

Mini Opera for submission to a competition held by English National Opera. This piece was shortlisted to the final 10.

The Falconer

A town-square scene, people going about their business. In the foreground, a Falconer is identifiable by his distinctive dress. A bedraggled young man comes rushing in.

Young man

A beast! A rough beast in the woods!
I heard an awful sound and, filled with dread,
I turned and fled...

Falconer

Son, what kind of beast?
Did you actually see anything?

Woman

What does it matter what kind?
Are you out of your mind?
Alert the King!

Man

The King is a spoiled child,
He'll leave us to be defiled,
And not do a thing!

Falconer

We must stay calm,
Not sound the alarm,
Panic will do no good...

But panic has already taken hold, and the townspeople are increasingly frenetic.

Chorus

There must be a beast in the wood,
There must be a beast in the wood,
For if there is nothing that's evil,
Then how will we know we are good?

A plush foyer-like space, expansive and shadowy. Two young men, dressed almost identically enter.

Courtier 1

The people believe in the beast...

Courtier 2

The falconer says it's untrue...

Both Courtiers

The soothsayer is on his way; he'll know what to do.

A well-attired, middle aged man enters, he is the King's soothsayer.

Courtier 1

When do we alert the King?

Courtier 2

Alarms are starting to ring.

Soothsayer

Now, now, there's no need for fuss;
I feel that this beast could be useful,
So we'll have the falconer work for us.

Courtier 1/ Courtier 2

But sir, the people are saying...

Opinion may be swaying...

Soothsayer

It's your role to please the king,
And the falconer's to bring back game.
There is always a beast in the woods,
And it's my job to give it a name.

A shrill bird cry marks the falconer's entrance. The Courtiers step forward and shake hands; the Soothsayer lurks in the shadows.

Courtier 1

Sir, an honour. I know your reputation.

Falconer

Being called to court, is surely above my station?

Courtier 2

You've been saying the beast is a myth,

Courtier 1

While the King feels certain it lives...

Both Courtiers

It's a bit of a bind, but I think you'll find;
His Majesty always forgives...

The Falconer sees the Soothsayer, who has been lurking in the shadows. The falcon cries from near where the Soothsayer stands and calls attention to him.

Falconer

Sir? Sir, you don't recognise me?
If memory is true,
It was ten years ago in Hamlin,
And a Piper worked for you...

Soothsayer

Ah, yes, Hamlin was tragic,
In a long career, I have some regrets.
But I no longer employ magic,
And my new king pays his debts...

Falconer

So, you want the beast to be real,
And you want me to swear to this lie?

Soothsayer

I want you to go to the forest,
Give the beast another try...

Falconer

Sir, I don't know what you've heard,
But I'm the falconer, not the bird.

Soothsayer

Ah, how easy it would be,
If all men were hooded and blind...
All I'm asking is that you look again,
And tell me what you find?

Falconer

And if I refuse?

Soothsayer

A good reputation
Is a sad thing to lose...

Falconer

My bird is not trained, to chase rumours,
Her art is in bringing death...

Soothsayer

Then sir, we wait,
With bated breath.

The Falconer exits.

Chorus

We know there's a beast in the wood.
We know there's a beast in the wood;
The name of the beast, is fear itself,
So beware the people's mood.

The Falconer comes back to report.

Falconer

The bird, she saw something that made her flee,
She's never before taken leave of me.

Both Courtiers/ Soothsayer
The beast! The beast took the falcon!

Falconer

No, she was startled and flew!
Tell me, why this madness? What is this beast to you?

Soothsayer

Sir, you are a fledgling,
In matters of the court,
You've done your duty and we have your report

Falconer

I'll not be a part of this scheme!
I went to do your bidding,
And lost that which I loved.

Soothsayer

You think that your hands will stay clean,
Because they are gloved?

Courtier 1

There is only one path to choose.

Courtier 2

Try to fight this beast, and you will lose.

Falconer

I'll go back to the forest,
I'll find my bird,
And tell of your lies and your scheming,
Until every person has heard!

The falconer storms out.

Chorus

There's always a beast in the wood,
There's always a beast in the wood,
The first casualty of the beast is truth,
And fighting won't do any good.

The young man who began the rumour enters.

Young man

Sir, as you requested,
The falconer never returned,

Soothsayer

Then your fee was well earned,
And the bird?

Young man

It is still in its trap.

Soothsayer

Then you've a final neck to snap.

Chorus

He who controls the beast is King,
And fighting won't do any good.