

[Pause. WINNIE's eyes front. Happy expression appears, grows.]

WINNIE: Win! [Pause.] Oh this is a happy day, this will have been another happy day! [Pause.] After all. [Pause.] So far. [Pause. She hums tentatively beginning of song, then sings softly, musical-box tune.]

Though I say not
What I may not
Let you hear,
Yet the swaying
Dance is saying,
Love me dear!
Every touch of fingers
Tells me what I know,
Says for you,
It's true, it's true,
You love me so!

[Pause. Happy expression off. She closes her eyes. Bell rings loudly. She opens her eyes. She smiles, gazing front. She turns her eyes, smiling, to WILLIE, still on his hands and knees looking up at her. Smile off. They look at each other. Long pause.]

CURTAIN

All That Fall

A play for radio

SAMUEL BECKETT
The Complete
Dramatic Works

ff *faber and faber*
faber and faber *de zure*
LONDON · BOSTON 1986

Samuel Beckett, All that fall

Written in English in July-September 1956. First published by Grove Press, New York, in 1957. First published in Britain by Faber and Faber, London, also in 1957. First broadcast by the BBC Third Programme on 13 January 1957.

CAST

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.]*

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 today.

[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 TAYLOR: 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 poor 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 rattles, 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 tyre 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 steps.*]

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 halt a moment and let 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.]* 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 today, these new balloon tyres 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 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: Pity!

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 ferrery 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, by-gones by-gones, 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 co-religionists. 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, my 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 handrail? [*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 home, 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.*]

A FEMALE VOICE: [*Sbrill.*] Oh look, Dolly, look!

DOLLY: What, Mamma?

A 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 anyone 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.*]

A 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.

MISS FITT: [*In marvelling aside.*] Ramdam!

A 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 understand . . . 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: 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 net-

work, 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 around me.

MR ROONEY: Have you been drinking again? [*Pause.*] You are quivering like a blancmange. [*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 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 today?

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 whatever 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 excitement! I forgot!

MR ROONEY: [*Quietly.*] Good God!

MRS ROONEY: But you must know, Dan, of course, you were on it. Whatever 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 today, 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 today? [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.]—ruminates 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 healthy 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, backstreet, 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 that 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 today, 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 had 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 really been 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 steps, 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.]

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 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 tomorrow? 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 his 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 approaching. He halts beside them, panting.*]

JERRY: [*Panting.*] You dropped—

MRS ROONEY: Take your time, my little man, you will burst a blood-vessel.

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, Ma'am.

[*Pause.*] 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.*]

END

All dark no begging
 No giving no words
 No sense no need
 Through the scum
 Down a little way
 To whence one glimpse
 Of that wellhead.

[*Pause. Shocked.*] My Lord! [*Sound of club let fall. As before.*] My Lord! [*Shuffling slippers, with halts. They die away. Long pause.*] Bob. [*Pause.*] Bob!

MUSIC: *Brief rude retort.*

WORDS: Music. [*Imploring.*] Music!

[*Pause.*]

MUSIC: *Rap of baton and statement with elements already used or wellhead alone.*

[*Pause.*]

WORDS: Again. [*Pause. Imploring.*] Again!

MUSIC: *As before or only very slightly varied.*

[*Pause.*]

WORDS: *Deep sigh.*

CURTAIN

Cascando.

A radio piece for music and voice

Written in French in 1962, with music by Marcel Mihalovici.
First published in *Dramatische Dichtungen*, vol. 1 (1963). First
published in English in *Evergreen Review* (May/June 1963).
First broadcast in French by the ORTF on 13 October 1963.
First broadcast in English on the BBC Third Programme on 6
October 1964.

OPENER: [*Cold.*] It is the month of May ... for me.

[*Pause.*]

Correct.

[*Pause.*]

I open.

VOICE: [*Low, panting.*] —story ... if you could finish it ...
you could rest ... sleep ... not before ... oh I know ...
the ones I've finished ... thousands and one ... all I ever
did ... in my life ... with my life ... saying to myself ...
finish this one ... it's the right one ... then rest ... sleep
... no more stories ... no more words ... and finished it ...
and not the right one ... couldn't rest ... straight away
another ... to begin ... to finish ... saying to myself ...
finish this one ... then rest ... this time ... it's the right
one ... this time ... you have it ... and finished it ... and
not the right one ... couldn't rest ... straight away another
... but this one ... it's different ... I'll finish it ... I've got
it ... Woburn ... I resume ... a long life ... already ... say
what you like ... a few misfortunes ... that's enough ...
five years later ... ten ... I don't know ... Woburn ... he's
changed ... not enough ... recognizable ... in the shed ...
yet another ... waiting for night ... night to fall ... to go
out ... go on ... elsewhere ... sleep elsewhere ... it's slow
... he lifts his head ... now and then ... his eyes ... to the
window ... it's darkening ... earth darkening ... it's night
... he gets up ... knees first ... then up ... on his feet ...
slips out ... Woburn ... same old coat ... right the sea ...
left the hills ... he has the choice ... he has only—

OPENER: [*With VOICE.*] And I close.

[*Silence.*]

I open the other.

MUSIC:

OPENER: [*With MUSIC.*] And I close.

[Silence.]

I open both.

VOICE: } [Together.] —on ... getting on ... finish ... don't
MUSIC: }
give up ... then rest ... sleep ... not before ... finish ...
this time ... it's the right one ... you have it ... you've got
it ... it's there ... somewhere ... you've got him ... follow
him ... don't lose him ... Woburn story ... getting on ...
finish ... then sleep ... no more stories ... no more words
... come on ... next thing ... he—

OPENER: [With VOICE and MUSIC.] And I close.

[Silence.]

I start again.

VOICE: —down ... gentle slopes ... boren ... giant aspens ...
wind in the boughs ... faint sea ... Woburn ... same old
coat ... he goes on ... stops ... not a soul ... not yet ...
night too bright ... say what you like ... he goes on ...
hugging the bank ... same old stick ... he goes down ...
falls ... on purpose or not ... can't see ... he's down ...
that's what counts ... face in the mud ... arms spread ...
that's the idea ... already ... there already ... no not yet
... he gets up ... knees first ... hands flat ... in the mud ...
head sunk ... then up ... on his feet ... huge bulk ...
come on ... he goes on ... he goes down ... come on ...
in his head ... what's in his head ... a hole ... a shelter ...
a hollow ... in the dunes ... a cave ... vague memory ...
in his head ... of a cave ... he goes down ... no more
trees ... no more bank ... he's changed ... not enough
... night too bright ... soon the dunes ... no more cover
... not a soul ... not—

[Silence.]

MUSIC:
[Silence.]

VOICE: } [Together.] —rest ... sleep ... no more stories ...
MUSIC: }
no more words ... don't give up ... this time ... it's the
right one ... we're there ... I'm there ... somewhere ...
Woburn ... I've got him ... don't lose him ... follow him
... to the end ... come on ... this time ... it's the right one
... finish ... sleep ... Woburn ... come on—

[Silence.]

OPENER: So, at will.

They say, It's in his head.

No. I open.

VOICE: —falls ... again ... on purpose or not ... can't see ...
he's down ... that's what matters ... face in the sand ...
arms spread ... bare dunes ... not a scrub ... same old
coat ... night too bright ... say what you like ... sea
louder ... thunder ... manes of foam ... Woburn ... his
head ... what's in his head ... peace ... peace again ... in
his head ... no further ... no more searching ... sleep ...
no not yet ... he gets up ... knees first ... hands flat ... in
the sand ... head sunk ... then up ... on his feet ... huge
bulk ... same old broadbrim ... jammed down ... come on
... he goes on ... ton weight ... in the sand ... knee-deep ...
he goes down ... sea—

OPENER: [With VOICE.] And I close.

[Silence.]

I open the other.

MUSIC:

OPENER: [With MUSIC.] And I close.

[Silence.]

So, at will.

It's my life, I live on that.

[Pause.]

Correct.

[Pause.]

What do I open?

They say, He opens nothing, he has nothing to open, it's in his head.

They don't see me, they don't see what I do, they don't see what I have, and they say, He opens nothing, he has nothing to open, it's in his head.

I don't protest any more, I don't say any more,

There is nothing in my head.

I don't answer any more.

I open and close.

VOICE: —lights ... of the land ... the island ... the sky ... he need only ... lift his head ... his eyes ... he'd see them ... shine on him ... but no ... he—

[*Silence.*]

MUSIC: [*Brief.*]
[*Silence.*]

OPENER: They say, That is not his life, he does not live on that.

They don't see me, they don't see what my life is, they don't see what I live on, and they say, That is not his life, he does not live on that.

[*Pause.*]

I have lived on it ... till I'm old.

Old enough.

Listen.

VOICE: [*Weakening.*] —this time ... I'm there ... Woburn ... it's him ... I've seen him ... I've got him ... come on ... same old coat ... he goes down ... falls ... falls again ... on purpose or not ... can't see ... he's down ... that's what counts ... come on—

OPENER: [*With* VOICE.] Full strength.

VOICE: —face ... in the stones ... no more sand ... all stones ... that's the idea ... we're there ... this time ... no not yet ... he gets up ... knees first ... hands flat ... in the stones ... head sunk ... then up ... on his feet ... huge bulk ... Woburn ... faster ... he goes on ... he goes down ... he—
[*Silence.*]

MUSIC: [*Weakening.*]

OPENER: [*With* MUSIC.] Full strength.

MUSIC:

[*Silence.*]

OPENER: That's not all.

I open both.

Listen.

VOICE:] —sleep ... no further ... no more

MUSIC:] [*Together.*]

searching ... to find him ... in the dark ... to see him ...

.....
to say him ... for whom ... that's it ... no matter ...

.....
never him ... never right ... start again ... in the dark ...

.....
done with that ... this time ... it's the right one ... we're

.....
there ... nearly ... finish—

[*Silence.*]

OPENER: From one world to another, it's as though they drew together. We have not much further to go. Good.

VOICE:] —nearly ... I've got him ... I've seen

MUSIC:] [*Together.*]

him ... I've said him ... we're there ... nearly ... no more

.....
stories ... all false ... this time ... it's the right one ... I

.....
have it ... finish ... sleep ... Woburn ... it's him ... I've

.....
got him ... follow him ... to—

[*Silence.*]

OPENER: Good.

[*Pause.*]

Yes, correct, the month of May.

You know, the reawakening.

[*Pause.*]

I open.

VOICE: —no tiller ... no thwarts ... no oars ... afloat ... sucked out ... then back ... aground ... drags free ... out ...
Woburn ... he fills it ... flat out ... face in the bilge ...

arms spread ... same old coat ... hands clutching ... the
gunnels ... no ... I don't know ... I see him ... he clings
on ... out to sea ... heading nowhere ... for the island ...
then no more ... else—

[Silence.]

MUSIC:
[Silence.]

OPENER: They said, It's his own, it's his voice, it's in his head.
[Pause.]

VOICE: —faster ... out ... driving out ... rearing ... plunging
... heading nowhere ... for the island ... then no more
... elsewhere ... anywhere ... heading anywhere ...
lights—
[Pause.]

OPENER: No resemblance.
I answered, And that ...

MUSIC: [Brief.]
[Silence.]

OPENER: ... is that mine too?
But I don't answer any more.
And they don't say anything any more.
They have quit.
Good.

[Pause.]

Yes, correct, the month of May, the close of May.
The long days.

[Pause.]

I open.

[Pause.]

I'm afraid to open.

But I must open.

So I open.

VOICE: —come on ... Woburn ... arms spread ... same old
coat ... face in the bilge ... he clings on ... island gone ...
far astern ... heading out ... open sea ... land gone ... his
head ... what's in his head ... Woburn—

OPENER: [With VOICE.] Come on! Come on!

VOICE: —at last ... we're there ... no further ... no more
searching ... in the dark ... elsewhere ... always elsewhere

... we're there ... nearly ... Woburn ... hang on ... don't
let go ... lights gone ... of the land ... all gone ... nearly
all ... too far ... too late ... of the sky ... those ... if you
like ... he need only ... turn over ... he'd see them ...
shine on him ... but no ... he clings on ... Woburn ... he's
changed ... nearly enough—

[Silence.]

MUSIC:
OPENER: [With MUSIC.] God.

MUSIC:
[Silence.]

OPENER: God God.

[Pause.]

There was a time I asked myself, What is it.
There were times I answered, It's the outing.

Two outings.

Then the return.

Where?

To the village.

To the inn.

Two outings, then at last the return, to the village, to the
inn, by the only road that leads there.

An image, like any other.

But I don't answer any more.

I open.

VOICE:] —don't let go ... finish ... it's the

MUSIC:] [Together.]
right one ... this time ... I have it ... we're there ...

.....
Woburn ... nearly—

OPENER: [With VOICE and MUSIC.] As though they had linked
their arms.

VOICE:] —sleep ... no more stories ... come on

MUSIC:] [Together.]
... Woburn ... it's him ... see him ... say him ... to the

.....
end ... don't let go—

OPENER: [With VOICE and MUSIC.] Good.

VOICE:] [Together.] —nearly ... just a few more ... a few
MUSIC:]
more ... I'm there ... nearly ... Woburn ... it's him ... it
.....
was him ... I've got him ... nearly—

OPENER: [With VOICE and MUSIC, fervently.] Good!

VOICE:] —this time ... it's the right one ...
MUSIC:] [Together.]
finish ... no more stories ... sleep ... we're there ... nearly
.....
... just a few more ... don't let go ... Woburn ... he clings
.....
on ... come on ... come on—
.....
[Silence.]

CURTAIN

Play

A play in one act

