

David Henry Wilson

THE DAWN

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THE DAWN

List of characters:

Sarah

Dan

Mr Smith

Michael

Mr. Smith's Assistant

Various voices, including singer and TV personalities as detailed in the text

The set:

A room with a double bed (back, right of centre), a dressing table and chair (right), a cupboard (back, left of bed), and a chair (left of bed). Entrances back left and side left. Modifications for Act Two as described in the text.

ACT ONE

When the curtain rises, the set is bathed in red light. DAN and SARAH are asleep, and so not visible to the audience. From off stage comes the clear voice of a woman singing:

I fed a snow-light butterfly on willow shoots for bread,
And asked him if the world was round, and laughingly he said:
"Your bread is good for sinners, and the world is very round,
And it has no ending even when the bone is in the ground."
I asked him if a feathered man could reach a summer sky,
And he smiled and asked me if I thought a feathered man could fly.
Then he brushed my cheeks with velvet, and drank the milk I shed,
And bade me go to sleep and made me dream that he was dead.
And when I woke, the sky was red, and its hands and feet were torn,
As though someone had driven nails into the cross of dawn.
But when I tried to sleep again, I heard a small voice say
That if a feathered man had wings, he'd fly all day.

As the song ends, the redness fades, and we see that the set is entirely in black and white. Dan sits up in bed, smiling at first, but then – as he realizes the situation – gradually losing the smile. In sitting up he has pulled some of the covers off Sarah.

SARAH: I wish you'd lie down.

DAN: I'm awake.

SARAH: I know you're awake, but I'm getting cold.

DAN: I'm only sitting up.

SARAH: You've pulled the covers off me.

DAN: Have I? Yes, so I have.

SARAH: Well put them back on me.

He tries, but remains sitting up.

DAN: They won't reach.

SARAH: They will reach if you lie down.

DAN: But I'm awake.

SARAH: Ts!

She sits up.

DAN: Morning, Sal.

SARAH: I was asleep then.

DAN: Good for you.

SARAH: It would have been if I'd had some more of it.

DAN: Did you sleep well?

SARAH: I did when I wasn't awake.

DAN: I have the same trouble.

SARAH: You seemed to be having a good enough night when I was awake.

DAN: You must have been awake when I was asleep.

SARAH: And that was most of the night, Dan.

Slight pause.

Did you dream again?

DAN (*suddenly sad:*) Yes.

SARAH: What did you dream?

DAN: I dreamt... wings... there were wings - and I was moving... rocking...or wherever I was was moving. I was afraid for a moment - because of this redness. Then I saw it was fire, and there were flames drumming...and it came closer, and I knew...it was then. The flames were suddenly all over me.

SARAH: That must have been painful.

DAN: No. It was a relief.

Pause.

SARAH: I suppose he'll be coming again today.

DAN: I suppose so.

SARAH: With his eternal questions. Why this, why that. How long's it going on for?

DAN: Till he finds what he wants.

SARAH: Will he ever find what he wants?

DAN: No.

SARAH: Then what's going to happen to us?

DAN: I don't know. It upsets me as much as it does you. I'm the one he goes on at.

SARAH: He should let us die in peace.

Dan gets out of bed and opens the cupboard, producing a urinal. He turns his back on the audience and urinates. When he has finished, he holds it up to examine it.

DAN: Nice and clear.

SARAH: Don't be sordid.

DAN: Amazing productivity. I haven't had a drop to drink all night, yet here I am in the morning with a bladderful of pure gold.

SARAH: I haven't had a movement for a week.

DAN: Funny you find it so difficult. Perhaps you don't relax enough.

SARAH: Some people can do it, and some people can't. It's like singing. No good thinking about it – either you can or you can't.

DAN: I never could sing.

SARAH: There you are.

DAN: Nor could you.

SARAH: I've got a beautiful singing voice.

DAN: Hm.

SARAH: I used to sing solo when I was younger.

DAN: 'Cos no-one'd stay in the room with you.

Dan puts the urinal back in the cupboard and closes the door.

SARAH: I could have been a professional.

Dan gets back into bed.

And sung at the Royal Albert Hall.

DAN: Inside or outside?

Sarah, still sitting up, begins to sing "Softly Awakes My Heart". She has a very powerful, very jarring voice, and is not too particular about key. After a few bars, Dan gets out of bed again.

Think I'll go and shit.

He goes off side left. Sarah stops singing and watches him go.

SARAH: I've got a lovely voice.

She gets out of bed. Dan returns.

DAN: Where's my Wisden?

SARAH: What's a Wisden?

DAN: My cricket annual.

SARAH: What do you want a cricket annual for?

DAN: Where is it?

SARAH: You mean that thick yellow book?

DAN: Yes.

SARAH: He took it. Wanted to examine what you read.

DAN: Damn him. How'm I going to shit without my Wisden?

He goes out again. Sarah sits at the dressing table, and undoes her hair, which is grey.. She begins to comb it. Through the door in the back left corner comes Mr. Smith. He is dressed in a glowing red doctor's coat. He looks round the room.

MR. SMITH: Your husband not here?

SARAH (*startled*): Oh! Can't you knock? He's through there – doing a number.

MR. SMITH (*going to the chair*): What kind of night did he have?

SARAH: Dark.

MR. SMITH (*not in the least put out*): Did he sleep?

SARAH: Only when he wasn't awake.

MR. SMITH: Did he sleep?

SARAH: Partly. According to him.

MR. SMITH: And according to you?

SARAH: Loud.

MR. SMITH: Did he dream?

SARAH: He dreamt he was burnt to death.

MR. SMITH: Did it frighten him?

SARAH (*with emphasis*): He was relieved. As I would have been.

MR. SMITH: Did he have any other dreams?

SARAH (*vehemently*): Why don't you leave us alone? Haven't you asked enough questions? We can't help you! We don't know anything! Leave us alone and let us finish!

MR. SMITH (*impassive*): Did he have any other dreams?

SARAH: I don't know.

MR. SMITH: His dreams are important.

SARAH: So am I. I'm important.

MR. SMITH: Did he have any other dreams?

SARAH: Go to hell.

The sound of the lavatory flushing off left.

MR. SMITH: I shall find out anyway.

SARAH: Then why ask me?

Dan re-enters left.

DAN: Hard as rock.

MR. SMITH: Good morning.

DAN: Not any more it isn't.

SARAH: You were quick.

DAN: Nothing to do in there. *(To Mr. Smith:)* What have you done with my Wisden?

MR. SMITH: The yellow book?

DAN: Yes.

MR. SMITH: It's being analysed.

DAN: What for?

MR. SMITH: We analyse everything.

DAN: Oh. I shouldn't have flushed, then.

MR. SMITH: Did you have a good night?

DAN: No, I had a lousy night.

MR. SMITH: Tell me about it.

DAN: I dreamt I was wearing hob-nailed boots – great heavy spiky things. And I was dancing. I was dancing with my hob-nailed boots. And the thing I was dancing on was a face. Your face.

MR. SMITH *(unperturbed)*: Your wife said you dreamt that you were burnt to death.

DAN *(to Sarah)*: What did you tell him that for?

She shrugs her shoulders.

MR. SMITH: What happened?

DAN: There were flames. I was in the middle of them. And I was burnt. To death.

MR. SMITH: Were you afraid?

DAN: I was not afraid.

MR. SMITH: Have you urinated?

DAN: I have urinated.

MR. SMITH: I'll have it analysed.

DAN: That'll be nice for you.

MR. SMITH: What have you remembered?

DAN: To do it in the bottle and put it in the cupboard.

MR. SMITH: What have you remembered about where you came from?

DAN: If I've told you that once, I've told you a hundred times.

MR. SMITH: You must try to remember.

Dan climbs back into bed, where he sits up.

DAN: I've told you.

MR. SMITH: I want the truth.
SARAH: Tell him they dug you up from under a gooseberry bush.
DAN: They dug me up from under a gooseberry bush.
MR. SMITH: And your son?
DAN: The bush next door.
MR. SMITH: I want your story again.
DAN: They dug me up...
MR. SMITH: Your other story.
DAN (*after deep breath*): I descended...if that's the right word... from my mother and father. My father screwed...there may be another word for that as well...my mother. I was the result.
MR. SMITH: How tall was your mother?
DAN: Five foot...something. But I was not as big then as I am now. Fortunately for my mother.
MR. SMITH: Was your mother the same size as your wife?
DAN: Approximately. Give or take a ton or two.
MR. SMITH: If, as you maintain, you began smaller than you are now – small enough to fit inside your mother – the rate of growth afterwards must have been fairly slow.
DAN: Why?
MR. SMITH: Because otherwise by now you would have filled this room.
DAN: I stopped growing.
MR. SMITH: Why?
DAN: How the hell should I know why I stopped growing?
MR. SMITH: Did you stop growing deliberately?
DAN: Of course I didn't!
MR. SMITH: So there must be a force which prescribes the limits of growth. What is that force?
DAN: Search me.
MR. SMITH: You claim to have come from within a woman smaller than yourself, to have grown larger than her, and then to have stopped growing.
DAN: Out of the acorn cometh the oak. It's called, I believe, a miracle of nature. And I, take it or leave it, am a miracle of nature.
MR. SMITH: What were you before you left your mother?
DAN: Doubled up.
MR. SMITH: What was it like inside?
DAN: I don't remember.
MR. SMITH: You must remember.
DAN: How can I?
MR. SMITH: Was it dark or light?
DAN: Dark. Dark and wet. Like bathing in a power cut.
MR. SMITH: How long were you there?
DAN: Nine months.
MR. SMITH: And before?
DAN: Before what?
MR. SMITH: Before you were there.
DAN: I was nowhere.

MR. SMITH: Were you inside or outside her?

DAN: I was nowhere. I didn't exist.

MR. SMITH: Are you telling me that at one time you didn't exist, and then suddenly you existed?

DAN: That is what I am telling you.

Pause.

MR. SMITH: What is "screwing"?

DAN (*after reflection*): Communion between the male and the female.

MR. SMITH: Between you and your wife?

DAN: For example.

MR. SMITH: Show me.

DAN: Oho, get away!

MR. SMITH: I want to see.

DAN: Are you kidding?

MR. SMITH (*to Sarah*): I want to see you and your husband screwing.

SARAH: There are names for people like you.

Dan gets out of bed.

DAN: What's a screw between friends?

He goes to Sarah, who is still at the dressing-table and looks up at him uncertainly. Dan forms a circle with the thumb and middle finger of his left hand.

Come on, Sal, let's have an orgy.

Sarah smiles, holds up her right forefinger, and waggles it around.

Heh heh, come along dearie, don't be shy.

SARAH: It's the anticipation.

DAN: You should have got it on by now.

She plunges her forefinger into the circle, and he lets out a whoop.

SARAH: Grrr!

DAN: Oh Dan, I love you!

SARAH: I love you, too, Sal.

DAN: You're killing me. Don't stop.

SARAH: Oomph!

DAN: Aaaaaaaaaaaaaah!

Sarah's forefinger falls, and she slumps in mock sleep, complete with mock snore.

DAN (*to Mr. Smith*): We have screwed. Once upon a time it wasn't a joke, but now we're old.

SARAH: Old and sick.

There is a pause in which both Dan and Sarah seem suddenly old and sick. Mr. Smith sits frowning in his chair.

I wonder what it is that goes out of you.

DAN: The newness.

SARAH: Yes. We dry up. Like leaves.

DAN: I'm not well.

He drags himself across the stage and back into bed.

SARAH (to Mr. Smith): You should have let us die. Like all the others. I had a beautiful singing voice, and my hair was black. (To Dan:) Do you remember?

DAN: Like all the others. Before we got too tired to live.

He lies back.

SARAH: You do remember, don't you?

MR. SMITH: There is a key in all this, if one could find it. But you may not be telling the truth.

Michael comes in from back left. He is carrying a guitar and a rolled-up poster. He is wearing a grey suit.

MICHAEL: Well, has he remembered anything?

SARAH: Sh, your father's asleep.

MICHAEL: What's he remembered?

MR. SMITH: The same as always, sir. It never varies.

MICHAEL: Did he dream in the night?

SARAH: He dreamt he was burnt to death.

MICHAEL: Always death. The night before, he was suffocated. Before that he was drowned. What's the matter with him?

Sarah gets up and goes to him.

SARAH: Michael, let him die. Let us both die.

MICHAEL: I can't. He's my last hope.

SARAH: But he can't help you!

MICHAEL: He has to help me!

SARAH: He's told you all he knows.

MICHAEL: He knows more. He must know more. These may dislodge the barrier.

SARAH (pointing at the guitar): Where did you find that?

MICHAEL: In the loft. Under dust and cobwebs.

SARAH: And the paper?

MICHAEL: You'll see. Mr. Smith, wake him up.

SARAH: But he's only just...

MICHAEL: Wake him.

Mr. Smith shakes Dan.

MR. SMITH: Wake up. Wake up.

MICHAEL (to Sarah): Stand over there, and hold this up.

Sarah goes to the right of the bed and unrolls the poster, which she holds in front of her so that both Dan and the audience can see. It shows a picture of four long-haired young men holding guitars. Underneath, in large letters:

THE RAVING LUNATICS

The latest and greatest in pop

Shoreditch Town Hall

Wednesday July 4th 7.30 p.m.

More writing, indecipherable, underneath.

MR. SMITH: Wake up.

From off stage comes the following, sung by three male voices with drum and guitar backing:

SONG: I want you, want you.

I need you, need you.

No-one else in the world will do for me. No!

If there's gonna be anyone, you're the one it's gonna be. Yeah!

I'm gonna hold you, baby, so tight,

Hug you an' a squeeze you with all of my might,

Hug you, hug you, hug you, hug you,

Squeeze you, squeeze you, squeeze you, squeeze you,

Yeah yeah yeah yeah, oooow!

There'll never be another woman in my life. No!

We're gonna marry so you're gonna be my wife. Yeah!

Then we'll raise a little family,

Some'll be like you an' the others like me,

You'n'me, you'n'me, you'n'me, you'n'me,

Me'n'you, me'n'you, me'n'you, me'n'you,

Yeah yeah yeah yeah, oooow!

I want you, want you,

I need you, need you,

Yeah yeah yeah yeah...(Fade out.)

Dan has sat up in bed, and gazes fascinated into the distance while the song is being sung. When it is over, his face beaming, he looks at the poster.

DAN: The Raving Lunatics.

He looks at the guitar, which is still held by Michael.

And my old guitar. Let's have it, son.

Michael passes it to him. Dan takes it, holds it lovingly for a moment, then strums a chord or two.

Cor, that brings back a few memories.

MICHAEL: What memories? I said, what memories?

DAN: All the girls screaming. Bodies everywhere. We were well known. Famous we were. (*Gazing at poster:*) That was...what'saname? Fred. Fred Lancaster. Called himself Mark Passion. Couldn't sing for nuts. And Billy. He was the only one who could play the guitar. Six chords he had. Rest of us only knew four. Who was the other fellow?

MICHAEL: What did you do?

DAN: What didn't we do? We were entertainers, son. We entertained the masses.

MICHAEL: Why?

DAN: Why?

MICHAEL: What was the purpose?

DAN: We entertained them, that's all. We sang to them.

MICHAEL: Why?

DAN: Because we wanted to sing, and because they wanted us to sing.

MICHAEL: Why?

DAN: I don't know why!

MICHAEL: You must know!

DAN: Well I don't.

MR. SMITH: It's always the same, sir. He can go back so far and no further.

Pause.

MICHAEL (*to Mr. Smith*): You'd better ask the questions.

SARAH: Am I to go on holding this?

MICHAEL: No, give it to me.

He takes the poster, and stands aside to let Mr. Smith continue his interrogation. Dan meanwhile strums his chords again.

DAN: We always used to take everything in the same key. Could only play in one.

(*Singing:*) Yeah yeah yeah yeah yeah. Yeah!

MR. SMITH: Did you enjoy those days?

DAN: Enjoy 'em? Yes, I enjoyed 'em. Plenty of booze, and birds.

MR. SMITH: Birds?

DAN: Birds. Floss. Girls. Queueing up they were.

MR. SMITH: What did they queue for?

DAN: Oh, you wouldn't know, would you? (*He gestures with his forefinger.*) Like we showed you.

MR. SMITH: Was that what you did it for?

DAN: Screwing? Partly, I s'pose. Got sick of 'em after a while, though.

MR. SMITH: Then what did you do it for?

DAN: What for? We enjoyed it.

MR. SMITH: What did you enjoy?

DAN: I told you. Boozing, screwing...

MR. SMITH: But you got sick of it.

DAN: Some of the time.

MR. SMITH: Then what else was there?

DAN: I don't know. Being looked at, listened to...We felt we were somebody.

MR. SMITH: I look at you. I listen to you.

DAN: That's not the same.

MR. SMITH: Why not?

DAN: Oh Christ, I don't know why not. Leave me alone, will you?

Pause.

MR. SMITH: Who told you to do it?

DAN: No-one told me.

MR. SMITH: It was your own choice?

DAN: Yes.

MR. SMITH: Did you always do it?

DAN: What do you mean 'always'?

MR. SMITH: From the beginning. You were born. You did this. Was there anything in between?

DAN: Oh, I see. Well, unfortunately my Mum didn't have room inside for a guitar as well as me, so no, I didn't always do it.

MR. SMITH: When did you start? And why?

DAN: We were at school together. Or three of us were – the other fellow joined later. We decided we'd form a group.

MR. SMITH: Why?

DAN: Other people were doing it.

MR. SMITH: Why?

DAN: That was what people were doing. It was there. Part of life.

MR. SMITH: What was the purpose?

DAN: To entertain. I've been through this before!

Michael suddenly strides to the bed, seizes the guitar, and smashes it down on the floor.

What are you doing?

Michael hammers it down two or three times more, until it is shattered.

Son, what are you doing?

He gets out of bed to try and rescue the instrument, but he is too late.

What did you do that for?

He picks up the broken handle.

What for?

MICHAEL: What have I broken?

DAN: My guitar.

MICHAEL: What else is it?

DAN: I don't know.

MICHAEL: Who are these people?

He holds up the poster.

DAN: That's Fred. That's Billy.

MICHAEL (*ripping it apart*): What else are they?

DAN: Son!

MICHAEL: What else are they?

DAN: We were the Raving Lunatics.

Michael scatters the pieces.

MICHAEL: You had a meaning! Didn't you have a meaning?

DAN: I don't understand.

MICHAEL: Everything had a meaning. The sun, stars, earth, the men on the earth – everything had a meaning!

DAN: I don't know what you're talking about.
MICHAEL (at the top of his voice): MEANING!
He slumps down in the chair on the left of the bed.
(Quietly:) Meaning.

Dan and Sarah look at him, while Mr. Smith looks at Dan. Michael has covered his eyes with his hands. Sarah takes a few steps towards him.

SARAH: Shouting won't get you anywhere, Michael. You'll only rupture yourself.
(Nodding towards Mr. Smith:) Best leave it to him - at least he keeps calm.

DAN: They're both barmy.

SARAH: At least he's quiet barmy.

Now she goes right up to Michael, and puts her hand on his shoulder.

Come on now, son, there's no need to be like that. Your father can't help it if he doesn't remember things he never knew.

MICHAEL: He knew.

SARAH: Well he can't remember.

MICHAEL: Can't, or won't?

SARAH: Can't.

MICHAEL: Are you on my side?

SARAH: I'm your mother.

MR. SMITH (to Michael): There's one possible clue, sir.

MICHAEL: What?

MR. SMITH: If we can discuss it.

SARAH (to Dan): Come on, let's get dressed.

DAN: We can dress in here.

SARAH: They want to talk.

Sarah and Dan go left.

MICHAEL: Well?

MR. SMITH: He seems to attach importance to what he calls 'screwing'. It came into his memories several times.

MICHAEL: When he talked about birds?

MR. SMITH: That was just one occasion. He gave me a demonstration just before you came in. With her.

MICHAEL: You asked him if that was the purpose, and he said no.

MR. SMITH: But he enjoyed it.

MICHAEL: He got sick of it.

MR. SMITH: We could try it, sir. Maybe experience what he experienced.

MICHAEL: You mean get into his mind through his actions?

MR. SMITH: We might feel what he felt and understand his reasons.

MICHAEL: All right, what do you do?

MR. SMITH: You have to hold your thumb and middle finger like this.

He shows Michael how to form the circle.

Then I shall put my forefinger into the circle, and move it around. But you must encourage me first. *(Pause.)* Encourage me, sir.

MICHAEL: Come on.

MR. SMITH: A bit more.

MICHAEL: Come on a bit more.

Mr. Smith puts his finger into the circle.

MR. SMITH: Now I'll waggle it around, sir. *(He does.)* Do you feel anything?

MICHAEL: No. Do you?

MR. SMITH: No.

MICHAEL: What are we meant to feel?

MR. SMITH: I don't know, sir. But they seemed to enjoy it.

MICHAEL: I fail to see anything to enjoy

Mr. Smith takes his finger out.

MR. SMITH: Is it possible they have certain...sensibilities that we haven't?

MICHAEL: We've found nothing in them that's the least bit different from ourselves. Same body structure, same excrement, same vestiges, same skeleton. What was the purpose of the screwing?

MR. SMITH: He says it's connected with our getting here.

MICHAEL: You mean the story of me coming out of her?

MR. SMITH: Yes. May I ask you, sir, do you remember being inside her?

MICHAEL: Of course not: We've disproved that story. She has no hole big enough for me to get in or out of.

MR. SMITH: But there are differences between her and us.

MICHAEL: She's fatter, that's all.

MR. SMITH: But she hasn't got the...um...

MICHAEL: She has. It's just underdeveloped. No, this screwing isn't the purpose, and it isn't the origin. So why's he trying to deceive us? That's what makes me think he knows. He's hiding something behind this story. And yet she says he doesn't know. She could be lying, too.

MR. SMITH: I don't think they're lying, sir.

Pause.

MICHAEL: What are you saying, Smith?

MR. SMITH: I don't believe they know any more than we do.

MICHAEL: You realize what that would mean?

MR. SMITH: Yes, sir.

MICHAEL: What will we do?

MR. SMITH: I don't know, sir.

MICHAEL: I'll never let him go:

MR. SMITH: You'll never give up hope?

MICHAEL: What else would be left? *(Violently:)* The man must know! Torture him. Questions get nowhere – use force. Do everything except tell him the truth. If it doesn't work, I've got just one more idea.

MR. SMITH: I'd prefer not to hurt him, sir.

MICHAEL: Then use your helper. I'll send him in.

He goes out back left. Mr. Smith picks up a piece of the guitar and studies it.

MR. SMITH: Why should they queue up for screwing because of this? Perhaps I should have tried it with a female.

Dan and Sarah re-enter from side left. He is dressed in a tight fitting shiny black suit with a white waistcoat, while she is wearing a white mini-dress.

DAN: Conference over?

SARAH: What have you decided?

MR. SMITH: We're going to try another method.

DAN: Tell me something. Who actually pays you? Is it him personally, or is it the Institute?

MR. SMITH: He is the Institute.

Mr. Smith's Assistant comes in. He is dressed in a green doctor's coat, which at present conceals his massive physique.

ASSISTANT: Assistant.

MR. SMITH: Oh, come in. *(To Dan:)* This gentleman's been sent to help me.

DAN *(nodding:)* Morning.

The Assistant stands impassive.

MR. SMITH: Your son believes this gentleman can extract information that I can't.

DAN: Pleased to meet you, I'm sure.

Still no response.

Maybe not so sure. Doesn't say much, does he?

MR. SMITH: He hasn't come to talk.

DAN: Telepathic, is he?

SARAH: I don't like it. What are you up to?

MR. SMITH: It's a change of method.

SARAH: What method? What's he here for?

MR. SMITH: If you're hiding anything, you'd best tell me now.

DAN: What's he going to do?

MR. SMITH: If you could just tell me where you came from...

ASSISTANT: Action.

MR. SMITH: And why you did what you did...

Dan and Sarah are looking at the Assistant, who takes off his coat. He is wearing a tight fitting green costume which shows off the enormous power of his body.

DAN: Blimey! Look at him!

The Assistant stands impassive. Dan and Sarah go up to him, and Dan feels his bicep.

Phew! More like a thigh than an arm, that is.

SARAH *(to Assistant:)* What are you here for?

DAN: That's probably what he's going to ask us. (*To Assistant:*) Eh? Weightlifting, was it? Or one o' them before-and-after courses? (*No response.*) Nice talking to you. (*To Mr. Smith:*) What's his act, then?

MR. SMITH: I think perhaps your wife should leave the room.

DAN: He's not a stripper, is he?

MR. SMITH (*to Sarah:*) Would you like to leave the room?

SARAH: I would not.

DAN: He can't show my Sal anything she hasn't seen before.

SARAH: Fetch my son back.

MR. SMITH: It was your son who sent this gentleman.

SARAH: I don't like it.

DAN: As the saying goes, you're not going to get it.

MR. SMITH: I'll ask you for the last time. Please leave the room.

SARAH: No.

MR. SMITH (*to Dan:*) Please tell me all you know.

DAN: I've told you all I know!

Slight pause.

MR. SMITH: Action.

The Assistant picks Dan up in one movement and hurls him across the stage. He swiftly follows up, leaps on Dan, and brings down both fists. There follow more movements of the utmost violence.

SARAH: Get off him!

She throws herself at the Assistant. At first he ignores her, but then with one heave he sends her spinning away to fall with a crash. She lies groaning as he resumes his brutal assault on Dan.

MR. SMITH: Enough.

The Assistant gets up, leaving Dan motionless on the floor. He walks calmly back to pick up his green coat, which he puts on. He now stands motionless and there is a long pause. Slowly Dan rolls over and crawls towards the bed. He reaches up, hauls himself to his feet, and flops onto the bed.

DAN: He caught me by surprise. I'll have him next time.

Sarah has also got up, and now limps to the side of the bed. Dan has propped himself up. His face is bloody.

SARAH: You all right, Dan?

DAN: No. You?

SARAH: No.

She wipes his face with the sheet.

DAN: Reminds me of the year I spent in Glasgow. Sauchiehall Street on Saturday nights.

MR. SMITH: What happened?

DAN: Oh, you still here?

MR. SMITH: What happened on Saturday nights?

DAN: What didn't happen!

SARAH: Lie still.

DAN: I remember taking a chap his size, and bigger. Didn't jump on me when I wasn't looking, though.

MR. SMITH: Was it important to you?

DAN: Saturday night? Destination of the week, that was.

MR. SMITH: What did you do?

DAN: First or last?

MR. SMITH: First.

DAN: Got pissed.

MR. SMITH: Pissed?

DAN: Alcohol – you wouldn't know about that. You drank it till you didn't know who you were, and then you had a bloody good time.

MR. SMITH: What came last?

DAN: Usually a punch-up.

MR. SMITH: Did you live for it?

DAN: Some people did.

MR. SMITH: Did you?

DAN: I enjoyed it.

MR. SMITH: Why?

DAN: I don't know.

MR. SMITH: Why didn't you want to know who you were?

DAN: I don't know why! Everybody else did it. There was nothing else to do.

SARAH: Leave him alone. He's ill.

Michael has entered unnoticed, back left.

MR. SMITH: Three things seem important to you. Screwing, alcohol, a punch-up. Are they connected?

DAN: The last two are.

MR. SMITH: How?

DAN: After a bit of the one, you feel like a bit of the other.

MR. SMITH: And screwing?

DAN: You might feel like it – but you can't do it.

MR. SMITH: Does screwing have to be done by a male and a female?

DAN: Well, you're not forced to do it.

MR. SMITH: I mean, can it be done by males alone

DAN: There were people like that, yes. In fact, it became quite fashionable at one time, though I could never see why. I liked it normal.

MICHAEL (*coming forward:*) What is normal?

DAN: Eh?

MICHAEL: What do you mean by normal?

DAN: I'm normal. And you're abnormal.

MICHAEL: There's no-one in this world like you. How can you be normal?
SARAH: Can't you leave your father alone? He's not well. Neither of us is well.
DAN: Come into bed and have a rest.
SARAH: I've got myself dressed now.
DAN: You've got less on now than when you were in bed.
SARAH: Move over, then.
DAN: Go round the other side.
She climbs over him, and gets in.
Welcome home.
SARAH: I don't want any hanky-panky, Dan.
DAN: Do I look in a condition for hanky-panky?
SARAH: No. But then you never did.
MICHAEL (*to Dan:*) What do you mean by normal?
DAN: Oh, you're not starting that again, are you?
SARAH: Michael, be a good boy and let Mummy and Daddy have a little break. Mummy's got such a headache.
MICHAEL: I want to know what my father means by normality.
DAN: Doing what everyone else does.
MICHAEL: No-one does as you do.
DAN: That's because we're different generations.
MICHAEL: Were the Raving Lunatics normal?
DAN: Yes.
MICHAEL: Saturday night?
DAN: Yes.
MICHAEL: Screwing, alcohol, punch-ups?
DAN: Yes, yes, and yes.
MICHAEL: And the way we live?
DAN: Barmy.
MICHAEL: Tell me where we've gone wrong.
DAN: You think too much. You just have to get on with it, son.
SARAH: Like children do. You don't remember when you were a child, do you?
DAN: How can he? He thinks he was born six foot tall.
SARAH: I used to sing to you when you were a baby. You used to love hearing me sing. 'Cos I had a beautiful voice then, you know. (*To Dan:*) Didn't I?
DAN: No.
SARAH: Yes I did. I used to sing you to sleep. Always calmed you down.
She begins to sing "Rockabye Baby".
DAN: Oh no. You don't have to pass your headache on to everyone else.
SARAH: I'm singing. To calm my son.
DAN: Well stop singing. To calm your husband.
MICHAEL: Is it because there's nothing left for us to fight?
SARAH: No, you don't want to start fighting, Michael.
MICHAEL: You think you're normal and I'm not.
DAN: Well one of us is barmy, and it's not me.
MICHAEL: It's true that I've always felt isolated. (*To Mr. Smith:*) Am I abnormal?
MR. SMITH: I can't answer that, sir.

MICHAEL: You're an outsider. You can judge us objectively. Is he normal?
MR. SMITH: I'm only paid to ask questions, sir.
MICHAEL: Then you'll be paid to answer. Which of us is normal – him or me?
MR. SMITH: Your father is of an older generation. What's normal for the fathers seems strange to the sons. And vice versa.
MICHAEL: Bloody politician! Am I insane?
MR. SMITH: No, sir.
MICHAEL: I'm in complete control of all I say and do.
MR. SMITH: You're not insane, sir.
SARAH: Of course he's not insane! (To Michael:) You must be mad, talking like that!
Dan has fallen asleep.
MICHAEL: If I'm not insane, why am I unhappy?
MR. SMITH: Perhaps, sir...
MICHAEL: Yes?
MR. SMITH: You ask too many questions.
MICHAEL (*in anguish*:) Help me! Help me!
DAN (*waking*:) Help me! Help me!
He realizes where he is.
Help...me.
SARAH: You've been dreaming again.
DAN: Yes.
MICHAEL (*wearily*:) What did you dream?
DAN: There was a stone in a field. A field of stones. And I had to get to it, but every step I took, I was pulled back, and I couldn't get there. I was trying to reach my stone, and I couldn't get there.
MICHAEL: So you called for help.
DAN: Yes.
MICHAEL (*to Mr. Smith*:) He's always dreaming of death. Is that normal?
MR. SMITH: No, sir. But it may have been for his generation.
SARAH (*plaintively*:) Michael, how long is this going on for?
Slight pause.
MICHAEL: For ever.
SARAH: We've reached a crisis.
DAN: Didn't know we were ever out of a crisis.
SARAH: They think our son's got something wrong with him.
DAN: So he has. It's his head. He always was a weirdo, with his short hair, collar and tie, no drink, no girls.
Michael is sitting deep in thought.
SARAH: He was the perfect son.
DAN: Exactly. He wasn't normal.
SARAH: But he's not insane.
DAN: Course he's insane. They're all insane, all except you and me. (*He looks at her.*) Well, me.
SARAH: He's just unhappy, that's all.
DAN: He's unhappy because he's insane. What sane person would keep his mum and dad locked up in this cell, being questioned day and night, bounced around by a human

gorilla, starved, parched and bloody analysed? He's as daft as a cuckoo eating bananas in a bats' belfry.

SARAH: He's not.

DAN: Then why won't he let us go? Eh? I'll tell you why. Because we're the last relics of sanity left on this earth, and he knows it. We're all he's got to cling to. Because he's been caught half way. Haven't you, boy?

He has arrested Michael's attention.

Isn't that right, boy? You're half way. Too dead for us, and too alive for them.

MICHAEL: Then which way am I to go?

DAN: Downwards. With us.

Pause.

The main thing about us, son, is we're cheerful in adversity. You're just an out and out misery. Like the rest of your lot, you couldn't raise a grin even if you were a skeleton.

MICHAEL: Laughter was an escape from pain, and we eliminated pain.

SARAH: You didn't eliminate my pain. I've got a head like a sledgehammer.

DAN: Nothing could ever eliminate your pain. You've had a headache as long as I can remember.

SARAH: Ever since I married you.

DAN (*to Michael:*) And if you think playing games with the gorilla is painless, then let him trampoline all over you.

MICHAEL: There's no pain, there's no adversity.

DAN: Then what's this all about, damn and blast it?

SARAH: Control yourself, Dan.

DAN: I'm sick of it!

MICHAEL: What we did was right. Wasn't it?

DAN: Well if what you did was right, and your generation has made everything fine and dandy, then that's fine and dandy. So let us go.

MICHAEL: What we did was right. But what's left isn't enough.

DAN: What's left is never enough. There wasn't enough for us when I was a boy, nor for my father when he was a boy. There's never enough! It's what clever people used to call the human condition.

MICHAEL: But our generation will last for ever.

DAN: Then hard cheese on your generation.

SARAH: I don't see why we should be punished, Michael, just because you're unhappy. Much as I love you.

MICHAEL: You don't feel responsible?

DAN: We've done our best. You took it all out of our hands anyway.

SARAH: We taught you all the things we were taught. Good table manners, brushing your teeth at night, doing numbers one and two in the potty.

DAN: I tried to teach you how to play the guitar once, but you weren't interested.

SARAH: You couldn't play the guitar yourself.

DAN: I tried to teach him my four chords. (*To Michael:*) And I tried to give you a sense of dress. Only again, you see, you had your own ideas, weird as they were.

SARAH: We did everything parents were expected to do for their children.

MICHAEL: But it wasn't enough!

DAN: Of course it wasn't. If anyone followed you, you couldn't give them enough either.

MICHAEL: You gave us chaos.

DAN: It wasn't that bad.

MICHAEL: We put it in order.

DAN: And that's your trouble. You've got nothing left to do. So you're bored stiff.

ASSISTANT: We are content.

Everyone looks at him.

We belong. We have our place in the perfect world. We are masters of the universe. We are immortal. We are content.

Michael goes to him.

MICHAEL: What is your place in the perfect world?

ASSISTANT: To assist.

MICHAEL: And what is my place? (*No response.*) What is my place?

Pause.

I'm damned.

SARAH: Let us go.

MICHAEL: No!

DAN: And then come with us.

MICHAEL: No!

SARAH: But we can't help you!

MICHAEL: It'll come back. He'll remember.

DAN: There's nothing to remember. I've told you all I remember. (*To Sarah:*) I've not done bad, all things considered, have I? I can go back quite a way.

SARAH: I can remember as much as you. More. You'd forgotten about my voice.

DAN: I did my best. It's not my fault if you reminded me.

MICHAEL: If you don't remember, there's another possibility. There are two ways of closing the breach. It would be better if you remembered.

DAN: And the other?

MICHAEL: A last resort. To make me like them. To kill the questions.

DAN: For you to have the treatment instead of us.

MICHAEL: Yes.

DAN: Sounds a bit more like it to me. Since you're the one who's barmy.

SARAH: He's not barmy. Don't talk like that. (*To Michael:*) You're not barmy. Just a bit odd, that's all.

MICHAEL: Whichever way it is, if you succeed, I'll let you go.

SARAH: How can we make you like them? They're the barmy ones, not you.

DAN: We're not on the same wavelength as them.

MICHAEL (*shouting:*) How were they made? Aren't they and I in the same world? Why do I ask questions when no-one else does? You've gone wrong! You! (*Calmer:*) You're my father and mother. You remember what I can't remember, you acted before I could act, and you chose before I could choose. You know what no-one else knows — how I became what I am. You saw the transition, and in the passing from one side to the other, you know what was lost. Through what happened either inside me or outside me, you can give me the cure. If you don't cure me, I'll give you what you've inflicted on me. A world without end.

CURTAIN

ACT TWO

Scene One

The same room. The bed is now further over to the right, about three-quarters of the way across the stage. On the extreme right, towards the front of the stage, is a large cot next to a flat-topped chest of drawers. In the cot sits Michael, now dressed in baby clothes. To the left of the bed Dan and Sarah are sitting in armchairs, eyes fixed on a TV set, which is in front of them and to their left. On the extreme left of the stage, sitting inconspicuously, are Mr. Smith and the Assistant. Voices come from the TV:

FEMALE VOICE: Forty-seven?

MALE VOICE: Forty-seven, forty-seven, forty-seven.

DEEP MALE VOICE: Ninety-one.

MALE VOICE: Ninety-one. Or do you mean ninety-two? (*Roars of laughter.*)

DAN (*sniggering:*) Ninety-two!

SARAH: He's a laugh, that one is.

FEMALE VOICE (*insistent:*) Forty-seven.

MALE VOICE: And it's still forty-seven, still forty-seven.

NORTHERN VOICE: Four 'oondred an' thirty-two.

Loud 'ooh'.

DAN: Get away with you

SARAH: He'll be lucky.

MALE VOICE: Maybe you mean forty-three point two.

Roars of laughter.

NORTHERN VOICE (*insistent:*) Four 'oondred an' thirty-two.

FEMALE VOICE (*irritated:*) Forty-seven!

MALE VOICE: Gently now, madam.

FEMALE VOICE: Well!

MALE VOICE: Every dog has his day.

Roars of laughter.

SARAH: Always got an answer, hasn't he?

MALE VOICE: There's someone who never gives up. If at first you don't succeed...

CHORUS: Try, try again!

Loud applause.

NORTHERN VOICE (*insistent:*) Four 'oondred an' thirty—two.

FEMALE VOICE: Forty-seven, and go to hell.

MALE VOICE: Now then, madam.

FEMALE: I said forty-seven.

DAN: Right one she is. Wouldn't like to meet her on a dark night!

MALE VOICE: She meant, of course, go to hell eh. Los Angeles!

Eruption of laughter, also from Dan and Sarah.

DAN: Brilliant!

Loud buzzer.

MALE VOICE: And that's it, folks. The clock's caught up with us again. Old Father Time waits for...

CHORUS: No man!

MALE VOICE: We'll see you all again next week – or if we don't see you...

CHORUS: You'll see us!

MALE VOICE: Tara, folks.

Cheerful music.

SARAH (*smiling and shaking her head:*) Very funny! Very funny!

DAN: Yes, always good for a laugh.

FEMALE ANNOUNCER: And as Hennessy told you, he'll be back next week with another edition of 'Your Number's Up'.

DAN: We'll be there.

SARAH: Yes, I wouldn't miss that.

MALE NEWSREADER: Here is the news.

Michael stands up and listens attentively.

SARAH: It's the news.

NEWSREADER: African Civil War, two million feared dead or dying. The war in South-East Asia, total of dead or dying nears one million mark. Middle East, two hundred dead in border clashes. Uprising in Eastern Europe, one hundred feared dead in clash with occupying forces. Student protests in Western Europe, fifty dead in battle with police. The latest figures on the American race riot, four hundred known casualties. Religious riots in India, a hundred trampled to death. Bomb explosion in Northern Ireland, twenty dead. Deaths from starvation last year are estimated to have been between thirty and forty million. The government is to treble its spending on defence and MPs' salaries. Lord Macduff has said this is a wonderful time to be alive. More news tomorrow.

Cheerful music.

SARAH: I like the way they always finish with something cheerful. What's on next?

DAN (*glancing at paper:*): A political thing. Lord Macduff.

SARAH: Ach!

FEMALE ANNOUNCER: The time is now ten pm.

SARAH: Switch off.

Dan switches off.

Yes, I do like 'Your Number's Up'.

DAN: Good programme.

SARAH: Of course, it's him that makes it.

DAN: Yes, he's good. Well, he ought to be, the money he earns.

SARAH: He's worth it, whatever they give him.

DAN: They used to have something quite like it when me and the boys were together. What was it called?

SARAH: 'Number Please', was it?

DAN: That's right, 'Number Please'.

SARAH: But that wasn't as good as this.

DAN: No, this is much better. Only it was along similar lines.

SARAH: It was that awful what's his name – the one with the chin. I met him once. He came to one of my concerts, and very rude he was, too.

DAN: Yes, this chap's much better.

SARAH: Like chalk and cheese.

DAN: Wonder what's happened to old Billy.

SARAH: Who's Billy?

DAN: Our lead guitarist. He was a talented bloke, you know.

SARAH: Oh, your group.

DAN: Billy was a bit like him – always had an answer. Ha...I remember once, a show we gave at the Shoreditch Town Hall...

SARAH: The only show you ever gave.

DAN: Somebody shouted out from the audience, "Why don't you learn to play the guitar?" And old Billy...*(Dan laughs)*...quick as a flash, he said, "If you don't belt up, I'll stuff it down your bleeding throat!" Always had an answer, our Billy.

SARAH: I didn't like that other fellow at all, who did the other programme. He came to this concert...

DAN: Good old Billy.

SARAH: He was just getting known then. Thought he was doing us a favour, honouring us with his presence, like Royalty. Told Mrs. Arkwright he'd quite enjoyed it, except for listening to the old crow with adenoids. That was me. I was very glad when they took his programme off the air.

DAN: Never hear of him now, do you?

SARAH: Good job, too.

DAN: Well, they come and go. I mean, like we had our day. All the rave, then someone else comes along and you're forgotten.

SARAH: I sang beautifully that night, too. That was before you knew me. I was just a young girl. With long black hair. I used to wear my hair long.

DAN *(standing and stretching:)* Well, better change his nappy – he stinks.

SARAH: Funny how it just went grey like that, all of a sudden.

DAN: Oi! *(She looks at him.)* Your son's stinking.

SARAH: Oh, he hasn't done another number, has he?

DAN: Well it's not Chanel No. 5, I can tell you that.

SARAH: Ts!

She gets up and goes to the cot. Michael has been sitting down during the last conversation.

You are a naughty boy. Stand up.

Michael stands.

DAN: He can't help it. He's got productive bowels, like his dad.

Sarah tries to lift Michael.

SARAH: Ts, give us a hand.

Dan helps her to lift Michael and lay him on the chest of drawers. Sarah begins to change his nappy.

DAN: Oof! They could use him for their chemical warfare in South East Asia.

He rapidly moves away from the danger area.

SARAH: I don't see why I always have to change him.

DAN: Part of the joys of motherhood.

SARAH: We're supposed to share our joys.
DAN: Well that's your share.
MICHAEL: If you don't like changing me, why do you do it?
SARAH: I can't let you lie in it, can I?
MICHAEL: Why not?
SARAH: Because you'll get a sore bottom.
MICHAEL: What does my sore bottom matter to you?
SARAH: Sore bottoms are nasty. It could make you ill, lying in all that...number.
MICHAEL: Does it make you happy to change me?
SARAH: Happy?
DAN: It's one of those negative arrangements, son. If she doesn't change you, you'll make us all miserable, so she changes you and that removes one possible cause of misery.
MICHAEL: I see.
SARAH: Shall we go on?
MICHAEL: Yes.
SARAH: He's got diarrhoea.
DAN: That's exciting.
SARAH: We'd better take him to the doctor. I think he's lost weight.
DAN: Lost weight!
SARAH: Watch him. Make sure he doesn't fall off.
She goes out left, and Dan crosses to the chest of drawers.
DAN: Hallo, stinker.
MICHAEL: So many millions died, and yet you weren't affected.
DAN: Wasn't real, son. Wasn't real.
'Softly Awakes My Heart' from off left.
Not a bad description, that – old crow with adenoids.
Sarah re-enters, carrying clean nappies.
One of these days you'll do someone an injury with that voice.
SARAH: You once told me my voice could charm the birds from the trees.
DAN: Drive – not charm.
SARAH (to Michael:.) Legs.
She puts on the clean nappies.
We'll take him to the doctor tomorrow.
DAN: He doesn't need to see a doctor.
SARAH: Diarrhoea can be very nasty.
DAN: Nothing compared to what you'll catch in the waiting-room. Let alone from the doctor.
SARAH: I don't like the look of his diarrhoea.
DAN: I don't mind the look - it's the smell I can't stand. Watch where you put that pin, or he'll have trouble with his wee-wee as well.
SARAH: You never know what these things might develop into.
DAN: Nothing a drop of whisky won't put right. Or a good belt round the ear.
SARAH: There. Help me get him back into his cot.
Dan helps her.
There you are, precious. Isn't that better?

DAN: You know something? He never laughs. I have never seen our baby laugh. Other people's babies laugh your nipples off, but this one never even smiles. I remember when Fred Lancaster's girl friend had her baby. That thing was giggling all day long.

SARAH: Well I don't know what he had to laugh at if Fred Lancaster was his father.

DAN: I don't think Fred Lancaster *was* his father.

SARAH: Then maybe that's what he was giggling about. Michael's just a quiet baby.

DAN: He's a ruddy miserable baby. Never even laughed at 'Your Number's Up'.

SARAH: Oh don't exaggerate.

DAN: He didn't. He wasn't even watching. (*To Michael:*) Were you? Forty-seven.

(*No reaction. Dan imitates the voices:*) Ninety-one...don't you mean ninety-two?...Four 'oondred an' thirty-two. Not a titter.

SARAH: Maybe he doesn't think it's funny. There's lots of people don't like 'Your Number's Up'.

DAN: It was third in the ratings last week.

SARAH: That doesn't mean everybody has to like it.

DAN: But he's our son.

SARAH: I know he's our son. What's that got to do with it?

DAN: He should laugh at the things we laugh at.

SARAH: Well he doesn't.

DAN: I know he doesn't: But he should.

SARAH: He doesn't have to. He likes the news. He always watches the news.

DAN: Oh a laugh a minute, that is.

SARAH: The news isn't meant to be laughed at.

DAN: That's why he watches it. Because he enjoys being miserable. You know what he is, don't you? He's a Massachusetts. That's what he is. I've had enough of this. I want to go to bed. (*To Michael:*) May we have your permission to go to bed, now we've had the slow motion replays of your action-packed past?

Michael nods.

Come on, Sal.

He goes off left.

SARAH: It's no good, is it?

Michael shakes his head.

Please let us die, Michael.

DAN (*off:*) Sal!

She continues to look at Michael for a moment, then goes off left.

MICHAEL: Well?

Mr. Smith and the Assistant stand up.

MR. SMITH: Nothing, sir.

MICHAEL: Was I different right from birth?

MR. SMITH: Your father thought so.

MICHAEL: Not my mother. Do you ever laugh?

MR. SMITH: No, sir.

MICHAEL: (*Indicating the Assistant:*) Nor does he. Did you see the news?

MR. SMITH: I heard it, sir.

MICHAEL: I reacted.

MR. SMITH: Yes, sir.

MICHAEL: They didn't.
MR. SMITH: No, sir.
MICHAEL: Did you?
MR. SMITH: No, sir.
MICHAEL: Why not?
MR. SMITH: Because I knew it was all over.
MICHAEL: I knew it was over. And yet I reacted. Even then I reacted.
MR. SMITH: You worry too much.
MICHAEL: Yes. Why?
MR. SMITH: Perhaps you were born without a layer of skin. And you've never ceased to react even when the stimulus has gone. But because of your reactions, we were acceptable to you.
MICHAEL: I want that scene. The scene when I accepted you. When they're asleep we'll play it.
Dan and Sarah re-enter in their night clothes.
DAN (*seeing Mr. Smith:*) Oh! Are we real, or do we go on acting?
MICHAEL: Act.
Mr. Smith returns to his seat and he and the Assistant sit down.
DAN: Right. Oh look, darling, our beloved son is standing in his cot, all ready to cheer us up. With his impersonation of a deaf, mute undertaker.
SARAH: Leave him alone, Dan. (*To Michael:*) Goodnight, my precious one. Don't take any notice of your father – he doesn't know his Massachusetts from his Saudi-Arabias.
Dan gets into bed as Sarah kisses Michael.
DAN: Ah, bed, my foam rubber friend.
SARAH: We'll see the doctor tomorrow. Sleep tight, my little angel.
She crosses to the bed and climbs in. She and Dan remain sitting up.
DAN: Another day gone.
SARAH: Yes.
DAN: Another night beginning.
SARAH: Yes.
DAN: And then there'll be another day.
SARAH: Can you see an end to it, Dan?
DAN: I can't see an end to anything. Not any more. In the old days everything finished, but this drags on.
SARAH: Is it our fault?
DAN: We did all we could. We didn't change things, did we?
SARAH: I meant him.
DAN: I meant him, too. But I'll tell you something. He's worse off than we are. We can look back and laugh.
SARAH (*beginning to cry:*) I feel I've failed him.
DAN (*gently:*) Don't cry, Sal.
She continues to cry, softly. He puts his arm round her.
Sal?
SARAH: I'm all right. (*She regains control.*) I'm all right.

Dan suddenly jumps out of bed, strides to the cot, and strikes Michael full in the face.

DAN: You sod! You bloody sod! This is our house! Get out of here and leave us alone!

(Striking him again:) Leave us!

SARAH *(getting out of bed:)* Leave him!

DAN: Leave us!

SARAH: Leave him! It's not his fault. We're all he's got.

DAN *(to Sarah:)* You want this to go on? And on and on and on? *(To Michael:)* What sort of a son are you? The millions of dead in a box'll move you, but your mother crying is nothing! The dead are gone. They can't die again. But we're alive and suffering, you bastard, suffering!

SARAH: Don't, Dan!

DAN: Suffering! Every minute of every bloody day we're suffering. For what?

MICHAEL: Cure me.

DAN: There's no cure.

MICHAEL: Cure me and you can go.

Dan whirls round at Mr. Smith.

DAN: Cure him! You put the world right – now put him right!

Mr. Smith gets up and goes to them.

MR. SMITH *(to Dan:)* Go to bed. I'll try.

DAN *(suddenly wary:)* What are you going to do?

MR. SMITH: The acceptance scene.

DAN: What's that?

MR. SMITH: Go to bed.

Dan and Sarah obey, but remain sitting up.

(To Michael:) We'll go back, sir, as you asked.

He returns to his seat. He clicks his fingers, and the lights dim.

MICHAEL: I'm a child.

MR. SMITH *(from where he is sitting:)* You're no longer a child.

MICHAEL: They're fighting, starving, dying.

MR. SMITH: You're no longer a child.

MICHAEL: They're the same as I am.

MR. SMITH: They're yours now.

MICHAEL: Who are you?

Pause. Mr. Smith slowly rises and crosses the stage. The Assistant accompanies him, but remains some way behind.

He's with you?

MR. SMITH: Yes.

MICHAEL: From the beginning?

MR. SMITH: Yes.

MICHAEL: What do you want with me?

MR. SMITH: To bring stillness, peace, rest.

MICHAEL: To them?

MR. SMITH: Yes.

MICHAEL: How?

MR. SMITH: Give them everlasting life.

MICHAEL: How?

MR. SMITH: By conquering war, sickness, and pain.

MICHAEL: There's too much suffering.

MR. SMITH: Then take it, and set them free of it.

MICHAEL: Who are you?

MR. SMITH: Give them everlasting life.

MICHAEL: On this earth?

Pause.

MR. SMITH: No.

MICHAEL: What are you asking of me? What are you asking?

MR. SMITH: Let them die, and begin again.

MICHAEL: I'm only a child! You can't ask me to do this! I'm a child!

MR. SMITH: They're your responsibility.

He and the Assistant withdraw to the left of the stage.

MICHAEL: Don't go!

MR. SMITH: We'll be with you. We'll assist you.

Michael stares into space. Pause.

SARAH: Do you understand it?

DAN: Not a word.

SARAH: Is this what happened then?

DAN: Must be.

SARAH: What was he telling him to do?

DAN: Kill us, I think.

SARAH: I'm putting the light on.

She does so.

It's not healthy being cooped up with people like that.

Michael is still gazing into space, and the others are seated as before.

DAN: He didn't kill us, though, did he?

SARAH: I don't know if this is then or now.

DAN: It's then. He's gone back. You know what's coming next, don't you?

She looks at him.

SARAH: Was that the night?

He nods.

Are we going to have to go through that again?

DAN: He wants the lot.

SARAH: I don't think I can stand it again, Dan.

DAN: Put your head under.

SARAH: What about you?

DAN: I'm going to try and watch.

SARAH: Tell me when it's over. Or if there's something worth seeing.

She goes under the covers.

MICHAEL: I'm no longer a child.

He stands up to his full height.

So be it.

From both sides of the stage comes a low moaning. Gradually this spreads to all sides of the theatre, increasing in intensity and accompanied by screams, weeping, cries for help

etc. The noise reaches a shattering climax, then slowly dies away. There is a long silence after it has finished.

DAN (*getting out of bed:*) I must have a pee.

SARAH (*reappearing from under covers:*) Don't leave me!

DAN: It's all right. It's finished.

He takes the urinal from the cupboard, and turns his back to the audience.

SARAH: Did you see anything?

DAN: No, just heard them all moaning like before.

SARAH: It was horrible.

DAN: Ah! That's better.

SARAH: I don't see why he had to go through it all again.

DAN: He's trying to find out why he's barmy. Look at that – pure apple juice, that is.

He puts the urinal back in the cupboard.

SARAH: What's going to happen now?

DAN: No use asking me.

SARAH (*to Michael:*) What are you going to do now, Michael?

Michael does not react.

DAN: Maybe they'll leave us alone for a bit.

SARAH: A bit of what?

DAN: Peace and quiet. (*To Mr. Smith:*) Any chance of us getting some sleep?

No response. Mr. Smith and the Assistant are both watching Michael.

Either they've gone deaf or I've gone dumb.

He goes right up to Mr. Smith.

Excuse me.

Mr. Smith puts his finger to his lips.

We'd like to get some sleep.

Mr. Smith waves him away. Dan climbs back into bed, sits up, and brings his hands down hard on the covers in front of him.

Well, that was a great show. Thank you all very much. Scintillating company, sparkling conversation, to while away the long hours of the night. We've thoroughly enjoyed ourselves, haven't we, Sal?

SARAH: I enjoyed 'Your Number's Up'.

DAN: Oh yes, I enjoyed that. We did see it, didn't we, Sal?

SARAH: What do you mean?

DAN: 'Your Number's Up' – we saw it.

SARAH: Of course we saw it.

DAN: Well, there might be something else on, then. Since we can't sleep, we might as well continue the festivities. Agreed?

SARAH: Why not?

Dan gets out of bed and switches on the set.

DAN: There we go.

He climbs back into bed, and the two of them sit watching the set.

Quite a life of luxury, this is eh? If we'd had it in the ceiling, we could have lain flat on our backs.

SARAH: It's not coming on.

DAN: It's just warming up.

Pause.

SARAH: There's nothing happening, Dan.

DAN: I'll try another channel.

He presses the remote control.

Dead.

MICHAEL: There are no programmes.

DAN: Eh?

MICHAEL: There are no programmes.

DAN: What do you mean? They go on till two o'clock in the morning.

MICHAEL: They did.

DAN: What are you on about?

MICHAEL: It's all over.

DAN: What's all over?

MICHAEL: There are no programmes. There were no programmes.

DAN: Of course there were programmes. We saw 'Your Number's Up'.

MICHAEL: You only thought you saw it.

Michael climbs out of the cot. Mr. Smith stands up.

DAN: Sal, we did see it, didn't we?

SARAH: Yes.

DAN: There you are.

Michael and Mr. Smith converge on Dan. The Assistant is now standing, but keeps well back.

MR. SMITH: You've decided?

MICHAEL: Yes.

DAN: Here, what are you two planning?

MICHAEL: There's nothing else we can do.

DAN: Don't you start anything with me.

MICHAEL: We've tried everything, and failed. Mum...Dad...I didn't want you to suffer.

DAN: Didn't want us to suffer? Blimey, you kept that well hidden.

MICHAEL: There were no programmes.

DAN: Oh, come off it:

MICHAEL: There's no television.

DAN *(to Sarah):* He's really gone.

MICHAEL: I'd keep it from you if I could.

MR. SMITH: You could just tell him alone.

MICHAEL: They've got to know in the end, and they're used to sharing.

DAN: Got to know what?

SARAH: Dan, what's going on?

DAN: I told you, they're all barmy.

MICHAEL: You believe you're in a room. You can see chairs, a bed, television, cot, cupboard. I could let you go on seeing them, but sooner or later you'd have to know. I'm telling you now because I've used the last resort, and it's failed. You've said many times since that night that you wanted to die. I told you we'd conquered death, and everything else that kept the world in agony when you were young. Well, we paid a price for the conquest.

Pause.

DAN: What price?

MICHAEL: We knew that pain was integral to existence. Each generation would suffer, put up its little fight, then pass the pain on. My generation took a decision. We decided that life was not to continue.

DAN: What are you trying to tell me, boy?

MICHAEL: That it's no use you wishing you were dead. Because you're dead already.

CURTAIN

Scene Two

The room is completely bare, and even the walls have lost their solid appearance, giving the impression rather of merging into something beyond. Dan and Sarah are sitting stage centre, still in their night clothes.

SARAH: I was a lot more comfortable when I thought I had a bed.

DAN: Can't even pee any more. I shall miss that bottle.

SARAH: Won't be the first time you missed, either.

DAN: I never missed!

SARAH: Maybe you thought you never missed.

DAN: That's right...and you thought I missed. And all the time there was nothing there. No, I don't believe it.

SARAH: It's all gone now.

DAN: It was there.

SARAH: I just wish he'd left us the bed.

DAN: Yes, I liked the bed. It felt good, didn't it, climbing in, sinking down, getting warm. You can relax in bed — let yourself go loose, and then drift away...

SARAH: I shan't be able to comb my hair any more.

DAN: No. And I'll never see my Wisden again.

Pause.

SARAH: I don't see why we can't imagine the bed back again.

DAN: Because we know it's not there. Before, we thought it was there, but now we know it's not.

SARAH: But if we think hard enough

DAN: We can try. But it won't work.

SARAH: It won't work if you say it won't work. But we had it before, and I don't see why we shouldn't have it again. We've got to believe. I believe the bed is there. I believe it.

Concentrate, Dan.

DAN (*unconvincingly*): I believe the bed is there.

SARAH: You've got to mean it, Dan! Now concentrate properly. I believe the bed is there.

DAN: I believe the bed is there.

They have both closed their eyes.

SARAH: Is it there?

DAN (*opening his eyes:*) No.

She opens her eyes.

SARAH: Maybe we're not concentrating hard enough.

DAN: How can you concentrate when you know it's not there?

SARAH: Perhaps a bed's too big. We should start with something smaller.

DAN: Sal, there's no point...

SARAH: Let's try for the urinal. Eh? You'd like that, wouldn't you?

DAN: Oh, all right.

SARAH: If you just believe it's there, it'll be there. The urinal.

They concentrate.

DAN: It's no good. I haven't even got the urge. I probably haven't even got a bladder now.

SARAH: How did you manage before?

DAN: I don't know. Maybe it's like having your leg off.

SARAH: I've never had my leg off.

DAN: What are we going to do?

Pause.

SARAH: It was kind of Michael not to tell us.

DAN: It would have been kinder if he'd gone on not telling us.

SARAH: I think I'd rather know, in the long run.

DAN: I'd rather have had a longer run. At least when we were alive we could look forward to being dead. Now what have we got to look forward to?

SARAH: But we were suffering.

DAN: We're suffering now, aren't we?

SARAH: True.

DAN: All this rubbish about ending the world's pain. A miracle cure for toothache – cut off the patient's head.

SARAH: Mind you, Dan, we'd have had the same problem eventually if we'd died.

DAN: We did die.

SARAH: I mean, if we hadn't died, and then we did.

DAN: Did what?

SARAH: Die.

DAN: We did.

SARAH: I know. But we'd have had the same problem.

DAN: Well what good's that?

SARAH: I'm just saying it's not Michael's fault.

DAN: I never said it was. Except that in the circumstances it makes what he did bloody stupid!

SARAH: Even if we had the bed, I expect we'd get tired of it.

DAN: I'd rather have it and get tired of it than not have it at all. At least getting tired of it would pass the time.

He stands up, and walks around.

SARAH: Did everybody die?

DAN: I think so.

SARAH: Funny we haven't met anybody.

DAN: No-one to meet. Nowhere to meet them. There's nothing here, Sal. We're in bloody limbo.

SARAH: I thought that was a dance.

DAN: What are we going to do?

SARAH: I don't know.

DAN: That's what he was after.

SARAH: Who?

DAN: Our son. That's why he was asking all those questions.

SARAH: Why did he ask all those questions?

DAN: To find...some way out.

SARAH: But you didn't remember anything, did you?

DAN: I remembered Shoreditch, and the birds, and Glasgow on a Saturday, and 'Your Number's Up', though that came later. I remembered Fred Lancaster's baby - if it was his baby – and Billy what'saname, who always had an answer. I remembered shitting, and peeing, and dreaming – I had my dreams clear enough. And my Wisden, and the boy's diarrhoea...

SARAH: And me?

DAN: You're the clearest of the lot.

SARAH: My singing?

DAN: Unforgettable.

SARAH: And my black hair?

DAN: Your grey hair. I'm not sure about your black hair.

SARAH: It was black.

DAN: Maybe. I can imagine it even if I can't remember it.

SARAH: Black. And very long, right down past my waist.

DAN: It wasn't what he wanted me to remember.

SARAH: My hair and my voice were my most beautiful possessions.

DAN: He was after something else.

Michael enters back left, still in his baby clothes.

Hullo, son.

SARAH: Hullo, Michael.

MICHAEL: Have you found anything?

DAN: No.

MICHAEL: Perhaps I shouldn't have told you.

DAN: Perhaps you shouldn't.

SARAH: You did right to tell us. Ignorance is a terrible thing. I wouldn't want to be left in ignorance.

DAN: Your mother's a great philosopher. *(To Sarah:)* You're more ignorant now than you were when he told us.

SARAH: I'm not!

DAN: Yes you are. Now you don't even know what you're doing here,

SARAH: I didn't know before.

DAN: But before, you didn't know that you didn't know...You're right, you were more ignorant before. Maybe it's better to be ignorant.

Pause.

So. Here we are then.

MICHAEL: Yes.

DAN: Yes. That advances the conversation.

SARAH: It's nice to have the whole family together.

DAN: Ah yes, it's very nice to have the whole family together. Isn't it, Michael?

MICHAEL: Yes.

DAN: Yes. All three of us. One, two, three. Together again. Tell me something, Michael. How old are you?

MICHAEL: Twenty-five.

DAN: Then why are you still wearing nappies?

SARAH: Don't embarrass him.

DAN: It's a fair question. And I'd like to know. I mean, if he's twenty-five, what's he still in nappies for? You don't normally have twenty-five-year-olds walking around in nappies, do you? But take your time, there's no hurry. You work out your answer. Make the most of it – it's a good question.

MICHAEL: I'm not wearing nappies.

Pause.

DAN: Ah! I wasn't expecting that, I must say. No, that's an unexpected reply. All right, what are you wearing?

MICHAEL: A suit, a collar and tie, black shoes.

DAN: What colour's the suit?

MICHAEL: Grey.

DAN: And the tie?

MICHAEL: Dark grey. The suit is light grey.

SARAH: I remember that suit.

DAN: And you're not wearing nappies?

MICHAEL: No.

DAN (*looking at Sarah:*) What's he wearing?

SARAH: Nappies.

DAN (nodding): Two – one. (*To Michael:*) Doesn't your diarrhoea damage your grey suit?

MICHAEL: I haven't got diarrhoea.

SARAH (*to Dan:*) Don't forget you've lost your urge, too.

DAN: That's true. (*To Michael:*) What am I wearing?

MICHAEL: Overalls. With black stains.

DAN: And your mother?

MICHAEL: An apron. With flowers, and pockets.

DAN: What colour's your mother's hair?

MICHAEL: Grey.

DAN: And mine?

MICHAEL: You have none.

DAN (*putting hand to head:*) I wouldn't go that far.

SARAH: He's right.

DAN (*to Sarah:*) What am I wearing?

SARAH: Pyjamas.

DAN: Two – one again. And you're wearing your nightdress. Right?

SARAH: Right.

DAN: Right. So something's wrong somewhere. *(To Michael:)* How many fingers am I holding up?

MICHAEL: Three.

DAN: Correct. But I'm wearing overalls?

MICHAEL: Yes.

DAN: I find this distinctly strange.

SARAH: You used to wear overalls.

DAN: Well you used to wear an apron, but you're not wearing it now. *(To Michael:)* She's not wearing an apron, you know.

MICHAEL: We see what we see.

DAN: It doesn't matter, I suppose, next to the everlasting mess we've got ourselves into, but it's just one of those niggly things I'd like to get right. You are wearing nappies.

MICHAEL: No, I'm wearing a grey suit.

DAN *(to Sarah:)*: Ridiculous, isn't it? Look, son, we've understood what you told us, that we're dead, and the things we thought we saw weren't there. We've understood that. But what I am seeing now is there, isn't it? I mean, you're there, aren't you? I'm not imagining you.

MICHAEL: No, I'm there.

DAN *(beginning to get vehement:)* Well you're wearing nappies!

MICHAEL: No.

DAN *(to Sarah:)* Is he or isn't he wearing nappies?

SARAH: Yes. I think.

DAN: You're wearing nappies, and she's wearing a nightdress!

MICHAEL: She's wearing an apron.

DAN: She's not wearing a bloody apron, she's wearing a nightdress. And I'm wearing pyjamas. We're in our night clothes, and you're in your nappies!

MICHAEL: As you like.

DAN: Well are you or aren't you?

MICHAEL: It doesn't matter.

DAN: It does matter. You can't go round wearing nappies and thinking you're wearing a suit. *(To Sarah:)* I mean, he looks daft enough in a suit, but...

SARAH: Maybe being dead has affected his eyes.

DAN: Affected his brain, more likely. *(Patiently:)* All right, son, let's see if we can tackle this another way. If you're wearing a tie, take it off, and give it to me. *Michael makes all the movements of taking off a tie, then he hands it over.*

MICHAEL: Take it.

Dan does not take it. He looks at Sarah, then back at Michael.

DAN: You've got nothing in your hand.

MICHAEL: It's my tie.

DAN: Son, there's nothing there.

Michael keeps his hand outstretched.

There's nothing there, boy! There's nothing there!

MICHAEL: You saw a bed, a cupboard, a chair. Where are they?

DAN: But I can see you! You're there!

MICHAEL: Yes.

DAN: And so help me, boy, there's nothing in your hand!

Pause.

Fetch your friends in. Fetch them, and ask them what you're wearing.

MICHAEL: What friends?

DAN: The one that asked the questions, and the gorilla.

MICHAEL: When did you see them?

DAN: Ha?

In his frustration he begins to walk round the stage.

The fellow who asked the questions. You paid him to ask the questions. And you paid the other one to knock me about.

MICHAEL: Where?

DAN: What do you mean, where? Here! *(To Sarah:)* I'm not going barmy, am I? You saw them.

SARAH: Yes, I saw them.

DAN: We both saw them. Here. In this room.

MICHAEL: What room? There isn't a room.

DAN: Here! Here! Just fetch them!

MICHAEL: How can I fetch them?

DAN: However you fetched them before!

MICHAEL: I didn't fetch them. You fetched them.

Dan stares at him, open-mouthed.

DAN: Like the bed?

Michael nods.

What a set-up! What a bloody shambles! Well, who asked the questions?

MICHAEL: You must have asked the questions.

DAN: Did you ask me any questions?

MICHAEL: Yes.

DAN: Ah! There were things you wanted to know.

MICHAEL: Yes.

DAN: But I couldn't tell you,

MICHAEL: No.

DAN: So that was real?

MICHAEL: Yes.

DAN: I didn't imagine it?

MICHAEL: No.

DAN: And now you're here, and your mother's here, and I'm here.

MICHAEL: Yes.

DAN: Well, that's something. Though it doesn't alter the fact that you're wearing nappies and I'm wearing pyjamas.

SARAH: Can't we change the subject? If he thinks he's wearing his suit, let him think he's wearing his suit. It doesn't make any difference if there's nobody else here. Besides, I'm not so sure that he is wearing his nappies.

Dan looks sharply at her.

I can see him in his suit as well. Like when he used to go to those meetings.

DAN: He is wearing his nappies!

SARAH: Don't shout, Dan. Shouting never made a suit into a nappy. I'm just saying it doesn't make any difference.

DAN: And I suppose it doesn't make any difference that there were two men here who asked me questions and beat the daylights out of me, and...

He breaks off, pauses, then speaks much more quietly:

There's no end to it. If the room wasn't there, the men weren't there...there's no end to it...is there? You as well...

MICHAEL: That was the reason for the questions.

DAN: What am I going to do?

SARAH: Well I'm here. And our son's here. I don't see that it matters what he's wearing, and I'm not sorry those other two have gone - they gave me the creeps anyway. If you ask me, we're better off now than we were before. Wallowing in ignorance we were before, and we were being put upon. Now we know just where we stand, and who we're with. It's much better. There's nothing like your own family. (*Looking at Dan:*) Imperfect though some of them may be.

DAN: What am I going to do?

SARAH: What have we ever done? We can talk, remember things we used to do, play games. You don't have to spend the day filling your urinal, do you? There are other things.

DAN: What shall we talk about?

Pause.

Are you there?

SARAH: Of course I'm there! I'm thinking.

DAN (*to Michael:*) Can't you start us on something?

MICHAEL: How did I ever believe you could help me? Of all you experienced, there's nothing left! A few silly memories, and not a single answer.

DAN: Son, help us, will you?

MICHAEL: With or without you, there's nothing but emptiness. A few worthless scraps of knowledge, that's all. That in wiping out the dark night, we also wiped out the day. That what people valued depended on the instant it was there, and the instant when it would not be there. That ignorance preconditions happiness. I need never have questioned you. I need never have known you. With or without you, there's nothing but emptiness.

He goes off back left. Pause.

DAN: Are you there?

SARAH: Why don't we play 'Your Number's Up'?

DAN: He's gone.

SARAH: What?

DAN: He's gone.

SARAH: I said why don't we play 'Your Number's Up'? We could have some fun.

DAN: How long for?

SARAH: Till we're tired.

DAN: I'm tired already.

SARAH: We haven't started. Come on, Dan, give me a number.

DAN: Sixty.

SARAH: One hundred...and...twenty-five.

Pause.

One hundred and twenty-five.

DAN: I'm tired, Sal.

SARAH: Come on, come on, come, on, a hundred and twenty-five.

DAN: No, no, that's enough.

SARAH: Enough's as good as a feast: How's that?

DAN: It's a stupid game.

SARAH: We used to enjoy it.

DAN: Things were different then.

SARAH (*touchy*): Well, if you can think of something better to do.

Pause.

DAN: I can't think of anything. I just seem to be going blank.

SARAH: I'd sing to you, only somehow I don't feel like singing.

DAN: I don't feel like you singing either.

SARAH: It's funny that you don't like my voice any more. Before we were married you did. You used to listen to me and look at me for hours. It made me go soft inside. My voice and my hair you loved. I can hear you saying it now – my voice, and my hair. I was nineteen when you first saw me.

She goes off back left.

DAN: I was twenty-five. It was a dance at Shoreditch. Then we went out, didn't we?

The lights slowly begin to fade.

Used to ring people's doorbells and run away. Gave us a laugh. You did have black hair. I should have said it before, but it was black. And you did have a good voice. Only it didn't stay good, so it was no use encouraging you. Then we signed the book, and you gave me a sloshy kiss, and we were Mr. and Mrs. We should have stopped there, shouldn't we? But things moved on. The boy came. Little misery with his diarrhoea and depression. Didn't notice the world changing, did we? Till we'd lost it.

Pause.

You've gone, haven't you? But you were there. The boy's wrong, it's not empty. Because you were there, and I know you were there. And so was the rest of it there. Somewhere. Inside. I haven't been dreaming. I've been awake, and I'm still awake. I'm not even dead. All the bits and pieces are there, if they can just be put together, in the pattern. I'll get it straight. I'll put it all together, and I'll bring you back. And him. And Fred and Billy. This bloody world is my piss bottle, and I'll fill it. I'll fill it, and you'll never say it's empty again.

He is crying.

There's no ending, and this isn't night. It's dawn. And in the daylight I'll have you back.

So help me!

CURTAIN

The End