

Footfalls

M: Would you like me to inject you again?

V: Yes, but it is too soon.

[Pause.]

M: Would you like me to change your position again?

V: Yes, but it is too soon.

[Pause.]

M: Straighten your pillows? [Pause.] Change your drawsheet?

[Pause.] Pass you the bedpan? [Pause.] The warming-pan?

[Pause.] Dress your sores? [Pause.] Sponge you down?

[Pause.] Moisten your poor lips? [Pause.] Pray with you?

[Pause.] For you? [Pause.] Again.

[Pause.]

V: Yes, but it is too soon.

[Pause.]

M: What age am I now?

V: And I? [Pause. No louder.] And I?

M: Ninety.

V: So much?

M: Eighty-nine, ninety.

V: I had you late. [Pause.] In life. [Pause.] Forgive me again.

[Pause. No louder.] Forgive me again.

[M resumes pacing. After one length halts facing front at L.

Pause.]

M: What age am I now?

V: In your forties.

M: So little?

V: I'm afraid so. [Pause. M resumes pacing. After first turn at L.]

May. [Pause. No louder.] May.

M: [Pacing.] Yes, Mother.

V: Will you never have done? [Pause.] Will you never have done

... revolving it all?

M: [Haling.] It?

V: It all. [Pause.] In your poor mind. [Pause.] It all. [Pause.]

It all.

[M resumes pacing. Five seconds. Fade out on strip.

All in darkness. Steps cease.

Pause.

Chime a little fainter. Pause for echoes.

Fade up to a little less on strip. Rest in darkness.

M discovered facing front at R.

Pause.]

V: I walk here now. [Pause.] Rather I come and stand. [Pause.]

At nightfall. [Pause.] She fancies she is alone. [Pause.] See

how still she stands, how stark, with her face to the wall.

[Pause.] How outwardly unmoved. [Pause.] She has not

been out since girlhood. [Pause.] Not out since girlhood.

[Pause.] Where is she, it may be asked. [Pause.] Why, in

the old home, the same where she— [Pause.] The same

where she began. [Pause.] Where it began. [Pause.] It all

began. [Pause.] But this, this, when did this begin? [Pause.]

When other girls of her age were out at . . . lacrosse she was

already here. [Pause.] At this. [Pause.] The floor here,

now bare, once was— [M begins pacing. Steps a little

slower.] But let us watch her move, in silence. [M paces.

Towards end of second length.] Watch how fear she

wheels. [M turns, paces. Synchronous with steps third

length.] Seven, eight, nine, wheel. [M turns at L, paces one

more length, halts facing front at R.] I say the floor here,

now bare, this strip of floor, once was carpeted, a deep

pile. Till one night, while still little more than a child, she

called her mother and said, Mother, this is not enough.

The mother: Not enough? May—the child's given name

—May: Not enough. The mother: What do you mean, May,

not enough, what can you possibly mean, May, not

enough? May: I mean, Mother, that I must hear the feet,

however faint they fall. The mother: The motion alone is

not enough? May: No, Mother, the motion alone is not

enough, I must hear the feet, however faint they fall.

[Pause. M resumes pacing. With pacing.] Does she still

sleep, it may be asked? Yes, some nights she does, in

snatches, bows her poor head against the wall and snatches

a little sleep. [Pause.] Still speak? Yes, some nights she

does, when she fancies none can hear. [Pause.] Tells how

it was. [Pause.] Tries to tell how it was. [Pause.] It all.

[Pause.] It all. [M continues pacing. Five seconds. Fade

out on strip.

All in darkness, Steps cease.

Pause.

Chime a little fainter still. Pause for echoes.

*Fade up to a little less still on strip. Rest in darkness.
m discovered facing front at R.*

Pause.]

m: Sequel. [Pause. Begins pacing. Steps a little slower still. After

two lengths balts facing front at R. Pause.] Sequel. A little

later, when she was quite forgotten, she began to— [Pause.]

A little later, when as though she had never been, it never

been, she began to walk. [Pause.] At nightfall. [Pause.]

Slip out at nightfall and into the little church by the north

door, always locked at that hour, and walk, up and down,

up and down, His poor arm. [Pause.] Some nights she would

halt, as one frozen by some shudder of the mind, and stand

stark still till she could move again. But many also were the

nights when she paced without pause, up and down, up and

down, before vanishing the way she came. [Pause.] No

sound. [Pause.] None at least to be heard. [Pause.] The sem-

blance. [Pause. Resumes pacing. After two lengths balts

facing front at R. Pause.] The semblance. Faint, though by

no means invisible, in a certain light. [Pause.] Given the

right light. [Pause.] Grey rather than white, a pale shade

of grey. [Pause.] Tattered. [Pause.] A tangle of tatters.

[Pause.] Watch it pass— [Pause.]—watch her pass before the

candelabrum, how its flames, their light... like moon

through passing rack. [Pause.] Soon then after she was

gone, as though never there, began to walk, up and down,

up and down, that poor arm. [Pause.] At nightfall. [Pause.]

That is to say, at certain seasons of the year, during

Vespers. [Pause.] Necessarily. [Pause. Resumes pacing.

After one length balts facing front at L. Pause.] Old Mrs

Winter, whom the reader will remember, old Mrs Winter,

one late autumn Sunday evening, on sitting down to

supper with her daughter after worship, after a few half-

hearted mouthfuls laid down her knife and fork and

bowed her head. What is it, Mother, said the daughter, a

most strange girl, though scarcely a girl any more...

[Brokenly.] ... dreadfully un... [Pause. Normal voice.]

What is it, Mother, are you not feeling yourself? [Pause.]

Mrs W. did not at once reply. But finally, raising her head

and fixing Amy—the daughter's given name, as the reader will remember—raising her head and fixing Amy full in the eye she said—*[Pause.]*—she murmured, fixing Amy full in the eye she murmured, Amy did you observe anything... strange at Evensong? Amy: No, Mother, I did not. Mrs W: Perhaps it was just my fancy. Amy: Just what exactly, Mother, did you perhaps fancy it was? *[Pause.]* Just what exactly, Mother, did you perhaps fancy this... strange thing was you observed? *[Pause.]* Mrs W: You yourself observed nothing... strange? Amy: No, Mother, I myself did not, to put it mildly. Mrs W: What do you mean, Amy,

to put it mildly, what can you possibly mean, Amy, to put it mildly? Amy: I mean, Mother, that to say I observed nothing... strange is indeed to put it mildly.

For I observed nothing of any kind, strange or otherwise. I saw nothing, heard nothing, of any kind. I was not there.

Mrs W: Not there? Amy: Not there. Mrs W: But I heard you respond. *[Pause.]* I heard you say Amen. *[Pause.]*

How could you have responded if you were not there? *[Pause.]* How could you possibly have said Amen if, as you claim, you were not there? *[Pause.]* The love of God,

and the fellowship of the Holy Ghost, be with us all, now, and for evermore. Amen. *[Pause.]* I heard you distinctly.

[Pause. Resumes pacing. After three steps balts without facing front. Long pause. Resumes pacing, balts facing front at R. Long pause.] Amy. *[Pause. No louder.]* Amy.

[Pause.] Yes, Mother. *[Pause.]* Will you never have done? *[Pause.]* Will you never have done... revolving it all?

[Pause.] It? *[Pause.]* It all. *[Pause.]* In your poor mind. *[Pause.]* It all. *[Pause.]* It all.

[Pause.] It all. *[Pause.]* It all. *[Pause.]* In your poor mind. *[Pause.]* It all. *[Pause.]* It all.

[Pause.] It all. *[Pause.]* It all. *[Pause.]* In your poor mind. *[Pause.]* It all. *[Pause.]* It all.

[Pause.] It all. *[Pause.]* It all. *[Pause.]* In your poor mind. *[Pause.]* It all. *[Pause.]* It all.

[Pause.] It all. *[Pause.]* It all. *[Pause.]* In your poor mind. *[Pause.]* It all. *[Pause.]* It all.

[Pause.] It all. *[Pause.]* It all. *[Pause.]* In your poor mind. *[Pause.]* It all. *[Pause.]* It all.

[Pause.] It all. *[Pause.]* It all. *[Pause.]* In your poor mind. *[Pause.]* It all. *[Pause.]* It all.

[Pause.] It all. *[Pause.]* It all. *[Pause.]* In your poor mind. *[Pause.]* It all. *[Pause.]* It all.

[Pause.] It all. *[Pause.]* It all. *[Pause.]* In your poor mind. *[Pause.]* It all. *[Pause.]* It all.

[Pause.] It all. *[Pause.]* It all. *[Pause.]* In your poor mind. *[Pause.]* It all. *[Pause.]* It all.

void my little sanctum, shed robe and skull, resume my hat and greatcoat, and issue forth again, to walk the roads.

[Pause.] The back roads.

53. *Dissolve to s empty. 2 seconds. m1 in robe and skullcap emerges from north shadow, advances five steps and stands facing camera. 2 seconds. He turns left and advances five steps to disappear in east shadow. 2 seconds. He emerges in hat and greatcoat from east shadow, advances five steps and stands facing west shadow. 2 seconds. He advances five steps to disappear in west shadow. 2 seconds.*

54. v: Right.

55. *Dissolve to m. 5 seconds.*

56. *Dissolve to w. 5 seconds.*

57. v: '... but the clouds of the sky ... when the horizon fades ... or a bird's sleepy cry ... among the deepening shades ...'
5 seconds.

58. *Dissolve to m. 5 seconds.*

59. *Fade out on m.*

60. *Dark. 5 seconds.*

A Piece of Monologue

Written in English for actor David Warrilow in 1979 and performed by him in New York in 1980. First published by *Kenyon Review* in 1979.

Curtain.

Faint diffuse light.

Speaker stands well off centre downstage audience left.

White hair, white nightgown, white socks.

Two metres to his left, same level, same height, standard lamp,

skull-sized white globe, faintly lit.

Just visible extreme right, same level, white foot of pallet bed.

Ten seconds before speech begins.

Thirty seconds before end of speech lamplight begins to fail.

Lamp out. Silence. SPEAKER, globe, foot of pallet, barely visible

in diffuse light.

Ten seconds.

Curtain.

SPEAKER: Birth was the death of him. Again. Words are few.

Dying too. Birth was the death of him. Ghastly grinning ever since. Up at the lid to come. In cradle and crib. At suck first fiasco. With the first totters. From mammy to nanny and back. All the way. Banded back and forth. So ghastly grinning on. From funeral to funeral. To now. This night. Two and a half billion seconds. Again. Two and a half billion seconds. Hard to believe so few. From funeral to funeral. Funerals of . . . he all but said of loved ones. Thirty thousand nights. Hard to believe so few. Born dead of night. Sun long sunk behind the larches. New needles turning green. In the room dark gaining. Till faint light from standard lamp. Wick turned low. And now. This night. Up at nightfall. Every nightfall. Faint light in room. Whence unknown. None from window. No. Next to none. No such thing as none. Gropes to window and stares out. Stands there staring out. Stock still staring out. Nothing stirring in that black vast. Gropes back in the end to where the lamp is standing. Was standing. When last went out.

Loose matches in right-hand pocket. Strikes one on his buttock the way his father taught him. Takes off milk white globe and sets it down. Match goes out. Strikes a second as before. Takes off chimney. Smoke-clouded. Holds it in left hand. Match goes out. Strikes a third as before and sets it to wick. Puts back chimney. Match goes out. Puts back globe. Turns wick low. Backs away to edge of light and turns to face east. Blank wall. So nightly. Up. Socks. Nightgown. Window. Lamp. Backs away to edge of light and strands facing blank wall. Covered with pictures once. Pictures of... he all but said of loved ones. Unframed. Unglazed. Pinned to wall with drawing-pins. All shapes and sizes. Down one after another. Gone. Torn to shreds and scattered. Strewn all over the floor. Not at one sweep. No sudden fit of... no word. Ripped from the wall and torn to shreds one by one. Over the years. Years of nights. Nothing on the wall now but the pins. Not all. Some out with the wrench. Some still pinning a shred. So strands there facing blank wall. Dying on. No more no less. No. Less. Less to die. Ever less. Like light at nightfall. Strands there facing east. Blank pinpocked surface once white in shadow. Could once name them all. There was father. That grey void. There mother. That other. There together. Smiling. Wedding day. There all three. That grey blot. There alone. He alone. So on. Not now. Forgotten. All gone so long. Gone. Ripped off and torn to shreds. Scattered all over the floor. Swept out of the way under the bed and left. Thousand shreds under the bed with the dust and spiders. All the... he all but said the loved ones. Stands there facing the wall staring beyond. Nothing there either. Nothing stirring there either. Nothing stirring anywhere. Nothing to be seen anywhere. Nothing to be heard anywhere. Room once full of sounds. Faint sounds. Whence unknown. Fewer and fainter as time wore on. Nights wore on. None now. No. No such thing as none. Rain some nights still slant against the panes. Or dropping gentle on the place beneath. Even now. Lamp smoking though wick turned low. Strange. Faint smoke issuing through vent in globe. Low ceiling strained by night after

night of this. Dark shapeless blot on surface elsewhere white. Once white. Strands facing wall after the various motions described. That is up at nightfall and into gown and socks. No. In them already. In them all night. All day. All day and night. Up at nightfall in gown and socks and after a moment to get his bearings gropes to window. Faint light in room. Unutterably faint. Whence unknown. Strands stock still staring out. Into black vast. Nothing there. Nothing stirring. That he can see. Hear. Dwells thus as if unable to move again. Or no will left to move again. Not enough will left to move again. Turns in the end and gropes to where he knows the lamp is standing. Thinks he knows. Was last standing. When last went out. March one as described for globe. Two for chimney. Three for wick. Chimney and globe back on. Turns wick low. Backs away to edge of light and turns to face wall. East. Still as the lamp by his side. Gown and socks white to take faint light. Once white. Hair white to take faint light. Foot of pallet just visible edge of frame. Once white to take faint light. Strands there staring beyond. Nothing. Empty dark. Till first word always the same. Night after night the same. Birth. Then slow fade up of a faint form. Out of the dark. A window. Looking west. Sun long sunk behind the larches. Light dying. Soon none left to die. No. No such thing as no light. Startless moonless heaven. Dies on to dawn and never dies. There in the dark that window. Night slowly falling. Eyes to the small pane gaze at that first night. Turn from it in the end to face the darkened room. There in the end slowly a faint hand. Holding aloft a lighted spill. In the light of spill faintly the hand and milkwhite globe. Then second hand. In light of spill. Takes off globe and disappears. Reappears empty. Takes off chimney. Two hands and chimney in light of spill. Spill to wick. Chimney back on. Hand with spill disappears. Second hand disappears. Chimney alone in gloom. Hand reappears with globe. Globe back on. Turns wick low. Disappears. Pale globe alone in gloom. Glimmer of brass bead. Fade. Birth the death of him. That nevoid smile. Thirty thousand nights. Strands at edge of lamplight staring

beyond. Into dark whole again. Window gone. Hands gone. Light gone. Gone. Again and again. Again and again gone. Till dark slowly parts again. Grey light. Rain pelting. Umbrellas round a grave. Seen from above. Streaming black canopies. Black ditch beneath. Rain bubbling in the black mud. Empty for the moment. That place beneath. Which . . . he all but said which loved one? Thirty seconds. To add to the two and a half billion odd. Then fade. Dark whole again. Blest dark. No. No such thing as whole. Stands staring beyond half hearing what he's saying. He? The words falling from his mouth. Making do with his mouth. Lights lamp as described. Backs away to edge of light and and turns to face wall. Stares beyond into dark. Waits for first word always the same. It gathers in his mouth. Parts lips and thrusts tongue forward. Birth. Parts the dark. Slowly the window. That first night. The room. The spill. The hands. The lamp. The gleam of brass. Fade. Gone. Again and again. Again and again gone. Mouth agape. A cry. Stifled by nasal. Dark parts. Grey light. Rain pelting. Streaming umbrellas. Ditch. Bubbling black mud. Coffin out of frame. Whose? Fade. Gone. Move on to other matters. Try to move on. To other matters. How far from wall? Head almost touching. As at window. Eyes glued to pane staring out. Nothing stirring. Black vast. Stands there stock still staring out as if unable to move again. Or gone the will to move again. Gone. Faint cry in his ear. Mouth agape. Closed with hiss of breath. Lips joined. Feel soft touch of lip on lip. Lip lipping lip. Then parted by cry as before. Where is he now? Back at window staring out. Eyes glued to pane. As if looking his last. Turns away at last and gropes through faint unaccountable light to unseen lamp. White gown moving through that gloom. Once white. Lights and moves to face wall as described. Head almost touching. Stands there staring beyond waiting for first word. It gathers in his mouth. Birth. Parts lips and thrusts tongue between them. Tip of tongue. Feel soft touch of tongue on lips. Of lips on tongue. Fade up in outer dark of window. Stare beyond through rift in dark to other dark. Further dark. Sun long sunk behind the larches. Nothing stirring. Nothing faintly stirring. Stock still eyes glued to pane. As if looking his last. At that first night. Of thirty thousand odd. Turn away in the end to darkened room.

Where soon to be. This night to be. Spill. Hands. Lamp. Gleam of brass. Pale globe alone in gloom. Brass bedrail catching light. Thirty seconds. To swell the two and a half billion odd. Fade. Gone. Cry. Snuffed with breath of nostrils. Again and again. Again and again gone. Till whose grave? Which . . . he all but said which loved one's? He? Black ditch in pelting rain. Way out through the grey rift in dark. Seen from on high. Streaming canopies. Bubbling black mud. Coffin on its way. Loved one . . . he all but said loved one on his way. Her way. Thirty seconds. Fade. Gone. Stands there staring beyond. Into dark whole again. No. No such thing as whole. Head almost touching wall. White hair catching light. White gown. White socks. White foot of pallet edge of frame stage left. Once white. Least . . . give and head rests on wall. But no. Stock still head haught staring beyond. Nothing stirring. Faintly stirring. Thirty thousand nights of ghosts beyond. Beyond that black beyond. Ghost light. Ghost nights. Ghost rooms. Ghost graves. Ghost . . . he all but said ghost loved ones. Waiting on the rip word. Stands there staring beyond at that black veil lips quivering to half-heard words. Treating of other matters. Trying to treat of other matters. Till half hears there are no other matters. Never were other matters. Never two matters. Never but the one matter. The dead and gone. The dying and the going. From the word go. The word begone. Such as the light going now. Beginning to go. In the room. Where else? Unnoticed by him staring beyond. The globe alone. Not the other. The unaccountable. From nowhere. On all sides nowhere. Unutterably faint. The globe alone. Alone gone.

Rockaby

Written in English in 1980. First performed in Buffalo, NY, in 1981. First published by Faber and Faber, London, in 1982.

NOTES

Light:

Subdued on chair. Rest of stage dark.

Subdued spot on face constant throughout, unaffected by successive fades. Either wide enough to include narrow limits of rock or concentrated on face when still or at mid-rock. Then throughout speech face slightly swaying in and out of light.

Opening fade-up: first spot on face alone, long pause, then light on chair.

Final fade-out: first chair, long pause with spot on face alone, head slowly sinks, come to rest, fade out spot.

W:

Prematurely old. Unkempt grey hair. Huge eyes in white expressionless face. White hands holding ends of armrests.

Eyes:

Now closed, now open in unblinking gaze. About equal proportions section 1, increasingly closed 2 and 3, closed for good halfway through 4.

Costume:

Black lacy high-necked evening gown. Long sleeves. Jet sequins to glitter when rocking. Incongruous flimsy head-dress set askew with extravagant trimming to catch light when rocking.

Attitude:

Completely still till fade-out of chair. Then in light of spot head slowly inclined.

Chair:

Pale wood highly polished to gleam when rocking. Footrest. Vertical back. Rounded inward curving arms to suggest embrace.

Rock:
Slight. Slow. Controlled mechanically without assistance from
w.

Voice:
Towards end of 4, say from 'saying to herself' on, gradually
softer. Lines in italics spoken by w with v. A little softer each
time. w's 'more' a little softer each time.

w : Woman in chair.
v : Her recorded voice.
*Fade up on w in rocking-chair facing front downstage slightly
off centre audience left.*
Long pause.

w : More.
[Pause. Rock and voice together.]

v : till in the end
the day came
in the end came
close of a long day
when she said
to herself
whom else
time she stopped
time she stopped
going to and fro
all eyes
all sides
high and low
for another
another like herself
another creature like herself
a little like
going to and fro
all eyes
all sides
high and low
for another
till in the end
close of a long day

to herself
 whom else
 time she stopped
time she stopped
 going to and fro
 all eyes
 all sides
 high and low
 for another
 another living soul
 going to and fro
 all eyes like herself
 all sides
 high and low
 for another
 another like herself
 a little like
 going to and fro
 till in the end
 close of a long day
 to herself
 whom else
 time she stopped
 going to and fro
 time she stopped
time she stopped
 [Together: echo of 'time she stopped', coming to rest of
 rock, faint fade of light.
 Long pause.]
 w: More.
 [Pause. Rock and voice together.]
 v: so in the end
 close of a long day
 went back in
 in the end went back in
 saying to herself
 whom else

time she stopped
time she stopped
 going to and fro
 time she went and sat
 at her window
 quiet at her window
 facing other windows
 so in the end
 close of a long day
 in the end went and sat
 went back in and sat
 at her window
 let up the blind and sat
 quiet at her window
 only window
 facing other windows
 other only windows
 all eyes
 all sides
 high and low
 for another
 at her window
 another like herself
 a little like
 another living soul
 one other living soul
 at her window
 gone in like herself
 gone back in
 in the end
 close of a long day
 saying to herself
 whom else
 time she stopped
time she stopped
 going to and fro
 time she went and sat

at her window
 quiet at her window
 only window
 facing other windows
 other only windows
 all eyes
 all sides
 high and low
 for another
 another like herself
 a little like
 another living soul
 one other living soul

[*Together: echo of 'living soul', coming to rest of rock,
 faint fade of light.*

Long pause.]

w: More.

[*Pause. Rock and voice together.*]

v: till in the end
 the day came
 in the end came
 close of a long day
 sitting at her window
 quiet at her window
 only window
 facing other windows
 other only windows
 all blinds down
 never one up
 hers alone up
 till the day came
 in the end came
 close of a long day
 sitting at her window
 quiet at her window
 all eyes
 all sides

high and low
 for a blind up
 one blind up
 no more
 never mind a face
 behind the pane
 furnished eyes
 like hers
 to see
 be seen
 no
 a blind up
 like hers
 a little like
 one blind up no more
 another creature there
 somewhere there
 behind the pane
 another living soul
 one other living soul
 till the day came
 in the end came
 close of a long day
 when she said
 to herself
 whom else
 time she stopped
time she stopped
 sitting at her window
 quiet at her window
 only window
 facing other windows
 other only windows
 all eyes
 all sides
 high and low
 time she stopped

time she stopped

[Together: echo of 'time she stopped', coming to rest of rock, faint fade of light.]

Long pause.]

w : More.

[Pause. Rock and voice together.]

v : so in the end

close of a long day

went down

in the end went down

down the steep stair

let down the blind and down

right down

into the old rocker

mother rocker

where mother rocked

all the years

all in black

best black

sat and rocked

rocked

till her end came

in the end came

off her head they said

gone off her head

but harmless

no harm in her

dead one day

no

night

dead one night

in the rocker

in her best black

head fallen

and the rocker rocking

rocking away

so in the end

close of a long day

went down

in the end went down

down the steep stair

let down the blind and down

right down

into the old rocker

those arms at last

and rocked

rocked

with closed eyes

closing eyes

she so long all eyes

famished eyes

all sides

high and low

to and fro

at her window

to see

be seen

till in the end

close of a long day

to herself

whom else

time she stopped

let down the blind and stopped

time she went down

down the steep stair

time she went right down

was her own other

own other living soul

so in the end

close of a long day

went down

let down the blind and down

right down

into the old rocker

and rocked
rocked
saying to herself
no
done with that
the rocker
those arms at last
saying to the rocker
rock her off
stop her eyes
fuck life
stop her eyes
rock her off
rock her off

[*Together: echo of 'rock her off', coming to rest of rock,
slow fade out.*]

Ohio Impromptu

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