkin. Run faraway and never comeback.

PERKIN

Oh, Birdy. That is always your answer. Do you not see? You would like to ride into the crusades, but you are a lady. I would like to be a great scholar, yet I cannot even read. We do not get to choose what we do. Life does not care about us- we are given our stations until death.

This is too much for Birdy and she collapses, panting. Perkin sits down beside her, laying a hand on her back, and begins to sing- the same song as earlier but much sweeter now, cozy.

PERKIN (CONT'D)

Through the buckle till the pin  
Holds the belt-end safely in...

**EXT. STONEBRIDGE VILLAGE- DAY- A MONTAGE OF SPRING**

Moving through springtime! The sheep have given birth. They nurse, the babies shaking their butts while they drink up.

**EXT. STONEBRIDGE VILLAGE- DAY**

Village women shake out their sheets and beat their rugs.

**EXT. STONEBRIDGE FIELD- STREAM- DAY**

The stream meanders on.

**INT. STONEBRIDGE MANOR- AISLINN'S CHAMBER- AFTERNOON**

Birdy lays on the bed with her mother, heavily pregnant once more. Aislinn lifts her night dress to reveal her naked stomach and the side of her thigh, and Birdy places a hand on it.

BIRDY

Mother! She kicks like a pony!

AISLINN

She?

BIRDY

(shy)

I might like a sister. Edward and Robert all have each other. I am quite alone.

AISLINN

(dropping her dress again)

I should like that too, Little Bird. But would she be as perfect as my first-born daughter? You are as naughty as God hoped you might be.

Birdy runs her finger along the scar on her mother's neck.

BIRDY

Mother, why does the skin on your neck bulge like a rope?

AISLINN

That's what happens when you touch fire, Birdy.

BIRDY

Did you touch fire, Mumma?

AISLINN

No, Bird. Fire touched me.

(beat)

It's why I tell you to obey. I was once willful too and my father showed me how he felt about that with the iron. And so when you try so hard to bend the ways of the world, Bird, I cheer for you, but I also fear for you. To see you hurt... I could not sustain that, Birdy. I would rather see you settle than be seared.

(beat)

There are worse fathers than yours, Bird.

BIRDY

But what of husbands, mother? What of the man I am meant to marry, mother?

AISLINN

(strained)

I believe that you will be protected, that he will see the goodness in your eyes and it will bring out the goodness in his. I must believe that.

A knock at the door.

AISLINN (CONT'D)

Enter.

Robert peeks his head around the door, uncharacteristically shy.

ROBERT

Mumma? I require your council.

He spies Birdy.

ROBERT (CONT'D)

(cold)

But I will wait until your bed is free of fleas.

AISLINN

Children, please. Let us leave behind childhood teasing and act a family while we still can. It does my heart a great deal of good.

Robert enters--this is a different kid than we've seen before. He's sheepish, almost embarrassed, with a sweet hope brimming around the edges. He's clutching a slip of parchment.

ROBERT

We have had word from Gloucestershire.

AISLINN

Gloucestershire?

BIRDY

Aelis!

ROBERT

Indeed.

(he reads blankly)

The child husband is dead. Fever. Oh, little Bird, everyone cries but I cry with joy for I am coming home.

BIRDY

The message was for me. Hand me my letter!

Birdy prepares for a fight, but Robert simply hands it over.

AISLINN

Life can be very cruel, my loves.

Beat.

BIRDY

Do you think they buried his turnip head doll beside him?

AISLINN

(clucking)

Birdyyy.

ROBERT

Mother, might I...?

AISLINN

You did well to never lose hope that you might have your own love, chick-a-loo.

Birdy looks at Robert, who wants to die: "Chick-a-loo?" What goes on between these two when she's not around?!

BIRDY

(crossly)

What is going on here? I do not like to be on the wrong end of secrets, Mumma.

Aislinn looks to Robert for approval. He nods.

AISLINN

Birdy, your brother has long harbored hopes of proposing to Aelis.

BIRDY

Robert? Aelis?? That Robert? My Aelis??

ROBERT

No. She is everyone's Aelis, like Jesus or springtime, and she brings the world just as much sacred joy.

(MORE)

ROBERT (CONT'D)

And if she would have me I would consider myself a man reformed, reborn and blessed by a God whose existence I could not deny.

Aislinn smiles. Even Birdy is moved. Wow, Robert.

BIRDY (V.O.)

Well, I guess I don't know everything. I think by sneaking and spying I can avoid surprises but they come anyway... sometimes in the form of unexpected love.

**EXT. STONEBRIDGE COUNTRY ROAD- DAY**

In her new lilac dress, Birdy is bouncing along dirt roads in a wooden carriage. Birdy looks at the driver's strong back, his handsome neck, the wind ruffling his hair.

BIRDY (V.O.)

It is a good day, for I head to Aelis's and we can rejoice in the news that we are now, and finally, sisters. I bring a welcome to the family gift of preserves from the kitchen and a comb for her hair.

(beat)

I once caught Morwenna staring at this driver while he washed blood from a boil on his thigh. She calls him Golden Tiger when she speaks of him in secret. Imagine life with a peasant. So simple. So passionate. So...

He turns to her to check on her, smiling to reveal absolutely zero teeth.

BIRDY (V.O.)

... Toothless.

**EXT. AELIS'S ROAD- AFTERNOON**

The carriage lurches to a stop, waking Birdy. Birdy notices that Aelis's family is waiting for her by the road and they bum-rush the carriage. Aelis stands between her baleful father and step mum. Lord Sidebottom wears some of his old chain mail and it clanks as his push chair moves.

AELIS

Birdy!

BIRDY

Aelis!

Birdy jumps out of the carriage and races to Aelis.

BIRDY (CONT'D)

Whatever is the emergency, Aelis?  
Why are you all standing in the  
road like cattle?

AELIS

(scared)  
Hello, Bird.

As Aelis hugs Birdy, she bursts into tears.

BIRDY

Aelis, what is the matter? It is a  
happy day! You're to be married! We  
are to be sisters!

LORD SIDEBOTTOM

Young Catherine, I am glad to see  
you. Please tell your drunk of a  
father that his offer is offensive.

BERENICE

(to her husband)  
She is not one of your special  
hunting dogs, the ones you pay for  
in gold brick! She is a girl. Just  
as I once was.

LORD SIDEBOTTOM

Shut up, shut up, shut up Berenice!  
I grow so tired of your voice!

BERENICE

And I grew weary of yours the  
moment I heard it. Good thing you  
don't have long to live.

AELIS

Can everyone please stop shouting?

GOLDEN TIGER

There do seem to be a lot of raised  
voices. I always say, speak like  
butter, not like knives...

LORD SIDEBOTTOM

AND WHOMST ARE YOU!? My daughter is  
a virgin, confirmed by exam!  
(MORE)

LORD SIDEBOTTOM (CONT'D)

She can command more than twice  
the pitiful marriage purse your  
father proposes.

BIRDY

They pay more for virgins?  
(nobody hears her)  
Aelis! They pay more... for  
virgins?

She looks at Aelis, awash in tears.

She feels the bag of silver at her side.

She backs slowly away.

BIRDY (CONT'D)

You men are not God! You don't get  
to decide who we are, where we go,  
or how much we cost! We aren't  
things, we are people. We can think  
and we can hear and we can feel,  
and you just broke my best friend's  
heart because of your greed.

LORD SIDEBOTTOM

Insolent whelp! What difference  
does that make! A girl's master  
merely changes from her father to  
husband!

Birdy looks at Aelis as if to say "I love you, I'm sorry."  
She hops back in the cart and taps Golden Tiger on the  
shoulder, hard.

BIRDY

Can we move?

GOLDEN TIGER

But where, m'lady.

BIRDY

Rutherford!

The wind whips Birdy's hair as she stews.

BIRDY (V.O.)

I'm sorry Aelis, I want to save you  
more than anything, I do.

AELIS

Birdy!

LORD SIDEBOTTOM

(to Aelis)

You! Get inside and straight to your room.

BIRDY (V.O.)

I am all out of tricks, it seems. Well, all but one.

**EXT. HANGING TOWN- AFTERNOON**

Birdy wanders into a town, bigger than her village, overwhelming her senses. The streets are bustling- sellers with food stalls and men welding steel. Birdy is dressed in baggy peasant's clothing, stolen from Golden Tiger.

BIRDY (V.O.)

I convinced Golden Tiger to give me his clothes, so I can run to the only place I think they might see me as more than a shiny gold coin.

**EXT. ROAD- SAME TIME- AFTERNOON**

Golden Tiger sits wearing Birdy's cape with her dress draped across his lap, showing too much flesh.

**EXT. GEORGE AND ETHELFRITHA'S MANOR- NIGHT**

Ragged and exhausted, Birdy approaches a house in the woods, and staggers toward the door.

BIRDY (V.O.)

Uncle George is a hero and perhaps he can tell me how to be one myself. Not just in fantasies. But in real life.

She raps at the door using a large welded knocker. It thunders through an empty-sounding house. She waits. The door finally rumbles open, revealing her uncle George. He is tired and drunk, bloated and sad. Our Golden George is a thing of the past.

GEORGE

(coldly)

We have nothing for you, peasant boy.

BIRDY

No, Uncle George.

Birdy removes her hat.

BIRDY (CONT'D)  
It is I, Catherine.

GEORGE  
Birdy?

She hugs her uncle around the waist.

**INT. GEORGE AND ETHELFRITHA'S MANOR- SOLAR- NIGHT**

Birdy sits across from George and Ethelfritha, wrapped in blankets and cozy. A fire roars. George and Ethelfritha wear their matching sleep outfits- George looks dashing but distracted, a little lifeless, in his silk robe. Birdy is eating an orange from an ornate dish.

ETHELFRITHA  
Delicious, no? I had my first orange upon my father's return from the Moorish country.

BIRDY  
I should like to go to the Moorish country!

GEORGE  
I had bet you would. I should think you'd like to go anywhere your father isn't.

BIRDY  
We have a baby due any day, you know. My father wants a boy but we secretly hope for a girl.  
(beat)  
And I am to marry Shaggy Beard.

GEORGE  
(stunned)  
Of Lithgow?

BIRDY  
It is he.

GEORGE  
Oh, Birdy. I knew it would be someone of note, but not that sort of note.  
(beat, empathy lessening)  
Lord Murgaw keeps a fine house and he will keep you well.

ETHELFRITHA

He owns three small towns and a leper colony- perhaps you can keep an arboretum in the back there behind it? George himself has started a garden of plants beloved by Christ.

GEORGE

It is barely a garden, my love, but a place to smoke my pipe in peace. Thus far only the crows seem impressed by my green thumb.

ETHELFRITHA

(proudly)

Crows adore George! They find him soothing.

Beat.

GEORGE

This tea has soothed me, my darling, and so I must retire.

BIRDY

(confused)

But I have just arrived.

GEORGE

I tire easily these days. I am not young.

(sad smile)

My back stoops and my stomach bloats. In the morning, I will deliver you back to Stonebridge.

Birdy stares at her uncle, who was also her first love.

BIRDY

Uncle George, please tuck me in?

He stares at her- despite the ways he's changed, her face still tugs at his heart strings.

**INT. GEORGE AND ETHELFRITHA'S MANOR- GUEST CHAMBER - NIGHT**

George pulls back the covers on a bed in a richly decorated room and Birdy scrambles in.

GEORGE

Alright, blow out the candle.

BIRDY

No, will you tell me a story?

George sighs, sitting down in the rocking chair beside the bed.

GEORGE

I don't think I know any stories.

BIRDY

You? No stories? But you have been around the world. You have seen the ocean.

GEORGE

But I did not keep a little book like you do. And so the memories have slipped through my hands like snow when I try and take them home.

(beat)

I remember very little about very little...

Beat.

BIRDY

Uncle George?

GEORGE

Yes, Bird.

BIRDY

If you are a hero, then why did you not try and save me?

GEORGE

Save you?

BIRDY

From my father. From Shaggy Beard. From my future...

GEORGE

But you see, Bird, I am not a hero.

(beat)

Can you ever forgive me, my sweet girl?

BIRDY

You are right, Uncle George- heroes are just in storybooks. Even the saints only escaped by dying.

GEORGE

And that does not sound like much  
of an answer either.

BIRDY

Do you love Ethelfritha?

GEORGE

As best I know how.

BIRDY

Do you love...

(beat)

Me?

GEORGE

(smiling, a flash of his  
old self)

Desperately.

**INT. GEORGE AND ETHELFRITHA'S MANOR- GUEST CHAMBER- MORNING**

Birdy sleeps, the candle burnt down to a nub, and George snores lightly in the rocking chair beside her. Ethelfritha, still in fantastic pajamas, busts in and shakes Birdy. She awakens with a start.

BIRDY

Ah!

ETHELFRITHA

Shhh! Hurry! We must go and feed  
the owls.

**EXT. GEORGE AND ETHELFRITHA'S MANOR- GARDEN- MORNING**

Birdy follows Ethelfritha to a large wooden habitat in the back yard. Between metal bars, she sees only sticks and leaves.

BIRDY

There is nothing inside.

ETHELFRITHA

Just you wait, little bird.

Ethelfritha pulls a dead white mouse from her pocket and hurls it through the bars. The owls swoop and one catches it. They return to their bars, hoo-hooing and staring with their big eyes. Birdy looks on in awe.

BIRDY

I keep birds, but mine are very small!

ETHELFRITHA

These are more than birds. They are creatures. I'm a creature, too, you know.

(beat)

Shaggy Beard, eh?

BIRDY

It is not fair.

ETHELFRITHA

You're right, Birdy. It is not fair. You should not have to marry him.

BIRDY

I should not!

ETHELFRITHA

Or have to be a lady.

BIRDY

I hate being a lady!

ETHELFRITHA

(leaning in  
conspiratorially)

Then let us run away.

BIRDY

Us?

ETHELFRITHA

Why not? I am rich and you are young. Together, we have it all. We can make our way to Arabia and taste the orange straight from the tree. Have you ever met a lion?

Birdy is finding her aunt more and more manic and also starting to consider the reality of the situation.

BIRDY

(hesitant)

No...

ETHELFRITHA

A sultan? Would you like to slay a sultan and steal his gold? Yes?

Beat.

BIRDY

Yes! I would... But I would miss Morwenna, my nurse.

ETHELFRITHA

Silly girl, you are too old for a nurse.

BIRDY

And Perkin. He is my dearest friend.

ETHELFRITHA

You need no friends when you have adventure.

BIRDY

At least if I am in Lithgow I can visit home. I can sleep in my bed at Christmas, check on my mother.

(beat)

If we went on a big adventure I could never reunite with Aelis. And I would never see the baby grow. And they would miss me. They would miss me, Birdy.

Ethelfritha smiles. Birdy gets it. They are divinely trapped in their lives and sometimes it is not a curse but a comfort.

**EXT. STONEBRIDGE MANOR- LATE MORNING**

Birdy looks out at her home with a new fondness. Her arms are wrapped around George's waist as they gallop home on his white horse.

George hops off the horse and helps his niece down, catching her in a hug as she slides off the saddle. For a moment, he can protect her. Then he lets go.

BIRDY

Uncle George?

GEORGE

Yes, Bird.

BIRDY

(real advice)

Next time a peasant boy raps on your door, please give him a scrap of something to eat.

GEORGE

Bye Birdy.

They hug deeply.

BIRDY

Bye Uncle George.

Morwenna rushes to the door, angry and frazzled.

MORWENNA

Birdy! You pest, you rat, you-  
(beat)

We were so afraid. Golden Tiger  
arrived late last night in your  
cape, CRYING!

She hugs Birdy tight, crying into the front of her dress.  
Birdy kisses Morwenna all over the face, kissing her tears.  
The love between them is apparent and, for a moment, free of  
the push pull we've come to know.

BIRDY

Do not weep, Morwenna. When you do,  
you puff up and resemble a roast  
beef.

MORWENNA

My Bird, it's your mother.

**INT. STONEBRIDGE MANOR- AISLINN'S CHAMBER- DAY**

Aislinn is in the midst of a painful and terrifying labor, on  
her knees on her bed holding two ropes tied to the bed post.  
Her chambermaid, concerned, supports her on one side while  
NAN the midwife is between her legs from behind. This isn't  
pretty TV labor- it is grim and real, the sheets soaked with  
sweat and dotted with blood.

NAN

Push more still, Lady Aislinn.  
Gather your strength yet.

Aislinn screams. Birdy runs to the head of the bed.

BIRDY

It is me, mother.

AISLINN

Urrrggghhh. Gahhhh.

Her eyes roll back in her head.

BIRDY

Your Birdy. Your only one. I am  
back, Mumma.

Morwenna is pulling at Birdy.

MORWENNA

Leave her be, Bird. She can't hear  
you right now.

BIRDY

I will always be the person you  
want me to be, Mumma. I promise.

Aislinn lets out a long, wild scream.

NAN

A crown!

Nan looks closely.

NAN (CONT'D)

Stuck. The skull too big to pass.

The door opens and the priest, FATHER HUY, enters. A few  
servant girls scatter.

NAN (CONT'D)

(whispering)

There is nothing to be done. You  
must baptize, father. Now. Bless  
them both.

The priest begins. Birdy watches in horror.

FATHER HUY

Our father who art in heaven,  
hallowed by thy name, your kingdom  
come, your will be done, on earth  
as in heaven.

AISLINN

Stop it! I can do it!

FATHER HUY

Lead us not into temptation--

Just then Rollo enters, screaming.

ROLLO

Did I hear that you are giving up?

NAN

Lord Rollo, we have tried all there is to try. The babe's head is stuck deep within her hips.

FATHER HUY

We baptize the baby in the name of the Holy Father.

Rollo grabs the priest by the neck.

ROLLO

Doubters! Doubters, all of you! My holy wife will not fail to do this. My holy child will not fail to live.

He hurries from the room, bellowing nonsense, then moves close to the terrified Nan.

ROLLO (CONT'D)

You, midwife, will stay. You will stay and you will not sleep until the child is delivered forth safely. I will not lose another child and I will not lose my only wife. Do you hear me? DO YOU HEAR ME!?

NAN

(whispered)  
Yes, m'lord.

ROLLO

(to the Priest)  
Thank you, we do not need you. Get out and don't come back!

Nan looks at the cook.

NAN

Go get some more boiling water and rags, and some butter too.

Rollo kneels at his wife's side.

ROLLO

My darling. My brave, beautiful darling, who is all I need and all I hold sacred. You were born for this. You are strong. So strong.

AISLINN

Rollo, my love. If this is to be,  
it is to be. But if it is not, and  
I am not, then all I ask is you  
make sure our children find their  
place in this world. Not just any  
place. Their place. Do you... Can  
you...

Her lip trembles. Her hands loosen on the ropes a bit.

ROLLO

No.

(tears in his eyes,  
gentle smile)

No. Look at me. All that I am is  
us. All that I can be, you already  
are. You are so good, so wise, so  
powerful. So spritely in the  
morning and so grumpy if you're  
denied a nap. So happy when the  
first flowers bloom and so pitiful  
when it rains. So good to our  
children and so intolerant of  
fools, but too polite to show it.  
So close to God while barely ever  
uttering his name. I want to make  
you laugh and to make you safe, and  
I will not live in a world where  
our children's children do not have  
the chance to hear you laugh as you  
watch them tumble on our grass.

(beat)

Can you try? Will you try?

A soft, loving beat as they gaze into each other's eyes.

ROLLO (CONT'D)

(to Nan)

Do not stand idle! Get the doctor!  
Get two doctors! Get three!

(to Aislinn)

You are so strong.

**EXT. STONEBRIDGE VILLAGE- MORNING**

The town is misty and solemn. A few farmers are afoot but  
they move slowly in the heavy air.

**INT. STONEBRIDGE MANOR- GREAT HALL- MORNING**

The servants change out the dirty rushes and open the leather window flaps, letting the air and light in.

**INT. STONEBRIDGE MANOR- AISLINN'S CHAMBER- MORNING**

Close up: An empty cradle dressed in white lace.

Close up: Aislinn and Rollo's empty bed.

Sat in a rocking chair by the window, Aislinn- pale but mighty- breastfeeds a tiny, naked baby.

BIRDY (V.O.)

Our baby was born last evening, a  
dear beautiful scrawny little girl.

We widen out to find a second baby in Rollo's arms.

BIRDY (V.O.)

In fact, two of them.

Birdy enters the frame and dangles a gold tassel on one baby's head, kissing the other. Aislinn laughs.

BIRDY (V.O.)

My father, for all his bellowing  
about sons, is floating on air.  
Which brings me to the strangest  
words I have ever said: thank you  
to my father, the most unlikely  
agent of a miracle that I know.

**INT. STONEBRIDGE MANOR- BIRDY'S CHAMBER- NIGHT**

Birdy writes at her desk, the cradle beside her- the babies sleeping peacefully, head to toe, inside it. Birdy rocks the cradle with one lazy, ecstatic arm. She smiles at the babies, who slumber in linen swaddling.

BIRDY (V.O.)

We will call them Eleanor and Mary  
Catherine, proper yet lovely. I  
wish I had more time to teach them  
tricks.

**EXT. STONEBRIDGE FIELD- DAY**

Birdy lies in the tall grass, taking in her surroundings. She spies Meg and Alf walking further down the hill, holding hands and engaged in private, sweet conversation. Meg carries a rough but charming bouquet of flowers, a gift from Alf.

BIRDY (V.O.)

Tenth day of June. I feel something changed inside of me. Just because I cannot be happy does not mean that I do not wish happiness for others. Joy is infectious, I am learning. I want to save Aelis and I think I know a way, even if it means sacrifice.

**INT. STONEBRIDGE MANOR- SOLAR- DAY**

Birdy is talking with her drunken father and Robert, but this time it's not a fight. We barely hear them, as we exist in Birdy's roaring mind as she makes this decision. She holds the velvet bag of coins out and, knowing she's sealed her fate to Shaggy Beard, dumps them. The sound of clattering coins brings us into the present. Robert starts gathering and counting the coins.

ROBERT

Is it coins?

BIRDY

Yes, Shaggy Beard's.

ROBERT

For... me? Is it enough, father? Is it??

BIRDY

Yes, you fool. I counted it.

Rollo is shocked.

ROLLO

Wonderful I can buy my tiger back!

They both stare at him incredulously.

ROLLO (CONT'D)

Robert, I am jesting. We will plan a wedding forthwith.

ROBERT  
 (in disbelief)  
 Well this means I am a husband.

ROLLO  
 Not yet...

ROBERT  
 (to Birdy)  
 This is really nice. The first nice  
 thing you have done for me.  
 Fantastic!

Robert begins to jump up and down like a teenage girl, does a happy dance and happy dances out of the room.

Rollo looks at his daughter, understanding her deep and inherent goodness. She is a remarkable woman, despite him.

Unsure of how to express this, he grabs her shoulders tight and, almost vibrating with love, shakes her. She nods at him as if to say "yes, sir."

BIRDY (V.O.)  
 This was as much for Aelis as it  
 was for my brother, likely more.  
 She is safe now. I may not be safe  
 with her, but I do know she will  
 walk my grounds, sleep in my  
 quarters, watch out for Perkin, and  
 feel something like love.

**EXT. STONEBRIDGE MANOR- DAY**

Aelis and Robert dance at Aelis's wedding, staring into each other's eyes. Aelis looks like Lily Collins at the Oscars, only 14 and anaemic.

BIRDY (V.O.)  
 We are having a wedding, for my  
 Aelis and her Robert. It may be the  
 last time I ever celebrate so I  
 better enjoy it.

The field is full of the people who love them and the ones they love.

Birdy's whole family.

Perkin in his finest coat (which has a rip at the seam).

Morwenna with her breasts hiked high in a royal blue gown.

Meg and Alf kiss and cuddle, their hands entwined with wedding rings on. Meanwhile, the Baker tenderly hand-feeds Berenice bites of fancy cakes and pastries from a platter. They kiss without shame as Lord Sidebottom grumbles in a push chair.

As Robert and Aelis's dance ends, Aelis reaches for Birdy and together they dance a merry jig, whirling and twirling, no longer girls, though not exactly women either.

We see Rollo dancing while Aislinn watches and smiles- he dances much like his daughter, delicate, free and joyous. He bows to his son, who bows back.

They dance on, the moves all their own.

Rollo looks as cheerful as he can. Aislinn stares at him as a single tear falls from his eye, despite his lips being stretched into a smile.

AISLINN

Oh, Rollo.

She whispers something to him. His face contorts in pain.

BIRDY (V.O.)

One more night in my own bed,  
then... Shaggy Beard.

**EXT. STONEBRIDGE MANOR- MORNING**

The bells on Aelis's toes become the church bells ringing on a rainy morning. The family- Aislinn, the babies Eleanor and Mary Catherine, Rollo, Robert, Aelis- form a goodbye line for Birdy, who is stepping into a cart.

Aislinn smiles, pained, and holds the babies up.

Aelis tears up and Robert comforts her.

Perkin stands with his goats, wagging a little finger awkwardly.

BIRDY (V.O.)

Do not cry. Do not cry.

Birdy steps past the group and through the gatehouse. They wave.

PERKINS

Goodbye Birdy!

MORWENNA

We love you Birdy!

MEG

Birdy!

Meg breaks through the crowd, running in her dirty skirt, and gives Birdy a quick kiss on the cheek. She turns to run back to the servants, but Birdy clutches her, hugging her as hard as she wants to hug all the others, panting into her hair. Meg lets out a little cry. After a beat, she lets go and Meg retreats.

Before she turns onto the road, Birdy looks back at her family and- despite her clear pain and desperation- sticks her tongue out. It's a tiny gesture, brave and playful, and a teary-eyed Rollo takes it in.

AISLINN

(whispered to Rollo)

Sometimes as the man of the house  
you have to make very hard  
decisions.

Birdy enters the carriage waiting beyond the gatehouse entrance.

**INT. CARRIAGE- SAME TIME- MORNING**

As Birdy enters she makes eye contact with the waiting Shaggy Beard, who smiles tightly with his mouth though not his eyes, his hands folded around a handkerchief in his lap. He blows his nose. She doesn't smile back, but she is placid, resigned to her fate.

SHAGGY BEARD

My yearly hay fever has come about-  
I trust you know how to prepare a  
proper cordial for your lord?

The carriage takes off for Shaggy Beard's castle. As they ride he chats on and on, his dialogue dulling to an abstract drone in Birdy's ears.

SHAGGY BEARD (CONT'D)

My health has never that of a man in his prime, but I have always dealt with it by being pure of habit and maintaining a stolid countenance, a regular schedule of cool baths and requiring that the servants dust daily under the wardrobe to rid the space of impurities.

Then, a shout. "BIRDY!" Someone is calling. "CATHERINE! BIRDY!" Her father catches up with the carriage, jumping and pounding the side.

ROLLO

Stop! Stop! Stop!

It finally draws to a stop.

SHAGGY BEARD

My lord?

ROLLO

My lord indeed.

(panting)

Good sir. We have changed our minds.

SHAGGY BEARD

Excuse me, my lord? I seem not to have heard you, for my allergies--

ROLLO

We've changed our bloody minds! The girl remains with us.

Birdy looks at her father in shock.

ROLLO (CONT'D)

For the time being.

(beat)

Frankly, sir, I would burn in hell for allowing my daughter to accept a proposal from such a rank and uniformly unconvincing man. She will die of boredom and furthermore, you resemble a bear who has attempted union with our local locksmith. It cannot be.

Birdy is utterly flummoxed- could this be real? Is it a hoax from the man who has always treated her like she's made of roaches? Shaggy Beard departs the carriage, careful of the mud, and stands in the road with Rollo.

ROLLO (CONT'D)

Birdy, out of the carriage.

She starts to follow, but is sharply stopped:

SHAGGY BEARD

(terrifying tone)

Stay. My lady, stay.

She watches from the window of the carriage.

SHAGGY BEARD (CONT'D)

Well, you've spent my money I gave for her dowry, so I do not see what we have to discuss.

ROLLO

The fact is, sir, I am walking back that path with my own daughter under my own arm.

Beat.

SHAGGY BEARD

If you want Lady Catherine, we will duel.

ROLLO

Alright. Yes of course. A duel. That does seem fair... May I just take a moment to... Fine, yes, I see...

BIRDY (V.O.)

I am to believe that my father plans to fight this man, swordplay being a skill he does not possess, in order to keep me, his greatest pest from having to marry?!

ROLLO

Robert! Collect my sword and accoutrements! For we are to...

(beat)

DUEL!

SHAGGY BEARD

Etienne! My sword!

Up by the gatehouse, Robert announces it to those around him, eyes lit up with excitement.

ROBERT  
We are having a DUEL!

The town rings out with people shouting DUEL!!! DUEL!!!

ROLLO  
So duel to the death... or what?

SHAGGY BEARD  
Aye! But if by my sword you do not die, I promise you life-changing injuries today, sir.

ROLLO  
Thank you!

Around Shaggy Beard and Rollo, townspeople start to crowd. They are SO DARN EXCITED. Robert appears with Rollo's sword, as well as his Rollo's MANSERVANT who begins to suit Rollo up with chain mail. On Shaggy Beard's side the same thing is happening with his groom.

Aislinn and Morwenna appear, each holding a twin, and they grin at Birdy in nervous shock.

Behind them, Perkin with Alf and Gerd and Meg- this is prime entertainment but there is also a hush- because it has consequences.

Still in the carriage, Birdy is watching it all in awe.

ROLLO (CONT'D)  
And if this duel is won by I, Lord Rollo of Stonebridge, then you will return our Lady.

Shaggy Beard nods.

SHAGGY BEARD  
And if it is won by I, Lord Murgaw of more villages than I can name in one earthly breath, you will hand me my wife.

Rollo nods solemnly.

SHAGGY BEARD (CONT'D)  
Someone say go!

ROBERT (O.S.)  
Go!

And OFF WE GO.

The two men begin- while they aren't knights, they fight with some power and confidence, clearly each serious about winning. It's unclear for a beat who is on top, with each making some serious strides.

Then, Shaggy Beard gets Rollo in a compromising position and he wounds him- a sword slash across the chest that bleeds. Rollo stumbles back, weakened and scared.

AISLINN

Rollo!

ROBERT

Father!

ROLLO

It's alright, Robert. It's alright.

BIRDY (V.O.)

I am too afraid to speak, but if I could I would tell you not to lose blood for me. You have Mumma and the babies to look after. Be careful father.

Rollo looks to Aislinn, who makes intense powerful eye contact and blows him a kiss, then to Birdy who throws him an adoring child like gaze of wonder that says she believes him but, moreover, that she needs him.

And with that he gathers his strength, lets out a growl and charges Shaggy Beard, who crumples:

SHAGGY BEARD

Oh, Christ our Savior, my spine. My legs. They tingle! They tingle! Me back is gone! I suffer from a sore case of spinal weakening! Pause! Pause!

Robert steps in from the crowd.

ROBERT

There is no clause to pause for spinal weakening, Lord.

ROLLO

(giddy, relieved)  
My Lord, that is called losing.

Robert and Rollo do the Medieval equivalent of a chest bump. Rollo lets out a cry of pain, realizing he just chest bumped with a chest gash.

SHAGGY BEARD

I do not call that defeat. We simply ran into a barrier and could not continue the match. We shall depart forthwith.

He staggers towards the carriage.

ROLLO

Not without you giving us our lady, you won't.

And then, Rollo starts a cheer.

ROLLO (CONT'D)

Give us our lady! Give us our lady!

The whole town joins. GIVE US OUR LADY! GIVE US OUR LADY! GIVE US OUR LADY!

Shaggy Beard's carriage attempts to pull out but cheering villagers have circled around it and stopped it. GIVE US OUR LADY! The crowd starts to rock his cart. Inside, Birdy and Shaggy Beard are being jangled back and forth, sliding all around. Shaggy Beard screeches like a little girl.

As the carriage stops our Catherine, smiling, realizes she is free to just dismount. And so she opens the door and hops out, coming face to face with her father who stares plaintively. After a beat, he grins.

The last image of the scene: Birdy in her father's arms, both cheering.

BIRDY (V.O.)

If I've inherited a bit of my father's heart... I suppose I shall leave it there in my chest.

**INT. STONEBRIDGE MANOR- BIRDY'S CHAMBER- AFTERNOON**

Birdy takes her cage, walks to the window and opens the door. She releases her birds, one by one, into the air.

BIRDY (V.O.)

I will never fully fathom what my father did for me.

It's a beautiful moment as she throws them each out and they fly through the air with ease and grace.

BIRDY (V.O.)

What any father should do for any daughter, but rarely does. Better late than never.

Birdy waves at each of her birds. We can hear her call to them.

BIRDY

Goodbye, Juniper! Goodbye, Breadberry! Goodbye, Joseph! Goodbye, Sir Neal! GOODBYE, LARD TURD, MY FAVORITE!

(whispering)

Do not tell Breadberry.

BIRDY (V.O.)

I wish I could help every girl in the world, but for now I am enough. And I know he has not granted me a pardon, only a reprieve from the most ungodly beast of marriage, but my father will find that my gratitude does not mean I have lost my fight.

She releases the final one and smiles to herself, running back toward the hall before she can see it take a massive nose-dive, making a hollow thump.

#### **EXT. STONEBRIDGE VILLAGE/STREAM- DUSK**

As dusk falls, Birdy walks along the stream. The same place she has always lived looks new and beautiful to her now- the setting sun creating a rosy glow.

She walks up along the field.

BIRDY (V.O.)

It is in this field I raged and dreamed and met Aelis in secret and cried over uncle George and over the fate I have been able to trick, just a bit.

She troops through the village.

BIRDY (V.O.)

There is the goat barn where I met  
Perkin when I was but a babe,  
hiding from Morwenna's silly slap.

She walks past the bakery.

BIRDY (V.O.)

And here is where the smell of  
bread is so strong it makes me want  
to eat the whole entire world as if  
it were a mere loaf.

Birdy looks out over the sunset town, dotted with houses,  
carts, people, animals, life.

BIRDY (V.O.)

And some day I will take my little  
sisters to the tippy top of the  
village and say run, little girls.  
Lift your skirts and run for  
everyone to see.

**INT. STONEBRIDGE MANOR- BIRDY'S CHAMBER- DAY**

Birdy lays in her bed, hair down, scribbling away. As she  
writes, her words appear on screen in her signature cursive.

BIRDY (V.O.)

Here ends the book of Catherine,  
called Little Bird or Birdy, of the  
manor of Stonebridge in the shire  
of Lincoln, the country of England,  
in the hands of God.

Birdy hears a sound and looks out the window down at the  
haystacks, where Morwenna is in the throes of passion with  
the toothless cart driver.

MORWENNA

Oh, Golden Tiger!

Birdy smiles. We pull out to reveal Perkin on a separate  
stack, writing slowly but surely in his own little book,  
showing the letters to a curious Gerd.

BIRDY (V.O.)

Someday, this journal will belong  
to my sisters. The two of you can  
see what I made of becoming a  
woman. It was not much, but it was  
my own.

**INT. ABBEY BEDROOM- AFTERNOON**

Edward sits at his desk, unwrapping a parcel.

BIRDY (V.O.)  
For right now, it's up to you to  
decide Edward, has writing in this  
diary made me more learned?

It is Birdy's diary- he opens it to a page with a drawing  
Birdy has made- her hand on Jesus's bum.

BIRDY (V.O.)  
Or simply more cheekier?

**EXT. STONEBRIDGE FIELD- SAME TIME- AFTERNOON**

Birdy and Perkin play their usual game of fetch. He chucks  
the stick. She runs hard, ecstatic to be where she is, as he  
chases her.

Behind Birdy, in the distance, a man comes on horseback. Is  
he a stranger? A messenger? Another suitor for her to fight?

It doesn't matter right now, because what she doesn't know  
can't hurt her, and there's so much she doesn't yet know. She  
is panting, having caught the stick, and she throws it for  
Perkin, who takes off. The man on horseback looms closer.

BIRDY (V.O.)  
Things girls can do: run in the  
fields, invent original curses,  
save the day, pee standing up, well  
that one was a bit tricky, and keep  
fighting... no matter who may come  
on horseback!

She raises her chin, her hair sweaty to her brow, and makes  
eye contact with the camera. Is that a wink we see?

She looks behind her and notices the man, then looks back at  
us, shaking her head.

THE END.