BEGGAR WOMAN

This reading you have the option of singing the vocals acapella if you wish. It is not mandatory.

ANTHONY

ME!
LOOK AT
ME!

LOOK AT ME ...

JOHANNA

GREEN FINCH AND LINNET BIRD,
NIGHTINGALE, BLACKBIRD,
TEACH ME HOW TO SING.
IF I CANNOT FLY...
LET ME SING ...

(As JOHANNA turns to go inside, their eyes meet and the song dies on their lips. A hushed moment. Then suddenly a clawlike hand darts out from a pile of trash. ANTHONY jumps and looks down to see the BEGGAR WOMAN, who has been sleeping in the garbage under a discarded shawl, thrusting her bowl at him. JOHANNA, frightened, slips back out of sight)

START

BEGGAR WOMAN

ALMS! ... ALMS! ...
FOR A MISERABLE WOMAN ...

(ANTHONY hurriedly digs out a coin and drops it in her bowl; SHE peers at him)

BEG YOUR PARDON, IT'S YOU, SIR...
THANK YER ... THANK YER KINDLY ...

(ANTHONY turns back to discover JOHANNA gone and the window shut. The BEGGAR WOMAN starts off)

ANTHONY

One moment, mother.

(SHE turns)

Perhaps you know whose house this is?

BEGGAR WOMAN

That! That's the great Judge Turpin's house, that is.

ANTHONY

And the young lady who resides there?

BEGGAR WOMAN

Ah, her! That's Johanna, his pretty little ward.

(Slyly confidential)

But don't you go trespassing there, young man. Not if you value your hide.

(SHE nods her head)

Tamper there and it's a good whipping for you – or any other youth with mischief on his mind. **FINISH OPTION ONE**

(Leers at him)

HEY! HOY! SAILOR BOY!

(BEGGAR WOMAN)

WANT IT SNUGLY HARBORED?
OPEN ME GATE, BUT DOCK IT STRAIGHT,
I SEE IT LISTS TO STARBOARD. FINISH OPTION TWO

(SHE grabs at his crotch and starts to dance around him grotesquely, lifting her skirts. ANTHONY is appalled. HE pulls coins out of his pocket and tosses them to her)

ANTHONY

Here and here and here. Take it and off with you. Off!

(The BEGGAR WOMAN, cackling, collects the coins and scampers off. ANTHONY turns back to the house, gazes up at the window. The noise has frightened the birds, who start screeching. ANTHONY becomes aware of them and moves over to the now sleeping BIRD SELLER, shakes him awake, and inspects the cages)

Which one sings the sweetest?

BIRD SELLER

All's the same, sir. Six pence and cheap at the price.

(ANTHONY selects one, gives the man a coin, holds up the cage)

ANTHONY

He sings bravely.

(Watches the cage)

But why does he batter his wings so wildly against the bars?

BIRD SELLER

We blind 'em, sir. That's what we always does. Blind 'em and, not knowing night from day, they sing and sing without stopping, pretty creatures.

(HE gets up, slinging the cages on his back and starts off)

Have pleasure of the bird, sir.

(HE exits. JOHANNA reappears at the window. ANTHONY holds up the cage, indicating it is a present and SHE should come down to get it. SHE hesitates, smiles, nods, disappears from the window. HE waits. Shyly, almost furtively, JOHANNA slips out of the door and stands there. HE moves toward her, holding out the cage. Slowly her hand goes out toward him. Their fingers touch)

#8 – *Johanna (Part I)*

ANTHONY

(Softly)

I FEEL YOU,
JOHANNA,
I FEEL YOU.