

The Story of St Sidwell of Exeter: a play

This play was written by Year 4 students at St Sidwell school in Exeter, in January 2014.

- Narrator 1 Once, long ago, in the Saxon times, Exeter was a very different place than it is today. The city itself stood protected behind a large, sturdy wall, with only four entrance gates in and out. They were at the four points of the compass, North, South, West and East.
- Narrator 2 The East gate was the most impressive and stood between where Boots and Next are now. Out from beneath this gate, stretched a long road which had beautiful, rolling fields either side, full of wheat, rye and barley which changed colour as the seasons passed.
- Narrator 3 In an idyllic valley, not far from the East gate, lived Beorna, a bear of a man who was very respected. He owned a lot of land in the area and had many workers, one of which was named Dunstan. He was trusted and loyal to Beorna and was often found cutting crops and grass with his scythe.
- Narrator 1 Beorna had a beautiful daughter named Sidwell. Sidwell was good; charming, kind and polite, the jewel in Beorna's eye, and many other people in Exeter for that matter.
- Narrator 2 Unfortunately, Sidwell's mother had died, and Beorna had married again. A woman named, Freda. Freda was Sidwell's sinister stepmother, and she despised everything about Sidwell. She hated the fact that everyone loved her, she was jealous.

Scene 1 – Beorna's house

- Narrator 3 One summer, harvesting was plentiful and Beorna had many workers that needed feeding. It was particularly hot and there was a lot of work to be done.
- Beorna I have a lot of workers that need feeding today, Wednesdays are always busy with extra helpers on the land.
- Freda It's OK, my husband, I will pop into the city and pick up the food.
- Beorna No, that's alright, Freda. Where is my lovely daughter? Sidwell! She always gets some good deals!
- (Freda looks scornfully at Beorna)*

Scene 2 – Market place

- Narrator 1 Later that day, Sidwell strolled through the market speaking to everyone she knew, which was almost everyone in Exeter!

Occasionally she stopped to at the market stalls to buy some goods for her father.

Baird (market trader 1) I've got fresh milk here from the best cows in Exeter! Great price, don't all push at once! Oh, hello Sidwell, a beautiful day for a beautiful lady! Will it be the usual?

Sidwell Yes please, Baird. You're milk is truly the amazing! I wouldn't go to anyone else.

Baird You're too kind ma'am. Here's an extra bottle, just for you.

Sidwell Thank you. *(walks away)*

Baird What a lovely girl that one.

Sidwell walks on through market

Bryn (market trader 2) Two pieces of silver for a box of apples! Hi Sidwell, my favourite customer! How are you?

Sidwell I'm very well thank you, Bryn. I'm just picking up some things for the workmen on my dad's land. My dad says they work harder on a full stomach.

Bryn Very true! Send my best to your dad.

Sidwell I will. Goodbye. *(They exchange money and Sidwell walks off)*

Friends Hi Sidwell

Friend 1 Do you want to go down to the river with us later?

Friend 2 It's too hot to be shopping around the market!

Friend 3 And there'll be loads of our friends down there.

Sidwell Yeah, ok. Sounds like fun. I just have to drop my shopping back home first.

Friend 4 Don't be too long!

All Bye

Scene 3 – By the roadside

- Narrator 2 One day, Freda was feeling particularly jealous and bitter and devised a sinister and evil plan to get rid of Sidwell.
- Narrator 3 She marched up the gravel path, away from her house, towards where a loyal worker named Dunstan was cutting the grass with his ominous looking scythe.
- Freda Morning Dunstan, will you do a favour for me?
- Dunstan Of course, mistress. Anything for you.
- Freda It's an unusual request and will require you not to say a word to anyone. But in return I will give you the three gold coins in my hand.
(hand clenched shut)
- Narrator 1 She took out 3 gold coins from inside her pocket and held them in a clenched fist so Dunstan could not see them.
- Dunstan Yes mistress, I can do that.
- Freda *(looks around her and gestures Dunstan closer)* I want you to kill Sidwell.
- Dunstan But... I can't...
- Narrator 2 Dunstan started to reply but couldn't finish his sentence. So much turmoil was swirling around in his head.
- Dunstan How can I kill Sidwell? How could I do that? But three gold coins is so much money, more than I've ever seen before! I'd be rich! But I can't kill someone, let alone Sidwell. She's so lovely. She's kind, polite, helpful and pretty. Everyone likes her and would be so sad.
- Narrator 2 Freda opened her hand to reveal the coins.
- Narrator 3 When Dunstan saw them glistening in the soft morning sunshine, greed got the better of him and he agreed to Freda's request.

(Dunstan nods his head and takes the gold)

Scene 4 – Beorna's house

- Narrator 1 Later that morning, Freda took the first steps of her cunning plan by sending Sidwell on an errand.
- Freda Sidwell, your dad asks that you go into Exeter market today and get the workers' lunch for them.
- Sidwell Yes ma'am. But normally I do that on Wednesdays and Saturdays. Why has he asked me to do it today?

Freda Uh... well... it's hot today and your dad says they need to have extra energy to keep them going. Dunstan will be first, he's on the road leading out of the East gate cutting grass.

(Sidwell nods her head, smiles, and walks off)

Scene 5 – Roadside near the East gate

Narrator 2 When Sidwell had finished gathering all the goods at the market, she headed out of the East gate towards where Dunstan was working.

Sidwell Good afternoon Dunstan, here is your lunch; bread, milk and some apples.

Dunstan Thank you miss Sidwell.

Sidwell There's a bit extra today from my dad because of the heat.

Dunstan Thank you. That's very kind of you.

Narrator 3 Feeling the money bulging in his pocket, he remembered his promise to Freda.

Narrator 1 Before he could talk himself out of it, he audaciously lifted his scythe and with one strong blow, he struck her head from her shoulders.

Narrator 2 Instantly regretting what he had done, he turned and fled, never looking back. He was never seen again.

Scene 6 – Beorna's house

Narrator 3 That evening, Beorna was growing increasingly worried that his daughter had not returned home.

Beorna Where is my daughter? Freda, where do you think she's gone?

Freda Well, she must be close by now. You know she's very popular. She's probably with some of her friends.

Beorna Maybe. I suppose she'll be alright.

(Freda gives a little smirk)

Scene 7 – The East gate

Narrator 1 That night, two watchmen stood on the East gate guarding the city's main entrance.

Narrator 2 Suddenly, the clouds eerily parted and a bright beam of moonlight shone down from the heavens to the place where Sidwell's body lay, just over the brow of a hill and out of sight.

Watchman 1 Woah! Would you look at that!

Watchman 2 What's that?

Watchman 1 I have no idea, but I've never seen anything like that before!

Watchman 2 We must keep an eye out tomorrow in case it happens again!

Narrator 3 The next night the same thing strangely happened for the second time.

Watchman 1 It's happening again!

Watchman 2 That is pretty epic!

(Mouths wide open)

Watchman 1 We must tell the people to come up here tomorrow night in case it happens again.

Narrator 1 So the next morning the two watchmen went around the city telling everyone they met about the weird phenomenon they had seen.

Narrator 2 On the third night, a large crowd stood watch with the pair. Unbelievably it happened again. The clouds gradually parted and the beam of moonlight came down.

Narrator 3 But this time was different, this time Sidwell herself began walking towards the astonished crowd. In one hand, she held the razor sharp scythe, and in the other arm, she cradled her decapitated head!

Narrator 1 She drew closer, and closer. The air stood still. The crowd took a step back. Their faces froze with fear.

Narrator 2 Without warning, Sidwell dropped to the floor again. The clouds closed in and obscured the moonlight. Pure darkness covered the scene once again.

Scene 8 – Next morning and spring

Narrator 3 Early the next morning, the crowd timidly emerged from the gates and made their way to where the body of Sidwell had fallen.

Narrator 1 Confusingly, the head of Sidwell was once again attached to the body. Many of the crowd stayed to keep watch over her, while others went off in search of where the body had come from.

Narrator 2 A short distance away, they found the place where Sidwell had been killed and incredibly, a water spring was rising up from the ground where there had been none before.

Crowd person 1 Oh look, there's a spring! Where did that come from?

Crowd person 2 It must be coming from where Sidwell's head hit the ground.

Narrator 3 Some people washed in the water while others drank. A frail old man knelt down to taste the fresh water and jumped up high with youth.

Old man I feel young again!

Narrator 1 Next, a blind lady approached and took a sip.

Blind lady I can see, I can see!

Narrator 2 Finally, a young girl, sick with disease itched and scratched her way to the front of the crowd and took a gulp.

Diseased girl My sores, they disappeared!

Narrator 3 The people of Exeter knew that this was a gift from God, a holy spring.

Narrator 1 The people of Exeter built a well where the spring stood and directed some of the water back into the city. For many years, people came from all around to taste the healing powers of the spring.

Narrator 2 Back where Sidwell had fallen for the second time, they buried her body and built church, tall and strong. They called this church, 'the church of St Sidwell'.

Narrator 3 Even today, you will see St Sidwell's church just off from Sidwell Street. This is the story of St Sidwell, patron saint of Exeter.

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