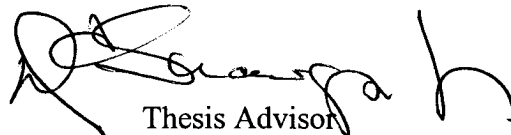


Piper: A Musical in Three Acts

An Honors Thesis (HONRS 499)

By

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(in partnership with Chance Varner)



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Abstract

My primary goal as a theatre artist is to tell stories that I believe will impact an audience. I believe that theatrical pieces should not only be engaging and interesting, they should also challenge an audience to introspection. I believe theatre can take difficult topics and ideas and explore them by setting these ideas in a context of a fictional world that can be observed. I also believe that using iconic stories and characters for this exploration is particularly effective, because the audience becomes first acquainted with the piece of art as something familiar. With all of this in mind I helped develop a concept for a Musical adaptation of the “Pied Piper of Hamelin” in conjunction with Chance Varner. My partner and I used the familiar story and iconic character types to explore difficult subjects of corruption, justice, crimes against the innocent, and the obscure nature of good and evil.

Acknowledgements

-I want to thank my partner Chance Varner for approaching me with the idea in the first place and for the long ours discussing character, plot and structure. The tea was lovely.

-I want to thank my advisor Beth Turcotte for her support and enthusiasm and for her insight into the plot holes of the story.

-I'd like to thank Jen Blackmer. Her directing class was instrumental in understanding the needs of plot structure and story construction in reference to the theatre.

Artist Statement

Theatre is by nature a disruptive act. A piece of theatre that does not have some effect on its audience is benign and therefore meaningless. In my time as a theatre student here at Ball State I have learned a great deal about how to express ideas through theatre. I have also learned how a story can effectively communicate an idea. For my honors thesis I worked with Chance Varner to develop a musical adaptation of the Pied Piper fairy tale that would bring up interesting questions and impact an audience. I did this thesis so that I could use all my understanding about what makes theatre effective, as well as explore my interest in writing and storytelling.

The idea for the “Piper” musical was Chance Varner’s. He needed a partner with experience in theatre, as well as a good understanding of character and story to help him tell the piece, so he invited me to be involved in the project. I first took his notes and rudimentary ideas on the characters and story and developed them. I took the iconic two dimensional characters like the School Marm and the Mayor and rounded them out with background and personal qualities that inform their actions. I used what I’d learned about character analysis as an actress to develop characters that were lifelike and grounded in humanity. I also took Chance’s story concept and developed it into a complete detailed narrative. Chance and I spent most of our early meetings discussing the characters and plot. In these meetings I shared with him the development work I had done so that he could write musical themes appropriate to the characters. After the preliminary Character and Story work was done, we created an outline of each act scene by scene detailing where each song took place. The outline we created is the substance of my thesis.

We decided to construct a three act musical because we knew that the semi-fantastical and archaic setting of the story as well as Chance's compositional style would lend itself to a classical structure similar to an operetta rather than a modern musical. Also, the three distinct acts allow us to set up a very specific kind of journey for our audience. The first act has a familiar traditional structure. The opening sequence in which the major characters are introduced is reminiscent of the opening of Disney's *Beauty and the Beast*. We intended the beginning to feel familiar to the audience in structure and setting but unfamiliar in that the tone is significantly more sinister and ominous than that of a Disney musical.

When first introduced the Mayor brings to mind the braggart town hero Gaston, particularly in his relationship to his lackey the Assistant. The School Marm being the intellectual yet beautiful female outcast is easily cast in the Belle role. The town itself is modeled after a small provincial archetype which automatically allows the audience to feel they are dealing with a familiar world, the rules of which they already know. For several reasons we placed the Piper character in the house with the audience before the curtain goes up. We want the audience to be conscious of the Piper before the town so that they feel they know what is going to happen. Through interacting with the Piper before the town, we hope that the audience will feel in on his secret and that they will subconsciously begin to "root for" him because of the association. If the Piper has already ingratiated himself with the audience before the curtain rises the audience will anticipate his entrance with interest and excitement.

The Piper's entrance has both the sense of an outsider mercenary coming in to solve the problem and the triumphal entry of the awaited hero. The audience may also

experience a sense of obscure foreboding. The Piper historically is a morally obscure character. We want to make him incredibly likable, but mysterious enough that the audience does not know what to think of him in the beginning. The first act is an act that is easily predicted. The characters are familiar. The town's problem (i.e., rat infestation) is expected as is the solution (the Piper). The Piper and School Marm make a connection that the audience will easily deduce as romantic, and the Piper will remove the rats and save the town as expected. In the first act we want the audience to feel they understand what the story is about.

We constructed the second act as a fulfillment of some of the expectations set up in the first act. The development of the romantic connection between the School Marm and the Piper is particularly notable, but the second act also introduces variation to the traditional tale. The revelation of the Mayor's madness and his plot to sell the children sets up an entirely different crisis for the town than audience expects. The suggestion that the Piper character might actually be a potential hero, who will save the town's children from the Mayor's evil plan, is both an interesting twist as well as an appealing "happy version" of the story. The audience will appreciate the novelty of the plot twists while enjoying the traditional hero vs. villain scenario that they are familiar with. At the end of the second act we leave the audience wishing the Piper well as he chooses to give up his con artist lifestyle. They are also anticipating the eminent conflict between the Piper and the Mayor over the children. However, the last event the audience witnesses in Act Two is the act of the Piper destroying the rats. This action of the Piper's is intended to be ambiguous. It can either be taken as a positive act symbolizing the death of the Piper's old morally corrupt life or as an act of destructive violence against the thing he

cares about. We've structured the end of Act Two to leave the audience with a sense of unease in the midst of a desire for the "good guys to win".

Act Three is the act in which we debunk the preconceived notions set up by Acts One and Two. We begin the act with the hero vs. villain scenario, but end it with a brutal lynching as a direct result of the actions of the "good guys" followed by the massacre of innocent children. The Piper shows his true colors as a mercenary and a child predator when he snaps after finding he won't be paid. Through a series of rapid fire destructive and violent events ending with assisted suicide of the School Marm the audience is forced to reevaluate their previous impressions of what took place earlier in the play. Our intention is to make the audience look back and realize that a lot of what they thought was going on had more to do with what they wanted to believe was going on, rather than what was actually happening. In the end they will realize that the Mayor wasn't really a villain and there were no heroes. The seemingly iconic characters are in fact as complicated and morally ambiguous as real humans. The last image of Davy playing jacks, paralleling the beginning, is representative of what the Piper has done to the town. While the town watched the ball bounce, the Piper removed the jacks from under their noses.

I feel like the three act journey from simplicity to complexity and moral ambiguity represents my journey as a student in the theatre department. I was raised with a very black and white perspective of the world. Now as I prepare to graduate I find myself discovering the overwhelming gray that seems to color the actions of most people. People are not entirely good or entirely evil. There are few villains that aren't also innocents in some capacity. The Mayor's insanity drives him to do villainous things, but

that insanity is the reason why he is unaware of the villainy of his actions. He like everyone in the play does terrible things with the best intentions. The School Marm, in her motherly zeal to save the children of the town, ends up getting a man lynched by a mob for a crime he has yet to commit and finds herself partially responsible for the slaughter of the very children she meant to save. The potential for “good people” to do terrible things when they intended to do the right thing is something I wanted to explore with this piece. I have used my understanding of theatre to create a piece that I believe will take the audience through a journey that will lead them to consider their own thoughts on the nature of right and wrong and “good intentions.” I’ve used my understanding of character analysis and story to accomplish this.

Piper: A Musical in Three Acts

Cast list (in order of appearance)

Piper

Davy

Mayor

Mayor's Assistant

School Marm

Town Mob

Children's Chorus

Mayor's household staff

Set list

Outskirts of town

Town square

Town Hall

School house

Mayor house/castle

Outside Piper's cave

Song list by scene

I,1 "Counting the Coins" (Davy), rhythmic jacks and rat theme (instrumental), town opening song (cast)

I,2 "Remember When" (Mayor)

I,3 "Doubts" (Assistant)

I,4 Assistant with town "What Have You Done" (Assistant and Town Mob)

I,5 leading the rats away (cast, minor)

II,1 festival song (cast)

II,2 children festival song (Children's Chorus), Davy's story (School Marm and Piper)

II,3 big production food number (Mayor household, Assistant), "What I've Done for Him" (Assistant)

II,4 "In a perfect world" (Davy, School Marm, Piper) Mayor song (Mayor), "Goodbye" (Piper)

II,5 mental break (Assistant and Mayor), "Goodbye" (Piper)

III,1 Assistant telling about mayor's insanity (Assistant)

III,2 "Children's March" "Not a Perfect World" (Piper)

III,3 mob song/recap of action (town mob), "Where Do We Go from Here?" (Town Mob)

III,4 "Counting the Coins" (Davy)

Piper Outline

Piper is already in the house amid the audience and in character before the curtain goes up. He watches the first scenes from the audience.

ACT I, Scene 1

Outskirts of town:

SONG- (Davy) "Counting the Coins"

The curtain opens on a lone boy, Davy, playing jacks and singing a song to himself. Davy has a crutch and is clearly crippled. Davy is startled from his play by a lone rat which approaches him. This does not alarm Davy at first, but when more rats approach him he finds that he is soon overwhelmed by their number and rushes into town to tell someone about the swarming rats.

Town Square:

SONG- (Full Cast) Town Opening Song

The town is gathered around the Mayor who is announcing an upcoming festival to celebrate the continued peace and prosperity that his leadership has produced.

Mayor, his Assistant and the Town Mob sing about how their village is free of strife unlike other villages.

He has always saved them from the "enemies." Assistant encourages the crowd's excitement.

Davy arrives in the hubbub, but none of the adults will listen to what he has to say about the rats.

At the same time School Marm approaches Mayor wanting to talk to him about the state of the school house. The roof is leaky and the small stove is not enough to heat the house in the winter.

Mayor tries to use his charisma to calm her feelings but does not deal with the problem.

School Marm is looked down on by Town Mob for causing problems for Mayor and complaining too much. Mayor who is secretly in love with School Marm is frustrated. She doesn't respect him.

Davy appears, runs to School Marm and tells her about the rats.

School Marm believes him, and says she'll talk to Mayor.

Mayor brushes off the story as a child's overactive imagination since "This town does not have a pest problem." Mayor once again tries to win School Marm's good opinion with charm and charisma, but she angrily returns to Davy.

A Frustrated Mayor exits and Assistant follows.

The rest of the town disperses leaving Davy and School Marm alone together on stage.

Davy wants to know everything will be ok.

School Marm wants to promise things will be ok, but isn't sure herself.

She tries to hide her insecurity from him to make him feel better.

She does not tell him how the Mayor reacted.

They exit to go to the school house.

Musical Interlude- Not long after they leave, the rats invade the town.

ACT I, Scene 2

Town Hall:

The Town is angry and frustrated petitioning Mayor to do something about the rats.

Mayor is stage right looking out the window still ruffled about the coldness of School Marm.

Assistant is fielding questions but does not possess the charisma of Mayor and Town Mob rejects anything he has to say.

He is unable to adequately deal with their questions.

Eventually, the town overwhelms the Assistant. Just before things get out of hand the Mayor steps up to remind the town why they trust him.

SONG- (Mayor) "Remember When"

He reminds them of what he's done for them in the past and how many years he's fended off the "enemies".

He finishes with a pledge to solve this rat problem too.

Piper who, up until this point, has been watching the whole thing from the house asks, "So what is your plan then?"

There is an awkward silence.

Assistant tries to come up with answer to cover the mayor's back and once again fails miserably.

Piper takes this opportunity to move to the front of the assembly.

He says he has a solution "But it will cost you."

He won't reveal what the solution is but offers the town the choice of going with Mayor's plan "Whatever that may be" or agreeing to enter into a contract in which the Piper guarantees to get rid of the rats for them.

The Town Mob do not trust outsiders and go with Mayor. Piper is nonplussed and intends to stick around just in case they change their minds.

The meeting is dismissed.

ACT I, scene 3

Town Square:

Davy is peeking into the windows of the Town Hall trying to find out what is happening. As people exit the hall he asks them what happened, but the townspeople brush him aside. In distress, with hurt feelings Davy sits down by himself to play jacks, but ends up crying.

Piper enters from the Town Hall and sees Davy crying.

Piper approaches him, and rather than say anything crouches down beside him and starts to play jacks.

Davy stops crying and watches him.

After a moment the Piper begins to talk about the game of jacks with Davy, as if it were the most natural conversation to be had.

The Piper explains that it is a game of misdirection.

The bouncing ball is merely a distraction from the real objective, which is taking the jacks.

You set the bouncing ball in motion, and while the ball is in the air you sweep in and take the jacks.

Soon Davy and Piper are playing the game together like old friends.

School Marm enters and sees Piper playing with Davy.

A little alarmed but mostly curious she approaches them and asks Davy where he's been.

Davy explains that he tried to find out about the meeting but that no one would talk to him.

Recalling that Piper was in the meeting, he asks Piper about the details.

Piper explains to Davy exactly what happened during the meeting.

He addresses Davy as a person rather than as a child.

School Marm notices Piper's behavior towards Davy and is impressed by both by his willingness to play with Davy and his way of honoring Davy's questions.

Piper takes his leave after a brief acknowledgement of School Marm.

School Marm tells Davy he should get back to class, and Davy cheerful and content returns to school.

School Marm stops a towns person to ask what really happened in the meeting.

She is intrigued to hear the piper challenged the mayor.

She exits with her interest peaked.

Mayor and Assistant enter.

Mayor is going up into the mountains to make the usual payment to the "enemies" of the town so that the peace can remain.

He doesn't want to even think about the rat situation until he returns, and leaves Assistant in charge.

SONG- (Assistant) "Doubts"

Left alone Assistant sings a song reflecting his self doubt, as well as how much he's supported and helped the mayor up to this point.

ACT I, Scene 4

Town Square: Musical interlude of the rat problem getting worse.

Town Hall:

The Town Mob demand a solution from Assistant but Assistant cannot think of anything. The town is beginning to look like a lynching mob when Piper finally steps in.

Piper reminds the town they have another option, but they will have to pay him.

The town readily agrees promising to pay him. They agree among themselves that once Mayor gets back he'll pay the Piper. Assistant cannot dissuade them.

Piper says he'll remove the rats at dusk and leaves the hall.

SONG- Assistant and Town "What have you done?"

The townspeople are not worried, believing that Mayor will take care of the money and any other problems when he gets back. They believe they had no other option in his absence than to trust the Piper.

ACT I, scene 5

Outskirts of town:

Piper is sitting by himself, polishing his flute.

Davy enters and asks the Piper what he will do.

Piper explains simply and honestly that he'll play music that will make the rats follow him out of the town.

Davy asks if he can watch.

Piper says that he wants Davy to watch. In fact, he asks Davy to gather the town so they can all see.

Davy exits to town as piper exits offstage.

Davy explains Piper's plan to the town but they do not believe him.

Piper enters, and the town chatter falls to a hush.

Piper takes seat in the center of the village with his pipe.

Town Mob mocks him when they see the flute.

Piper pays them no attention, and he starts to play.

Town Mob quiets as the playing gets louder.

The Town Mob are stunned as the rats appear from all over.

Piper stands and begins to lead the rats out of the town and towards the mountain.

Town Mob hangs back but Davy stands on a raised level upstage, where he can see and announce that Piper is leading the rats to the river and drowning them.

The Town Mob cheers, rushing to Davy's position to get a look, but they cannot see Piper.

He has disappeared.

Davy is pushed back and stands alone center stage.

Piper reappears at the back of the house and walks down the aisle.

Davy alone sees him.

Davy rushes down (as well as he can) to meet Piper.

"You did it!" Davy cries excitedly.

"Of course," Piper replies. "You can always trust me to do what I say."

He picks Davy up.

By now the town has noticed Piper and is looking at him silently from the stage.

Piper slowly makes his way onto the stage with Davy in his arms. "So..." he says. "Shall we discuss my payment?"

ACT II, Scene 1

Town Square:

SONG- (Cast) festival song

The town is holding a large celebratory festival similar to what Mayor promised them, except that it is in honor of Piper leading away the rats.

Mayor arrives during the festivities and sees what is going on. He is upset and confused.

Assistant enters and explains that Town Mob expects him to pay the Piper.

Mayor is distressed since the town is basically broke. All the money goes to the "enemies."

Mayor tries to leave, but is intercepted by happy Town Mob who don't realize he is upset.

They mean well, but are actually upsetting him more with their praise of Piper.

Then Piper is brought to the Mayor who is forced to say "thank you."

Mayor exits soon after that, and the festival resumes.

School Marm approaches Piper with Davy saying that Davy has something to say on behalf of all the students.

Davy invites Piper to come visit the children in the schoolhouse so the children can thank him.

Piper accepts the invitation.

School Marm and Davy leave. Piper rejoins the festival.

ACT II, Scene 2

School House:

Piper is dragged onstage by a group of kids laughing and playing.

SONG- Children's Chorus

The children sing him a little thank you song.

School Marm insist the children give Piper a break for a minute and they sit together.

SONG- School Marm, Piper "Davy's Story"

Piper asks her questions about how she became the teacher. School Marm tells Piper how she was an orphan adopted by the previous headmaster and school marm.

Her adopted father died, and her adopted mother is very sick so she's basically on her own.

She explains she's always felt an affinity for children, particularly Davy who is also an orphan.

Piper asks her a lot of questions about the children.

She is impressed by his interest in children, since none of the men in town care for children.

They are falling in love.

ACT II, Scene 3

Mayor's house:

Mayor is gloomy at home.

SONG- Assistant and Household staff

The Household staff and Assistant attempt to entertain and cheer up Mayor with a big meal.

It does not improve Mayor's mood.

He wants to take action.

He needs to see Piper.

Assistant tells the Mayor that Piper has been seen at the school house these past few days.

Mayor abruptly exits in the middle of the song and the song fizzles out.

Assistant dismisses the staff.

Song- Assistant "What I've done for him"

Left alone on stage he sings the song about what he's done for Mayor.

He tells the story of how he found out that the "enemies" weren't real and that the tax money was just being buried and hidden.

He reveals that Mayor seems to believe the "enemies" are real, that he found Mayor talking to someone who wasn't there and burying the tax money in the foothills of the mountains.

Assistant has been protecting the secret of the Mayor's delusion from being discovered.

ACT II, Scene 4

School House:

Piper, School Marm and Davy are having a picnic.

Davy wants to play pretend that they're a family so Piper and School Marm play along, but really begin to consider the possibilities of a life together.

SONG- Piper, School Marm, Davy "In a Perfect World"

They paint a picture of a life where they are a family, and everything is good.

Mayor arrives midway through the song but is unseen. He overhears the end of the song

Piper tempted by the picture of the life they've painted says he has something to take care of and leaves.

School Marm and Davy clean up and exit.

SONG- Mayor Soliloquy

Mayor comes out of hiding and sings about his love for School Marm. He ends with his hatred for Piper and how Piper has stolen everything from him.

ACT II, Scene 5

Mayor's House:

SONG- Mayor, Assistant "Mental Break"

Mayor is becoming unstable thinking about Piper and School Marm.

Assistant finds him in distress and tries to calm him, but is unsuccessful.

Suddenly Mayor hears the voices in his head demanding payment and he begins to talk to them.

Assistant watches it all unable to do anything.

Mayor starts raving about a letter he received as the voices tell him to sell the children. Mayor runs out in a fit, muttering something about a letter and selling the children.

Assistant finds and reads a letter from the army, which promises to pay for healthy young men, even as young as 10.

Assistant becomes afraid that the Mayor will try to sell the children to the army.

Unable to think of anything else to do he resolves to go tell School Marm, since he knows she will believe his story and help him protect the children.

He exits to find School Marm.

Outside Piper's cave in Mountains:

SONG- Piper "Goodbye"

Piper is saying goodbye to his rats.

They've been his children and his family, but now he has a chance at a real family.

He then throws his cages of rats in the river weighted down with stones and resolves to start a new life.

Act III, Scene 1

School House:

Piper, School Marm, and Davy are having another picnic similar to the one in act two, but it is uncomfortable and silent.

The silence is broken by short attempts at conversation that putter out quickly. There is a feeling that the Piper is not entirely comfortable in the "Perfect World" but wants to be.

Assistant runs in disrupting the picnic and is perturbed to find Piper there.

SONG- Assistant

Assistant does not want to talk about the problem in front of Piper, but eventually reveals Mayor's plan to sell the children and get money for the imagined enemies.

Assistant reveals the mayor to be mentally unstable.

School Marm is outraged and thinks something should be done to get the Mayor deposed since he is unfit to lead.

School Marm suggests they beat the Mayor to it and get the kids out of town before he can get to them.

She suggests the Piper can take them to x location and keep them safe.

In the meantime she and the Assistant can confront the Mayor about his plan in front of the town.

With the children actually gone the town will have no choice but to believe them.

She leaves to get the children.

Since School Marm is gone the Piper asks Assistant how's he's going to be paid.

Assistant offers to dig up the money Mayor buried and let Piper have that as payment.

Assistant exits to get the “enemy” money.

Piper exits to get the kids.

Act III, Scene 2

Outside cave:

SONG – “Children’s March” Piper and Children

Piper marches children to safety. There is an overall sense of joviality and fun. They reach the agreed hiding place outside the cave which can only be reached by climbing up a rocky path. Piper sings a song with the kids to calm their fears.

Assistant appears and timidly approaches.

He tells Piper that the money is gone.

Piper asks, “How will I be paid?”

Piper is outraged remembering that he destroyed his rats, the key to his livelihood, in exchange for nothing.

Assistant has no answers but has to leave to meet the School Marm in the town.

SONG- Piper’s soliloquy

Piper’s livelihood is gone, and what was it for? He killed his precious ones, and a price must be paid for that as well. Nothing is perfect in this world, etc.

The Piper tells the children he needs to move them to a “safer” location.

He leads them up the rocky path to the cave.

Davy can’t follow because of his handicap. He cries for help, but Piper leaves him behind.

Davy dejectedly heads toward town to find the School Marm.

Act III, Scene 3

Town Hall:

School Marm is confronting the angry Town Mob:

Mob demands to know where the children are.

School Marm reveals the Mayor’s plan to sell the children to the army.

The Angry Mob becomes increasingly upset.

Assistant enters.

School Marm reveals what has really been happening to the Town’s tax money

Assistant corroborates all of teacher’s claims.

He reveals that the money is now gone.

SONG- MOB SONG

The town feels taken advantage of. They recall the events that led to this point.

Mayor enters and demands to know what is going on.

Mob Song continues as the town decides to lynch the mayor.

School Marm and Assistant try to prevent the lynching, but are knocked aside by Town Mob.

Assistant and School Marm are in shock. "What have we done?"

School Marm claims that she never meant things to go this far

Assistant unable to face what is happening runs off.

Davy enters and School Marm shields him from the sight of the Mayor's hanging body.

She asks him what he's doing there.

Davy tells about Piper taking kids to the cave.

Davy says that Piper wouldn't help him climb up.

School Marm senses something wrong and wants to find Piper and the kid

Davy and Teacher leave to find Piper and the kids.

SONG- (Town Mob) "Where do we go from here?"

optional cut:

Piper enters

Town wants to know "why weren't you here?" at a loss for who to trust.

Piper- "I was taking the children out of the mayor's reach"

Town Mob relieved, asks where the children are.

Piper- "In a cave on the outskirts of town"

Starts to leave...

Town- "Where are you going?"

Piper- "I have no reason to stay. I finished job and was paid..."

Act III, Scene 1

Davy and Teacher arrive at the designated location.

Davy points out the cave.

School Marm calls out to kids and Piper but hears nothing but silence.

School Marm tells Davy to stay there and climbs up to the cave.

She stands in entrance... She enters the cave and after a moment stumbles out.

Davy asks her as she descends the path "Did you find them?"

School Marm believes that she found all of them. They are all there.

She is in a moment of hysteria, but will not answer his questions.

She wants to hold Davy, but cannot bring herself to touch him.

She suddenly rushes back up to the cave and reappears with a bloodstained rope.

She asks Davy to help her. She asks him to tie one end of the rope around a tree, but does not explain why.

Davy turns with his back to School Marm to tie the knot, and does not see her form a noose with the other end and toss it over a branch.

Davy croys with his back turned, and School Marm maintains a calm conversation with him, encouraging him to check his knots, make them tight, etc.

During a lull in their conversation, she hangs herself.

Davy asks a question, and is met with silence.

He turns to look and sees School Marm hanging from the tree

Davy does not understand what is happening and keeps asking questions while he approaches the corpse.

Even as Davy asks getting no answers, Davy sits underneath her dead body and plays jacks, waiting for the answers.

The Town folk arrive and go straight to cave.

Some of them leave the cave and are sick warning the others of what is in the cave and not to enter for fear of seeing the corpses of the children.

The Town folk are shocked to see Davy and ask him what he's doing there.

Davy explains he is playing jacks while he waits for the School Marm to answer his question. He begins to give them the explanation of the game of jacks that Mr. Piper explained it to him in Act I.

Davy sings "The Game of the Coins" to a stunned town.

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