

*Krapp's Last Tape*  
*and other dramatic pieces*  
*by Samuel Beckett*

# KRAPP'S LAST TAPE

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# **Krapp's Last Tape**

**AND OTHER DRAMATIC PIECES**

*Other Works by Samuel Beckett*

*Published by Grove Press*

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**SAMUEL  
BECKETT**

**Krapp's  
Last  
Tape**

**AND OTHER  
DRAMATIC PIECES**

**GROVE PRESS, INC.  
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# **Krapp's Last Tape**

**A PLAY IN  
ONE ACT**



*Krapp's Last Tape* was first performed at the Royal Court Theatre in London on October 28, 1958. It was directed by Donald McWhinnie and played by Patrick Magee.

*A late evening in the future.*

*Krapp's den.*

*Front centre a small table, the two drawers of which open towards audience.*

*Sitting at the table, facing front, i.e. across from the drawers, a wearish old man:*

*Krapp.*

*Rusty black narrow trousers too short for him. Rusty black sleeveless waistcoat, four capacious pockets. Heavy silver watch and chain. Grimy white shirt open at neck, no collar. Surprising pair of dirty white boots, size ten at least, very narrow and pointed.*

*White face. Purple nose. Disordered grey hair. Unshaven.*

*Very near-sighted (but unspectacled).  
Hard of hearing.*

*Cracked voice. Distinctive intonation.*

*Laborious walk.*

*On the table a tape-recorder with microphone and a number of cardboard boxes containing reels of recorded tapes.*

*Table and immediately adjacent area in strong white light. Rest of stage in darkness.*

*Krapp remains a moment motionless, heaves a great sigh, looks at his watch, fumbles in his pockets, takes out an envelope, puts it back, fumbles, takes out a small bunch of keys, raises it to his eyes, chooses a key, gets up and moves to front of table. He stoops, unlocks first drawer, peers into it, feels about inside it, takes out a reel of tape, peers at it, puts it back, locks drawer, unlocks second drawer, peers into it, feels about inside it, takes out a large banana, peers at it, locks drawer, puts keys back in his pocket. He turns, advances to edge of stage, halts, strokes banana, peels it, drops skin at his feet, puts end of banana*

*in his mouth and remains motionless, staring vacuously before him. Finally he bites off the end, turns aside and begins pacing to and fro at edge of stage, in the light, i.e. not more than four or five paces either way, meditatively eating banana. He treads on skin, slips, nearly falls, recovers himself, stoops and peers at skin and finally pushes it, still stooping, with his foot over the edge of stage into pit. He resumes his pacing, finishes banana, returns to table, sits down, remains a moment motionless, heaves a great sigh, takes keys from his pockets, raises them to his eyes, chooses key, gets up and moves to front of table, unlocks second drawer, takes out a second large banana, peers at it, locks drawer, puts back keys in his pocket, turns, advances to edge of stage, halts, strokes banana, peels it, tosses skin into pit, puts end of banana in his mouth and remains motionless, staring vacuously before him. Finally he has an idea, puts banana in his waistcoat pocket, the end emerging, and goes with all the speed he*

*can muster backstage into darkness. Ten seconds. Loud pop of cork. Fifteen seconds. He comes back into light carrying an old ledger and sits down at table. He lays ledger on table, wipes his mouth, wipes his hands on the front of his waistcoat, brings them smartly together and rubs them.*

KRAPP *(briskly). Ah! (He bends over ledger, turns the pages, finds the entry he wants, reads.) Box . . . three . . . spool . . . five. (He raises his head and stares front. With relish.) Spool! (Pause.) Spoooool! (Happy smile. Pause. He bends over table, starts peering and poking at the boxes.) Box . . . three . . . three . . . four . . . two . . . (with surprise) nine! good God! . . . seven . . . ah! the little rascal! (He takes up box, peers at it.) Box three. (He lays it on table, opens it and peers at spools inside.) Spool . . . (he peers at ledger) . . . five . . . (he peers at spools) . . . five . . . five . . . ah! the little scoundrel! (He takes out a spool, peers at it.) Spool five. (He lays it on table, closes*

*box three, puts it back with the others, takes up the spool.) Box three, spool five. (He bends over the machine, looks up. With relish.) Spooooo! (Happy smile. He bends, loads spool on machine, rubs his hands.) Ah! (He peers at ledger, reads entry at foot of page.) Mother at rest at last . . . Hm . . . The black ball . . . (He raises his head, stares blankly front. Puzzled.) Black ball? . . . (He peers again at ledger, reads.) The dark nurse . . . (He raises his head, broods, peers again at ledger, reads.) Slight improvement in bowel condition . . . Hm . . . Memorable . . . what? (He peers closer.) Equinox, memorable equinox. (He raises his head, stares blankly front. Puzzled.) Memorable equinox? . . . (Pause. He shrugs his shoulders, peers again at ledger, reads.) Farewell to—(he turns the page)—love.*

*He raises his head, broods, bends over machine, switches on and assumes listening posture, i.e. leaning forward, elbows on table, hand cupping ear towards machine, face front.*

TAPE    (*strong voice, rather pompous, clearly Krapp's at a much earlier time.*) Thirty-nine today, sound as a—(*Settling himself more comfortably he knocks one of the boxes off the table, curses, switches off, sweeps boxes and ledger violently to the ground, winds tape back to beginning, switches on, resumes posture.*) Thirty-nine today, sound as a bell, apart from my old weakness, and intellectually I have now every reason to suspect at the . . . (*hesitates*) . . . crest of the wave—or thereabouts. Celebrated the awful occasion, as in recent years, quietly at the Winehouse. Not a soul. Sat before the fire with closed eyes, separating the grain from the husks. Jotted down a few notes, on the back of an envelope. Good to be back in my den, in my old rags. Have just eaten I regret to say three bananas and only with difficulty refrained from a fourth. Fatal things for a man with my condition. (*Vehemently.*) Cut 'em out! (*Pause.*) The new light above my table is a great improvement. With all this darkness round

---

me I feel less alone. (*Pause.*) In a way.  
 (*Pause.*) I love to get up and move about  
 in it, then back here to . . . (*hesitates*) . . .  
 me. (*Pause.*) Krapp.

*Pause.*

The grain, now what I wonder do I mean  
 by that, I mean . . . (*hesitates*) . . . I suppose  
 I mean those things worth having when all  
 the dust has—when all *my* dust has settled.  
 I close my eyes and try and imagine them.

*Pause. Krapp closes his eyes briefly.*

Extraordinary silence this evening, I strain  
 my ears and do not hear a sound. Old Miss  
 McGlome always sings at this hour. But  
 not tonight. Songs of her girlhood, she says.  
 Hard to think of her as a girl. Wonderful  
 woman though. Connaught, I fancy.

(*Pause.*) Shall I sing when I am her age, if  
 I ever am? No. (*Pause.*) Did I sing as a  
 boy? No. (*Pause.*) Did I ever sing? No.

*Pause.*

Just been listening to an old year, passages  
 at random. I did not check in the book, but



it must be at least ten or twelve years ago. At that time I think I was still living on and off with Bianca in Kedar Street. Well out of that, Jesus yes! Hopeless business. (*Pause.*) Not much about her, apart from a tribute to her eyes. Very warm. I suddenly saw them again. (*Pause.*) Incomparable! (*Pause.*) Ah well . . . (*Pause.*) These old P.M.s are gruesome, but I often find them—(*Krapp switches off, broods, switches on*)—a help before embarking on a new . . . (*hesitates*) . . . retrospect. Hard to believe I was ever that young whelp. The voice! Jesus! And the aspirations! (*Brief laugh in which Krapp joins.*) And the resolutions! (*Brief laugh in which Krapp joins.*) To drink less, in particular. (*Brief laugh of Krapp alone.*) Statistics. Seventeen hundred hours, out of the preceding eight thousand odd, consumed on licensed premises alone. More than 20%, say 40% of his waking life. (*Pause.*) Plans for a less . . . (*hesitates*) . . . engrossing sexual life. Last illness of his father. Flagging pursuit of happiness.

Unattainable laxation. Sneers at what he calls his youth and thanks to God that it's over. (*Pause.*) False ring there. (*Pause.*) Shadows of the opus . . . magnum. Closing with a—(*brief laugh*)—yelp to Providence. (*Prolonged laugh in which Krapp joins.*) What remains of all that misery? A girl in a shabby green coat, on a railway-station platform? No?

*Pause.*

When I look—

*Krapp switches off, broods, looks at his watch, gets up, goes backstage into darkness. Ten seconds. Pop of cork. Ten seconds. Second cork. Ten seconds. Third cork. Ten seconds. Brief burst of quavering song.*

KRAPP      (*sings*).      Now the day is over,  
                          Night is drawing nigh-igh,  
                          Shadows—

*Fit of coughing. He comes back into light, sits down, wipes his mouth, switches on, resumes his listening posture.*

TAPE —back on the year that is gone, with what I hope is perhaps a glint of the old eye to come, there is of course the house on the canal where mother lay a-dying, in the late autumn, after her long viduity (*Krapp gives a start*), and the—(*Krapp switches off, winds back tape a little, bends his ear closer to machine, switches on*)—a-dying, after her long viduity, and the—

*Krapp switches off, raises his head, stares blankly before him. His lips move in the syllables of "viduity." No sound. He gets up, goes backstage into darkness, comes back with an enormous dictionary, lays it on table, sits down and looks up the word.*

KRAPP (*reading from dictionary*). State—or condition of being—or remaining—a widow—or widower. (*Looks up. Puzzled.*) Being—or remaining? . . . (*Pause. He peers again at dictionary. Reading.*) "Deep weeds of viduity" . . . Also of an animal, especially a bird . . . the vidua or weaver-bird . . . Black plumage of male . . . (*He looks up. With relish.*) The vidua-bird!

*Pause. He closes dictionary, switches on, resumes listening posture.*

TAPE —bench by the weir from where I could see her window. There I sat, in the biting wind, wishing she were gone. (*Pause.*) Hardly a soul, just a few regulars, nursemaids, infants, old men, dogs. I got to know them quite well—oh by appearance of course I mean! One dark young beauty I recollect particularly, all white and starch, incomparable bosom, with a big black hooded perambulator, most funereal thing. Whenever I looked in her direction she had her eyes on me. And yet when I was bold enough to speak to her—not having been introduced—she threatened to call a policeman. As if I had designs on her virtue! (*Laugh. Pause.*) The face she had! The eyes! Like . . . (*hesitates*) . . . chrysolite! (*Pause.*) Ah well . . . (*Pause.*) I was there when—(*Krapp switches off, broods, switches on again*)—the blind went down, one of those dirty brown roller affairs, throwing a ball for a little white

dog, as chance would have it. I happened to look up and there it was. All over and done with, at last. I sat on for a few moments with the ball in my hand and the dog yelping and pawing at me. (*Pause.*) Moments. Her moments, my moments. (*Pause.*) The dog's moments. (*Pause.*) In the end I held it out to him and he took it in his mouth, gently, gently. A small, old, black, hard, solid rubber ball. (*Pause.*) I shall feel it, in my hand, until my dying day. (*Pause.*) I might have kept it. (*Pause.*) But I gave it to the dog.

*Pause.*

Ah well . . .

*Pause.*

Spiritually a year of profound gloom and indigence until that memorable night in March, at the end of the jetty, in the howling wind, never to be forgotten, when suddenly I saw the whole thing. The vision, at last. This I fancy is what I have chiefly to record this evening, against the

day when my work will be done and perhaps no place left in my memory, warm or cold, for the miracle that . . . (*hesitates*) . . . for the fire that set it alight. What I suddenly saw then was this, that the belief I had been going on all my life, namely— (*Krapp switches off impatiently, winds tape forward, switches on again*)—great granite rocks the foam flying up in the light of the lighthouse and the wind-gauge spinning like a propellor, clear to me at last that the dark I have always struggled to keep under is in reality my most— (*Krapp curses, switches off, winds tape forward, switches on again*)—unshatterable association until my dissolution of storm and night with the light of the understanding and the fire— (*Krapp curses louder, switches off, winds tape forward, switches on again*)—my face in her breasts and my hand on her. We lay there without moving. But under us all moved, and moved us, gently, up and down, and from side to side.

*Pause.*

Past midnight. Never knew such silence.  
The earth might be uninhabited.

*Pause.*

Here I end—

*Krapp switches off, winds tape back,  
switches on again.*

—upper lake, with the punt, bathed off the bank, then pushed out into the stream and drifted. She lay stretched out on the floorboards with her hands under her head and her eyes closed. Sun blazing down, bit of a breeze, water nice and lively. I noticed a scratch on her thigh and asked her how she came by it. Picking gooseberries, she said. I said again I thought it was hopeless and no good going on, and she agreed, without opening her eyes. (*Pause.*) I asked her to look at me and after a few moments—(*pause*)—after a few moments she did, but the eyes just slits, because of the glare. I bent over her to get them in the shadow and they opened. (*Pause. Low.*) Let me in. (*Pause.*) We drifted in among

the flags and stuck. The way they went down, sighing, before the stem! (*Pause.*) I lay down across her with my face in her breasts and my hand on her. We lay there without moving. But under us all moved, and moved us, gently, up and down, and from side to side.

*Pause.*

Past midnight. Never knew—

*Krapp switches off, broods. Finally he fumbles in his pockets, encounters the banana, takes it out, peers at it, puts it back, fumbles, brings out the envelope, fumbles, puts back envelope, looks at his watch, gets up and goes backstage into darkness. Ten seconds. Sound of bottle against glass, then brief siphon. Ten seconds. Bottle against glass alone. Ten seconds. He comes back a little unsteadily into light, goes to front of table, takes out keys, raises them to his eyes, chooses key. unlocks first drawer, peers into it, feels about inside, takes out reel, peers at it,*



*locks drawer, puts keys back in his pocket, goes and sits down, takes reel off machine, lays it on dictionary, loads virgin reel on machine, takes envelope from his pocket, consults back of it, lays it on table, switches on, clears his throat and begins to record.*

KRAPP     Just been listening to that stupid bastard I took myself for thirty years ago, hard to believe I was ever as bad as that. Thank God that's all done with anyway. (*Pause.*) The eyes she had! (*Broods, realizes he is recording silence, switches off, broods. Finally.*) Everything there, everything, all the—(*Realizes this is not being recorded, switches on.*) Everything there, everything on this old muckball, all the light and dark and famine and feasting of . . . (*hesitates*) . . . the ages! (*In a shout.*) Yes! (*Pause.*) Let that go! Jesus! Take his mind off his homework! Jesus! (*Pause. Weary.*) Ah well, maybe he was right. (*Pause.*) Maybe he was right. (*Broods. Realizes. Switches off. Consults envelope.*) Pah! (*Crumples it and throws it away. Broods. Switches*

on.) Nothing to say, not a squeak. What's a year now? The sour cud and the iron stool. (*Pause.*) Revelled in the word spool. (*With relish.*) Spooooo! Happiest moment of the past half million. (*Pause.*)

Seventeen copies sold, of which eleven at trade price to free circulating libraries beyond the seas. Getting known. (*Pause.*) One pound six and something, eight I have little doubt. (*Pause.*) Crawled out once or twice, before the summer was cold. Sat shivering in the park, drowned in dreams and burning to be gone. Not a soul.

(*Pause.*) Last fancies. (*Vehemently.*) Keep 'em under! (*Pause.*) Scalded the eyes out of me reading *Effie* again, a page a day, with tears again. Effie . . . (*Pause.*) Could have been happy with her, up there on the Baltic, and the pines, and the dunes.

(*Pause.*) Could I? (*Pause.*) And she? (*Pause.*) Pah! (*Pause.*) Fanny came in a couple of times. Bony old ghost of a whore. Couldn't do much, but I suppose better than a kick in the crutch. The last time wasn't so bad. How do you manage it, she

said, at your age? I told her I'd been saving up for her all my life. (*Pause.*) Went to Vespers once, like when I was in short trousers. (*Pause. Sings.*)

Now the day is over,  
 Night is drawing nigh-igh,  
 Shadows—(*coughing, then almost inaudible*)—of the evening  
 Steal across the sky.

(*Gasping.*) Went to sleep and fell off the pew. (*Pause.*) Sometimes wondered in the night if a last effort mightn't—(*Pause.*) Ah finish your booze now and get to your bed. Go on with this drivel in the morning. Or leave it at that. (*Pause.*) Leave it at that. (*Pause.*) Lie propped up in the dark—and wander. Be again in the dingle on a Christmas Eve, gathering holly, the red-berried. (*Pause.*) Be again on Croghan on a Sunday morning, in the haze, with the bitch, stop and listen to the bells. (*Pause.*) And so on. (*Pause.*) Be again, be again. (*Pause.*) All that old misery. (*Pause.*)

Once wasn't enough for you. (*Pause.*) Lie down across her.

*Long pause. He suddenly bends over machine, switches off, wrenches off tape, throws it away, puts on the other, winds it forward to the passage he wants, switches on, listens staring front.*

TAPE —gooseberries, she said. I said again I thought it was hopeless and no good going on, and she agreed, without opening her eyes. (*Pause.*) I asked her to look at me and after a few moments—(*pause*)—after a few moments she did, but the eyes just slits, because of the glare. I bent over her to get them in the shadow and they opened. (*Pause. Low.*) Let me in. (*Pause.*) We drifted in among the flags and stuck. The way they went down, sighing, before the stem! (*Pause.*) I lay down across her with my face in her breasts and my hand on her. We lay there without moving. But under us all moved, and moved us, gently, up and down, and from side to side.

*Pause. Krapp's lips move. No sound.*

Past midnight. Never knew such silence.  
The earth might be uninhabited.

*Pause.*

Here I end this reel. Box—(pause)—three,  
spool—(pause)—five. ( *Pause.* ) Perhaps my  
best years are gone. When there was a  
chance of happiness. But I wouldn't want  
them back. Not with the fire in me now.  
No, I wouldn't want them back. •

*Krapp motionless staring before him. The  
tape runs on in silence.*

CURTAIN

# **All That Fall**

**A PLAY  
FOR RADIO**

*All That Fall* was first presented by The British Broadcasting Corporation's Third Programme on January 13, 1957.

MRS. ROONEY (Maddy)    *a lady in her seventies*

CHRISTY                      *a carter*

MR. TYLER                   *a retired bill-broker*

MR. SLOCUM                *Clerk of the Racecourse*

TOMMY                      *a porter*

MR. BARRELL              *a station-master*

MISS FITT                   *a lady in her thirties*

A FEMALE VOICE

DOLLY                      *a small girl*

MR. ROONEY (Dan)    *husband of Mrs. Rooney, blind*

JERRY                        *a small boy*





*Rural sounds. Sheep, bird, cow, cock, severally, then together.*

*Silence.*

*Mrs. Rooney advances along country road towards railway-station. Sound of her dragging feet.*

*Music faint from house by way. "Death and the Maiden." The steps slow down, stop.*

MRS. ROONEY     Poor woman. All alone in that ruinous old house.

*Music louder. Silence but for music playing.*

*The steps resume. Music dies. Mrs. Rooney murmurs melody. Her murmur dies.*

*Sound of approaching cartwheels. The cart stops. The steps slow down, stop.*

MRS. ROONEY     Is that you, Christy?

CHRISTY     It is, Ma'am.

MRS. ROONEY I thought the hinny was familiar. How is your poor wife?

CHRISTY No better, Ma'am.

MRS. ROONEY Your daughter then?

CHRISTY No worse, Ma'am.

*Silence.*

MRS. ROONEY Why do you halt? (*Pause.*) But why do I halt?

*Silence.*

CHRISTY Nice day for the races, Ma'am.

MRS. ROONEY No doubt it is. (*Pause.*) But will it hold up? (*Pause. With emotion.*) Will it hold up?

*Silence.*

CHRISTY I suppose you wouldn't—

MRS. ROONEY Hist! (*Pause.*) Surely to goodness that cannot be the up mail I hear already?

*Silence. The hinny neighs. Silence.*

CHRISTY Damn the mail.

MRS. ROONEY Oh thank God for that! I could have sworn I heard it, thundering up the track in the far distance. (*Pause.*) So hinnies whinny. Well, it is not surprising.

CHRISTY I suppose you wouldn't be in need of a small load of dung?

MRS. ROONEY Dung? What class of dung?

CHRISTY Stydung.

MRS. ROONEY Stydung . . . I like your frankness, Christy. (*Pause.*) I'll ask the master. (*Pause.*) Christy.

CHRISTY Yes, Ma'am.

MRS. ROONEY Do you find anything . . . bizarre about my way of speaking? (*Pause.*) I do not mean the voice. (*Pause.*) No, I mean the words. (*Pause. More to herself.*) I use none but the simplest words, I hope, and yet I sometimes find my way of speaking very . . . bizarre. (*Pause.*) Mercy! What was that?

CHRISTY Never mind her, Ma'am, she's very fresh in herself to-day.  
*Silence.*

MRS. ROONEY Dung? What would we want with dung, at our time of life? (*Pause.*) Why are you on your feet down on the road? Why do you not climb up on the crest of your

manure and let yourself be carried along?  
Is it that you have no head for heights?

*Silence.*

CHRISTY (to the hinny). Yep! (*Pause. Louder.*) Yep  
wiyya to hell owwa that!

*Silence.*

MRS. ROONEY She does not move a muscle. (*Pause.*) I too  
should be getting along, if I do not wish  
to arrive late at the station. (*Pause.*) But a  
moment ago she neighed and pawed the  
ground. And now she refuses to advance.  
Give her a good welt on the rump. (*Sound  
of welt. Pause.*) Harder! (*Sound of welt.  
Pause.*) Well! If someone were to do that  
for me I should not dally. (*Pause.*) How  
she gazes at me to be sure, with her great  
moist cleg-tormented eyes! Perhaps if I  
were to move on, down the road, out of  
her field of vision . . . (*Sound of welt.*) No,  
no, enough! Take her by the snaffle and  
pull her eyes away from me. Oh this is  
awful! (*She moves on. Sound of her  
dragging feet.*) What have I done to

deserve all this, what, what? (*Dragging feet.*) So long ago . . . No! No! (*Dragging feet. Quotes.*) "Sigh out a something something tale of things. Done long ago and ill done." (*She halts.*) How can I go on, I cannot. Oh let me just flop down flat on the road like a big fat jelly out of a bowl and never move again! A great big slop thick with grit and dust and flies, they would have to scoop me up with a shovel. (*Pause.*) Heavens, there is that up mail again, what will become of me! (*The dragging steps resume.*) Oh I am just a hysterical old hag I know, destroyed with sorrow and pining and gentility and church-going and fat and rheumatism and childlessness. (*Pause. Brokenly. Minnie!*) Little Minnie! (*Pause.* Love, that is all I asked, a little love, daily, twice daily, fifty years of twice daily love like a Paris horse-butcher's regular, what normal woman wants affection? A peck on the jaw at morning, near the ear, and another at evening, peck, peck, till you grow whiskers on you. There is that lovely laburnum again.

*Dragging feet. Sound of bicycle-bell. It is old Mr. Tyler coming up behind her on his bicycle, on his way to the station. Squeak of brakes. He slows down and rides abreast of her.*

MR. TYLER      Mrs. Rooney! Pardon me if I do not doff my cap, I'd fall off. Divine day for the meeting.

MRS. ROONEY      Oh, Mr. Tyler, you startled the life out of me stealing up behind me like that like a deer-stalker! Oh!

MR. TYLER      (*playfully*). I rang my bell, Mrs. Rooney, the moment I sighted you I started tinkling my bell, now don't you deny it.

MRS. ROONEY      Your bell is one thing, Mr. Tyler, and you are another. What news of your daughter?

MR. TYLER      Fair, fair. They removed everything, you know, the whole . . . er . . . bag of tricks. Now I am grandchildless.

*Dragging feet.*

MRS. ROONEY      Gracious how you wobble! Dismount, for mercy's sake, or ride on.

MR. TYLER      Perhaps if I were to lay my hand lightly

on your shoulder, Mrs. Rooney, how would that be? (*Pause.*) Would you permit that?

MRS. ROONEY No, Mr. Rooney, Mr. Tyler I mean, I am tired of light old hands on my shoulders and other senseless places, sick and tired of them. Heavens, here comes Connolly's van! (*She halts. Sound of motor-van. It approaches, passes with thunderous rattle, recedes.*) Are you all right, Mr. Tyler? (*Pause.*) Where is he? (*Pause.*) Ah there you are! (*The dragging steps resume.*) That was a narrow squeak.

MR. TYLER I alit in the nick of time.

MRS. ROONEY It is suicide to be abroad. But what is it to be at home, Mr. Tyler, what is it to be at home? A lingering dissolution. Now we are white with dust from head to foot. I beg your pardon?

MR. TYLER Nothing, Mrs. Rooney, nothing, I was merely cursing, under my breath, God and man, under my breath, and the wet Saturday afternoon of my conception. My back tire has gone down again. I pumped



it hard as iron before I set out. And now I am on the rim.

MRS. ROONEY Oh what a shame!

MR. TYLER Now if it were the front I should not so much mind. But the back. The back! The chain! The oil! The grease! The hub! The brakes! The gear! No! It is too much!  
*Dragging feet.*

MRS. ROONEY Are we very late, Mr. Tyler, I have not the courage to look at my watch.

MR. TYLER (*bitterly*). Late! I on my bicycle as I bowled along was already late. Now therefore we are doubly late, trebly, quadrupedly late. Would I had shot by you, without a word.  
*Dragging feet.*

MRS. ROONEY Whom are you meeting, Mr. Tyler?

MR. TYLER Hardy. (*Pause.*) We used to climb together. (*Pause.*) I saved his life once. (*Pause.*) I have not forgotten it.  
*Dragging feet. They stop.*

MRS. ROONEY Let us a halt a moment and this vile dust

fall back upon the viler worms.

*Silence. Rural sounds.*

MR. TYLER      What sky! What light! Ah in spite of all it is a blessed thing to be alive in such weather, and out of hospital.

MRS. ROONEY      Alive?

MR. TYLER      Well half alive shall we say?

MRS. ROONEY      Speak for yourself, Mr. Tyler. I am not half alive nor anything approaching it. (*Pause.*) What are we standing here for? This dust will not settle in our time. And when it does some great roaring machine will come and whirl it all skyhigh again.

MR. TYLER      Well, shall we be getting along in that case?

MRS. ROONEY      No.

MR. TYLER      Come, Mrs. Rooney—

MRS. ROONEY      Go, Mr. Tyler, go on and leave me, listening to the cooing of the ringdoves. (*Cooing.*) If you see my poor blind Dan tell him I was on my way to meet him when it all came over me again, like a flood. Say to him, Your poor wife, she told

me to tell you it all came flooding over her again and . . . (*the voice breaks*) . . . she simply went back home . . . straight back home . . .

MR. TYLER Come, Mrs. Rooney, come, the mail has not yet gone up, just take my free arm and we'll be there with time and to spare.

MRS. ROONEY (*sobbing*). What? What's all this now? (*Calmer.*) Can't you see I'm in trouble? (*With anger.*) Have you no respect for misery? (*Sobbing.*)<sup>\*</sup> Minnie! Little Minnie!

MR. TYLER Come, Mrs. Rooney, come, the mail has not yet gone up, just take my free arm and we'll be there with time and to spare.

MRS. ROONEY (*brokenly*). In her forties now she'd be, I don't know, fifty, girding up her lovely little loins, getting ready for the change . . .

MR. TYLER Come, Mrs. Rooney, come, the mail—

MRS. ROONEY (*exploding*). Will you get along with you, Mr. Rooney, Mr. Tyler I mean, will you get along with you now and cease molesting me? What kind of a country is this where a woman can't weep her heart out on the highways and byways without

being tormented by retired bill-brokers!  
*(Mr. Tyler prepares to mount his bicycle.)*  
 Heavens, you're not going to ride her flat!  
*(Mr. Tyler mounts.)* You'll tear your tube  
 to ribbons! *(Mr. Tyler rides off. Receding  
 sound of bumping bicycle. Silence.*  
*Cooing.)* Venus birds! Billing in the woods  
 all the long summer long. *(Pause.)* Oh  
 cursed corset! If I could let it out, without  
 indecent exposure. Mr. Tyler! Mr. Tyler!  
 Come back and unlace me behind the  
 hedge! *(She laughs wildly, ceases.)* What's  
 wrong with me, what's wrong with me,  
 never tranquil, seething out of my dirty  
 old pelt, out of my skull, oh to be in atoms,  
 in atoms! *(Frenziedly.)* ATOMS! *(Silence.*  
*Cooing. Faintly.)* Jesus! *(Pause.)* Jesus!  
*Sound of car coming up behind her. It  
 slows down and draws up beside her,  
 engine running. It is Mr. Slocum, the Clerk  
 of the Racecourse.*

MR. SLOCUM      Is anything wrong, Mrs. Rooney? You are  
 bent all double. Have you a pain in the  
stomach?

*Silence. Mrs. Rooney laughs wildly.  
Finally.*

MRS. ROONEY Well, if it isn't my old admirer, the Clerk of the Course, in his limousine.

MR. SLOCUM May I offer you a lift, Mrs. Rooney? Are you going in my direction?

MRS. ROONEY I am, Mr. Slocum, we all are. (*Pause.*) How is your poor mother?

MR. SLOCUM Thank you, she is fairly comfortable. We manage to keep her out of pain. That is the great thing, Mrs. Rooney, is it not?

MRS. ROONEY Yes, indeed, Mr. Slocum, that is the great thing, I don't know how you do it. (*Pause. She slaps her cheek violently.*) Ah these wasps!

MR. SLOCUM (*coolly*). May I then offer you a seat, Madam?

MRS. ROONEY (*with exaggerated enthusiasm*). Oh that would be heavenly, Mr. Slocum, just simply heavenly. (*Dubiously.*) But would I ever get in, you look very high off the ground to-day, these new balloon tires, I presume. (*Sound of door opening and Mrs.*

*Rooney trying to get in.*) Does this roof never come off? No? (*Efforts of Mrs. Rooney.*) No . . . I'll never do it . . . you'll have to get down, Mr. Slocum, and help me from the rear. (*Pause.*) What was that? (*Pause. Aggrieved.*) This is all your suggestion, Mr. Slocum, not mine. Drive on, Sir, drive on.

MR. SLOCUM (*switching off the engine*). I'm coming, Mrs. Rooney, I'm coming, give me time, I'm as stiff as yourself.

*Sound of Mr. Slocum extracting himself from driver's seat.*

MRS. ROONEY Stiff! Well I like that! And me heaving all over back and front. (*To herself.*) The dry old reprobate!

MR. SLOCUM (*in position behind her*). Now, Mrs. Rooney, how shall we do this?

MRS. ROONEY As if I were a bale, Mr. Slocum, don't be afraid. (*Pause. Sounds of effort.*) That's the way! (*Effort.*) Lower! (*Effort.*) Wait! (*Pause.*) No, don't let go! (*Pause.*) Suppose I do get up, will I ever get down?

MR. SLOCUM (*breathing hard*). You'll get down, Mrs. Rooney, you'll get down. We may not get you up, but I warrant you we'll get you down.

*He resumes his efforts. Sound of these.*

MRS. ROONEY Oh! . . Lower! . . Don't be afraid! . . We're past the age when . . . There! . . Now! . . Get your shoulder under it . . . Oh! . . (*Giggles.*) Oh glory! . . Up! Up! . . Ah! . . I'm in! (*Panting of Mr. Slocum. He slams the door. In a scream.*) My frock! You've nipped my frock! (*Mr. Slocum opens the door. Mrs. Rooney frees her frock. Mr. Slocum slams the door. His violent unintelligible muttering as he walks round to the other door. Tearfully.*) My nice frock! Look what you've done to my nice frock! (*Mr. Slocum gets into his seat, slams driver's door, presses starter. The engine does not start. He releases starter.*) What will Dan say when he sees me?

MR. SLOCUM Has he then recovered his sight?

MRS. ROONEY No, I mean when he knows, what will he say when he feels the hole? (*Mr. Slocum*

*presses starter. As before. Silence.*) What are you doing, Mr. Slocum?

MR. SLOCUM      Gazing straight before me, Mrs. Rooney, through the windscreen. into the void.

MRS. ROONEY    Start her up, I beseech you, and let us be off. This is awful!

MR. SLOCUM    (*dreamily*). All morning she went like a dream and now she is dead. That is what you get for a good deed. (*Pause. Hopefully.*) Perhaps if I were to choke her. (*He does so, presses the starter. The engine roars. Roaring to make himself heard.*) She was getting too much air!

*He throttles down, grinds in his first gear, moves off, changes up in a grinding of gears.*

MRS. ROONEY    (*in anguish*). Mind the hen! (*Scream of brakes. Squawk of hen.*) Oh mother, you have squashed her, drive on, drive on! (*The car accelerates. Pause.*) What a death! One minute picking happy at the dung, on the road, in the sun, with now and then a dust bath, and then—bang!—all



her troubles over. (*Pause.*) All the laying and the hatching. (*Pause.*) Just one great squawk and then . . . peace. (*Pause.*) They would have slit her weasand in any case. (*Pause.*) Here we are, let me down. (*The car slows down, stops, engine running. Mr. Slocum blows his horn. Pause. Louder. Pause.*) What are you up to now, Mr. Slocum? We are at a standstill, all danger is past and you blow your horn. Now if instead of blowing it now you had blown it at that unfortunate—

*Horn violently. Tommy the porter appears at top of station steps.*

MR. SLOCUM (*calling*). Will you come down, Tommy, and help this lady out, she's stuck. (*Tommy descends the steps.*) Open the door, Tommy, and ease her out.

*Tommy opens the door.*

TOMMY Certainly, Sir. Nice day for the races, Sir. What would you fancy for—

MRS. ROONEY Don't mind me. Don't take any notice of me. I do not exist. The fact is well known.

MR. SLOCUM      Do as you're asked, Tommy, for the love  
                         of God.

TOMMY          Yessir. Now, Mrs. Rooney.  
                         *He starts pulling her out.*

MRS. ROONEY    Wait, Tommy, wait now, don't bustle me,  
                         just let me wheel round and get my feet  
                         to the ground. (*Her efforts to achieve*  
                         *this.*) Now.

TOMMY          (*pulling her out*). Mind your feather,  
                         Ma'am. (*Sounds of effort.*) Easy now, easy.

MRS. ROONEY    Wait, for God's sake, you'll have me  
                         beheaded.

TOMMY          Crouch down, Mrs. Rooney, crouch down,  
                         and get your head in the open.

MRS. ROONEY    Crouch down! At my time of life! This is  
                         lunacy!

TOMMY          Press her down, Sir.  
                         *Sounds of combined efforts.*

MRS. ROONEY    Merde!

TOMMY          Now! She's coming! Straighten up, Ma'am!  
                         There!  
                         *Mr. Slocum slams the door.*

MRS. ROONEY    Am I out?

*The voice of Mr. Barrell, the station-master, raised in anger.*

MR. BARRELL Tommy! Tommy! Where the hell is he?

*Mr. Slocum grinds in his gear.*

TOMMY (*hurriedly*). You wouldn't have something for the Ladies Plate, Sir, I was given Flash Harry.

MR. SLOCUM (*scornfully*). Flash Harry! That carthorse!

MR. BARRELL (*at top of steps, roaring*). Tommy! Blast your bleeding bloody—(*He sees Mrs. Rooney.*) Oh, Mrs. Rooney . . . (*Mr. Slocum drives away in a grinding of gears.*) Who's that crucifying his gearbox, Tommy?

TOMMY Old Cissy Slocum.

MRS. ROONEY Cissy Slocum! That's a nice way to refer to your betters. Cissy Slocum! And you an orphan!

MR. BARRELL (*angrily to Tommy*). What are you doing stravaging down here on the public road? This is no place for you at all! Nip up there on the platform now and whip out the truck! Won't the twelve thirty be on top of us before we can turn round?

TOMMY     (*bitterly*). And that's the thanks you get for a Christian act.

MR. BARRELL     (*violently*). Get on with you now before I report you! (*Slow feet of Tommy climbing steps.*) Do you want me to come down to you with the shovel? (*The feet quicken, recede, cease.*) Ah, God forgive me, it's a hard life. (*Pause.*) Well, Mrs. Rooney, it's nice to see you up and about again. You were laid up there a long time.

MRS. ROONEY     Not long enough, Mr. Barrell. (*Pause.*) Would I were still in bed, Mr. Barrell. (*Pause.*) Would I were lying stretched out in my comfortable bed, Mr. Barrell, just wasting slowly painlessly away, keeping up my strength with arrowroot and calves-foot jelly, till in the end you wouldn't see me under the blankets any more than a board. (*Pause.*) Oh no coughing or spitting or bleeding or vomiting, just drifting gently down into the higher life, and remembering, remembering . . . (*the voice breaks*) . . . all the silly unhappiness . . . as though . . . it had never happened . . . what did I

do with that handkerchief? (*Sound of handkerchief loudly applied.*) How long have you been master of this station now, Mr. Barrell?

MR. BARRELL Don't ask me, Mrs. Rooney, don't ask me.

MRS. ROONEY You stepped into your father's shoes, I believe, when he took them off.

MR. BARRELL Poor Pappy! (*Reverent pause.*) He didn't live long to enjoy his ease.

MRS. ROONEY I remember him clearly. A small ferrety purple-faced widower, deaf as a doornail, very testy and snappy. (*Pause.*) I suppose you'll be retiring soon yourself, Mr. Barrell, and growing your roses. (*Pause.*) Did I understand you to say the twelve thirty would soon be upon us?

MR. BARRELL Those were my words.

MRS. ROONEY But according to my watch, which is more or less right—or was—by the eight o'clock news, the time is now coming up to twelve . . . (*pause as she consults her watch*) . . . thirty-six. (*Pause.*) And yet upon the other hand the up mail has not yet gone

through. (*Pause.*) Or has it sped by  
 unbeknown to me? (*Pause.*) For there was  
 a moment there, I remember now, I was so  
 plunged in sorrow I wouldn't have heard  
 a steam roller go over me. (*Pause. Mr.  
 Barrell turns to go.*) Don't go, Mr. Barrell!  
 (*Mr. Barrell goes. Loud.*) Mr. Barrell!  
 (*Pause. Louder.*) Mr. Barrell!  
*Mr. Barrell comes back.*

MR. BARRELL (*testily*). What is it, Mrs. Rooney, I have  
 my work to do.

*Silence. Sound of wind.*

MRS. ROONEY The wind is getting up. (*Pause. Wind.*)  
 The best of the day is over. (*Pause. Wind.  
 Dreamily.*) Soon the rain will begin to fall  
 and go on falling, all afternoon. (*Mr.  
 Barrell goes.*) Then at evening the clouds  
 will part, the setting sun will shine an  
 instant, then sink, behind the hills. (*She  
 realizes Mr. Barrell has gone.*) Mr. Barrell!  
 Mr. Barrell! (*Silence.*) I estrange them all.  
 They come towards me, uninvited, bygones  
 bygones, full of kindness, anxious to help  
 . . . (*the voice breaks*) . . . genuinely

pleased . . . to see me again . . . looking so well . . . (*Handkerchief.*) A few simple words . . . from my heart . . . and I am all alone . . . once more . . . (*Handkerchief. Vehemently.*) I should not be out at all! I should never leave the grounds! (*Pause.*) Oh there is that Fitt woman, I wonder will she bow to me. (*Sound of Miss Fitt approaching, humming a hymn. She starts climbing the steps.*) Miss Fitt! (*Miss Fitt halts, stops humming.*) Am I then invisible, Miss Fitt? Is this cretonne so becoming to me that I merge into the masonry? (*Miss Fitt descends a step.*) That is right, Miss Fitt, look closely and you will finally distinguish a once female shape.

MISS FITT      Mrs. Rooney! I saw you, but I did not know you.

MRS. ROONEY      Last Sunday we worshipped together. We knelt side by side at the same altar. We drank from the same chalice. Have I so changed since then?

MISS FITT      (*shocked*). Oh but in church, Mrs. Rooney, in church I am alone with my Maker. Are

not you? (*Pause.*) Why, even the sexton himself, you know, when he takes up the collection, knows it is useless to pause before me. I simply do not see the plate, or bag, whatever it is they use, how could I? (*Pause.*) Why even when all is over and I go out into the sweet fresh air, why even then for the first furlong or so I stumble in a kind of daze as you might say, oblivious to my coreligionists. And they are very kind, I must admit—the vast majority—very kind and understanding. They know me now and take no umbrage. There she goes, they say, there goes the dark Miss Fitt, alone with her Maker, take no notice of her. And they step down off the path to avoid my running into them. (*Pause.*) Ah yes, I am distract, very distract, even on week-days. Ask Mother, if you do not believe me. Hetty, she says, when I start eating my doily instead of the thin bread and butter, Hetty, how can you be so distract? (*Sighs.*) I suppose the truth is I am not there, Mrs. Rooney, just not really there at all. I see, hear, smell, and so on, I



go through the usual motions, but my heart is not in it, Mrs. Rooney, but heart is in none of it. Left to myself, with no one to check me, I would soon be flown . . . home. (*Pause.*) So if you think I cut you just now, Mrs. Rooney, you do me an injustice. All I saw was a big pale blur, just another big pale blur. (*Pause.*) Is anything amiss, Mrs. Rooney, you do not look normal somehow. So bowed and bent.

MRS. ROONEY ( *ruefully*). Maddy Rooney, née Dunne, the big pale blur. (*Pause.*) You have piercing sight, Miss Fitt, if you only knew it, literally piercing.

*Pause.*

MISS FITT Well . . . is there anything I can do, now that I am here?

MRS. ROONEY If you would help me up the face of this cliff, Miss Fitt, I have little doubt your Maker would requite you, if no one else.

MISS FITT Now now, Mrs. Rooney, don't put your teeth in me. Requite! I make these sacrifices for nothing—or not at all. (*Pause.*

*Sound of her descending steps.*) I take it you want to lean on me, Mrs. Rooney.

MRS. ROONEY I asked Mr. Barrell to give me his arm, just give me his arm. (*Pause.*) He turned on his heel and strode away.

MISS FITT Is it my arm you want then? (*Pause. Impatiently.*) Is it my arm you want, Mrs. Rooney, or what is it?

MRS. ROONEY (*exploding*). Your arm! Any arm! A helping hand! For five seconds! Christ, what a planet!

MISS FITT Really . . . Do you know what it is, Mrs. Rooney, I do not think it is wise of you to be going about at all.

MRS. ROONEY (*violently*). Come down here, Miss Fitt, and give me your arm, before I scream down the parish!

*Pause. Wind. Sound of Miss Fitt descending last steps.*

MISS FITT (*resignedly*). Well, I suppose it is the Protestant thing to do.

MRS. ROONEY Pismires do it for one another. (*Pause.*) I have seen slugs do it. (*Miss Fitt proffers*

*her arm.*) No, the other side, my dear, if it's all the same to you, I'm left-handed on top of everything else. (*She takes Miss Fitt's right arm.*) Heavens, child, you're just a bag of bones, you need building up. (*Sound of her toiling up steps on Miss Fitt's arm.*) This is worse than the Matterhorn, were you ever up the Matterhorn, Miss Fitt, great honeymoon resort. (*Sound of toiling.*) Why don't they have a hand-rail? (*Panting.*) Wait till I get some air. (*Pause.*) Don't let me go! (*Miss Fitt hums her hymn. After a moment Mrs. Rooney joins in with the words.*) . . . the encircling gloo-oom (*Miss Fitt stops humming*) . . . tum tum me on. (*Forte.*) The night is dark and I am far from ho-ome, tum tum—

MISS FITT (*hysterically*). Stop it, Mrs. Rooney, stop it, or I'll drop you!

MRS. ROONEY Wasn't it that they sung on the Lusitania? Or Rock of Ages? Most touching it must have been. Or was it the Titanic?

*Attracted by the noise a group, including Mr. Tyler, Mr. Barrell and Tommy, gathers*

*at top of steps.*

MR. BARRELL      What the—

*Silence.*

MR. TYLER      Lovely day for the fixture.

*Loud titter from Tommy cut short by Mr. Barrell with backhanded blow in the stomach. Appropriate noise from Tommy.*

FEMALE VOICE      (*shrill*). Oh look, Dolly, look!

DOLLY      What, Mamma?

FEMALE VOICE      They are stuck! (*Cackling laugh.*) They are stuck!

MRS. ROONEY      Now we are the laughing-stock of the twenty-six counties. Or is it thirty-six?

MR. TYLER      That is a nice way to treat your defenceless subordinates, Mr. Barrell, hitting them without warning in the pit of the stomach.

MISS FITT      Has anybody seen my mother?

MR. BARRELL      Who is that?

TOMMY      The dark Miss Fitt.

MR. BARRELL      Where is her face?

MRS. ROONEY      Now, deary, I am ready if you are. (*They toil up remaining steps.*) Stand back, you cads!

*Shuffle of feet.*

FEMALE VOICE      Mind yourself, Dolly!

MRS. ROONEY      Thank you, Miss Fitt, thank you, that will do, just prop me up against the wall like a roll of tarpaulin and that will be all, for the moment. (*Pause.*) I am sorry for all this ramdam, Miss Fitt, had I known you were looking for your mother I should not have importuned you, I know what it is.

MR. TYLER      (*in marvelling aside*). Ramdam!

FEMALE VOICE      Come, Dolly darling, let us take up our stand before the first-class smokers. Give me your hand and hold me tight, one can be sucked under.

MR. TYLER      You have lost your mother, Miss Fitt?

MISS FITT      Good-morning, Mr. Tyler.

MR. TYLER      Good-morning, Miss Fitt.

MR. BARRELL      Good-morning, Miss Fitt.

MISS FITT      Good-morning, Mr. Barrell.

MR. TYLER      You have lost your mother, Miss Fitt?

MISS FITT      She said she would be on the last train.

MRS. ROONEY    Do not imagine, because I am silent, that  
I am not present, and alive, to all that is  
going on.

MR. TYLER      (*to Miss Fitt*). When you say the last  
train—

MRS. ROONEY    Do not flatter yourselves for one moment,  
because I hold aloof, that my sufferings  
have ceased. No. The entire scene, the  
hills, the plain, the racecourse with its  
miles and miles of white rails and three  
red stands, the pretty little wayside station,  
even you yourselves, yes, I mean it, and  
over all the clouding blue, I see it all, I  
stand here and see it all with eyes . . . (*the*  
*voice breaks.*) . . . through eyes . . . oh, if  
you had my eyes . . . you would under-  
stand . . . the things they have seen . . .  
and not looked away . . . this is nothing  
. . . nothing . . . what did I do with that  
handkerchief?

*Pause.*

MR. TYLER      (*to Miss Fitt*). When you say the last train—(*Mrs. Rooney blows her nose violently and long*)—when you say the last train, Miss Fitt, I take it you mean the twelve thirty.

MISS FITT      What else could I mean, Mr. Tyler, what else could I *conceivably* mean?

MR. TYLER      Then you have no cause for anxiety, Miss Fitt, for the twelve thirty has not yet arrived. Look. (*Miss Fitt looks.*) No, up the line. (*Miss Fitt looks. Patiently.*) No, Miss Fitt, follow the direction of my index. (*Miss Fitt looks.*) There. You see now. The signal. At the bawdy hour of nine. (*In rueful afterthought.*) Or three alas! (*Mr. Barrell stifles a guffaw.*) Thank you, Mr. Barrell.

MISS FITT      But the time is now getting on for—

MR. TYLER      (*patiently*). We all know, Miss Fitt, we all know only too well what the time is now getting on for, and yet the cruel fact remains that the twelve thirty has not yet arrived.

MISS FITT      Not an accident, I trust! (*Pause.*) Do not

tell me she has left the track! (*Pause.*) Oh darling mother! With the fresh sole for lunch!

*Loud titter from Tommy, checked as before by Mr. Barrell.*

MR. BARRELL      That's enough old guff out of you. Nip up to the box now and see has Mr. Case anything for me.

*Tommy goes.*

MRS. ROONEY      (*sadly*). Poor Dan!

MISS FITT          (*in anguish*). What terrible thing has happened?

MR. TYLER          Now now, Miss Fitt, do not—

MRS. ROONEY      (*with vehement sadness*). Poor Dan!

MR. TYLER          Now now, Miss Fitt, do not give way . . . to despair, all will come right . . . in the end. (*Aside to Mr. Barrell.*) What is the situation, Mr. Barrell? Not a collision surely?

MRS. ROONEY      (*enthusiastically*). A collision! Oh that would be wonderful!

MISS FITT          (*horried*). A collision! I knew it!



MR. TYLER      Come, Miss Fitt, let us move a little up the platform.

MRS. ROONEY    Yes, let us all do that. (*Pause.*) No?  
                          (*Pause.*) You have changed your mind?  
                          (*Pause.*) I quite agree, we are better here,  
                          in the shadow of the waiting-room.

MR. BARRELL    Excuse me a moment.

MRS. ROONEY    Before you slink away, Mr. Barrell, please,  
                          a statement of some kind, I insist. Even the  
                          slowest train on this brief line is not ten  
                          minutes and more behind its scheduled  
                          time without good cause, one imagines.  
                          (*Pause.*) We all know your station is the  
                          best kept of the entire network, but there  
                          are times when that is not enough, just not  
                          enough. (*Pause.*) Now, Mr. Barrell, leave  
                          off chewing your whiskers, we are waiting  
                          to hear from you—we the unfortunate  
                          ticket-holders' nearest if not dearest.

*Pause.*

MR. TYLER      (*reasonably*). I do think we are owed some  
                          kind of explanation, Mr. Barrell, if only to  
                          set our minds at rest.

MR. BARRELL I know nothing. All I know is there has been a hitch. All traffic is retarded.

MRS. ROONEY (*derisively*). Retarded! A hitch! Ah these celibates! Here we are eating our hearts out with anxiety for our loved ones and he calls that a hitch! Those of us like myself with heart and kidney trouble may collapse at any moment and he calls that a hitch! In our ovens the Saturday roast is burning to a shrivel and he calls that—

MR. TYLER Here comes Tommy, running! I am glad I have been spared to see this.

TOMMY (*excitedly, in the distance*). She's coming. (*Pause. Nearer.*) She's at the level-crossing!

*Immediately exaggerated station sounds. Falling signals. Bells. Whistles. Crescendo of train whistle approaching. Sound of train rushing through station.*

MRS. ROONEY (*above rush of train*). The up mail! The up mail! (*The up mail recedes, the down train approaches, enters the station, pulls up with great hissing of steam and clashing*

*of couplings. Noise of passengers descending, doors banging, Mr. Barrell shouting "Boghill! Boghill!", etc. Piercingly.)* Dan! . . Are you all right? . . Where is he? . . Dan! . . Did you see my husband? . . Dan! . .  
*(Noise of station emptying. Guard's whistle. Train departing, receding. Silence.)*  
 He isn't on it! The misery I have endured, to get here, and he isn't on it! . . Mr. Barrell! . . Was he not on it? *(Pause.)* Is anything the matter, you look as if you had seen a ghost. *(Pause.)* Tommy! . . Did you see the master?

TOMMY      He'll be along, Ma'am, Jerry is minding him.

*Mr. Rooney suddenly appears on platform, advancing on small boy Jerry's arm. He is blind, thumps the ground with his stick and pants incessantly.*

MRS. ROONEY      Oh, Dan! There you are! *(Her dragging feet as she hastens towards him. She reaches him. They halt.)* Where in the world were you?

MR. ROONEY      *(coolly.)* Maddy.

- MRS. ROONEY      Where were you all this time?
- MR. ROONEY      In the men's.
- MRS. ROONEY      Kiss me!
- MR. ROONEY      Kiss you? In public? On the platform?  
Before the boy? Have you taken leave of  
your senses?
- MRS. ROONEY      Jerry wouldn't mind. Would you, Jerry?
- JERRY      No, Ma'am.
- MRS. ROONEY      How is your poor father?
- JERRY      They took him away, Ma'am.
- MRS. ROONEY      Then you are all alone?
- JERRY      Yes, Ma'am.
- MR. ROONEY      Why are you here? You did not notify me.
- MRS. ROONEY      I wanted to give you a surprise. For your  
birthday.
- MR. ROONEY      My birthday?
- MRS. ROONEY      Don't you remember? I wished you your  
happy returns in the bathroom.
- MR. ROONEY      I did not hear you.
- MRS. ROONEY      But I gave you a tie! You have it on!
- Pause.*

- MR. ROONEY      How old am I now?
- MRS. ROONEY      Now never mind about that. Come.
- MR. ROONEY      Why did you not cancel the boy? Now we shall have to give him a penny.
- MRS. ROONEY      (*miserably*). I forgot! I had such a time getting here! Such horrid nasty people! (*Pause. Pleading.*) Be nice to me, Dan, be nice to me today!
- MR. ROONEY      Give the boy a penny.
- MRS. ROONEY      Here are two halfpennies, Jerry. Run along now and buy yourself a nice gobstopper.
- JERRY              Yes, Ma'am.
- MR. ROONEY      Come for me on Monday, if I am still alive.
- JERRY              Yessir.
- He runs off.*
- MR. ROONEY      We could have saved sixpence. We have saved fivepence. (*Pause.*) But at what cost? *They move off along platform arm in arm. Dragging feet, panting, thudding stick.*
- MRS. ROONEY      Are you not well?
- They halt, on Mr. Rooney's initiative.*

MR. ROONEY      Once and for all, do not ask me to speak  
and move at the same time. I shall not say  
this in this life again.

*They move off. Dragging feet, etc. They  
halt at top of steps.*

MRS. ROONEY    Are you not—

MR. ROONEY      Let us get this precipice over.

MRS. ROONEY    Put your arm round me.

MR. ROONEY      Have you been drinking again? (*Pause.*)  
You are quivering like a blanc-mange.  
(*Pause.*) Are you in a condition to lead  
me? (*Pause.*) We shall fall into the ditch.

MRS. ROONEY    Oh, Dan! It will be like old times!

MR. ROONEY      Pull yourself together or I shall send  
Tommy for the cab. Then, instead of  
having saved sixpence, no, fivepence, we  
shall have lost . . . (*calculating mumble*)  
. . . two and three less six one and no plus  
one one and no plus three one and nine  
and one ten and three two and one . . .  
(*normal voice*) two and one, we shall be  
the poorer to the tune of two and one.  
(*Pause.*) Curse that sun, it has gone in.

What is the day doing?

*Wind.*

MRS. ROONEY Shrouding, shrouding, the best of it is past.  
(*Pause.*) Soon the first great drops will  
fall splashing in the dust.

MR. ROONEY And yet the glass was firm. (*Pause.*) Let us  
hasten home and sit before the fire. We  
shall draw the blinds. You will read to me.  
I think Effie is going to commit adultery  
with the Major. (*Brief drag of feet.*) Wait!  
(*Feet cease. Stick tapping at steps.*) I have  
been up and down these steps five  
thousand times and still I do not know how  
many there are. When I think there are  
six there are four or five or seven or eight  
and when I remember there are five there  
are three or four or six or seven and when  
finally I realize there are seven there are  
five or six or eight or nine. Sometimes I  
wonder if they do not change them in the  
night. (*Pause. Irritably.*) Well? How many  
do you make them to-day?

MRS. ROONEY Do not ask me to count, Dan, not now.

MR. ROONEY      Not count! One of the few satisfactions in life?

MRS. ROONEY      Not steps, Dan, please, I always get them wrong. Then you might fall on your wound and I would have that on my manure-heap on top of everything else. No, just cling to me and all will be well.

*Confused noise of their descent. Panting, stumbling, ejaculations, curses. Silence.*

MR. ROONEY      Well! That is what you call well!

MRS. ROONEY      We are down. And little the worse.  
(*Silence. A donkey brays. Silence.*) That was a true donkey. Its father and mother were donkeys.

*Silence.*

MR. ROONEY      Do you know what it is, I think I shall retire.

MRS. ROONEY      (*appalled*). Retire! And live at home? On your grant!

MR. ROONEY      Never tread these cursed steps again.  
Trudge this hellish road for the last time.  
Sit at home on the remnants of my bottom



counting the hours—till the next meal.  
*(Pause.)* The very thought puts life in me!  
 Forward, before it dies!

*They move on. Dragging feet, panting,  
 thudding stick.*

MRS. ROONEY      Now mind, here is the path . . . Up! . .  
 Well done! Now we are in safety and a  
 straight run home.

MR. ROONEY      *(without halting, between gasps).* A  
 straight . . . run! . . She calls that . . . a  
 straight . . . run! . .

MRS. ROONEY      Hush! do not speak as you go along, you  
 know it is not good for your coronary.  
*(Dragging steps, etc.)* Just concentrate on  
 putting one foot before the next or what-  
 ever the expression is. *(Dragging feet, etc.)*  
 That is the way, now we are doing nicely.  
*(Dragging feet, etc. They suddenly halt, on  
 Mrs. Rooney's initiative.)* Heavens! I knew  
 there was something! With all the excite-  
 ment! I forgot!

MR. ROONEY      *(quietly).* Good God.

MRS. ROONEY      But you must know, Dan, of course, you

were on it. What ever happened? Tell me!

MR. ROONEY I have never known anything to happen.

MRS. ROONEY But you must—

MR. ROONEY (*violently*). All this stopping and starting again is devilish, devilish! I get a little way on me and begin to be carried along when suddenly you stop dead! Two hundred pounds of unhealthy fat! What possessed you to come out at all? Let go of me!

MRS. ROONEY (*in great agitation*). No, I must know, we won't stir from here till you tell me. Fifteen minutes late! On a thirty minute run! It's unheard of!

MR. ROONEY I know nothing. Let go of me before I shake you off.

MRS. ROONEY But you must know! You were on it! Was it at the terminus? Did you leave on time? Or was it on the line? (*Pause.*) Did something happen on the line? (*Pause.*) Dan! (*Brokenly.*) Why won't you tell me! *Silence. They move off. Dragging feet, etc. They halt. Pause.*

MR. ROONEY Poor Maddy! (*Pause. Children's cries.*)

What was that?

*Pause for Mrs. Rooney to ascertain.*

MRS. ROONEY     The Lynch twins jeering at us.

*Cries.*

MR. ROONEY     Will they pelt us with mud to-day, do you suppose?

*Cries.*

MRS. ROONEY     Let us turn and face them. (*Cries. They turn. Silence.*) Threaten them with your stick. (*Silence.*) They have run away.

*Pause.*

MR. ROONEY     Did you ever wish to kill a child? (*Pause.*)  
Nip some young doom in the bud. (*Pause.*)  
 Many a time at night, in winter, on the  
 black road home, I nearly attacked the  
 boy. (*Pause.*) Poor Jerry! (*Pause.*) What  
 restrained me then? (*Pause.*) Not fear of  
 man. (*Pause.*) Shall we go on backwards  
 now a little?

MRS. ROONEY     Backwards?

MR. ROONEY     Yes. Or you forwards and I backwards.  
 The perfect pair. Like Dante's damned,

with their faces arsy-versy. Our tears will water our bottoms.

MRS. ROONEY      What is the matter, Dan? Are you not well?

MR. ROONEY      Well! Did you ever know me to be well? The day you met me I should have been in bed. The day you proposed to me the doctors gave me up. You knew that, did you not? The night you married me they came for me with an ambulance. You have not forgotten that, I suppose? (*Pause.*) No, I cannot be said to be well. But I am no worse. Indeed I am better than I was. The loss of my sight was a great fillip. If I could go deaf and dumb I think I might pant on to be a hundred. Or have I done so? (*Pause.*) Was I a hundred to-day? (*Pause.*) Am I a hundred, Maddy?  
*Silence.*

MRS. ROONEY      All is still. No living soul in sight. There is no one to ask. The world is feeding. The wind—(*brief wind*)—scarcely stirs the leaves and the birds—(*brief chirp*)—are tired singing. The cows—(*brief moo*)—and

sheep—(*brief baa*)—ruminant in silence.  
 The dogs—(*brief bark*)—are hushed and the  
 hens—(*brief cackle*)—sprawl torpid in the  
 dust. We are alone. There is no one to ask.  
*Silence.*

MR. ROONEY (*clearing his throat, narrative tone*). We  
 drew out on the tick of time, I can vouch  
 for that. I was—

MRS. ROONEY How can you vouch for it?

MR. ROONEY (*normal tone, angrily*). I can vouch for it,  
 I tell you! Do you want my relation or  
 don't you? (*Pause. Narrative tone.*) On  
 the tick of time. I had the compartment to  
 myself, as usual. At least I hope so, for I  
 made no attempt to restrain myself. My  
 mind—(*Normal tone.*) But why do we not  
 sit down somewhere? Are we afraid we  
 should never rise again?

MRS. ROONEY Sit down on what?

MR. ROONEY On a bench, for example.

MRS. ROONEY There is no bench.

MR. ROONEY Then on a bank, let us sink down upon a  
 bank.

MRS. ROONEY      There is no bank.

MR. ROONEY      Then we cannot. (*Pause.*) I dream of other roads, in other lands. Of another home, another—(*he hesitates*)—another home. (*Pause.*) What was I trying to say?

MRS. ROONEY      Something about your mind.

MR. ROONEY      (*startled*). My mind? Are you sure. (*Pause. Incredulous.*) My mind? . . . (*Pause.*) Ah yes. (*Narrative tone.*) Alone in the compartment my mind began to work, as so often after office hours, on the way home, in the train, to the lilt of the bogeys. Your season-ticket, I said, costs you twelve pounds a year and you earn, on an average, seven and six a day, that is to say barely enough to keep you alive and twitching with the help of food, drink, tobacco and periodicals until you finally reach home and fall into bed. Add to this—or subtract from it—rent, stationery, various subscriptions, tramfares to and fro, light and heat, permits and licences, hairtrims and shaves, tips to escorts, upkeep of premises and appearances, and a thousand unspecifiable

sundries, and it is clear that by lying at home in bed, day and night, winter and summer, with a change of pyjamas once a fortnight, you would add very considerably to your income. Business, I said—(*A cry. Pause. Again. Normal tone.*) Did I hear a cry?

MRS. ROONEY     Mrs. Tully, I fancy. Her poor husband is in constant pain and beats her unmercifully.

*Silence.*

MR. ROONEY     That was a short knock. (*Pause.*) What was I trying to get at?

MRS. ROONEY     Business.

MR. ROONEY     Ah yes, business. (*Narrative tone.*) Business, old man, I said, retire from business, it has retired from you. (*Normal tone.*) One has these moments of lucidity.

MRS. ROONEY     I feel very cold and weak.

MR. ROONEY     (*narrative tone*). On the other hand, I said. there are the horrors of home life, the dusting, sweeping, airing, scrubbing,

waxing, waning, washing, mangling, drying, mowing, clipping, raking, rolling, scuffling, shovelling, grinding, tearing, pounding, banging and slamming. And the brats, the happy little hearty little howling neighbours' brats. Of all this and much more the week-end, the Saturday intermission and then the day of rest, have given you some idea. But what must it be like on a working-day? A Wednesday? A Friday! What must it be like on a Friday! And I fell to thinking of my silent, back-street, basement office, with its obliterated plate, rest-couch and velvet hangings, and what it means to be buried there alive, if only from ten to five, with convenient to the one hand a bottle of light pale ale and to the other a long ice-cold fillet of hake. Nothing, I said, not even fully certified death, can ever take the place of that. It was then I noticed we were at a standstill. (*Pause. Normal tone. Irritably.*) Why are you hanging out of me like that? Have you swooned away?

MRS. ROONEY

I feel very cold and faint. The wind—



(*whistling wind*)—is whistling through my summer frock as if I had nothing on over my bloomers. I have had no solid food since my elevenses.

MR. ROONEY      You have ceased to care. I speak—and you listen to the wind.

MRS. ROONEY    No no, I am agog, tell me all, then we shall press on and never pause, never pause, till we come safe to haven.

*Pause.*

MR. ROONEY    Never pause . . . safe to haven . . . Do you know, Maddy, sometimes one would think you were struggling with a dead language.

MRS. ROONEY    Yes indeed, Dan, I know full well what you mean, I often have that feeling, it is unspeakably excruciating.

MR. ROONEY    I confess I have it sometimes myself, when I happen to overhear what I am saying.

MRS. ROONEY    Well, you know, it will be dead in time, just like our own poor dear Gaelic, there is that to be said.

*Urgent baa.*

MR. ROONEY    (*startled*). Good God!

MRS. ROONEY     Oh, the pretty little woolly lamb, crying to suck its mother! Theirs has not changed, since Arcady.

*Pause.*

MR. ROONEY     Where was I in my composition?

MRS. ROONEY     At a standstill.

MR. ROONEY     Ah yes. (*Clears his throat. Narrative tone.*)  
I concluded naturally that we had entered a station and would soon be on our way again, and I sat on, without misgiving. Not a sound. Things are very dull to-day, I said, nobody getting down, nobody getting on. Then as time flew by and nothing happened I realized my error. We had not entered a station.

MRS. ROONEY     Did you not spring up and poke your head out of the window?

MR. ROONEY     What good would that have done me?

MRS. ROONEY     Why to call out to be told what was amiss.

MR. ROONEY     I did not care what was amiss. No, I just sat on, saying, If this train were never to move again I should not greatly mind.

Then gradually a—how shall I say—a growing desire to—er—you know—welled up within me. Nervous probably. In fact now I am sure. You know, the feeling of being confined.

MRS. ROONEY Yes yes, I have been through that.

MR. ROONEY If we sit here much longer, I said, I really do not know what I shall do. I got up and paced to and fro between the seats, like a caged beast.

MRS. ROONEY That is a help sometimes.

MR. ROONEY After what seemed an eternity we simply moved off. And the next thing was Barrell bawling the abhorred name. I got down and Jerry led me to the men's, or Fir as they call it now, from Vir Viris I suppose, the V becoming F, in accordance with Grimm's Law. (*Pause.*) The rest you know. (*Pause.*) You say nothing? (*Pause.*) Say something, Maddy. Say you believe me.

MRS. ROONEY I remember once attending a lecture by one of these new mind doctors, I forget

what you call them. He spoke—

MR. ROONEY      A lunatic specialist?

MRS. ROONEY      No no, just the troubled mind, I was hoping he might shed a little light on my lifelong preoccupation with horses' buttocks.

MR. ROONEY      A neurologist.

MRS. ROONEY      No no, just mental distress, the name will come back to me in the night. I remember his telling us the story of a little girl, very strange and unhappy in her ways, and how he treated her unsuccessfully over a period of years and was finally obliged to give up the case. He could find nothing wrong with her, he said. The only thing wrong with her as far as he could see was that she was dying. And she did in fact die, shortly after he washed his hands of her.

MR. ROONEY      Well? What is there so wonderful about that?

MRS. ROONEY      No, it was just something he said, and the way he said it, that have haunted me ever since.

- MR. ROONEY      You lie awake at night, tossing to and fro and brooding on it.
- MRS. ROONEY      On it and other . . . wretchedness. (*Pause.*) When he had done with the little girl he stood there motionless for some time, quite two minutes I should say, looking down at his table. Then he suddenly raised his head and exclaimed, as if he had had a revelation, The trouble with her was she had never been really born! (*Pause.*) He spoke throughout without notes. (*Pause.*) I left before the end.
- MR. ROONEY      Nothing about your buttocks? (*Mrs. Rooney weeps. In affectionate remonstrance.*) Maddy!
- MRS. ROONEY      There is nothing to be done for those people!
- MR. ROONEY      For which is there? (*Pause.*) That does not sound right somehow. (*Pause.*) What way am I facing?
- MRS. ROONEY      What?
- MR. ROONEY      I have forgotten what way I am facing.
- MRS. ROONEY      You have turned aside and are bowed

down over the ditch.

MR. ROONEY      There is a dead dog down there.

MRS. ROONEY      No no, just the rotting leaves.

MR. ROONEY      In June? Rotting leaves in June?

MRS. ROONEY      Yes dear, from last year, and from the year before last, and from the year before that again. (*Silence. Rainy wind. They move on. Dragging steps, etc.*) There is that lovely laburnum again. Poor thing, it is losing all its tassels. (*Dragging steps, etc.*) There are the first drops. (*Rain. Dragging feet, etc.*) Golden drizzle. (*Dragging steps, etc.*) Do not mind me, dear, I am just talking to myself. (*Rain heavier. Dragging steps, etc.*) Can hinnies procreate, I wonder.

*They halt, on Mr. Rooney's initiative.*

MR. ROONEY      Say that again.

MRS. ROONEY      Come on, dear, don't mind me, we are getting drenched.

MR. ROONEY      (*forcibly*). Can what what?

MRS. ROONEY      Hinnies procreate. (*Silence.*) You know,

hinnies, or is it jinnies, aren't they barren, or sterile, or whatever it is? (*Pause.*) It wasn't an ass's colt at all, you know, I asked the Regius Professor.

*Pause.*

MR. ROONEY      He should know.

MRS. ROONEY      Yes, it was a hinny, he rode into Jerusalem or wherever it was on a hinny. (*Pause.*) That must mean something. (*Pause.*) It's like the sparrows, than many of which we are of more value, they weren't sparrows at all.

MR. ROONEY      Than many of which . . . You exaggerate, Maddy.

MRS. ROONEY      (*with emotion*). They weren't sparrows at all!

MR. ROONEY      Does that put our price up?

*Silence. They move on. Wind and rain. Dragging feet, etc. They halt.*

MRS. ROONEY      Do you want some dung? (*Silence. They move on. Wind and rain, etc. They halt.*)  
Why do you stop? Do you want to say something?

- MR. ROONEY      No.
- MRS. ROONEY      Then why do you stop?
- MR. ROONEY      It is easier.
- MRS. ROONEY      Are you very wet?
- MR. ROONEY      To the buff.
- MRS. ROONEY      The buff?
- MR. ROONEY      The buff. From buffalo.
- MRS. ROONEY      We shall hang up all our things in the hot-cupboard and get into our dressing-gowns. (*Pause.*) Put your arm round me. (*Pause.*) Be nice to me! (*Pause. Gratefully.*) Ah Dan! (*They move on. Wind and rain. Dragging feet, etc. Faintly same music as before. They halt. Music clearer. Silence but for music playing. Music dies.*) All day the same old record. All alone in that great empty house. She must be a very old woman now.
- MR. ROONEY      (*indistinctly*). Death and the Maiden.  
*Silence.*
- MRS. ROONEY      You are crying. (*Pause.*) Are you crying?
- MR. ROONEY      (*violently*). Yes! (*They move on. Wind*



*and rain. Dragging feet, etc. They halt. They move on. Wind and rain. Dragging feet, etc. They halt.)* Who is the preacher to-morrow? The incumbent?

MRS. ROONEY No.

MR. ROONEY Thank God for that. Who?

MRS. ROONEY Hardy.

MR. ROONEY "How to be Happy though Married"?

MRS. ROONEY No no, he died, you remember. No connexion.

MR. ROONEY Has he announced the text?

MRS. ROONEY "The Lord upholdeth all that fall and raiseth up all those that be bowed down."  
*(Silence. They join in wild laughter. They move on. Wind and rain. Dragging feet, etc.)* Hold me tighter, Dan! *(Pause.)* Oh yes!  
*They halt.*

MR. ROONEY I hear something behind us.  
*Pause.*

MRS. ROONEY It looks like Jerry. *(Pause.)* It is Jerry.  
*Sound of Jerry's running steps approach-*

*ing. He halts beside them, panting.*

JERRY (*panting*). You dropped—

MRS. ROONEY Take your time, my little man, you will burst a bloodvessel.

JERRY (*panting*). You dropped something, Sir, Mr. Barrell told me to run after you.

MRS. ROONEY Show. (*She takes the object.*) What is it? (*She examines it.*) What is this thing, Dan?

MR. ROONEY Perhaps it is not mine at all.

JERRY Mr. Barrell said it was, Sir.

MRS. ROONEY It looks like a kind of ball. And yet it is not a ball.

MR. ROONEY Give it to me.

MRS. ROONEY (*giving it*). What is it, Dan?

MR. ROONEY It is a thing I carry about with me.

MRS. ROONEY Yes, but what—

MR. ROONEY (*violently*). It is a thing I carry about with me!

*Silence. Mrs. Rooney looks for a penny.*

MRS. ROONEY I have no small money. Have you?

- MR. ROONEY I have none of any kind.
- MRS. ROONEY We are out of change, Jerry. Remind Mr. Rooney on Monday and he will give you a penny for your pains.
- JERRY Yes, Ma'am.
- MR. ROONEY If I am alive.
- JERRY Yessir.  
*Jerry starts running back towards the station.*
- MRS. ROONEY Jerry! (*Jerry halts.*) Did you hear what the hitch was? (*Pause.*) Did you hear what kept the train so late?
- MR. ROONEY How would he have heard? Come on.
- MRS. ROONEY What was it, Jerry?
- JERRY It was a—
- MR. ROONEY Leave the boy alone, he knows nothing! Come on!
- MRS. ROONEY What was it, Jerry?
- JERRY It was a little child, Ma'am.  
*Mr. Rooney groans.*
- MRS. ROONEY What do you mean, it was a little child?
- JERRY \* It was a little child fell out of the carriage,

On to the line, Ma'am. (*Pause.*) Under  
the wheels, Ma'am.

*Silence. Jerry runs off. His steps die away.*  
*Tempest of wind and rain. It abates. They*  
*move on. Dragging steps, etc. They halt.*  
*Tempest of wind and rain.*

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# **Embers**

**A PLAY  
FOR RADIO**

*Embers* was first produced by The British Broadcasting Corporation's Third Programme on June 24, 1959.

*Sea scarcely audible.*

HENRY's boots on shingle. He halts.

*Sea a little louder.*

HENRY     On. (*Sea. Voice louder.*) On! (*He moves on. Boots on shingle. As he goes.*) Stop. (*Boots on shingle. As he goes, louder.*) Stop! (*He halts. Sea a little louder.*) Down. (*Sea. Voice louder.*) Down! (*Slither of shingle as he sits. Sea, still faint, audible throughout what follows whenever pause indicated.*) Who is beside me now? (*Pause.*) An old man, blind and foolish. (*Pause.*) My father, back from the dead, to be with me. (*Pause.*) As if he hadn't died. (*Pause.*) No, simply back from the dead to be with me, in this strange place. (*Pause.*) Can he hear me? (*Pause.*) Yes, he must hear me. (*Pause.*) To answer me? (*Pause.*) No, he doesn't answer me. (*Pause.*) Just to be with me. (*Pause.*) That sound you hear is the sea. (*Pause. Louder.*) I say that sound you hear is the



sea, we are sitting on the strand. (*Pause.*)  
 I mention it because the sound is so  
 strange, so unlike the sound of the sea,  
 that if you didn't see what it was you  
 wouldn't know what it was. (*Pause.*)  
 Hooves! (*Pause. Louder.*) Hooves! (*Sound  
 of hooves walking on hard road. They die  
 rapidly away. Pause.*) Again! (*Hooves as  
 before. Pause. Excitedly.*) Train it to mark  
 time! Shoe it with steel and tie it up in the  
 yard, have it stamp all day! (*Pause.*) A ten  
 ton mammoth back from the dead, shoe it  
 with steel and have it tramp the world  
 down! (*Pause.*) Listen to it! (*Pause.*)  
 Listen to the light now, you always loved  
 light, not long past noon and all the shore  
 in shadow and the sea out as far as the  
 island. (*Pause.*) You would never live this  
 side of the bay, you wanted the sun on the  
 water for that evening bathe you took once  
 too often. But when I got your money I  
 moved across, as perhaps you may know.  
 (*Pause.*) We never found your body, you  
 know, that held up probate an unconscion-  
 able time, they said there was nothing to

prove you hadn't run away from us all and alive and well under a false name in the Argentine for example, that grieved mother greatly. (*Pause.*) I'm like you in that, can't stay away from it, but I never go in, no, I think the last time I went in was with you. (*Pause.*) Just be near it. (*Pause.*) Today it's calm, but I often hear it above in the house and walking the roads and start talking, oh just loud enough to drown it, nobody notices. (*Pause.*) But I'd be talking now no matter where I was, I once went to Switzerland to get away from the cursed thing and never stopped all the time I was there. (*Pause.*) I usen't to need anyone, just to myself, stories, there was a great one about an old fellow called Bolton, I never finished it, I never finished anything, everything always went on for ever. (*Pause.*) Bolton. (*Pause. Louder.*) Bolton! (*Pause.*) There before the fire. (*Pause.*) Before the fire with all the shutters . . . no, hangings, hangings, all the hangings drawn and the light, no light, only the light of the fire, sitting there in the

... no, standing, standing there on the hearthrug in the dark before the fire with his arms on the chimney-piece and his head on his arms, standing there waiting in the dark before the fire in his old red dressing-gown and no sound in the house of any kind, only the sound of the fire. (*Pause.*) Standing there in his old red dressing-gown might go on fire any minute like when he was a child, no, that was his pyjamas, standing there waiting in the dark, no light, only the light of the fire, and no sound of any kind, only the fire, an old man in great trouble. (*Pause.*) Ring then at the door and over he goes to the window and looks out between the hangings, fine old chap, very big and strong, bright winter's night, snow everywhere, bitter cold, white world, cedar boughs bending under load, and then as the arm goes up to ring again recognizes ... Holloway ... (*long pause*) ... yes, Holloway, recognizes Holloway, goes down and opens. (*Pause.*) Outside all still, not a sound, dog's chain maybe or a bough

groaning if you stood there listening long enough, white world, Holloway with his little black bag, not a sound, bitter cold, full moon small and white, crooked trail of Holloway's galoshes. Vega in the Lyre very green. (*Pause.*) Vega in the Lyre very green. (*Pause.*) Following conversation then on the step, no, in the room, back in the room, following conversation then back in the room, Holloway: "My dear Bolton, it is now past midnight, if you would be good enough—", gets no further, Bolton: "Please! PLEASE!" Dead silence then, not a sound, only the fire, all coal, burning down now. Holloway on the hearthrug trying to toast his arse, Bolton, where's Bolton, no light, only the fire, Bolton at the window, his back to the hangings, holding them a little apart with his hand, looking out, white world, even the spire, white to the vane, most unusual, silence in the house, not a sound, only the fire, no flames now, embers. (*Pause.*) Embers. (*Pause.*) Shifting, lapsing, furtive like, dreadful sound, Holloway on the rug, fine old chap,

six foot, burly, legs apart, hands behind his back holding up the tails of his old macfarlane, Bolton at the window, grand old figure in his old red dressing-gown, back against the hangings, hand stretched out widening the chink, looking out, white world, great trouble, not a sound, only the embers, sound of dying, dying glow, Holloway, Bolton, Bolton, Holloway, old men, great trouble, white world, not a sound. (*Pause.*) Listen to it! (*Pause.*) Close your eyes and listen to it, what would you think it was? (*Pause. Vehement.*) A drip! A drip! (*Sound of drip, rapidly amplified, suddenly cut off.*) Again! (*Drip again. Amplification begins.*) No! (*Drip cut off. Pause.*) Father! (*Pause. Agitated.*) Stories, stories, years and years of stories, till the need came on me, for someone, to be with me, anyone, a stranger, to talk to, imagine he hears me, years of that, and then, now, for someone who . . . knew me, in the old days, anyone, to be with me, imagine he hears me, what I am, now. (*Pause.*) No good either.

(*Pause.*) Not there either. (*Pause.*) Try again. (*Pause.*) White world, not a sound. (*Pause.*) Holloway. (*Pause.*) Holloway says he'll go, damned if he'll sit up all night before a black grate, doesn't understand, call a man out, an old friend, in the cold and dark, an old friend, urgent need, bring the bag, then not a word, no explanation, no heat, no light, Bolton: "Please! PLEASE!", Holloway, no refreshment, no welcome, chilled to the medulla, catch his death, can't understand, strange treatment, old friend, says he'll go, doesn't move, not a sound, fire dying, white beam from window, ghastly scene, wishes to God he hadn't come, no good, fire out, bitter cold, great trouble, white world, not a sound, no good. (*Pause.*) No good. (*Pause.*) Can't do it. (*Pause.*) Listen to it! (*Pause.*) Father! (*Pause.*) You wouldn't know me now, you'd be sorry you ever had me, but you were that already, a washout, that's the last I heard from you, a washout. (*Pause. Imitating father's voice.*) "Are you coming for a dip?" "No." "Come on, come

on." "No." Glare, stump to door, turn, glare. "A washout, that's all you are, a washout!" (*Violent slam of door. Pause.*) Again! (*Slam. Pause.*) Slam life shut like that! (*Pause.*) Washout. (*Pause.*) Wish to Christ she had. (*Pause.*) Never met Ada, did you, or did you, I can't remember, no matter, no one'd know her now. (*Pause.*) What turned her against me do you think, the child I suppose, horrid little creature, wish to God we'd never had her, I used to walk with her in the fields, Jesus that was awful, she wouldn't let go my hand and I mad to talk. "Run along now, Addie, and look at the lambs." (*Imitating ADDIE's voice.*) "No papa." "Go on now, go on." (*Plaintive.*) "No papa." (*Violent.*) "Go on with you now when you're told and look at the lambs!" (*ADDIE's loud wail. Pause.*) Ada too, conversation with her, that was something, that's what hell will be like, small chat to the babbling of Lethe about the good old days when we wished we were dead. (*Pause.*) Price of margarine fifty years ago. (*Pause.*) And now. (*Pause.*)

*With solemn indignation.*) Price of blue-band now! (*Pause.*) Father! (*Pause.*) Tired of talking to you. (*Pause.*) That was always the way, walk all over the mountains with you talking and talking and then suddenly mum and home in misery and not a word to a soul for weeks, sulky little bastard, better off dead, better off dead. (*Long pause.*) Ada. (*Pause. Louder.*) Ada!

ADA (*low remote voice throughout*). Yes.

HENRY Have you been there long?

ADA Some little time. (*Pause.*) Why do you stop, don't mind me. (*Pause.*) Do you want me to go away? (*Pause.*) Where is Addie?

*Pause.*

HENRY With her music master. (*Pause.*) Are you going to answer me today?

ADA You shouldn't be sitting on the cold stones, they're bad for your growths. Raise



yourself up till I slip my shawl under you.  
*(Pause.)* Is that better?

HENRY No comparison, no comparison. *(Pause.)*  
 Are you going to sit down beside me?

ADA Yes. *(No sound as she sits.)* Like that?  
*(Pause.)* Or do you prefer like that?  
*(Pause.)* You don't care. *(Pause.)* Chilly  
 enough I imagine, I hope you put on your  
 jaegers. *(Pause.)* Did you put on your  
 jaegers, Henry?

HENRY What happened was this, I put them on  
 and then I took them off again and then I  
 put them on again and then I took them  
 off again and then I took them on again  
 and then I—

ADA Have you them on now?

HENRY I don't know. *(Pause.)* Hooves! *(Pause.*  
*Louder.)* Hooves! *(Sound of hooves*  
*walking on hard road. They die rapidly*  
*away.)* Again!

*Hooves as before. Pause.*

ADA Did you hear them?

HENRY Not well.

ADA Galloping?

HENRY No. (*Pause.*) Could a horse mark time?

*Pause.*

ADA I'm not sure that I know what you mean.

HENRY (*irritably*). Could a horse be trained to stand still and mark time with its four legs?

ADA Oh. (*Pause.*) The ones I used to fancy all did. (*She laughs. Pause.*) Laugh, Henry, it's not every day I crack a joke. (*Pause.*) Laugh, Henry, do that for me.

HENRY You wish *me* to laugh?

ADA You laughed so charmingly once, I think that's what first attracted me to you. That and your smile. (*Pause.*) Come on, it will be like old times.

*Pause. He tries to laugh, fails.*

HENRY Perhaps I should begin with the smile.

(*Pause for smile.*) Did that attract you?  
 (*Pause.*) Now I'll try again. (*Long  
 horrible laugh.*) Any of the old charm  
 there?

ADA Oh Henry!

*Pause.*

HENRY Listen to it! (*Pause.*) Lips and claws!  
 (*Pause.*) Get away from it! Where it  
 couldn't get at me! The Pampas! What?

ADA Calm yourself.

HENRY And I live on the brink of it! Why?  
 Professional obligations? (*Brief laugh.*)  
 Reasons of health? (*Brief laugh.*) Family  
 ties? (*Brief laugh.*) A woman? (*Laugh in  
 which she joins.*) Some old grave I cannot  
 tear myself away from? (*Pause.*) Listen to  
 it! What is it like?

ADA It is like an old sound I used to hear.  
 (*Pause.*) It is like another time, in the  
 same place. (*Pause.*) It was rough, the  
 spray came flying over us. (*Pause.*)  
 Strange it should have been rough then.

(*Pause.*) And calm now.

*Pause.*

HENRY     Let us get up and go.

ADA        Go? Where? and Addie? She would be very distressed if she came and found you had gone without her. (*Pause.*) What do you suppose is keeping her?

*Smart blow of cylindrical ruler on piano case. Unsteadily, ascending and descending, ADDIE plays scale of A Flat Major, hands first together, then reversed. Pause.*

MUSIC MASTER     (*Italian accent*). Santa Cecilia!

*Pause.*

ADDIE       Will I play my piece now please?

*Pause. MUSIC MASTER beats two bars of waltz time with ruler on piano case. ADDIE plays opening bars of Chopin's 5th Waltz in A Flat Major. MUSIC MASTER beating time lightly with ruler as she plays. In first chord of bass, bar 5, she plays E instead of F. Resounding blow of ruler on piano case.*

ADDIE *stops playing.*

MUSIC MASTER (violently). Fa!

ADDIE (tearfully). What?

MUSIC MASTER (violently). Eff! Eff!

ADDIE (tearfully). Where?

MUSIC MASTER (violently). Qua! (*He thumps note.*) Fa!

*Pause. ADDIE begins again, MUSIC MASTER beating time lightly with ruler. When she comes to bar 5 she makes same mistake. Tremendous blow of ruler on piano case. ADDIE stops playing, begins to wail.*

MUSIC MASTER (frenziedly). Eff! Eff! (*He hammers note.*) Eff! (*He hammers note.*) Eff!

*Hammered note, "eff" and ADDIE's wail amplified to paroxysm, then suddenly cut off. Pause.*

ADA You are silent today.

HENRY It was not enough to drag her into the world, now she must play the piano.

ADA She must learn. She shall learn. That—and riding.

*Hooves walking.\**

RIDING MASTER Now Miss! Elbows in Miss! Hands down Miss! (*Hooves trotting.*) Now Miss! Back straight Miss! Knees in Miss! (*Hooves cantering.*) Now Miss! Tummy in Miss! Chin up Miss! (*Hooves galloping.*) Now Miss! Eyes front Miss! (*ADDIE begins to wail.*) Now Miss! Now Miss!

*Galloping hooves, “now Miss!” and ADDIE’S wail amplified to paroxysm, then suddenly cut off. Pause.*

ADA What are you thinking of? (*Pause.*) I was never taught, until it was too late. All my life I regretted it.

HENRY What was your strong point, I forget.

ADA Oh . . . geometry I suppose, plane and solid. (*Pause.*) First plane, then solid. (*Shingle as he gets up.*) Why do you get up?

HENRY I thought I might try and get as far as the water's edge. (*Pause. With a sigh.*) And back. (*Pause.*) Stretch my old bones.

*Pause.*

ADA Well why don't you? (*Pause.*) Don't stand there thinking about it. (*Pause.*) Don't stand there staring. (*Pause. He goes towards sea. Boots on shingle, say ten steps. He halts at water's edge. Pause. Sea a little louder. Distant.*) Don't wet your good boots.

*Pause.*

HENRY Don't, don't . . .

*Sea suddenly rough.*

ADA (*twenty years earlier, imploring*). Don't! Don't!

HENRY (*do., urgent*). Darling!

ADA (*do., more feebly*). Don't!

HENRY (*do., exultantly*). Darling!

*Rough sea. ADA cries out. Cry and sea*

*amplified, cut off. End of evocation. Pause. Sea calm. He goes back up deeply shelving beach. Boots laborious on shingle. He halts. Pause. He moves on. He halts. Pause. Sea calm and faint.*

ADA Don't sit there gaping. Sit down. (*Pause. Shingle as he sits.*) On the shawl. (*Pause.*) Are you afraid we might touch? (*Pause.*) Henry.

HENRY Yes.

ADA You should see a doctor about your talking, it's worse, what must it be like for Addie? (*Pause.*) Do you know what she said to me once, when she was still quite small, she said, Mummy, why does Daddy keep on talking all the time? She heard you in the lavatory. I didn't know what to answer.

HENRY Daddy! Addie! (*Pause.*) I told you to tell her I was praying. (*Pause.*) Roaring prayers at God and his saints.

ADA It's very bad for the child. (*Pause.*) It's silly to say it keeps you from hearing it, it



doesn't keep you from hearing it and even if it does you shouldn't be hearing it, there must be something wrong with your brain.

*Pause.*

HENRY     That! I shouldn't be hearing that!

ADA     I don't think you are hearing it. And if you are what's wrong with it, it's a lovely peaceful gentle soothing sound, why do you hate it? (*Pause.*) And if you hate it why don't you keep away from it? Why are you always coming down here? (*Pause.*) There's something wrong with your brain, you ought to see Holloway, he's alive still, isn't he?

*Pause.*

HENRY     (*wildly*). Thuds, I want thuds! Like this! (*He fumbles in the shingle, catches up two big stones and starts dashing them together.*) Stone! (*Clash.*) Stone! (*Clash. "Stone!" and clash amplified, cut off. Pause. He throws one stone away. Sound of its fall.*) That's life! (*He throws the other*

*stone away. Sound of its fall.*) Not this . . .  
(*pause*) . . . sucking!

ADA And why life? (*Pause.*) Why life, Henry?  
(*Pause.*) Is there anyone about?

HENRY Not a living soul.

ADA I thought as much. (*Pause.*) When we  
longed to have it to ourselves there was  
always someone. Now that it does not  
matter the place is deserted.

HENRY Yes, you were always very sensitive to  
being seen in gallant conversation. The  
least feather of smoke on the horizon and  
you adjusted your dress and became  
immersed in the Manchester Guardian.  
(*Pause.*) The hole is still there, after all  
these years. (*Pause. Louder.*) The hole is  
still there.

ADA What hole? The earth is full of holes.

HENRY Where we did it at last for the first time.

ADA Ah yes, I think I remember. (*Pause.*) The  
place has not changed.

HENRY     Oh yes it has, *I* can see it. (*Confidentially.*)  
               There is a levelling going on! (*Pause.*)  
               What age is she now?

ADA        I have lost count of time.

HENRY     Twelve? Thirteen? (*Pause.*) Fourteen?

ADA        I really could not tell you, Henry.

HENRY     It took us a long time to have her. (*Pause.*)  
               Years we kept hammering away at it.  
               (*Pause.*) But we did it in the end. (*Pause.*  
               *Sigh.*) We had her in the end. (*Pause.*)  
               Listen to it! (*Pause.*) It's not so bad when  
               you get out on it. (*Pause.*) Perhaps I  
               should have gone into the merchant navy.

ADA        It's only on the surface, you know.  
               Underneath all is as quiet as the grave. Not  
               a sound. All day, all night, not a sound.

*Pause.*

HENRY     Now I walk about with the gramophone.  
               But I forgot it today.

ADA        There is no sense in that. (*Pause.*) There  
               is no sense in trying to drown it. (*Pause.*)

See Holloway.

*Pause.*

HENRY Let us go for a row.

ADA A row? And Addie? She would be very distressed if she came and found you had gone for a row without her. (*Pause.*) Who were you with just now? (*Pause.*) Before you spoke to me.

HENRY I was trying to be with my father.

ADA Oh. (*Pause.*) No difficulty about that.

HENRY I mean I was trying to get him to be with me. (*Pause.*) You seem a little cruder than usual today, Ada. (*Pause.*) I was asking him if he ever met you, I couldn't remember.

ADA Well?

HENRY He doesn't answer any more.

ADA I suppose you have worn him out. (*Pause.*) You wore him out living and now you are wearing him out dead. (*Pause.*) The time

comes when one cannot speak to you any more. (*Pause.*) The time will come when no one will speak to you at all, not even complete strangers. (*Pause.*) You will be quite alone with your voice, there will be no other voice in the world but yours. (*Pause.*) Do you hear me?

*Pause.*

HENRY I can't remember if he met you.

ADA You know he met me.

HENRY No, Ada, I don't know, I'm sorry, I have forgotten almost everything connected with you.

ADA You weren't there. Just your mother and sister. I had called to fetch you, as arranged. We were to go bathing together.

*Pause.*

HENRY (*irritably*). Drive on, drive on! Why do people always stop in the middle of what they are saying?

ADA None of them knew where you were. Your bed had not been slept in. They were all shouting at one another. Your sister said

she would throw herself off the cliff. Your father got up and went out, slamming the door. I left soon afterwards and passed him on the road. He did not see me. He was sitting on a rock looking out to sea. I never forgot his posture. And yet it was a common one. You used to have it sometimes. Perhaps just the stillness, as if he had been turned to stone. I could never make it out.

*Pause.*

HENRY      Keep on, keep on! (*Imploringly.*) Keep it going, Ada, every syllable is a second gained.

ADA          That's all, I'm afraid. (*Pause.*) Go on now with your father or your stories or whatever you were doing, don't mind me any more.

HENRY      I can't! (*Pause.*) I can't do it any more!

ADA          You were doing it a moment ago, before you spoke to me.

HENRY      (*angrily.*) I can't do it any more now! (*Pause.*) Christ!

*Pause.*

ADA Yes, you know what I mean, there are attitudes remain in one's mind for reasons that are clear, the carriage of a head for example, bowed when one would have thought it should be lifted, and vice versa, or a hand suspended in mid air, as if unowned. That kind of thing. But with your father sitting on the rock that day nothing of the kind, no detail you could put your finger on and say, How very peculiar! No, I could never make it out. Perhaps, as I said, just the great stillness of the whole body, as if all the breath had left it. (*Pause.*) Is this rubbish a help to you, Henry? (*Pause.*) I can try and go on a little if you wish. (*Pause.*) No? (*Pause.*) Then I think I'll be getting back.

HENRY Not yet! You needn't speak. Just listen. Not even. Be with me. (*Pause.*) Ada! (*Pause. Louder.*) Ada! (*Pause.*) Christ! (*Pause.*) Hooves! (*Pause. Louder.*) Hooves! (*Pause.*) Christ! (*Long pause.*) Left soon afterwards, passed you on the road, didn't see her, looking out to . . . (*Pause.*) Can't have been looking out to sea. (*Pause.*)

Unless you had gone round the other side.  
*(Pause.)* Had you gone round the  
 cliff side? *(Pause.)* Father! *(Pause.)* Must  
 have I suppose. *(Pause.)* Stands watching  
 you a moment, then on down path to tram,  
 up on open top and sits down in front.  
*(Pause.)* Sits down in front. *(Pause.)*  
 Suddenly feels uneasy and gets down  
 again, conductor: "Changed your mind,  
 Miss?", goes back up path, no sign of you.  
*(Pause.)* Very unhappy and uneasy, hangs  
 round a bit, not a soul about, cold wind  
 coming in off sea, goes back down path  
 and takes tram home. *(Pause.)* Takes tram  
 home. *(Pause.)* Christ! *(Pause.)* "My dear  
 Bolton . . ." *(Pause.)* "If it's an injection  
 you want, Bolton, let down your trousers  
 and I'll give you one, I have a panhyster-  
 ectomy at nine," meaning of course the  
 anaesthetic. *(Pause.)* Fire out, bitter cold,  
 white world, great trouble, not a sound.  
*(Pause.)* Bolton starts playing with the  
 curtain, no, hanging, difficult to describe,  
 draws it back, no, kind of gathers it  
 towards him and the moon comes flooding  
 in, then lets it fall back, heavy velvet



affair, and pitch black in the room, then  
 towards him again, white, black, white,  
 black, Holloway: "Stop that for the love of  
 God, Bolton, do you want to finish me?"  
 (*Pause.*) Black, white, black, white, mad-  
 dening thing. (*Pause.*) Then he suddenly  
 strikes a match, Bolton does, lights a  
 candle, catches it up above his head,  
 walks over and looks Holloway full in the  
 eye. (*Pause.*) Not a word, just the look, the  
 old blue eye, very glassy, lids worn thin,  
 lashes gone, whole thing swimming, and  
 the candle shaking over his head. (*Pause.*)  
 Tears? (*Pause. Long laugh.*) Good God no!  
 (*Pause.*) Not a word, just the look, the old  
 blue eye, Holloway: "If you want a shot  
 say so and let me get to hell out of here."  
 (*Pause.*) "We've had this before, Bolton,  
 don't ask me to go through it again."  
 (*Pause.*) Bolton: "Please!" (*Pause.*)  
 "Please!" (*Pause.*) "Please, Holloway!"  
 (*Pause.*) Candle shaking and guttering all  
 over the place, lower now, old arm tired,  
 takes it in the other hand and holds it high  
 again, that's it, that was always it, night,  
 and the embers cold, and the glim shaking

in your old fist, saying, Please! Please!  
 (*Pause.*) Begging. (*Pause.*) Of the poor.  
 (*Pause.*) Ada! (*Pause.*) Father! (*Pause.*)  
 Christ! (*Pause.*) Holds it high again,  
 naughty world, fixes Holloway, eyes  
 drowned, won't ask again, just the look,  
 Holloway covers his face, not a sound,  
 white world, bitter cold, ghastly scene, old  
 men, great trouble, no good. (*Pause.*) No  
 good. (*Pause.*) Christ! (*Pause. Shingle as  
 he gets up. He goes towards sea. Boots on  
 shingle. He halts. Pause. Sea a little  
 louder.*) On. (*Pause. He moves on. Boots  
 on shingle. He halts at water's edge.  
 Pause. Sea a little louder.*) Little book.  
 (*Pause.*) This evening . . . (*Pause.*)  
 Nothing this evening. (*Pause.*) Tomorrow  
 . . . tomorrow . . . plumber at nine, then  
 nothing. (*Pause. Puzzled.*) Plumber at  
 nine? (*Pause.*) Ah yes, the waste. (*Pause.*)  
 Words. (*Pause.*) Saturday . . . nothing.  
 Sunday . . . Sunday . . . nothing all day.  
 (*Pause.*) Nothing, all day nothing. (*Pause.*)  
 All day all night nothing. (*Pause.*) Not  
 a sound.

*Sea.*



# **Act Without Words I**

**A MIME FOR  
ONE PLAYER**

**Translated from the  
French by the author**

*Act Without Words I (Acte sans Paroles)* was first performed at the Royal Court Theatre in London on April 3, 1957. It was directed and performed by Deryk Mendel, the decor was designed by Jacques Noel and the music composed by John Beckett.

Desert. Dazzling light.

The man is flung backwards on stage from right wing. He falls, gets up immediately, dusts himself, turns aside, reflects.

Whistle from right wing.

He reflects, goes out right.

Immediately flung back on stage he falls, gets up immediately, dusts himself, turns aside, reflects.

Whistle from left wing.

He reflects, goes out left.

Immediately flung back on stage he falls, gets up immediately, dusts himself, turns aside, reflects.

Whistle from left wing.

He reflects, goes towards left wing, hesitates, thinks better of it, halts, turns aside, reflects.

A little tree descends from flies, lands. It has a single bough some three yards from ground and at its summit a meager tuft of palms casting at its foot a circle of shadow.

He continues to reflect.

Whistle from above.

He turns, sees tree, reflects, goes to it, sits down in its shadow, looks at his hands.

A pair of tailor's scissors descends from flies, comes to rest before tree, a yard from ground.

He continues to look at his hands.

Whistle from above.

He looks up, sees scissors, takes them and starts to trim his nails.

The palms close like a parasol, the shadow disappears.

He drops scissors, reflects.

A tiny carafe, to which is attached a huge label inscribed WATER, descends from

flies, comes to rest some three yards from ground.

He continues to reflect.

Whistle from above.

He looks up, sees carafe, reflects, gets up, goes and stands under it, tries in vain to reach it, renounces, turns aside, reflects.

A big cube descends from flies, lands.

He continues to reflect.

Whistle from above.

He turns, sees cube, looks at it, at carafe, reflects, goes to cube, takes it up, carries it over and sets it down under carafe, tests its stability, gets up on it, tries in vain to reach carafe, renounces, gets down, carries cube back to its place, turns aside, reflects.

A second smaller cube descends from flies, lands.

He continues to reflect.



Whistle from above.

He turns, sees second cube, looks at it, at carafe, goes to second cube, takes it up, carries it over and sets it down under carafe, tests its stability, gets up on it, tries in vain to reach carafe, renounces, gets down, takes up second cube to carry it back to its place, hesitates, thinks better of it, sets it down, goes to big cube, takes it up, carries it over and puts it on small one, tests their stability, gets up on them, the cubes collapse, he falls, gets up immediately, brushes himself, reflects.

He takes up small cube, puts it on big one, tests their stability, gets up on them and is about to reach carafe when it is pulled up a little way and comes to rest beyond his reach.

He gets down, reflects, carries cubes back to their place, one by one, turns aside, reflects.

A third still smaller cube descends from flies, lands.

He continues to reflect.

Whistle from above.

He turns, sees third cube, looks at it,  
reflects, turns aside, reflects.

The third cube is pulled up and disappears  
in flies.

Beside carafe a rope descends from flies,  
with knots to facilitate ascent.

He continues to reflect.

Whistle from above.

He turns, sees rope, reflects, goes to it,  
climbs up it and is about to reach carafe  
when rope is let out and deposits him  
back on ground.

He reflects, looks around for scissors, sees  
them, goes and picks them up, returns to  
rope and starts to cut it with scissors.

The rope is pulled up, lifts him off ground,  
he hangs on, succeeds in cutting rope,  
falls back on ground, drops scissors, falls,

gets up again immediately, brushes himself, reflects.

The rope is pulled up quickly and disappears in flies.

With length of rope in his possession he makes a lasso with which he tries to lasso carafe.

The carafe is pulled up quickly and disappears in flies.

He turns aside, reflects.

He goes with lasso in his hand to tree, looks at bough, turns and looks at cubes, looks again at bough, drops lasso, goes to cubes, takes up small one, carries it over and sets it down under bough, goes back for big one, takes it up and carries it over under bough, makes to put it on small one, hesitates, thinks better of it, sets it down, takes up small one and puts it on big one, tests their stability, turns aside and stoops to pick up lasso.

The bough folds down against trunk.

He straightens up with lasso in his hand,  
turns and sees what has happened.

He drops lasso, turns aside, reflects.

He carries back cubes to their place, one  
by one, goes back for lasso, carries it over  
to cubes and lays it in a neat coil on  
small one.

He turns aside, reflects.

Whistle from right wing.

He reflects, goes out right.

Immediately flung back on stage he falls,  
gets up immediately, brushes himself,  
turns aside, reflects.

Whistle from left wing.

He does not move.

He looks at his hands, looks around for  
scissors, sees them, goes and picks them  
up, starts to trim his nails, stops, reflects,  
runs his finger along blade of scissors,  
goes and lays them on small cube, turns

aside, opens his collar, frees his neck  
and fingers it.

The small cube is pulled up and  
disappears in flies, carrying away rope  
and scissors.

He turns to take scissors, sees what has  
happened.

He turns aside, reflects.

He goes and sits down on big cube.

The big cube is pulled from under him.  
He falls. The big cube is pulled up and  
disappears in flies.

He remains lying on his side, his face  
towards auditorium, staring before him.

The carafe descends from flies and comes  
to rest a few feet from his body.

He does not move.

Whistle from above.

He does not move.

The carafe descends further, dangles and  
plays about his face.

He does not move.

The carafe is pulled up and disappears  
in flies.

The bough returns to horizontal,  
the palms open, the shadow returns.

Whistle from above.

He does not move.

The tree is pulled up and disappears in  
flies.

He looks at his hands.

CURTAIN

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# **Act Without Words II**

**A MIME FOR  
TWO PLAYERS**

**Translated from the  
French by the author**





**NOTE** This mime should be played on a low and narrow platform at back of stage, violently lit in its entire length, the rest of the stage being in darkness. Frieze effect.

A is slow, awkward ( gags dressing and undressing ), absent. B brisk, rapid, precise. The two actions therefore, though B has more to do than A, should have approximately the same duration.

**ARGUMENT** Beside each other on ground, two yards from right wing, two sacks, A's and B's, A's being to right ( as seen from auditorium ) of B's, i.e. nearer right wing. On ground beside sack B a little pile of clothes (C) neatly folded ( coat and trousers surmounted by boots and hat ). Enter goad right, strictly horizontal. The point stops a foot short of sack A. Pause. The point draws back, pauses, darts forward into sack, withdraws, recoils to a foot short of sack. Pause. The sack does not move. The point draws back

again, a little further than before, pauses, darts forward again into sack, withdraws, recoils to a foot short of sack. Pause. The sack moves. Exit goad.

A, wearing shirt, crawls out of sack, halts, broods, prays, broods, gets to his feet, broods, takes a little bottle of pills from his shirt pocket, broods, swallows a pill, puts bottle back, broods, goes to clothes, broods, puts on clothes, broods, takes a large partly eaten carrot from coat pocket, bites off a piece, chews an instant, spits it out with disgust, puts carrot back, broods, picks up two sacks, carries them bowed and staggering on his back half way to left wing, sets them down, broods, takes off clothes (except shirt), lets them fall in an untidy heap, broods, takes another pill, broods, kneels, prays, crawls into sack and lies still, sack A being now to left of sack B.

Pause.

Enter goad right on wheeled support (one

wheel). The point stops a foot short of sack B. Pause. The point draws back, pauses, darts forward into sack, withdraws, recoils to a foot short of sack. Pause. The sack moves. Exit goad.

B, wearing shirt, crawls out of sack, gets to his feet, takes from shirt pocket and consults a large watch, puts watch back, does exercises, consults watch, takes a tooth brush from shirt pocket and brushes teeth vigorously, puts brush back, rubs scalp vigorously, takes a comb from shirt pocket and combs hair, puts comb back, consults watch, goes to clothes, puts them on, consults watch, takes a brush from coat pocket and brushes clothes vigorously, brushes hair vigorously, puts brush back, takes a little mirror from coat pocket and inspects appearance, puts mirror back, takes carrot from coat pocket, bites off a piece, chews and swallows with appetite, puts carrot back, consults watch, takes a map from coat pocket and consults it, puts map back, consults watch, takes a

compass from coat pocket and consults it, puts compass back, consults watch, picks up two sacks and carries them bowed and staggering on his back to two yards short of left wing, sets them down, consults watch, takes off clothes (except shirt), folds them in a neat pile, consults watch, does exercises, consults watch, rubs scalp, combs hair, brushes teeth, consults and winds watch, crawls into sack and lies still, sack B being now to left of sack A as originally.

Pause.

Enter goad right on wheeled support (two wheels). The point stops a foot short of sack A. Pause. The point draws back, pauses, darts forward into sack. withdraws, recoils to a foot short of sack. Pause. The sack does not move. The point draws back again, a little further than before, pauses, darts forward again into sack, withdraws, recoils to a foot short of sack. Pause. The sack moves.

Exit goad.

A crawls out of sack, halts, broods, prays.

CURTAIN

POSITION I



POSITION II



POSITION III



STAGE FRONT