

# THE SEA

**EDWARD BOND**



methuen | drama



## The Sea

**Edward Bond** was born and educated in London. His plays include *The Pope's Wedding* (Royal Court Theatre, 1962), *Saved* (Royal Court, 1965), *Early Morning* (Royal Court, 1968), *Lear* (Royal Court, 1971), *The Sea* (Royal Court, 1973), *The Fool* (Royal Court, 1975), *The Woman* (National Theatre, 1978), *Restoration* (Royal Court, 1981), *Summer* (National Theatre, 1982), *The War Plays* (RSC at the Barbican Pit, 1985), *In the Company of Men* (Paris, 1992; RSC at the Barbican Pit, 1996), *At the Inland Sea* (toured by Big Brum Theatre-in-Education, 1995), *Coffee* (Rational Theatre Company, Cardiff and London, 1996; Paris, 2000), *Eleven Vests* (toured by Big Brum Theatre-in-Education, 1997), *The Crime of the Twenty-First Century* (published 1998 and produced in Paris, 2000), *The Children* (Classworks, Cambridge, 2000), *Have I None* (toured by Big Brum Theatre-in-Education, 2000), *Existence* (Paris, 2002), *The Under Room* (toured by Big Brum Theatre-in-Education, 2005), *Born* (Avignon and Paris, 2006), *Tune* (toured by Big Brum Theatre-in-Education, 2007), and *People* (Marseilles and Paris, 2008); also *Olly's Prison* (BBC2 Television, 1993: stage version Paris, 1999), *Tuesday* (BBC Schools TV, 1993: stage version Lille, 1995) and *Chair* (BBC Radio 4, 2000: stage version Avignon and Paris, 2006).

*by the same author*

A-A-America! & Stone  
At the Inland Sea  
The Children & Have I None  
Eleven Vests/Tuesday  
Restoration

BOND PLAYS: 1

(Saved, Early Morning, The Pope's Wedding)

BOND PLAYS: 2

(Lear, The Sea, Narrow Road to the Deep North, Black Mass, Passion)

BOND PLAYS: 3

(Bingo, The Fool, The Woman)

BOND PLAYS: 4

(The Worlds *with* The Activists Papers, Restoration, Summer)

BOND PLAYS: 5

(Human Cannon, The Bundle, Jackets, In the Company of Men)

BOND PLAYS: 6

(The War Plays – Red Black and Ignorant, The Tin Can People,  
Great Peace; Choruses from After the Assassinations)

BOND PLAYS: 7

(Olly's Prison, Coffee, The Crime of the Twenty-First Century,  
The Swing, Derek, Fables and Stories)

BOND PLAYS: 8

(Born, People, Chair, Existence,  
The Under Room, Freedom and Drama)

*Poetry*

Theatre Poems and Songs  
Poems 1978–1985

*Prose*

Selections from the Notebooks of Edward Bond (two volumes)  
The Hidden Plot

**Edward Bond**

# **The Sea**

*A comedy*



**Methuen Drama**



Published by Methuen Drama 2008

3 5 7 9 10 8 6 4

Methuen Drama  
A & C Black Publishers Limited  
36 Soho Square  
London W1D 3QY  
www.methuendrama.com

*The Sea* first published by Eyre Methuen Ltd in 1973, revised 1978 and 2008  
Copyright © 1973, 1978, 2008 by Edward Bond

Translation of *The Child and the Toad* © 2008 by Elisabeth Bond

Edward Bond has asserted his rights under the Copyright, Designs  
and Patents Act, 1988, to be identified as the author of this work

ISBN: 978 1 408 10150 6

Available in the USA from Bloomsbury Academic & Professional,  
175 Fifth Avenue, 3<sup>rd</sup> Floor,  
New York, NY 10010  
www.bloomsburyAcademicUSA.com

A CIP catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

Typeset by Country Setting, Kingsdown, Kent  
Printed and bound in Great Britain by Good News Digital Books, Ongar

### **Caution**

All rights whatsoever in this play are strictly reserved  
and application for performance etc. should be made  
before rehearsals begin to Casarotto Ramsay & Associates Ltd,  
Waverley House, 7-12 Noel Street, London W1F 8GQ

No performance may be given unless a licence has been obtained.

No rights in incidental music or songs contained in the work are hereby  
granted and performance rights for any performance/presentation  
whatsoever must be obtained from the respective copyright owners.

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced  
in any form or by any means – graphic, electronic or mechanical, including  
photocopying, recording, taping or information storage and retrieval systems –  
without the written permission of A & C Black Publishers Limited.

This book is produced using paper that is made from wood grown  
in managed, sustainable forests. It is natural, renewable and recyclable.  
The logging and manufacturing processes conform to the environmental  
regulations of the country of origin.

*The Sea* was first presented by the Royal Court Theatre and Michael Codron on 22 May 1973 with the following cast:

**Willy Carson**

**Evens**

**Hatch**

**Hollarcut**

**Vicar**

**Carter**

**Thompson**

**Louise Rafi**

**Rose Jones**

**Jessica Tilehouse**

**Mafanwy Price**

**Jilly**

**Rachel**

**Davis**

Simon Rouse

Alan Webb

Ian Holm

Mark McManus

Jeremy Wilkin

Anthony Langdon

Simon Cord

Coral Browne

Diana Quick

Gillian Martell

Susan Williamson

Adrienne Byrne

Barbara Ogilvie

Margaret Lawley

*Director*

*Designer*

William Gaskill

Deirdre Clancy

PUACP





The play was revived at the Theatre Royal, Haymarket, London, on 17 January 2008 with the following cast:

**Willy Carson**

**Evens**

**Hatch**

**Hollarcut**

**Vicar**

**Carter**

**Thompson**

**Louise Rafi**

**Rose Jones**

**Jessica Tilehouse**

**Mafanwy Price**

**Jilly**

**Rachel**

**Davis**

Harry Lloyd

David Burke

David Haig

Russell Tovey

William Chubb

John Branwell

Jem Wall

Eileen Atkins

Mariah Gale

Marcia Warren

Selina Griffiths

Emma Noakes

Sarah Annis

Philippa Urquhart

*Director*

*Designer*

*Lighting designer*

*Sound designer*

Jonathan Kent

Paul Brown

Mark Henderson

Paul Groothuis

PUACP



# **The Sea**

*A comedy*



## **Characters**

**Willy Carson**

**Evens**

**Hatch**

**Hollarcut**

**Vicar**

**Carter**

**Thompson**

**Louise Rafi**

**Rose Jones**

**Jessica Tilehouse**

**Mafanwy Price**

**Jilly**

**Rachel**

**Davis**

**Ladies and men**

## **Place**

East Coast of England, 1907

## **Scenes**

<i>One</i>	Beach
<i>Two</i>	Shop
<i>Three</i>	Beach
<i>Four</i>	House
<i>Five</i>	Shop
<i>Six</i>	Beach
<i>Seven</i>	Cliff
<i>Eight</i>	Beach

*There is an interval after Scene Five*

## Scene One

*Beach.*

*Empty stage. Darkness and thunder. Wind roars, whines, crashes and screams over the water. Masses of water swell up, rattle and churn, and crash back into the sea. Gravel and sand grind slowly. The earth trembles.*

**Willy** Help. Aaahhh –

*The voice is drowned by water.*

Help. Colin. Shout. Oh god, make him shout.

*The tempest grows louder.*

Help –

*The sound is drowned by water again. A drunken man comes on singing.*

**Evens**

I don't know why – I sing'ss song –  
'Ss day'ss short – an'ss –

**Willy** Help. Help.

**Evens** Wha'?

**Willy** Here. In the water. A man's in the water.

*Thunder.*

**Evens** 'Ss too late f'ss thass. 'Ss sea 'sl finish all'ss thass.  
Have'ss drink. Lil'ss drink. Here'ss, take'ss bottle . . .

**Willy** Help me. Our boat turned over. I can't find him.

**Evens**

I sing 'ss song –  
'Ss day'ss short – an'ss –

**Willy** You bastard. Colin. Colin.

**Evens** Wah'? I don' know why'ss – 'Ssing'ss song – 'Ss  
some'ss in'ss wasser?

*The storm is worse. Thunder. The wind screams. **Hatch**, a middle-aged man, comes on with a torch.*

**Hatch** What are you up to?

**Evens** Oh god, 'ss draper. Have'ss drink, ol' pal. Tha'ss bottle –

**Hatch** Filthy beast.

**Evens** I'm off. (*Going*) Wha'ss night! Dear o' lor'.

**Hatch** I know what's going on here.

**Willy** Help. Help.

**Hatch** I know who you are. You thought you wouldn't be seen out here.

**Willy** Colin. For god's sake shout.

**Evens** *goes out singing*

**Evens** (*going*)

I ssing'ss my song –

'Ss day'ss short –

**Willy** Oh god.

**Willy** *comes out of the water. He is soaked. His hair and clothes are plastered down. He stands on the edge of the sea crying and pleading*

**Hatch** *catches him in his torch. Willy is heard shouting above the storm.*

**Willy** Help us.

**Hatch** Go back.

**Willy** Are you all mad? Where am I?

**Hatch** I knew you were coming. We'll fight you, you filthy beast.

**Willy** *turns and goes back into the sea.*

**Willy** Colin. Colin.

*Heavy guns fire some way off.*

**Hatch** The guns! They've brought the guns up! Hurrah!

**Willy** What?



**Hatch** Hurrah the guns! The army knows you're here. The whole country's turning out. We'll smash you.

**Hatch** *goes out with his torch. The storm grows.*

**Willy** Colin. Don't die. Not like this. Shout.

**Willy** *runs through the water.*

## Scene Two

*Draper's shop.*

*Counter. Shelves with rolls of material and piles of clothes. Two wicker chairs for customers. On the counter, various haberdasheries, a wooden till, and a display dummy cut off at the waist and neck.*

**Mrs Rafi** (ageing) and her companion **Mrs Tilehouse** (forties, retiring but determined) are in the shop. **Hatch**, the draper, is serving them. He is fortyish, with oiled hair and a rather flat face. Very pale blue eyes.

**Hatch** Art serge is coming in now, Mrs Rafi. Very fashionable for winter curtains.

**Mrs Rafi** ignores him and goes on examining a specimen on the counter.

**Mrs Rafi** Does this wear?

**Hatch** Embosseds don't wear as well as Utrechts, of course.

**Mrs Rafi** Show me this in blue.

**Hatch** We don't carry any blues, I'm afraid. I can show you a faded pink or the club green.

**Mrs Rafi** (to him as she looks through a bulky catalogue) Blue, blue.

**Hatch** Have you seen the moquettes?

*He tries to show her a place in the catalogue.*

**Mrs Rafi** Don't jolly me along. I wouldn't be comfortable with an artificial material. I want velvet.

**Hatch** Velvet does hang best. It gives the wear and it keeps its lustre.

**Mrs Rafi** At that price it should.

**Hatch** (*to Mrs Tilehouse*) Have you seen our Indian dupattas, Mrs Tilehouse? New in this week. You'll appreciate the superb colourings. You can carry them off.

**Mrs Rafi** I'm not interested in this new-fangled craze to support the trading efforts of the Empire by getting the east coast into native dress. I came to choose curtains, and I want Utrecht velvet – which I suppose comes from Birmingham. Your catalogue is full of interesting items but none of them are in your shop. You offer only shoddy! How can you attract a discriminating and rewarding class of client? Look, your catalogue lists blue – (*She hands him the catalogue.*) – at the bottom of page one-three-two-one in the right-hand column.

**Hatch** (*holding catalogue*) All you see here is available against special order, Mrs Rafi. Blue isn't asked for. (*To Mrs Tilehouse.*) There isn't the demand for it. Not at the price, Mrs Tilehouse.

**Mrs Tilehouse** (*nods sympathetically*) There wouldn't be.

**Mrs Rafi** I suppose it would be wholly optimistic of me to ask to see an example?

*Silently Hatch takes a blue sample from a drawer and hands it to her. She studies it.*

**Mrs Rafi** I take it delivery is appalling.

**Hatch** The suppliers quote two weeks to the nearest railway station. Very reasonable, I think.

**Mrs Rafi** If you could rely on it.

**Mrs Tilehouse** My new workbasket came within the week.

**Mrs Rafi** (*looking in the catalogue*) Nottingham lace, guipure d'art, Turkish carpets, Japanese nainsooks: I suppose they all come in two weeks from the warehouse in Birmingham. The art has gone out of shopping. (*She sighs. She picks up the sample.*) Is this accurate?

**Hatch** I believe so.

**Mrs Rafi** Most samples are sent out to deliberately deceive customers. I have no doubt about it, you could add it to the Articles of Religion. Well, it's a handsome material. I'll say that. It will look well at Park House. I want a hundred and sixty-two yards in three-yard lengths. I'll have it made up at Forebeach. I can supervise the work there. (*She puts the sample in her bag.*) I'll take this piece of evidence.

**Mrs Tilehouse** Louise, would it be better to have one room made up first? So that you get the sight of it.

**Mrs Rafi** Why? The downstairs curtains are shabby, even you remarked on it. This material is suitable. I've already enlarged my impression of this small piece into the entire scene – and I can tell you it looks very well.

**Hatch** I'll send a copy of the order up to Park House. (*A bit too firmly.*) Then you'll have your own reminder.

**Mrs Rafi** I'm obliged. Now gloves. What have you to offer me in that line?

**Hatch** Only what you saw last week, Mrs Rafi.

**Mrs Rafi** Nothing new? But you undertook to obtain further examples for me to see.

**Hatch** Not in yet.

**Mrs Rafi** I suppose on gloves they quote immediate delivery. Well, you'd better show me the ones I saw last week. I must have gloves and if that's all you offer I shall have to make do with them – until I can drive into Forebeach and select from a more convenient range.

**Hatch** *produces two boxes of gloves.*

**Mrs Tilehouse** I liked these on you, Louise. They go with anything.

**Mrs Rafi** Jessie, please don't try to hustle me into a purchase. You know it makes me cross. One uses one's hands to point and emphasise and gesture. People are judged by what they have on their hands. They're important.

**Hatch** Gazelle. Five shillings and five and eleven. Buck. Close-grained, hard-wearing. Doe. Feel the softness, Mrs Rafi. Washable kid. Two and six. Natural beaver. These have white tips, which many ladies prefer for the few pence extra. Then we have the military style – that's coming in now. At three shillings.

**Mrs Rafi** (*trying on a pair of gloves*) It says six and three-quarters in the cuff. Why can't I get into them?

**Hatch** Perhaps if you tried a slender man's –

**Mrs Rafi** I've always worn a lady's habit. Seven at the most. And these come from Birmingham. Isn't that a centre of precision engineering? One should at least be entitled to expect them to manufacture gloves to size. (*She tries another pair*) Six and three-quarters again and a completely different fit. (*She gets a glove on with difficulty*) They support the hand comfortably, but will they stand wearing? (*She thumps her hand on the counter*.) No. Gone at the seams. There you are, they give under the slightest emphasis. (*Takes the glove off*) I'm an emphatic woman and I must have gloves that accommodate themselves to my character. I'm not having those. Thank heavens I found out in time. (*She picks up another pair*.) Now these have style. I could wear this cuff. Tap on the window.

**Mrs Tilehouse** What?

**Mrs Rafi** Quickly.

**Mrs Tilehouse** *taps on the window.*

**Mrs Rafi** Louder.

**Mrs Tilehouse** *taps louder.* **Mrs Rafi** *waves broadly but genteelly and calls by opening her mouth wide and whispering*

**Mrs Rafi** A moment.

*The doorbell clangs. Willy comes in.*

**Mrs Rafi** It is Mr Carson? I'm Mrs Rafi. Howdyoudo.

**Willy** Howdyoudo.

**Mrs Rafi** This is a terrible tragedy. Colin was engaged to my niece. My companion, Mrs Jessica Tilehouse.

**Willy** Howdyoudo.

**Mrs Tilehouse** Howdyoudo. Oh terrible. I knew Colin well. So courteous. He always had a kind word, even for those in the background.

**Mrs Rafi** The coroner's wife called to tell me the details after breakfast. You must feel low. You can imagine the state my poor niece is in.

**Willy** I've just been at your house. I tried to see her but they told me to come back later.

**Mrs Rafi** Please treat my house as your home. I was devoted to Colin.

**Mrs Tilehouse** *He* was one for whom the future seemed all brightness. Oh dear.

**Mrs Rafi** Are you staying long?

**Willy** Till the inquest.

**Mrs Tilehouse** Oh dear.

**Mrs Rafi** You must tell me exactly what happened. I was going to complain to the Chief of Staff about the battery opening fire. But the coroner's wife tells me you'd strayed into their target area. How can that be? It's marked on the charts. Who was the navigator?

**Willy** Oh. We both looked after that. It was a small boat. The storm swept us off course. The guns didn't sink us. We'd already turned over.

**Mrs Tilehouse** Such a night. Thank heavens I didn't know you were out in it. I would have had no sleep. I assure you. I would have been tormented by the vision of – *(She stops in sudden realisation and deep embarrassment. She almost panics.)* Not that my sufferings would have mattered. Of course. Compared to you. I would gladly, gladly have watched the whole night through if –

**Mrs Rafi** *(drops a pair of gloves on the counter)* I shan't take these after all, Hatch. My umbrella handle lodges itself in the cuff.



Send these others back to the manufacturers. Tell them they are not up to the standard one should be entitled to expect. Mr Carson, perhaps you'll drive back to Park House for luncheon. My pony and trap is outside.

**Willy** Will they find the body?

**Mrs Tilehouse** Oh dear. This terrible sea, this terrible life.

**Mrs Rafi** Everything is washed up. Our coast is known for it. You throw a handkerchief into the sea one day and pick it up the next. See Mr Evens. He's peculiar, but he knows the water round here. He'll tell you where anything will come out, and when. Jessie, you must walk. Pony can't manage three.

**Willy** I'll walk.

**Mrs Rafi** Come along.

**Mrs Rafi and Willy** go out. *The doorbell clangs.*

**Mrs Tilehouse** Mr Hatch, who was on coastguard duty last night?

**Hatch** Why?

**Mrs Tilehouse** Surely it will come out at the inquest? Why was nothing seen by the town lookout?

**Hatch** You'd need second sight to see anything last night. (*He is putting the gloves away.*) I was on duty.

**Mrs Tilehouse** Dear me, and the town pays you ten shillings a year to watch –

**Hatch** I watch, Mrs Tilehouse. More than the town's ten shillings is worth.

*The doorbell clangs. Hollarcut comes in. He is a quiet, blond young man.*

**Hollarcut** Oh.

**Hatch** Morning, Billy. Wait out the back, lad.

**Hollarcut** starts to go through behind the counter.

**Mrs Tilehouse** Morning, Hollarcut. Were you on duty last night?



**Hollarcut** No, Mrs Tilehouse.

**Mrs Tilehouse** Not? But surely on such a night? I thought all the coastguards would have gone to their posts.

**Hatch** That's not in my copy of the Regulations, Mrs Tilehouse.

**Hollarcut** An' I can't read mine.

**Hollarcut** *goes out behind the counter.*

**Hatch** This material, Mrs Tilehouse. A hundred and sixty-two yards. Will she change her mind? Last time she ordered cushions she wouldn't even look at them. Now I have to send cash with every order, and they'll only take back against bona fide complaints. I've had a letter from the suppliers. It's signed by the managing director.

**Mrs Tilehouse** You're in business, Mr Hatch. You have to do what the customer wants.

**Hatch** *(goes to door)* Very good, Mrs Tilehouse. Good day.

**Mrs Tilehouse** I think I'll look at those Indian dhurries.

**Hatch** We're closed for lunch. Allow me. *(He opens the door for her.)* Good day, ma'am. Much obliged.

**Mrs Tilehouse** *goes out.* **Hatch** *locks the door behind her. He stands looking through the window.*

**Hatch** Bit longer, lads. The old buzzard's still there . . . *(Turns back into the shop, smacking his hands together.)* She's gone.

**Hollarcut, Thompson and Carter** *come out of the back of the shop. Thompson is a thinnish man with dark hair. Early middle age. Carter is heavier and older.*

**Thompson** My life. I was sweatin' back there. I was certain-shar Mrs Rafi'd come through. Juss the sort a' notion she'd git took in her hid. She give me the sack doo she find me here.

**Hatch** Did you follow him?

**Hollarcut** I bin on his tail all mornin'. Then I seen him come here an goo off with that ol' bat. Ten't no use followin' him now. She see you comin' afore yoo started.

**Hatch** What did he do?

**Hollarcut** Nothin' t' remark on.

**Hatch** Clever.

**Thompson** What yoo make on him then, Mr Hatch?

**Hatch** Look at the facts. He lands in the middle of the storm when no one's going to see him. He arranges to meet that devil Evens out on the beach.

**Hollarcut** Right.

**Hatch** And Mr Bentham's dead. They've started with murder and they'll do worse.

**Thompson** Oh lor'.

**Hatch** That boat didn't go down by accident.

**Hollarcut** You may depend on it.

**Carter** We must take this to the magistrates, lads. It's too big for us.

**Hatch** They wouldn't believe us, Mr Carter. You coastguards don't believe me half the time, in spite of all my warnings.

**Thompson** Thass a rum ol' do.

**Carter** You hear tell a' such queer ol' gooins on. Tell the truth, I on't know what I doo believe n'more . . .

**Hollarcut** (*to Hatch*) They do believe sometime. (*To*

**Thompson**.) Don't yoo, Wad?

**Thompson** Oh, I believe sometime right enough. Oh ah.

**Hatch** They come from space. Beyond our world. Their world's threatened by disaster. If they think we're a crowd of weak fools they'll all come here. By the million. They'll take our jobs and our homes. Everything. We'll be slaves working all our lives to make goods for sale on other planets.

**Thompson** An' the women folk? 'T'hey after that?

**Hatch** No. They come from a higher stage of progress. Their intellects run more on science and meditation. They build formal gardens for a hobby.

**Thompson** Chriss.

**Hatch** Listen, where's the world's weak spot?

*Silence.*

Here.

**Hollarcut and Thompson** grunt assent.

**Hatch** They know there's no leadership, no authority, no discipline in this town. So it's up to us. All these ships in distress are really secret landings from space. We won't go out to help them, we'll go and drive them off. Run them down.

**Carter** What if they're sailors in distress?

**Hatch** They aren't sailors, they aren't even real storms. These people come millions of miles – they know how to whip up a storm when they get here. We might lose a few innocent men. (*Shrugs.*) That's a risk, but *they're* guilty, not us. Now go and wait outside Park House, Billy. Follow him when he leaves.

**Hollarcut** Right.

**Hatch** They'll have arranged times to hover overhead invisibly. You watch and you'll see him make signs in a prearranged code. It could be anything: a scratch, a wave, or he'll pretend to tie his shoe. Keep it all in your head. I'll go through it with you later.

**Hollarcut, Thompson and Carter** go out. *The doorbell clangs.*

**Hatch** *bolts the door behind them. He goes to the till, takes out the money and puts it into a little canvas bank-bag. He looks up into the air and makes a small, ritualised gesture of defiance. He speaks in an almost businesslike voice.*

**Hatch** St George for England.

### Scene Three

*Beach.*

*An old hut with an old bike leaning against it. An empty shopping bag hangs from the handle bars. A few washed-up wooden spars and boxes smoothed by water.*

*Bright, sunny, fresh. A wind from the sea. Willy is just coming on. His jacket collar is turned up and his hands are in his pockets. He looks round, goes to the hut and taps on the door. No answer. It is padlocked. He tries the padlock. Evens comes on behind him and watches. He is old, weathered and bearded.*

**Evens** It's locked.

**Willy** Oh. Hello. I'm a friend of Mrs Rafi.

**Evens** Yes.

**Willy** I was on the boat that turned over last night.

**Evens** A boat?

**Willy** Yes.

**Evens** Last night?

**Willy** Yes.

**Evens** It was rough.

**Willy** My friend drowned.

**Evens** Oh. You want to know where he'll come up.

**Willy** Well, yes.

**Evens** (*shrugs wearily*) Depends where he went down.

**Evens** goes into the hut. **Willy** stands silently. When **Evens** comes out again he is surprised to see **Willy** still there.

**Evens** Oh. I'll think about it. (*He is turning to go back into the hut.*) I'm sorry about the accident.

**Willy** You live here?

**Evens** Yes.

**Willy** It must be nice.

**Evens** . . . Sometimes. It gets cold. The wind.

**Willy** *sits down on a box and starts to cry into his hands.* **Evens** *looks at him for a moment and then goes slowly into the hut.* **Willy** *cries a bit longer before he speaks.*

**Willy** *(trying to stop)* So stupid – doing this – coming here and . . .

**Evens** *(inside the hut)* Is there a proper place?

**Willy** *(trying to stop)* . . . last night . . .

**Hatch** *comes on.* **Hollarcut** *follows a little way behind and stands watching*

**Hatch** It didn't take you long to get out here. You've got to get rid of the body before anyone sees the marks. Wait till it comes in and tow it out to sea or bury it in the sand. I'm watching you –

**Evens** *comes out of the hut.*

**Hatch** – yes, and you, Evens. You're both under surveillance. *(Yells back to Hollarcut.)* Did you see him cry, Billy?

**Hollarcut** Ay.

**Hatch** That was a sign. Crying: bad news. That's us. Those devils are up there watching. He's telling them we're onto him.

**Willy** *(trying to stop crying)* What's the matter with him?

**Evens** He's harmless.

**Hatch** Oh, we know how to handle you, Evens. This isn't your sort of sea. This is real sea where you drown. It's not governed by your fancy, twisted laws of gravity. You'll find out. *(Yells back to Hollarcut.)* They're afraid of our sea, Billy. They're not immune to wetness. It soaks in and melts their insides. You watch: they're terrorised of it.

**Hollarcut** They en't worth a sermon, Mr Hatch. Give the word an' I'll kick their bloody hids off.

**Hatch** Not yet. We'll make a study of them first. Learn their ways. Break their code. You keep the watching going. Goodbye, Mr Evens. We'll settle our account shortly.

**Hatch and Hollarcut** *go out.*

**Evens** (*normally*) It's nice now. I hope the weather lasts.

**Willy** Do they often come here?

**Evens** No. They're as timid as mice. You coming, the storm, the boat – they're excited.

**Willy** Aren't they dangerous?

**Evens** (*shrugs*) Yes, to themselves.

**Willy** Why d'you live here?

**Evens** Isn't it what everyone wants?

**Willy** No.

**Evens** Perhaps not. We're into the spring tides now. He'll be washed up where the coast turns in. (*Points.*) You see? People are cruel and boring and obsessed. If he goes past that point you've lost him. He should come in. He's hanging round out there now. He could see us if he wasn't dead. My wife died in hospital. She had something quite minor. I sold up. They hate each other. Force. Make. Use. Push. Burn. Sell. For what? A heap of rubbish. Don't believe what they say: I don't understand the water. I know the main currents, but luck and chance come into it. It doesn't matter how clear the main currents are, you have to live through the details. It's always the details that make the tragedy. Not anything larger. They used to say tragedy purified, helped you to let go. Now it only embarrasses. They'll make a law against it. He should come out in the middle of next week. Don't count on it. There might be a flood. Then everything goes by the board. A man was drowned at sea and the next day a flood washed him miles inland and left him in his own garden hanging up in the apple tree. All the apples were washed off and went bobbing away in the water. His wife and children were stranded up on the roof watching him. They sat there three days.



**Hollarcut** *throws a lump of driftwood against the side of the hut.*

**Hollarcut** (*off*) Let yoo know I'm still watchin'.

**Willy** Couldn't you have him certified?

**Evens** The town doctor's madder than he is.

**Evens** *takes out a half-bottle of whisky. He removes the cap and holds the bottle out towards* **Hollarcut**.

**Evens** Drink?

**Hollarcut** (*off*) Is it poisoned?

**Evens** Yes.

**Hollarcut** No ta then.

**Evens** *drinks from the bottle. He holds it towards* **Willy**.

**Evens** (*looks round*) I don't have a cup.

**Willy** No thanks.

**Evens** (*calls to Hollarcut*) Come and sit by the house, lad. Out of the wind.

**Hollarcut** *comes and sits down by the hut.*

**Hollarcut** Juss so's I see yoo better.

**Evens** What's old Hatch been telling you?

**Hollarcut** Thass right, he say yoo'd start in with yoor questions. On't took you long, hev it!

**Evens** You know he's mad.

**Hollarcut** (*evenly*) So you say.

**Evens** You're not that stupid, lad.

**Hollarcut** He on't normal like me, or Wad, or my ma. But how'd I know he can't fathom out things I can't? Thass a rum ol' world. Yoo hev t'be a bit daft in the hid to know what doo goo on in en. Ask me it on't pay t'be too level-hided. I know it on't pay *me*.

**Evens** It's hard work talking to you.

**Hollarcut** (*contentedly*) I never ask yoo t' start. I on't interfere. I'm quite content sittin' here listenin'. You think I'm soft in the hid. Well, there on't much goo' by I miss. I'll surprise the lot on yer one day.

**Evens** (*drinks*) It keeps the wind out.

**Evens** *puts the whisky bottle down on a box.*

**Willy** I met you on the beach last night.

**Evens** Oh?

**Hollarcut** Thass right, when yoo was up t' yoor tricks in the water.

**Willy** You were drunk.

**Evens** Was I? I am sometimes.

**Hollarcut** If they put yoo through a wringer they could start a brewery.

**Willy** You had a lantern.

**Hollarcut** Signal for yoo t' come ashore.

**Evens** (*sudden irritation*) You said you wouldn't talk.

**Hollarcut** Juss let yoo know I'm listenin'.

**Willy** (*calmly*) Why were you drunk?

**Hollarcut** Cause he drunk too much. (*Laughs.*) There, I told yoo: I hev a sharp wit when I like. I hev 'em in stitches in our kitchen some nights when I hev my sprits up. My ma doo laugh. She hev all the neighbours in. She goo hollerin' arter 'em down the road. That make me laugh even more. We doo enjoy ourselves. Then we hev a singsong.

**Evens** I drink to keep sane. There's no harm in the little I drink. Li Po: you who are sated with life, now drink the dregs.

**Hollarcut** Ah, code-talk now. We're on to that.

**Evens** Who drowned?

**Willy** From this town. Colin Bentham.

**Evens** Oh.

**Willy** He was going to marry Mrs Rafi's niece.

**Evens** I knew him. He came here when he was a boy. All the time. He used to play by the hut and swim. I remember the sea last night.

Mad woman in a grey bed  
She struggles under the sheets  
Threshing her grey hair

**Willy** If you hadn't been drunk.

**Evens** I answered that question long ago: *if* he hadn't gone to sea.

**Willy** He wanted to get here quickly, not go round on land.

**Evens** Why?

*Silence. Willy stands.*

**Hollarcut** Where yoo gooin?

**Evens** Hatch told you to watch us both, didn't he. Now you're for it.

**Willy** *goes out.*

**Hollarcut** I'll stay put an' watch you. I'm settled down now.

**Evens** You'll miss something.

**Hollarcut** (*contentedly*) 'S obvious yoo want a' get rid a me. So I'll stay. I can work that out, boy.

**Evens** *screws the cap onto the whisky bottle and goes towards the hut.*

**Evens** Go and watch the vicar's girls swimming.

**Hollarcut** Thass right: Mr Hatch say yoo come t' corrupt our manhood. What yoo get up to in there?

**Evens** I shrink little men and put them into bottles. Then the Martians stand them over the mantelpiece.

**Evens** goes into the hut and shuts the door behind him. **Hollarcut** settles down more comfortably against the side of the hut.

**Hollarcut** (*contentedly*) I on't believe that. Thass a tall story, I doo know.

#### Scene Four

*Park House.*

*Drawing room. Upper middle-class furniture. Comfortable, hard-wearing, good. Round table. Bookcase.*

**Mrs Rafi**, **Mrs Tilehouse**, **Mafanwy Price** (*thirtyish, bun*), **Jilly** (*eighteen, bright cheeks and eyes*), **Rachel** (*slightly plump, and neat and capable*). The **Vicar** (*about forty-three but looks younger. Wears a grey, summer suit*). **Rose** has just come in. She is *pale and tired*. The others are staring at her in surprise.

**Mrs Rafi** Go back to your room, Rose. We'll manage without you.

**Rose** I'll stay.

**Mafanwy** Poor thing.

**Mrs Rafi** You'll bring yourself down.

**Rose** I can see the sea through the windows.

*A hushed moan from the ladies.*

**Jilly** How awful.

**Mafanwy** In this town you can't get away from the sea.

**Mrs Rafi** Pull the curtains.

**Rose** Oh no.

**Mrs Rafi** The curtains. The curtains. Shut it out.

*Ladies hurry to close the curtains.*

Lights.

*Some of the ladies change direction and hurry to fetch lights.*

Yes, stay with us. We understand. We've all known pain in our time. Bereavements, lost hopes. All our lives pass through the shadows. Jessica, hand out the books. I hope we've all got up our lines.

**Ladies** Yes. Oh dear.

**Mrs Rafi** We shall see.

**Mrs Tilehouse** (*to Rose*) How brave of you to challenge your despair. You are right. We dare not fall back under the blows.

**Mrs Rafi** Jessica, stop trying to sound like a woman with an interesting past. Nothing has ever happened to you. That is a tragedy. But it hardly qualifies you to give advice. Hand out the books. Act one, scene three. Enter Orpheus.

*A flurry of nervous anticipation.*

I have lost my Eurydice. You all have the place? Overwhelmed with misery I set out on the journey down the steep rocky path to hell. On either side rise terrible bottomless pits blazing with smoky darkness. The rocky cavern arches over my head. Maddened bats fly through its blackened vaults. I reach the river that lies before hell. Wearily I sit down on a rock and survey the dismal scene. I take out my lute and sing 'There's No Place Like Home'.

**Mrs Tilehouse** Louise, dear. Is that the right song?

**Mrs Rafi** The right song? I always sing 'There's No Place Like Home'. The town expects it of me.

**Mrs Tilehouse** Yes.

**Mrs Rafi** Then am I to disappoint them? I will not break the stage's unwritten law and comment on my fellow artistes' performance, but I will say, with confidence that comes from many tributes, that my performance of 'There's No Place Like Home' will be one of the highlights of the evening.

**Rachel** We always enjoy it.

**Mrs Tilehouse** Well, we'd better get on.

**Mrs Rafi** Get on, she says – as if we were drawing a glass of water from a tap. I do not know on what level you would find your inspiration – had you been entrusted with a part – but I cannot jump in and out of my part like a lady athlete.

*Silence. She sings.*

'Bait havver sah hoobull hahs noo-hoo place lake hoo . . .'

*She cuts quickly to the end of the song*

'Dum-di-dum-di – Ya-ho-hoo place lake hoo.'

Moved by the atmosphere I have created, I cry – together with a large part of the audience, if things go as usual. The sound of my torment attracts Cerberus, the watchdog of hell. He comes swimming over the dark water towards me.

**Mafanwy** Louise, couldn't I already be on your side of the river?

**Mrs Rafi** Would you sit quietly by while I sang? Not at all. You would want to join in the chorus.

**Mafanwy** It's so difficult to pretend I'm swimming when I am in fact walking.

**Mrs Rafi** Act, Miss Price. Remember your audience will do most of the work for you. They have already been set up by the poetry that has gone before.

**Mafanwy** (*sudden temper*) I can't, I can't!

**Mrs Rafi** Every year the same. One sympathises with god when he struggled to breathe life into the intractable clay. Do you not wish to support the Coastguard Fund? Has it no meaning for you?

**Mafanwy** How cruel, Louise.

**Mrs Rafi** Then act. Give yourself to the part and it will carry you through.



**Mafanwy** Why must I be a dog? Last year I was the monkey. If we did a pantomime you'd make me be the cat. I want to be one of the floral maids-of-honour who greet Orpheus with rose petals and song when he comes out of hell.

**Mrs Rafi** You'll be a dog. You collect for your Save the Animals Fund every year and you never go away till we've given twice as much as we can afford. Now you have the chance to earn some more gratitude from your little friends. *(Sighs.)* I know you need all the help you can get. I have foreseen it. Therefore two auxiliary ladies will hold a sheet across the stage. It will be decorated with dolphins, starfish and other sea emblems, and the ladies will be clad in bathing attire. You swim on behind the sheet. Only your head, arms and chest will show.

*The ladies exclaim happy approval.*

**Mafanwy** Oh thank you, thank you, Louise. You have such an inspiration.

**Mrs Rafi** At the same time – Mrs Tilehouse will crawl along in the dark under the stage and splash water round in a basin.

**Mrs Tilehouse** I can't. There isn't room.

**Mrs Rafi** Then create room. Don't you aspire to be an artist? Think of the miners who spend their lives crawling through darkness so that you may have light. That also, in its way, is the task of art.

*The ladies murmur fervent agreement, Mrs Rafi picks up a loose cover decorated with flowers, stems and leaves. Jilly and Rachel hold it shoulder-high across the stage. Mafanwy swims along behind it, as if the top of her body were coming out of the waves.*

**Mafanwy** I come along, spitting water out of my mouth . . .

**Mrs Rafi** Not the dog paddle, I think. It's too obvious. Eurydice, are you for ever lost?

*Normally Mafanwy manages an acceptable middle-class accent, but the effort to act makes the dog very Welsh.*

**Mafanwy** Who calls? What terrible shouts sound through these halls of death? Is that all right?

**Mrs Rafi** Don't be afraid to attack your part. I start up crazily at the sound of your voice. I cry: Eurydice, is it you?

**Mafanwy** I step from the water and shake myself.

**Mrs Rafi** Shake yourself?

**Mafanwy** All dogs shake themselves when they leave the water. I've been studying our Roger very carefully for the part.

**Mafanwy** *shakes herself.*

**Jilly** It's so real, Fanny. I can feel the water. I want to dry myself, Mrs Rafi. I want to put on my overshoes and open my umbrella.

**Mrs Rafi** Yes, dear. Describe your reactions later over tea. They sound so interesting and fresh.

**Mafanwy** From whence this voice of terror? It is the voice of a living man. The dead are spared such sufferings. Oh mortal, do not disturb these shades of darkness.

*A knock on the door.*

**Mrs Rafi** Never more shall I be silent. Lo, I tamed the wild beasts, but I cannot tame the torments of my breast –

**Davis**, *the maid*, *puts her head round the door.*

**Mrs Rafi** What is it, Davis?

**Davis** Begpardonmam. Mr Carson. You said to show him in anytime.

**Mrs Rafi** (*nods to Davis*) Ladies, you don't mind?

**Davis** *goes.*

*For a few moments they stand and fidget nervously. Then Willy comes in. He looks round at the darkness.*

**Mrs Rafi** Come in, Mr Carson. We're rehearsing a performance.

**Willy** Ah, I'm sorry. Let me come back at –

**Mrs Rafi** No, no. Do come in. Here is my niece. Rose.

**Willy** Miss Jones. Howdyoudo. I wish our meeting was different. I can only tell you –

**Mrs Rafi** Hush, hush. Not now, children.

**Rose** *shakes Willy's hand. Then she goes back to her place.*

**Mrs Rafi** Sit down, Mr Carson. Your presence might shame our ladies into some efforts at creativity. I am about to cross the Styx. The Styx is made from the tears of the penitent and suffering. Fortunately it is not in the care of our coastguard. Do sit down. There – you'll see everything there.

**Mafanwy** Do not disturb these shades of darkness. I use the special tone, Mr Carson, because I am portraying a dog.

**Mrs Rafi** Dum-di-dum-di silent. Lo, I tamed the wild beasts –

**Mafanwy** Shall I woof-woof?

**Mrs Rafi** – but cannot tame the torments of my breast. Eurydice, let me clasp your marble bosom to my panting breast and warm it with my heart.

**Jilly** *starts to cry.*

**Jilly** Oh dear. So sorry. It's so moving. So sad.

**Mrs Rafi** Let it flow, dear. Be moved. It's to be expected.

**Jilly** How awful!

**Jilly** *runs crying from the room.*

**Mrs Rafi** I hope you'll all act like that on the night.

**Rachel** I'll go after her.

**Mrs Rafi** Leave her. Never show any interest in the passions of the young, it makes them grow up selfish and come to a bad end writing for the newspapers. Davis will pat her and give her some tea and a slice of cake. Eurydice, oh speak.

*She embraces Mafanwy.*

**Mafanwy** Away, distracted man. I am a dog.

**Mrs Tilehouse** Shouldn't she get down on all fours?

**Mrs Rafi** Jessica, I am directing this production. Your job is to sell programmes and assist the stage carpenter. Eurydice, oh speak.

**Mafanwy** Alas, you have awakened old Pluto, the god of this place. Now I shall be well thrashed.

*Slight pause.*

**Mrs Rafi** (*loudly*) Pluto comes. (*Nothing happens. Louder.*) The god of hell. (*Calls.*) Vicar.

**Vicar** Oh, dear, I thought I was being summoned by Gabriel. Pardon me, fellow Thespians. I was admiring your bibliographic splendours, Mrs Rafi. A true delight.

**Mrs Rafi** Never mind books now, Vicar. We're struggling with life.

**Vicar** Quite so. I await direction.

**Mrs Rafi** You come on on the far side of Styx.

**Vicar** Like so? Good. Now where are these excellent lines? What is this dreadful wailing? By the by, Mrs Rafi. In the interest of light relief might I at this juncture add a reference – a sly reference, ladies – to a certain church choir of my acquaintance?

**Mrs Rafi** No.

**Vicar** I feared not. I do lend myself to these ribald interjections, Mrs Rafi. However. Bad dog, come to your master.

**Mrs Rafi** Try: bad dog, come to your master.

**Vicar** Dear me, if I were Cerberus I would run straight back to hell. However. Down, sir.

**Mrs Rafi** On your knees, dog.

**Vicar** Ah yes. On your knees, dog. Oh excellent, Miss Price. Our Ajax lies just so before the hearth when he comes home from his walk on winter evenings.

**Mafanwy** Thank you, Vicar. I've been noting the mannerisms of our Roger in a little book.

**Mrs Rafi** Ah! Eurydice.

**Vicar** The excellent Roger. Yes. I'm sorry to tell you, Miss Price, that Roger has been chasing Ajax. I should explain, ladies, that I've always wanted an Ajax and I had bestowed that name on my dog before I noticed that she was of an altogether inappropriate gender. However, Roger noticed. Yes. I wonder, Miss Price, if I might ask you to –

**Mrs Rafi** Vicar.

**Vicar** Indeed the subject is somewhat delicate. (*To Mafanwy.*) A few whispered words after choir practice will suffice.

**Mrs Rafi** Ah! Eurydice.

**Vicar** Who calls my wife.

**Mrs Rafi** Ah horror.

**Vicar** Yes, she is mine. Oh man, in this cold place of hell I lost my heart to her.

**Mrs Rafi** Ah horror. Ah horror.

**Mrs Tilehouse** That's only written down once. I hope I shan't be told I can't read – or count.

**Mrs Rafi** You can say what you like as long as you can carry it off. Ah horror. Ah horror. You shall not come out of hell to fetch that which is not thine or all women shall live in fear of Pluto's lust.

**Vicar** He sounds like Roger. I cannot let her go.

**Mrs Rafi** Then defiance and resistance are my lot.

**Vicar** Rise, my sleeping furies. Mrs Rafi, might I here make reference to a certain local congregation toward the end of sermon time?

**Mrs Rafi** No, Vicar. I enter hell to set her free.

**Vicar** Furies, up!

*Ladies surround the **Vicar**, gesturing and grimacing.*

**Vicar** Be warned, O vain and foolish man. That way lies madness and despair. O man, a god pleads with you. You may not put your hand into the iron sea to pluck out the glittering thing. Behold, my ferryman. Think well before you step into my ferryboat.

**Rachel** *picks up a punting pole and a straw boater. Ladies lay the loose cover flat on the floor.*

**Rachel** I'm sure Mr Carson will think I row like a chump. Here goes.

**Rachel** *steps into the punt. She speaks her lines timidly and cannot remember them. Mrs Tilehouse and the ladies prompt sotto voce.*

**Rachel** I am the . . . ferryman of . . . hell. I come to . . . take . . . you . . . over the . . . black . . . water.

**Mrs Rafi** *is about to step into the boat. She stops and peers down into the water.*

**Mrs Rafi** I see a white thing shining down in the darkness.

**Rachel** That is the . . . reflection of . . . Narcissus. It is . . . condemned to . . . haunt these waters for . . . ever –

**Mrs Rafi** Ah horror. *Ah horror.*

**Mrs Tilehouse** *grimaces.*

**Rachel** – and stare up at the . . . tormented and . . . harrowed . . . (*Final happy rush.*) faces of those who pass to death. Look and turn back!

*The ladies applaud discreetly but fervently.*

**Mrs Rafi** I cannot.

**Mrs Rafi** *steps onto the cover. Rachel starts to punt rhythmically.*

**Mrs Rafi** *poses on an imaginary prow and stares at the distant far shore of Styx. The rest of the cast softly hum the 'Eton Boating Song'. Rose slowly comes into the space on the shore and stands by Pluto.*

**Mrs Rafi** (*ecstatic*) Eurydice. Beloved. I see you.



**Rose** I am queen of this dark place. My heart burns with a new cold fire. Your love, your fear, your hope – what are they to me now? Dust scattered over the sea.

**Mrs Rafi** (*stretching both arms towards Eurydice*) Eurydice, I cannot hear you. The wind blows your words over this cold river, I only see you calling me.

**Rose** Go back.

**Mrs Rafi** (*ecstatic*) Beloved, I come.

**Rose** Go back.

**Mrs Rafi** Yes, I come.

*The rumble of very distant guns. The people in the room are silent for a moment. Then they make a low moan of annoyance and regret.*

**Mrs Tilehouse** The battery.

**Rachel** Such a sad sound.

**Mrs Rafi** They practise all day and night! Someone should write to the War Office.

**Mafanwy** They have their job.

**Mrs Tilehouse** I gladly embrace the inconvenience. The soldiers are our defenders.

**Vicar** Just so, ladies. One reads the newspapers. The continental balance of power is threatened. Then there's the naval question . . .

**Mrs Rafi** I hope I'm a patriot. But an army belongs in the battlefield or the barracks. Not at the bottom of one's garden rattling the windows. Open the curtains.

*The ladies sigh with relief.*

The mood of art has been pounded away. If I were doing *Lear* I could rise to it. But one can't play lutes to the sound of gunfire.

**Vicar** What a pity. I do enjoy our clash on the bleak strand. Two mighty Titans locked in mortal battle.

**Rachel** I've laid out the designs on the table.

*They go up to the round table to look at the designs. Rose crosses to Willy. He sits alone on a chair. While they talk the others are admiring and giggling at the designs.*

**Rose** What is the matter, Mr Carson? You're white.

**Willy** It's nothing.

**Rose** Surely you're ill.

**Willy** The guns. They fired when our boat turned over.

**Rose** Can I get you something?

**Willy** No, no. That's very kind. I'm all right.

**Rose** It's an ordeal for you.

**Willy** We'd been friends so long.

**Rose** Yes.

**Willy** I can't say how sorry I am. There's nothing I can do.

**Rose** (*nods*) No. There's nothing.

**Vicar** (*looking at a design; frightened*) Oh Mrs Rafi, do I approve? Is it proper to wear tights in front of one's parishioners? I must have a vestry ruling.

**Mrs Rafi** (*at the round table*) They can't object. I designed them.

**Willy** They say his body will be washed up.

**Vicar** (*as before*) And the trident?

**Mrs Rafi** Pitchfork.

**Willy** I know he's dead, but when there's no body there's still a chance he might be . . .

**Rose** Mr Carson, you must go home.

**Willy** No. I sat in that hotel all yesterday. No. And what has been happening here this afternoon, I noticed nothing till the guns . . . ? There were people on the beach when the boat turned over.

**Rose** Who?

**Willy** One was drunk and the other stood and shouted at me.

**Rose** Shouted?

**Willy** The man who runs the draper's on the front.

**Rose** Surely you're mistaken.

**Willy** No, no. He swore at me.

**Rose** Swore?

**Willy** Waved his arms. I thought he was mad. Or I was.

*The Vicar has come down to them.*

**Vicar** We've shocked you, Mr Carson.

**Willy** How?

**Vicar** Rehearsing a play when an inquest is about to take place in our town. You see, it's for our yearly evening in aid of the Coastguard Fund. Under the circumstances . . .

**Willy** Of course.

**Vicar** Yet I feel some guilt. (*To Rose as she is about to speak.*) Yes, my dear, pardon me, but I do. I'd be happier on my knees praying for our dead friend. And I would pray for guidance and understanding. He was so very young. God asks much of us. I christened him. I was hardly more than a boy myself, you know. Quite new here. And now he's gone. If the body is found I shall read the burial service. That is always – well, particularly moving, you find, when you bury someone you baptised. (*He starts to mumble some tears.*) Now you must forgive me . . . One comes to live the life of the parish. The births and deaths are in part one's own.

*The Vicar goes away.*

**Willy** We were so near the shore. If only I'd been able to get to him. I swim well enough. It was so dark. I went back in the water. I think I went in four times. More.

**Rose** (*frightened*) Please go home, Mr Carson.

**Jilly** *comes into the room.*

**Jilly** I'm sorry. Aren't I a silly? But I'm better now. I helped them to set tea. It's all ready in the conservatory.

**Mrs Rafi** Shall we go through?

**Willy** *stands. Everyone moves towards the door.*

## Scene Five

*Draper's shop.*

**Hollarcut, Thompson, Carter and Hatch.**

**Hatch** Read the papers between the lines. It says preparations against continental powers. Now what does that mean? Space travellers. But London can't say that.

**Thompson** Count a' they'd start up a rare ol' panic?

**Hatch** Right. Imagine it, Wad, the enemy from another world! People would lose hope. They wouldn't even try to fight.

**Carter** Some on us would.

**Hatch** *You* would. But would they at Forebeach?

**Carter** Wouldn't bet on that, true. But how'd yoo know he come from space?

**Hatch** The guns. You can't get round that. They opened up the moment he came. Oh, the army knows what's going on. That new range's not for practice. They mean business.

**Thompson** Oh lor'. 'S plain as a baptist's funeral.

**Carter** Well, why'd he drown young Bentham?

**Hatch** That's obvious. Mr Bentham was about to marry. We may hope, he and his lady being nice, clean, well-brought-up members of the gentry, they'd provide offspring.

**Thompson** (*knowingly*) Oh ah.

**Hatch** And that's just what *they* don't want. 'I he fewer we are the easier we're overcome.

**Thompson** What? You mean every time a chap's thinkin' a gooin' t' church he's liable to be done in?

**Hatch** 'Fraid so, Mr Thompson.

**Thompson** An' every time yoo tak' a gal back of a hedge they're watchin' an' . . . my life.

**Hatch** If you only knew the half of it. There's no end to their cunning.

**Hollarcut** Bet even yoo don't know, Mr Hatch – meanin' no disrespect.

**Hatch** I know you don't, Billy. Still, I do know they've got more than one friend in this town.

**Thompson** } Who?

**Carter** } (together) Not just Evens, then?

**Hatch** Oh no. You soon spot them behind this counter. You get a fair indication from the way they pay their bill. That shows if they respect our way of life or if they're just out to make trouble by running people into debt. Oh, some of them don't even know themselves. Their brains are taken out at night, bit by bit, and replaced by artificial material brought here in airships. Course, that's a slow method, it can take years –

**Hollarcut** Oh, you hadn't ought a' say that, Mr Hatch. That worries a man. I hope there on't no particle a' me I warn't born with.

**Hatch** Not you, Billy. They wouldn't try it on you. You've led a clean life and now you see your reward. They tried to bribe me, you know.

**Thompson** Goo on.

**Hatch** Oh yes. Leave notes. I found one in the jam. Took the lid off and there it was.

**Thompson** The devils!

**Hatch** Write on a steamy window. That's another of their tricks. By the time you've brought someone to see it, it's gone.

**Carter** How much did they offer yer?

**Hatch** I didn't read the exact sum. I was too disgusted.

*The doorbell clangs. Mrs Rafi and Mrs Tilehouse come in.*

**Hatch** Thank you for coming, lads. I'll gladly help raise money for new instruments for the town band. That's a worthy cause. Ah, Mrs Rafi, ma'am. I was hoping you'd call. Good day, Mrs Tilehouse. Right lads, out through the back.

**Mrs Rafi** Thompson, what are you doing here?

**Thompson** Mornin', missus. I juss come down t' get some seedlin' off the market –

**Mrs Rafi** Get back to the house. I pay you to work in my garden, not come here and idle and gossip. See me in the morning.

**Thompson** Missus.

**Mrs Rafi** Mr Hatch, will you explain why you're holding a mass meeting in secret at eleven o'clock in the morning on a working day? Has the whole town gone on strike?

**Hatch** Now, Mrs Rafi, your curtainings have come. Mr Hollarcut was just running up to the house with a message. (*To the men.*) Off you go, there's good lads.

*The three men go out behind the counter. Hatch goes to two large rolls of velvet on the counter and pats them.*

**Hatch** Not many houses in these parts can afford to hang this quality at the window, Mrs Rafi. I congratulate you on an excellent choice. That's very like the sample, I think you'll agree. Identical.

**Mrs Rafi** Mr Hatch, I've been speaking to Mr Carson.

**Hatch** Ah yes, and I hope the young gentleman's as well as circumstances allow.



**Mrs Rafi** Mr Carson tells me that on the night of the drowning he met you on the beach. That he called on you for help. And that you refused – in a language not merely abusive but callous.

**Hatch** Ah.

**Mrs Rafi** (*taps the material*) Send it back.

**Hatch** What?

**Mrs Rafi** Mr Hatch, you cannot expect me to patronise a tradesman who ignores his duty as a coastguard –

**Hatch** But you must take it!

**Mrs Rafi** – for which he is paid ten shillings, and who allows his fellow man –

**Mrs Tilehouse** And your duty as a Christian!

**Hatch** Did you see the storm? What could I do – Christian or not! – calm the waters, Mrs Rafi?

**Mrs Tilehouse** Oh.

**Mrs Rafi** Hatch, it's all of a piece. I'd expect you to blaspheme. Mr Carson tells me you raved and swore at him.

**Hatch** He's a liar!

**Mrs Rafi** A liar?

**Hatch** And a scoundrel!

**Mrs Tilehouse** Oh dear.

**Mrs Rafi** (*taps material*) Send it back.

**Hatch** Not a liar. No. But he was half-drowned. He couldn't understand me. How could you expect it? The gentleman was hallucinated. Shocked. I shouted instructions to him. I tried to help.

**Mrs Rafi** You let an innocent man drown.

**Hatch** I've sent back so many things for you, Mrs Rafi. The calico. The Irish muslin. The set of Renaissance chair covers,

with those wonderful embroidered hunting scenes. The manufacturers won't deal with me any more.

**Mrs Rafi** Nor will I.

**Hatch** I'm in a *small* way of business, Mrs Rafi. I'm on the blacklist. I had to pay for all this before they sent it. And I made such a fuss about delivery. All my capital has gone into it.

**Mrs Rafi** You should have thought of that before. I won't have it in the house. I'd be afraid to have the curtains drawn. They'd remind me of the tragedy.

**Hatch** I tried to help. I've never seen such a storm. You didn't see it. You were safely tucked up in bed. My name, my goodwill, my whole life's work is at stake. I'm on the edge of a terrible disaster.

**Mrs Rafi** It goes back. (*She prepares to go.*)

**Hatch** I see. You're acting on his instructions already then? What's he said to you? Has he told you to break me? You're his first victim, you've been corrupted.

**Mrs Rafi** (*turning to go*) Good day.

**Hatch** (*standing between her and the door, some way from her*) I must speak out, Mrs Rafi. Mr Carson is a spy. He murdered Mr Bentham. He's here on a mission. He's sowing the wind of discord. He'll reap the whirlwind.

**Mrs Tilehouse** Mrs Rafi corrupted? Oh! What else did he say? A spy? Murder? Oh dear, I must go home immediately. (*She sits.*)

**Mrs Rafi** Of course I shall not take your allegations seriously. You always were over-imaginative for a draper. No doubt you should have taken up something more artistic. Certainly you haven't found your proper place in our community. It would be better if you were to close your shop and leave.

**Hatch** Yes, yes, I am more in the creative line. They always said that at school. I was head scholar in Bible class. You will take the material, Mrs Rafi? This whole shop's tied up in it.

The little I've put by – not much, there's no big buyers here. I couldn't set up in the larger towns. No capital. But I've worked hard, much of it against the grain – my inclinations being elsewhere, as you so rightly pointed out. D'you want me to crawl, Mrs Rafi? Feel the stuff, ma'am. Really, an educated person of your taste can't resist a product as beautiful as – (*Crying*) But oh, the pity of it is you don't see the whole community's threatened by that swine, yes swine, bastard, the welfare and livelihood of this whole town! He's tricked you. Only I spotted him. Well, I've warned the coastguards. We don't let anyone land here now. They'll drown. I'll kick them under with my boot.

**Thompson, Carter and Hollarcut** *come out from the back of the shop.*

**Mrs Rafi** Thompson, are you still here?

**Thompson** Missus, missus –

**Carter** Can't you keep your snout clean, Hatch? Now there'll be the devil to pay.

**Thompson** Don't mind Mr Hatch, missus. He likes t' spout a lot a' ol' rot. We coastguards well 's we can. We on't put town money in our pocket till we earn en –

**Hollarcut** Doo watch that stuff, Mr Hatch. Yoo dutty en with yoor cryin'.

**Mrs Rafi** *takes hold of Thompson's ear.*

**Mrs Rafi** Just as you earn money in my garden! Now get back to work.

**Thompson** Ouch, missus. Yoo'll hev my hid off.

**Mrs Rafi** I've had enough of this tomfoolery.

**Mrs Tilehouse** Careful, Louise. He's too heavy for you.

**Mrs Rafi** *leads Thompson out by the ear. The doorbell clangs.*

**Carter, Hollarcut and Mrs Tilehouse** *go out after her. Hatch is left alone.*

**Hatch** I took an order and there's a copy in the order book. *(He picks up his draper's shears.)* So she'll take delivery and pay. And she can collect – I'm damned if I'll deliver to the door. Pieces of three yards. *(He starts cutting three-yard lengths from the rolls.)* This is the moment that tests and proves. Events are moving and I must act. Three yards. I'll disclose it all at the inquest. Yes, that's my public pulpit. Oh god, what can I do? They'll never believe me. The fools. The swine. *(Cutting.)* Careful. Three yards. Don't let your hand shake. Stop that! No trembling. No complaints. Three yards. I'll take my shears to that little swine. I'll snip him. I'll improve his outline. Send me to the workhouse! Begging like a skivvy-worker. Picking rags. Cleaning drains. 'Here's a crust, my man, here's a mug. Draw yourself some water from the pump.' No! Three yards: one, two, three.

**Hollarcut** *appears in the doorway. He is looking down the street. The doorbell clangs all the while he talks.*

**Hollarcut** She's leadin' him along the front by the ear. They're comin' out a' shops t' gawk. Ol' Mrs Tilehouse's tannin' his arse with her brolly. The ol' tarter. He'll be blacker 'n a darkie on a dark night. Hev you ever seen the like? Ho up, lads. Here she come!

**Hollarcut** *runs into the shop. The doorbell stops clanging. Hollarcut stops when he sees Hatch. Hatch is still cutting the material – slashing and tearing at it when the shears stick. The material unrolls over the floor.*

**Hollarcut** Whatever yoo up to, Mr Hatch?

**Hatch** *(points to the pieces he has cut)* Roll them up, Billy. Nice and neat. You can't drop high-class goods in the bottom of a cart like a sack of sprouts. That's the makings of the good draper: finesse, industry, and an understanding of the feminine temperament. They stamp on you but they wipe their little boots first.

**Hollarcut** I on't touchin' nothin', Mr Hatch. Folks've got their dander up. You must fend for yoorself now.

**Hatch** I'll start on the other roll. Bit off each. Three yards. The moment for action, Billy. Time draws near. An army can't

watch the grass grow round it. It's out in the open now. People will rally round the truth. You'll see many signs and wonders in the days to come.

**Hatch** goes on cutting **Mrs Rafi** comes in. The doorbell clangs.

**Hollarcut** goes behind the counter and watches.

**Mrs Rafi** Hatch, I'll report this morning's outrage to the constable and the town doctor. I shall certainly see that no one under my influence ever uses any shop of yours again.

**Mrs Tilehouse** appears in the doorway behind **Mrs Rafi**. Until she comes into the shop later on, the doorbell makes isolated, spasmodic clangs.

**Hatch** Come in, Mrs Rafi. Your order is being attended to.

**Mrs Tilehouse** Louise, don't go in.

**Mrs Rafi** comes further into the shop.

**Mrs Rafi** Hatch, pull yourself together.

**Hatch** (still cutting) The cutting's nearly done. You see I cut it all myself. You have to know cloth. There's an art to this. That's why I don't hire an assistant. They'll never stop long enough to learn the trade. Oh, it's not that I can't afford one. Look at that edge. I could have ten assistants. Open departments. Haberdasheries. Riding habits. Liveries. A sporting counter. I could attract the towns to me. But no one stays long enough to learn the trade. It takes a lifetime, Mrs Rafi. Three yards. Always move. Why? Don't they take to me? Am I so hard to . . . They must be off. What do they ever see, what are they looking for, what do they ever find? The trade is a respectable vocation. Sons of the gentry haven't been above it. (In tears.) I walked my life away on this floor. Up and down . . . Three yards . . . Why isn't the floor worn through? . . . Thirty years . . . I'm worn through . . . (He goes on cutting, tearing, ripping and slashing)

**Mrs Rafi** Mr Hatch. You're hacking it to pieces. No one can take the material now.

**Mrs Tilehouse** Hollarcut, take his collar.

**Hollarcut** I on't touch him.



**Hollarcut** *ducks down out of sight behind the counter.*

**Hatch** *(smiles and cuts)* These shears are part of my hand. Watch how the cloth leads them. That's the gesture of my soul, Mrs Rafi, there's a whole way of life in that . . .

**Mrs Rafi** Mr Hatch, listen to your friends. You make it hard for me to help you.

**Hatch** There, Mrs Rafi. Some lengths to be getting on with. Will you take them with you now?

**Mrs Rafi** No.

**Mrs Tilehouse** Don't beard him, Louise.

**Hatch** *(cunningly)* Ah, but it must be taken. You see, it's cut. According to the customer's requirement. It's in pieces.

**Mrs Rafi** No.

**Mrs Tilehouse** What foolishness to bait the unchained lion.

**Mrs Rafi** *turns to go.* **Hatch** *stops her by cutting off her path.*

**Hatch** Are you paying now? Pay the bill and tidy it away. Of course! Don't let these things hang over you.

**Mrs Rafi** Hollarcut.

**Hollarcut** *looks over the top of the counter.*

**Hollarcut** Don't antagonise him, missus.

**Hollarcut** *goes down out of sight.* **Hatch** *holds one end of Mrs Rafi's bag and she holds the other.*

**Hatch** You've brought the money. Are you too shy to take it out? The company of men? I understand all that. Don't look away, ma'am. Each one has his failings. I never put a lady to shame. Let me. I do it all in a nice, clean way. A lady can't be soiled with money.

**Mrs Rafi** Take it. *(She gives him her bag and turns away. Weakly.)* My legs . . .

**Mrs Tilehouse** *hurries into the room. The doorbell clangs and stops.*



**Mrs Tilehouse** Louise, your bag.

**Mrs Rafi** Nonsense, Mrs Tilehouse. Farthings. Shout in the street. Mr Hatch has made me a prisoner.

**Mrs Tilehouse** *collapses in a chair. Hatch is struggling with Mrs Rafi. Hollarcut looks up from behind the counter, yells and runs out. The doorbell clangs.*

**Hatch** Farthings! Farthings! All that money under your bed and you won't pay your debts!

**Mrs Rafi** Mr Hatch, remember who we are.

**Hatch** Mr Carson keeps your money now! You're all liars, swindlers, frauds, bankrupts –

**Hatch** *hits Mrs Rafi with the shears. She is cut. They stand in silence for half a second.*

**Mrs Rafi** Hatch, you're a fool.

**Carter** *comes in. The doorbell clangs. Hatch goes behind the counter.*

**Mrs Rafi** See to Mr Hatch. He's very poorly. I have only a slight cut.

**Hatch** Well, well. How did that happen? She tried to grab my shears, Jack. She must be a lady burglar. She interfered with work on the premises. You know they come in here and whisper, ask for intimate garments. Could I try this on, Hatch? Then they're off to the fitting room before you can stop them and leave the curtain open. All the intimate things. Wriggling into this and that. Is it too tight, Mr Hatch? Is this gusset in order?

**Carter** Thass enough a' that, Hatch. You howd yoor noise an' come with me like a good man.

**Carter** *goes cautiously towards Hatch, who dodges round him and goes out of the shop. The doorbell clangs. As he goes he points to Mrs Tilehouse. She is sitting unconscious in a chair.*

**Hatch** *(going)* There's the worst. Leaves the curtain open and turns the mirror – brazen! – so you see the darkness underneath.

**Mrs Rafi** *takes a piece of material from the display dummy on the counter and wraps it round her wrist while she talks. She is frightened and angry.*

**Mrs Rafi** I don't know what you've been up to amongst yourselves. Have you no respect for public opinion –

**Carter** Yes, ma'am.

**Mrs Rafi** Will your wives and children hold their heads up for years? And your superiors, they'll certainly be pained by these excesses?

**Carter** Yes, ma'am. Please don't goo on, ma'am.

**Mrs Rafi** Put your finger on this knot.

**Carter** *holds the knot while she fastens the material on her wrist.*

**Mrs Rafi** You've plunged the town into scandal. What will they say in Forebeach?

**Carter** Yes, ma'am.

**Mrs Rafi** Thank you. I shall go and alert the town constable. As it's only midday I suppose he's still in bed. That is, if he's as conscientious as the rest of the town. I hardly know if I dare approach a representative of the law. In this state of anarchy one might find oneself inside. See to my companion – another sentry asleep at her post.

**Mrs Rafi** *goes out. The doorbell clangs.* **Carter** *goes quietly to Mrs Tilehouse.*

**Carter** Mrs Tilehouse, ma'am.

**Mrs Tilehouse** *(jumping to her feet)* Help! I am about to be attacked by a large man.

**Carter** Mrs Rafi tol' me t' say –

**Mrs Tilehouse** Louise is dead! What were her last words? She apologised to me for it all! I forgive her! I hold no grudge, however justified –

**Carter** No, no. She's gone for the officer.

**Mrs Tilehouse** Thank god. The town is relieved! We're saved!

**Carter** She said I'm to see yoo home.

**Mrs Tilehouse** Ah, thank you, Carter. I don't think I could walk there unassisted, I shall require your arm – in the less public places. (*She sees the shears on the counter.*) Ah! The murderer's shears.

**Carter** Look the other way, ma'am.

**Mrs Tilehouse** Yes. After this I shall regard Gomorrah as a spa resort. They probably sell picture postcards.

**Carter** leads **Mrs Tilehouse** out. *The doorbell clangs. Immediately Hollarcut comes on through the back of the shop. He calls softly.*

**Hollarcut** Mr Hatch . . . Where yoo hidin', Mr Hatch? . . . I'll put some bread an' cheese on the window ledge out the back for yoo, an' a bottle a' sweet tea . . . Don't you run out without yoor coat . . .

## Scene Six

*Beach.*

*The stage is empty except for a body upstage. It is covered with trousers, socks, vest and jersey – all dark. White canvas deck shoes. The jersey is pulled up over the head and the arms, which are lifted up and bent at the elbows in the act of removing the jersey – so the jersey forms a hood covering the head, neck, shoulders, arms and hands. The dark vest covers the trunk. The top half of the body is on the beach and the rest in the water.*

**Rose** comes on. *She is looking ahead at someone who has gone on in front of her.*

**Rose** (*calling ahead*) I must sit down. (*She sits.*)

**Willy** comes on from the direction in which she shouted.

**Willy** Are you all right?

**Rose** Yes.

**Willy** Shall I leave you alone?

**Rose** Yes.

**Willy** (*nod. Slight pause*) I don't like to. You haven't been out here since he drowned.

**Rose** (*remotely*) I'll see you back at the house.

**Willy** All right.

*Pause. Willy doesn't move.*

**Rose** This stupid inquest.

**Willy** Why?

*Pause.*

**Rose** The coroner will say he's sorry and decide why he died. Why? You might as well have an inquest on birth. They're afraid of me. I'm touched by death. Perhaps you are. I see it when they call to say they're sorry. They look at me as if I'm a dangerous animal they have to pat . . .

**Willy** You're supposed to forget what they look like very soon. It comes as a shock. But it's hard to forget the voice. You suddenly hear that twenty years later.

**Rose** Really they come to be calmed and assured. I have to find some of my pain to share with them. A taste. Then they know that if I can bear it so can they when it comes. What was the last thing he said?

**Willy** To do with the weather, I think. He knew more about sailing than I do. But we both knew it was wrong to be out. He wanted to get here quickly. To see you. Perhaps he wanted to show something. I mean: prove. (*Shrugs.*) I said let's go back. I kept asking, 'How close is the land?' He didn't answer. He went on working. Pulling ropes. And he baled water in a bucket. He knew we'd made a mistake. It was dangerous to be there.

**Rose** What did he say?

**Willy** Nothing. Then the boat turned over. I saw the bottom coming up out of the water. It looked very ugly. It was wet and

suddenly smooth in all that chaos. I yelled but I couldn't hear him. He was gone.

*Pause.*

**Willy** Did you love him . . . a great deal?

**Rose** What?

**Willy** I thought perhaps he wasn't sure. I mean about what you felt. It was clear what he felt.

**Rose** Why are you saying this?

**Willy** Somehow, he was afraid. That was so unnatural for him. He was sure and firm about everything else. It seems terrible that he could be afraid . . . I think that would have destroyed him. A hero's fear.

**Rose** Fear?

**Willy** You were brought up together. Your aunt wanted you to marry. Everyone knew you would. It was too easy. He was afraid one day you'd meet another man – perhaps even a weaker man – and he'd lose you. A hero must be afraid of weaker men.

**Rose** Why?

**Willy** He never talked of you. No photographs. I didn't know what you looked like. Sometimes he said he'd written or you'd been somewhere. Of course I'd formed my own picture of you.

**Rose** How long did you know him?

**Willy** Seven years. I'm twenty-one. We were the same age.

*Silence.*

**Rose** If I'd seen him die it would be easier to forget him. I can see him working and not saying anything. Wet to the skin. And the noisy sea. But I can't see him when he dies. (*Pause.*) He was very beautiful. He had dark eyes. I think of him as a fire.

**Willy** Why?

**Rose** A fire that doesn't die out. I've seen it burn in the sea.

**Willy** What d'you mean?

**Rose** When we were young we lit fires on the beach. At night. The fire shone on his face. I saw it reflected in the sea. It danced because both the flames and the water moved.

**Willy** D'you feel anything wrong?

**Rose** You mean guilty?

**Willy** Yes. When someone dies people sometimes –

**Rose** No. I was always happy with him. There was nothing mean and selfish in it. It seemed perfect. Now I have nothing to live for. There's nothing to look forward to. My life is meaningless. I don't know what I shall do. I can't think of anything to make one day pass. Yet I have most of my life to live. I don't know how I shall get through it. He was the only person who could understand me now.

**Willy** I understand you a little.

**Rose** Yes, but what does that matter to me?

**Willy** All people matter to each other.

**Rose** That isn't true, of course.

**Willy** No.

*Silence.*

**Rose** I can't bear to lose him. I don't think I can live without him.

**Willy** (*quiet anger*) I think that love can be a terrible disaster. And hope is sometimes pride and ambition. When I'm lost in darkness I'll shut my eyes and feel my way forward, grope like an animal, not be guided by some distant light.

**Rose** How can you escape from yourself, or what's happened to you, or the future? It's a silly question. It's better out here where he died. At home there's so much to do. People coming and going. Why? What does it matter to them? How can I escape from *that*?

**Willy** If you look at life closely it is unbearable. What people suffer, what they do to each other, how they hate themselves,



anything good is cut down and trodden on, the innocent and the victims are like dogs digging rats from a hole, or an owl starving to death in a city. It is all unbearable, but that is where you have to find your strength. Where else is there?

**Rose** An owl starving in a city.

**Willy** To death. Yes. Wherever you turn. So you should never turn away. If you do you lose everything. Turn back and look into the fire. Listen to the howl of the flames. The rest is lies.

**Rose** How just. How sane.

**Willy** *stands and looks upstage.*

**Rose** What is it?

**Willy** He's on the beach. There.

**Rose and Willy** *go up to the body.*

**Rose** Why is he like that?

**Willy** He tried to pull the jumper over his head. So he could swim.

**Rose** He drowned.

**Willy** Yes.

*They stare silently for a moment.*

**Rose** Is it him?

**Willy** Yes. I lent him my shoes. Go and fetch Mr Evens. I'll keep watch.

**Rose** Yes.

**Rose** *hurries out. After a moment Willy crouches down by the body.*

**Willy** Dragging the jumper over your head. Your arms in the air as if you were pleading. They'll break them to get you into the box. Cut your clothes. Fold you up like a dummy. What's on your face now? Is it at peace or swollen with water or scratched? Keep my shoes. You won't walk in them. Ever.

*A sound in the distance. Not a tune, but a high, inarticulate, singsong whining, mad, with the note of a hunter in it. Willy looks at something offstage. He comes quickly downstage and crouches out of sight. The sound comes closer. He waits. Hatch comes on. He carries a knife. He follows Rose's and Willy's footprints. Willy crouches lower.*

**Hatch** More prints. And still someone with him. Always back to the beach. He can't keep away. What drags him back time after time? Obsession. You must get him, Mr Hatch. The fools in this town think they're safe. No, life's being worn away. Their bodies are crunched underfoot like sand. This long beach is a stream trickling through god's hands. Their bones are ground down and fall through the hour-glass. Time runs and the enemy is closer. Quiet, Hatch. Hold your noise. Stop your rant. Follow your victim.

*He takes a few steps towards the body. He stops and looks round.*

Mr Carson asleep on the beach. Where's the head? In his hands. That's it! What confidence. Insolence. Sleeping while he waits for his friends to come out of the sea. This is the quiet place where the sea monsters breed and play and lie in the sun. Mr Hatch, you have him. Careful.

*He creeps towards the body. He still holds the knife.*

A sound and he's gone . . .

*He reaches the body. He falls on it and knives it in a frenzy.*

Kill it! Kill it! Kill it! At last! What's this? Water! Look, water! Water, not blood? (*Stabbing*) Kill it! Kill it! (*He stops.*) More water? (*Stabs.*) The filthy beast!

**Willy** (*to himself*) Hit it. That's an innocent murder.

**Hatch** No blood. Only water. How do I know he's dead? Surely, surely! (*Stabs.*) There, that's hard enough. Hack his throat. Cut it! Tear it! Rip it! Slash it! (*Stops stabbing Rambles on quickly to himself.*) Still no blood! Oh, who would have thought of this? Surely they die? Why come here, why do anything, if you're not afraid of death? Yes. Their world's dying and they'll die if they stay – they know, they know! Of course they die!

Yes — watch and see if they bury him! You can't bury something that's still alive. (*Looks offstage.*) Hide, Mr Hatch. 'They're after you.

**Hatch** *hurries out. Willy is sitting downstage with his back to the body.*

**Rose and Evens** *hurry on. Evens brings a folded blanket.*

**Rose** We saw the draper.

**Evens** The town's out looking for him.

**Rose** Are you all right?

**Willy** Yes. (*To Evens.*) The body's up there.

**Evens** *stares offstage after Hatch. Then he goes upstage to the body.*

**Rose** He's cut. Look. His clothes. His arms.

**Willy** Hatch. He went for him with a knife.

**Rose** How terrible.

**Willy** He thought it was me.

**Rose** How terrible. How terrible.

**Willy** Why? What does it matter? You can't hurt the dead. How can you desecrate dust? (*Shrugs.*) He's just dead bait for a madman.

**Rose** But it seems so violent.

**Evens** *covers the body with the old blanket. It is pale green or faded, dirty white. He lays it out like a square and doesn't tuck it in. The body makes a bump in the middle.*

**Evens** (*to Rose*) Go into town and fetch a horse and cart. Go quietly or they'll come out to gape. There's no need for that. We'll watch.

**Rose** Yes.

**Rose** *goes out. Evens and Willy stand some way apart. They face half upstage and wait in silence. The body lies upstage.*

## Scene Seven

*Cliff-top.*

*Open, windy, sunny morning. An upright piano has been carried up on to the cliffs. When it is played the sound is hollow and spread. A chair stands in front of it. Mafanwy and Jilly are alone. They arrange sheet music on the piano.*

**Mafanwy** The wind.

**Jilly** When I'm dead I'll be brought up here to the cliff tops.

**Mafanwy** How can you even think about it!

**Jilly** (*looking off*) They're coming. Why don't you play?

**Mafanwy** Mrs Rafi wants to enter to silence.

**Jilly** (*looking offstage*) Oh, isn't she marvellous? Look how she holds the urn. Oh, isn't it small?

**Mafanwy** How disgraceful.

**Jilly** Whatever is it, Fanny?

**Mafanwy** They've brought Mr Evens.

**Jilly** Oh, where?

**Mafanwy** He's lower than a tramp. Louise only does it to annoy.

**Jilly** Oh, is that what he looks like? Oh dear. You must let me stand by you. I feel quite afraid. How silly. Are those stories true?

**Mafanwy** I haven't listened to them.

**Jilly** The girls say that if you go by his hut at night –

**Mafanwy** (*sharply*) Sh-sh! What is the matter with you? Your neck's gone quite red.

**Jilly** Oh dear.

**Mafanwy and Jilly** stand with bowed heads. Their hands are crossed in their laps. The procession comes on. **Mrs Rafi, Mrs Tilehouse, Rose, Rachel, Willy, Evens, Vicar, Carter, Thompson** and other men and ladies. **Mrs Rafi** carries a small urn. Two of the

*men carry the town banner. It is a red strip stretched between two poles. It is heavily embroidered with gold-coloured wire and silk. Everyone goes to their place in silence.*

**Vicar** (*low and considerate*) You'll be more comfortable over there, Mrs Rafi. A trifle more sheltered from the blast.

**Mrs Rafi** *goes silently to her place. The group settles down.*

**Vicar** Dearly beloved, we the friends of this poor departed soul in god remember today, as we cast his ashes about this favourite walk, the faithful townsman who has gone before us on the great journey that leads to that home where there is always peace. So we come to bid him our last earthly adieus. Let us pray, each in the silence of his heart.

*They bow their heads and clasp their hands. A short silence.*

Amen.

**All** Amen.

**Vicar** I heard a voice from heaven saying unto me, write. From henceforth happy are the dead, for they rest from their labours. The first hymn, Miss Price, thank you. Page 432.

*Some of the people use hymn books, others know the words. As they sing, a rivalry for the most elaborate descant develops between Mrs Rafi and Mrs Tilehouse. Mrs Tilehouse becomes operatic. Mafanwy stamps out the proper rhythm at the piano.*

Eternal father, strong to save  
Whose arm doth bind the restless wave  
Who bidst the mighty ocean deep  
Its own appointed limits keep  
O hear us when we cry to thee  
For those in peril on the sea

O Saviour, whose almighty word  
The winds and waves submissive heard  
Who walkedst on the foaming deep  
And calm amid its rage didst sleep  
O hear us when we cry to thee  
For those in peril on the sea

<b>All</b>	}	Amen.
<b>Mrs Tilehouse</b>		(sing) A-a-a-a-a-a-a-meeeeeeen.
<b>Mrs Rafi</b>		A-a-a-a -

**Mrs Rafi** (sung) — men.

**Vicar** Colin's goodness speaks for him. I will not tarnish that sound with my foolish words. One incident I cannot forbear to relate. Yesterday I went to the battery commander at Forebeach and asked if, during the brief moments of our ceremony here today, his guns might be silent. Without prompting he lifted up his martial voice and said 'Yes. Mr Bentham was a good man, Padre. He goes before the Almighty with a clean record. He is destined for high rank among the heavenly hosts. Would that I had numbered him amongst my own officers.' Saying which, this soldier, so reminiscent of some fine hero of the ancient world, raised his sherry glass and sang the opening lines of the Regimental —

*In the distance the battery starts to fire. There is an embarrassed silence.*

**Vicar** Miss Price, perhaps we might go on to the next hymn.

*They sing the 'Old One Hundredth'. Mrs Tilehouse again delays the tune with her descant. Mrs Rafi glares at her angrily and unconsciously beats time against the urn.*

All people that on earth do dwell  
Sing to the Lord with hopeful voice  
Him serve with fear, his praise forth tell  
Come ye before him and rejoice.

O enter then his gates with praise  
Approach with joy his courts unto  
Praise laud and bless his name always  
For it is seemly so to do.

**Mrs Tilehouse** begins to sing 'Amen', **Mafanwy** doesn't accompany her. **Mrs Tilehouse** stops. During the singing the **Vicar** has gone upstage to the edge of the cliff. The guns have stopped.



**Vicar** We commit this body to the air over the deep waters; to be turned to corruption; and we look to the resurrection of the body when the sea shall give up her dead. Amen.

**All** Amen.

**Vicar** I believe you have prepared a few words, Mrs Rafi.

**Mrs Rafi** *goes towards the edge of the cliff. She still carries the urn.*

**Vicar** Not too near the edge, dear lady.

**Mrs Rafi** Be not afraid, Vicar.

**Mrs Rafi** *recites. While she does so she mimes to her words. The effect suggests 'Under the Spreading Chestnut Tree'.*

*At the same time Mrs Tilehouse starts to search in her large handbag. She can't find what she is searching for. She speaks to herself in a sweet, patient, chiding voice, lower than Mrs Rafi's, but loud enough to be heard, especially in Mrs Rafi's dramatic pauses.*

**Mrs Tilehouse** Smelling salts. Smelling salts. Dear me, where are you? Did I leave you in my ormolu trinket box? Given to me by my aunt *en souvenir* before she embarked on the steamer to India. Under this distress I may perchance have left off the top. What misfortune! – the mixture is so volatile . . .

**Mrs Rafi**

Like dust and ash all men become  
Broken and old when they leave home

*She reacts to a sudden idea.*

I'll throw his ash into the heartless sea  
The waves will calm like water under lee

**Mrs Tilehouse** *is taking things from her bag to hand to ladies to hold.*

**Mrs Tilehouse** That Davis has been at them again. Nowadays even the under-servants are getting above themselves. Hold this. They are of the most expensive distillation. I gave the chemist four shillings and thrupence for them.

**Mrs Rafi**

And in that water that is always night –

**Mrs Rafi** *dramatically gropes a few steps towards the edge. The spectators gasp.* **Mrs Tilehouse** stands her bag on the ground and rummages in it.

**Mrs Rafi**

His ash will fall sparkling as light  
There they will drift through ages yet to come  
Lighting the deep with dreams of home!

**Mrs Tilehouse** *empties her bag on the ground to search through the things.*

**Mrs Tilehouse** Such is the cost of living one can no longer afford to faint.

**Mrs Rafi**

Men who live out their little year –

*She stares dramatically into the urn as if she has discovered something in it.*

Are diamonds polished by their labours here!  
Fire has burned! It gives no ashes grey!  
Diamonds only from this mortal clay!

*She snatches out a handful of ashes and holds them up triumphantly. The spectators gasp.*

**Mrs Tilehouse** Or might I indeed have lent them to the cook?

**Mrs Rafi**

Arise ye dust, and take the air on wings!  
Pale spirit rise! For hark! the angel –

Mrs Tilehouse, perhaps you would like to go down and cut the sandwiches for our tea?

**Mrs Tilehouse** I beg your pardon?

**Mrs Rafi** I only wish to spare you your little upset.

**Mrs Tilehouse** (*plaintively*) Louise, how can you? I cannot help it if my feelings make the use of salts necessary –

**Mrs Rafi** Feelings!

**Vicar** Ladies, let us pray.

**Mrs Rafi** Is this an exhibition of feelings?

**Mrs Tilehouse** (*angrily*) You would not understand, Louise. No one has feelings except you, of course.

**Mrs Rafi** Most people would say it is an exhibition of hysteria. It seems to me to be quite close to insanity!

**Vicar** Our Father which art —

**Mrs Rafi** Oh do be quiet, Vicar!

**Mrs Rafi** *crosses to Mrs Tilehouse. She still carries a handful of ashes. As she passes Jilly she gives them to her.*

**Mrs Rafi** Hold these for a moment.

**Jilly** Ah! (*She bursts into tears.*)

**Mrs Rafi** You've deliberately destroyed this occasion. (*She holds up the urn.*) Now what are my last memories of this poor dead boy? Your absurd singing. Your absurd histrionics. Oh, I know what's behind this, madam. (*Going back to her place.*) It's because she didn't get a part in the play.

**Evens** *goes to help Jilly. He puts his hand on her shoulder.*

**Evens** Allow me, my dear.

**Jilly** *turns and sees him. She screams. He tries to take her hand.*

**Evens** But I want to help —

**Jilly** You beast! You beast!

**Jilly** *faints and drops the ashes on the ground.*

**Mrs Tilehouse** Look at this poor girl. Another of your victims.

**Vicar** Miss Price, the next hymn.

**Mafanwy** *starts to play 'Eternal Father'. She switches to 'All People'. She stops in confusion and starts to cry. Mrs Tilehouse is trying to sweep up the ashes in her handkerchief.*

**Mrs Rafi** Wallow, Mrs Tilehouse. Look at her. Snatch and grab! That's what she wanted all along. She wants to scatter them. Well let her. I won't!

**Mrs Tilehouse** I'll never forgive you. You've gone too far this day, madam.

**Hatch** *comes in in a frenzy of excitement and triumph.*

**Hatch** He's dead! He's dead! The first one's chalked up!

**Vicar** The devil's come.

**Hatch** Put him in a hole at the crossroads.

*He dodges about. The others try to catch him.*

Put him in quicklime. There's a place for him in the prison wall. The little green where the hangman grows flowers for Buckingham Palace.

**Mrs Rafi** Ruffian, have you no respect for the dead?

**Mrs Tilehouse** Anarchist!

**Hatch** (*dancing*) Witches! Hussies!

**Mrs Rafi** Silence before your betters.

**Hatch** *attacks them.* **Hollarcut** *runs on.*

**Hatch** Push them over the top, Billy. That's where the swine go!

**Rachel** *starts to beat Hollarcut with the sheet music. Ladies surround Hollarcut and Hatch and hit them. The Vicar kneels.*

**Vicar** Page 78 in your prayer books. A prayer in time of war and tumult. Save and deliver us, confound their devices --

**Mrs Rafi** (*throwing handfuls of ashes at Hatch*) Have you no respect for the dead?

**Hatch** Billy, save me!

**Hollarcut** Mr Hatch, help!

**Carter** I'll larrup yoo, lad. I'll bang yoo. I'll knock 'em into next week, Mrs Rafi.

**Hatch** (*throwing his arms open*) Take me to my end. My work is done.

*Suddenly Hatch steps in front of Willy. Willy is taking the empty urn from Mrs Rafi. He holds it awkwardly upside down. He stares at Hatch. The silence spreads till you might hear the ashes drift.*

**Hatch** Alive?

*He half reaches out to touch Willy.*

Alive? (*He begins crying.*) No. No. No. No. He's still alive.

*He falls to his hands and knees.*

**Willy** Touch me. I won't hurt you. No one will hurt you here.

**Hollarcut** Mr Hatch . . . Don't yoo cry. 'Tis better so.

*He goes to Hatch and crouches beside him.*

**Hollarcut** Stop that . . .

*He looks at the others.*

Why yoo do this to Mr Hatch? He on't done yoo no harm.

**Mrs Rafi** No harm! D'you know what you're saying?

**Hollarcut** He only stopped yoor spoutin' for a little while. Not even so much. Take more'n a few whacks t' shut her up. How hev the likes-a' him ever harmed yoo? Look on him now, if yoo can.

**Mrs Tilehouse** He wounded Mrs Rafi's arm.

**Hollarcut** She on't die a' no scratch. She come nearer dyin' every time she stick her ol' hat pin in.

**Vicar** Hollarcut, I have failed. Week after week I laboured at your side in the heat of Sunday school. For hours I struggled with your soul. I fought with your rational mind to instil some order into it. Did you not understand one word?

**Hollarcut** No.

**Vicar** Oh. Excuse me, I must go down and prepare myself. The time of the great beast cannot be far off.

*The Vicar goes out. Mrs Rafi shouts after him.*

**Mrs Rafi** Remember, Vicar: the Lord moves in a mysterious way. The poor man's gone. (*To Hollarcut.*) You bully! Surely you know it's your duty to look after him? He's weaker than you!

**Mafanwy** *fusses round Mrs Rafi with a shawl.*

**Mafanwy** Oh, Mrs Rafi, I'm so sorry. You tried so hard to make everything nice today.

**Mrs Rafi** Carter, take Hatch down to the town lock-up.

**Carter and Thompson** *are holding Hatch.*

**Hatch** (*afraid*) I don't know if you're all ghosts or if you still have time to save yourselves. (*He cries to himself.*) I'm out of touch. I tried to save you from your foolishness and selfishness . . . (*Cries.*) Now someone else will come and take my place and no one will help you . . . No one can help you now . . .

**Carter and Thompson** *take Hatch out.*

**Mrs Rafi** Mafanwy, stop fussing and put your shawl on. Whenever you catch a cold you behave as if you'd taken the sins of the world on your shoulders and expected a tip. You'll be snivelling round self-righteously for half the year.

**Mafanwy** (*turns away in tears*) How can you be so hard . . .

*She starts to collect the scattered sheet music.*

**Mrs Rafi** (*making an announcement*) Ladies, attention. I think I may say that everything was going very well today until Mr Hatch came on with his lunacy. Our behaviour was as usual an example to the town.

**Ladies** Yes.

**Mrs Rafi** No doubt some of us had been moved by the high emotionalism of the occasion –

**Mrs Tilehouse** Ah yes, how true.

**Mrs Rafi** – but that is only proper. (*A murmur of agreement.*) Indeed it shows the depths of our feelings.



*A few claps from the ladies.*

No more will be said about that. By anyone. Of course, it was unfortunate that the wind blew some of our articles about –

*She takes the urn from Willy.*

– but you expect it in these high, exposed places.

*She gives the urn to Evens.*

Mr Evens, kindly see that is returned to my study. Perhaps you will help me to choose a niche. Our work is done – (*She dusts a speck from herself.*) – and we may safely say the ashes have been well scattered. Where's Rose?

*They look round. She is not there.*

**Mrs Tilehouse** Something terrible is going to happen. I know it. A thing brushed past me through the air.

**Mrs Rafi** Nonsense, Jessica. Rose is a sensible girl. She's gone off for a few moments' peace away from this madhouse. Hollarcut, can I trust you to go quietly down to the town with at least the outward show of decorum?

**Hollarcut** I on't give yoo n' more chance to pin nothin' on me, if thass what yoo mean.

**Mrs Rafi** You can come and work *hard* in my garden every evening for the next two months. There's a lot of especially *hard* digging you can do. That, or I must take up this matter with the local magistrates. Which?

**Hollarcut** (*grumbling*) Diggin', I suppose.

**Mrs Rafi** I'm glad you've got some wits left. I shall assume Hatch led you astray – an easy assumption. Present yourself at my back door tomorrow at five-thirty sharp.

**Hollarcut** Mornin' or evenin'?

**Mrs Rafi** Both.

**Hollarcut** *goes out, grumbling to himself.*

**Mrs Rafi** Ladies, you can go down now.

**Rachel** } But are you all right?

**Mrs Tilehouse** } Oh no, my dear. I won't leave you out here unattended –

**Mrs Rafi** You'll be safe, Jessica. Carter won't let Hatch slip away.

*The ladies and the others go out. Mrs Rafi and Willy are left alone. She is downstage and he is upstage. The empty chair still stands in front of the piano. It has not moved.*

**Mrs Rafi** Fetch me the chair. Willy.

*Willy fetches her the chair. He sets it downstage. She sits on it. He stands a little way from her.*

**Mrs Rafi** I'm afraid of getting old. I've always been a forceful woman. I was brought up to be. People expect my class to shout at them. Bully them. They're disappointed if you don't. It gives them something to gossip about in their bars. When they turn you into an eccentric, it's their form of admiration. Sometimes I think I'm like a lighthouse in their world. I give them a sense of order and security. My glares mark out a channel to the safe harbour. I'm so tired of them. I'm tired of being a sideshow in their little world. Nothing else was open to me. If I were a Catholic – (*She looks round.*) – it's all right, the Vicar's gone – I'd have been an abbess. I'd have terrified the nuns. They'd have loved it. Like living next door to the devil. But the grand old faith didn't allow me even that consolation. Of course I have my theatricals – (*She looks round as before.*) – Yes, the ladies have gone – none of them can act, you know. Oh no. I'm surrounded by mediocrities. A flaming torch and no path to shine on . . . I'll grow old and shout at them from a wheelchair. That's what they're waiting for. They get their own back for all the years I bullied them. They wheel you where they like. 'Take me there.' 'You went there yesterday. We want to go the other way.' 'Take me down to the beach. I want to see the sea.' 'You don't want to see the sea. You saw the sea yesterday. The wind's bad for your head. If you misbehave and catch a cold we'll shut you up in bed. You'll stay there for good this time.' Subtle. Jessica would probably stick matchsticks

under my nails. I'll see she's pensioned off. She is one of those ladies who are meant to die alone in a small room. You give up shouting. You close your eyes and the tears dribble down your ugly old face and you can't even wipe it clean – they won't give you your hanky. 'Don't let her have it. She gets into a tizzy and tears it to shreds.' There you are: old, ugly, whimpering, dirty, pushed about on wheels and threatened. I can't love them. How could I? But that's a terrible state in which to move towards the end of your life: to have no love. Has anything been worthwhile? No. I've thrown my life away. (*She sees someone offstage.*) Come along. They've gone.

**Rose** *comes on. She walks calmly towards them.*

**Mrs Rafi** Go away, Rose. Don't stay in the town and marry the solicitor or doctor or parson. You can't breathe here.

**Rose** Where shall I go?

**Mrs Rafi** Colin would have taken you away. It's why I wanted him to marry you. He'd never settle down in this ditch. Oh no. But they've got him now. He's up on these cliffs for ever. A ghost haunting the sea. Till *that* goes – even the sea must go sometime. Even the ghosts. Ha, ha. You take her, Willy.

**Willy** Will she come?

**Mrs Rafi** If she's got any sense.

**Rose** (*to Mrs Rafi*) You didn't go.

**Mrs Rafi** No. (*She stands.*) I've arranged a burying tea. These little things break the monotony of their lives. There'll be chaos if I don't go and rule the tea room. They'll hack themselves to pieces on the cake knives and empty the teapot over the sandwiches. But I shall be thinking of the sea and dead Colin, and how the world is full of things that have always been far away from me. Don't come down – it'll disgust you. Stay up here and shock them. They'll have a good gossip and it'll help them to get over the funeral.

**Mrs Rafi** *goes out.*

**Willy** Are you all right?

**Rose** Yes.

**Willy** Shall we go away?

**Rose** (*calmly*) Would you like to?

**Willy** . . . Yes.

**Rose** Oh yes, but then I could go away with anyone.

**Willy** Who?

**Rose** Any sailor from the port. I don't mind having my life messed up. Or I could go to London and work. Don't feel sorry for Aunt Louise. She's such a coward. Haven't you noticed? It's safer to stay in the garden and shout over the wall. She's a bully and only the weak ones like being bullied. The town's full of her cripples. They're the ones she's nicest to.

**Willy** I know.

**Rose** (*shrugs slightly*) When are you going?

**Willy** Soon. Everything's done here.

**Rose** If you'd drowned I'd be married to Colin now.

**Willy** I suppose it was a near thing.

**Rose** You missed drowning. You missed the draper's knife. Does living excite you?

**Willy** Shall I kiss you?

*He kisses her in silence.*

**Rose** In a dead man's shoes.

**Willy** The dead don't matter.

**Rose** I'm not sure.

**Willy** Then you're like your aunt. You talk and have no courage.

**Rose** Look, they've left the cover off the piano. Damp spoils the strings.

*She covers the piano with a green or faded dirty white sheet.*

Aunt will order two strong men with a barrow to bring it back.

*She stands the chair in front of the piano. Willy turns to go.*

**Rose** Where are you going?

**Willy** For a swim.

**Rose** (*uncertain shock*) Today?

**Willy** Yes.

**Rose** In the sea?

**Willy** Yes.

**Rose** Where's your towel?

**Willy** I don't need one.

**Rose** Will you?

**Willy** Oh yes.

*He looks at her for a moment and then turns again to go.*

**Rose** Wait.

*He stops.*

I'll come down and hold your clothes . . .

**Willy** *nods at her. They go. The stage is empty except for the covered piano and the empty chair.*

## Scene Eight

*Beach.*

**Evans's** *hut. Bright, clear morning with some wind. Evans sits on a box. He has a small whisky flask in his hand but he doesn't drink. After a moment he shouts offstage.*

**Evans** You've been hanging round there all morning!

**Hollarcut** (*off*) Oh ay?

**Evens** What's the big stick for?

*After a few moments Hollarcut comes in. He looks tired and unshaved. His collar is open. He is exhausted but has the energy of anger.*

**Hollarcut** (*flatly*) What, scum?

**Evens** Come to batter me to death, have you? Batter me with your big stick?

**Hollarcut** (*flatly*) What if I have?

**Evens** You won't.

**Hollarcut** (*flatly*) Oh ay?

**Evens** You haven't got it in you.

**Hollarcut** (*flatly*) No?

**Evens** Not now Hatch is inside.

**Hollarcut** Don't you dutty his name with yoor foul ol' snout.

**Evens** You don't believe the stories he told you? D'you believe I ride on a broomstick?

**Hollarcut** (*flatly*) What if I don't?

**Evens** Then why d'you come to batter me with your big stick? (*He takes a drink.*)

**Hollarcut** Who drove him wrong in the hid? Why'd he take up all they daft notions? I don't know no one doo that if that weren't yoo.

*He hits a box with the stick. The stick breaks.*

**Evens** Probably.

**Hollarcut** He allus treat me right. Who else talked t' me 'cept t' say goo here, fetch that, yoo en't got this in yoo, yoo can't doo that? He on't ashamed t' talk t' me, or listen. He on't used me like that ol' bitch an' the rest on yer. He wanted me with him.

**Evens** Yes, I see.



**Hollarcut** I count in the end. Yoo may not like it but mostly I'm like yoo an' I count. He knew that. That on't so mad. Thass all I'll say for today.

**Evens** All right, Billy. But don't do mad things. Drop your stick on the ground.

**Hollarcut** Mr Hollarcut.

**Evens** Drop your stick, Mr Hollarcut.

**Hollarcut** No. I'll howd on to en now I got en. That remind yoo I'm here.

**Willy** *comes in.*

**Willy** Hello. I thought I'd walk out this way.

**Evens** (*nods*) They had their inquest this morning.

**Willy** Yes.

**Evens** It's all wrapped up.

**Willy** Death by drowning.

**Evens** Satisfied?

**Willy** And the coroner mentioned careless people who go to sea in bad weather and put the coastguard at risk.

**Evens** When are you going?

**Willy** This morning. We catch the 11.45. Morning, Billy. I see Mrs Rafi's got you digging in her garden.

**Hollarcut** Mr Hollarcut.

**Willy** Ah yes.

**Hollarcut** That's all right – Carson on't it? I'll tell yoo somethin' yoo ought a know, boy. I dig for her – (*He lays the side of his index finger against the side of his nose and looks crafty.*) – but will anythin' grow? . . . Mornin'.

**Hollarcut** *goes out.* **Willy** *sits on a box.*

**Evens** Have you come to kill me?

**Willy** I don't think so.

**Evens** He had.

**Willy** Oh dear. Should we take it seriously?

**Evens** (*shrugs*) God knows.

**Willy** Perhaps you'd better move back into town. For a while anyway.

**Evens** I'd rather be battered to death.

**Willy** Tch tch.

*Silence.*

**Willy** The draper thought there were more people up there. Other worlds.

**Evens** There are. There are countless millions of suns, so there must be more planets. Millions and millions of living worlds.

**Willy** But would they come all this way to visit us even if they could?

**Evens** No, hardly worth the trip.

**Willy** Perhaps they're busy killing each other and killing other things. What if they've killed everything up there? They might come here to kill us. That'd be a reason for coming. It would make the long trip worthwhile. A space safari. Perhaps we're violent little vermin to them. Not to be taken seriously. Just sport.

**Evens** Yes.

**Willy** D'you think they kill each other?

**Evens** Must do. All life kills things.

**Willy** You mean living things are a growth that stretches across the universe and kills and devours itself?

**Evens** In a way.

**Willy** Up there. Out there. When I look up into the sky there are things dying and bleeding and groaning?

**Evans** Oh yes. The music of the spheres.

**Willy** How can you bear to live?

**Evans** Are you going to cry again?

**Willy** How?

**Evans** I really don't know. I don't know why I'm not mad.

*Silence.*

**Willy** I'm not sure I can bear it.

**Evans** You don't have to bear it long. The years go very quickly and you seem to be spared the minutes. Would you like some tea?

**Willy** No thanks.

**Evans** *takes two flasks from a box. He stands them on the box. He unscrews one and pours tea. He lets it stand in the cup. He takes the small whisky flask from his pocket and drinks. He puts it away again. He picks up the tea and warms his hands on the cup.*

**Evans** I believe in the rat. What's the worst thing you can imagine? The universe is lived in by things that kill and this has gone on for all time. Sometimes the universe is crowded with killing things. At other times it falls out they've killed everything off, including each other. The universe is almost deserted. But not quite. Somewhere on a star a rat will hide under a stone. It looks out on the broken desert. From time to time it scatters out to feed on the debris. A shambling, lolloping great rat. Like a fat woman with shopping bags running for a bus. Then it scuttles back to its nest and breeds. Rats build nests. I believe in that. In time it will change into things that fly and swim and crawl and run. And one day it will change into the ratcatcher. The rat has the seeds of the ratcatcher in it. I believe in the ratcatcher. I believe in sand and stone and water. In the wind that stirs them into a dirty sea that gives birth to living things. The universe lives. It teems with life. Men take themselves to be strong and cunning. But who can kill space or time or dust? They destroy everything but they only make the materials of life. All destruction is finally petty. In the end life laughs at death.

**Willy** But if it fails in the end? If it always goes back to the rat?

**Evens** I also believe in the wise ratcatcher. He can bear to live in the minutes as well as the years. He understands the voice of the thing he's going to kill. Suffering is a universal language and everything that has a voice is human.

**Willy** And hope is listening?

**Evens** Yes.

*He takes out the whisky flask. Takes one swallow. The alcohol has immediate effect. He manages to hide most of it. Toasts with the flask.*

To Li Po. (*Puts the flask away.*) A little joke I sometimes . . . (*Gestures with the back of his hand.*) We sit here and the world changes. When your life's over everything will be changed. Or have started to change. Our brains won't be big enough. They'll plug into bigger brains. They'll get rid of this body. It's too liable to get ill and break. They'll transplant the essentials into a better container. An unbreakable glass bottle on steel stilts. Men will look at each others' viscera as they pass in the street. There'll be no more grass. Why? What's it for? There'll be no more tragedy. There's no tragedy without grass for you to play it on. Well, without tragedy no one can laugh – there's only discipline and madness. That's why the draper's afraid. Not of things from space, of us. We're becoming the strange visitors to this world.

**Willy** Perhaps a better world.

**Evens** Then why will they fill it with bombs and germs and gas? If you live you'll see a time when that happens and people will do nothing. They'll sit on the ground and say perhaps a better world.

**Willy** What should I do? Stay here? Work? Make money? Become Mayor of Forebeach?

**Evens** (*shudders*) No.

**Willy** You sound so sure.

**Evens** I'm a wreck rotting on the beach. Past help. That's why I live out here. Out of people's way. It wouldn't help *them* to live here. We all have to end differently . . . Don't trust the wise fool too much. What he knows matters. And you die without it But he never knows enough. Go. You won't find answers here. Go away and find them. Don't give up hope. That's stupid. The truth's waiting. It's very patient and you'll find it. I've told you these things so you won't despair. Now go. Catch the 11.45 and change the world.

**Rose** *comes on.*

**Rose** The packing's finished. What were you saying?

**Willy** I came to say goodbye. And I'm glad you –  
*End.*

وقل رب زدني علما  
PUACP

## **The Child and the Toad**

*A story about the origin of drama in childhood*

There was once a small child. Every day at noon the mother gave the child a little bowl of bread and milk. The child sat down with it out on the doorstep in the yard. And when it began to eat a toad jumped out of a crack in the wall and dipped its little head in the milk and ate with it. This made the child laugh with joy. Some days if the child sat down with its little bowl and the toad did not come straightaway the child called to it:

Toad toad hurry quick  
Come here you little thing  
You must have your bread and milk  
A feast that's fit for a king

Then the toad would come leaping and join in the meal with relish. To show her thanks the toad brought the child all sorts of beautiful things from her secret treasure: shining stones, pearls and golden playthings. But the toad only drank the milk and did not touch the sops of bread. Then one day the child gently tapped it on the head and said: 'Little thing, eat the bread too.' The mother was standing in the kitchen and heard the child speak to someone. She looked out and saw the child hit a toad on the head with a little spoon. She ran into the yard with a log of wood and killed the poor creature.

From then on the child changed. While the toad had shared its meal it had grown big and strong. Now its beautiful red cheeks faded and its limbs shrunk and grew thin. Soon the screech owl was heard in the night and the robin gathered twigs and leaves for a wreath. And before long the child was lowered into its grave.

*Translated from 'Märchen von der Unke' in the Grimm Brothers' collection.*







Ottawa Public  
**Library**



**Bibliothèque**  
publique d'Ottawa



Su-14

methuen | drama



A  
lag  
liv  
wc

BIBLIO OTTAWA LIBRARY



3 2950 70610 195 1

farce, high comedy, biting social satire and poetic tragedy.

*The Sea* was first produced at the Royal Court Theatre, London, in 1973 and was revived at the Theatre Royal Haymarket, London, in January 2008.

'This cosmically inclined neo-Chekhovian romp set in a stiflingly small seaside town in 1907 proves to be every bit as masterful as its sensational predecessor [*Saved*].'

*Time Out* (New York)

www.methuendrama.com £9.99

ISBN 978-1-4081-0150-6

90300>



9 781408 101506

methuen | drama

Cover image designed by Dewynters