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ONE WAY PENDULUM

A Farce in a New Dimension

by

N. F. SIMPSON

SAMUEL



FRENCH

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NEW YORK TORONTO SYDNEY HOLLYWOOD

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ONE WAY PENDULUM

Presented by The English Stage Company at The Royal Court Theatre, London, on the 22nd December, 1959, and subsequently at The Criterion Theatre, London, with the following cast of characters:

(in the order of their appearance)

KIRBY GROOMKIRBY	<i>Roddy Maude-Roxby</i>
ROBERT BARNES	<i>John Horsley</i>
MABEL GROOMKIRBY, Kirby's mother	<i>Alison Leggatt</i>
SYLVIA GROOMKIRBY, her daughter	<i>Patsy Rowlands</i>
AUNT MILDRED, Mabel's sister	<i>Patsy Byrne</i>
MYRA GANTRY	<i>Gwen Nelson</i>
ARTHUR GROOMKIRBY, Mabel's husband	<i>George Benson</i>
STANLEY HONEYBLOCK	<i>Douglas Livingstone</i>
JUDGE	<i>Douglas Wilmer</i>
POLICEMAN	<i>Alan Gibson</i>
USHER	<i>Jeremy Longhurst</i>
CLERK OF THE COURT	<i>Robert Levis</i>
PROSECUTING COUNSEL	<i>Graham Crowden</i>
DEFENDING COUNSEL	<i>Graham Armitage</i>

Directed by WILLIAM GASKILL

Décor by STEPHEN DONCASTER

Music arranged by DUDLEY MOORE

ACT I

The Groomkirbys' living-room

ACT II

The same

ACT I

SCENE—*The Groomkirbys' living-room.*

There is a doorway up L through which part of a kitchen can be seen. A door R, opening inwards, leads to the hall where part of the staircase can be seen. The fireplace is L. Below the door R is a cupboard on which stands a cash register, covered and so unrecognizable. Leading inconspicuously up the wall from the cash register is a tube which disappears into the ceiling. On the mantelpiece stands a small replica of a skull, where a clock might stand. There is a table C, covered with a painted tablecloth and littered with books. These are also to be seen filling a bookshelf above the door R and scattered about the floor of the room. A sideboard stands C of the back wall. An upright chair is R of the table and an armchair stands LC. An ironing-board stands against the wall above the fireplace.

When the CURTAIN rises, the stage is in darkness. LIGHTS come slowly up revealing a front-cloth, in the form of a projector screen, in place down stage C. In front of the screen there are three weighing machines. NUMBER ONE (GORMLESS) is LC. It is large, eye-catching and flamboyantly ugly. On it is an enormous weight. NUMBERS TWO and THREE are RC. They are identically small, modest and unpretentious. On them are correspondingly smaller weights. A music stand, without music is C. There is a pause, then KIRBY GROOMKIRBY enters and crosses to C. He is a rather grotesque figure, dressed entirely in black. He has the gauche ungainliness of the self-absorbed introvert, and takes himself very seriously. It is only with his weighing machines that he is at all easy or relaxed. He is uneasy and querulous in his rare encounters with people. He bows first to the machines R, then to the machine L, picks up his baton from the stand, crosses to R of "Gormless" and faces it.

KIRBY (*on one note*) Mi mi mi mi mi mi mi mi mi mi mi mi mi mi.
(*He listens coaxingly*)

(*There is silence*)

(*He tries again*) Mi mi mi mi mi mi mi mi mi mi mi mi mi mi.

(*There is a pause*)

GORMLESS (*with a metallic, mechanical voice*) Mi mi mi mi mi mi mi mi mi mi mi mi mi mi.

KIRBY (*in a tone higher*) Mi mi mi mi mi mi mi mi mi mi mi mi mi mi.

(*There is a short pause*)

GORMLESS (*in a tone higher*) Mi mi mi mi mi mi mi mi mi mi mi mi mi mi.

KIRBY (*raising the sound another tone*) Mi mi mi mi mi mi mi mi mi mi mi mi mi mi.

GORMLESS (*imitating*) Mi mi mi mi . . . (*It breaks off. After a pause*)
Fifteen stone ten pounds.

(KIRBY makes an impatient gesture)

KIRBY (*on the same note as before*) Mi mi mi mi mi mi mi mi mi mi mi mi mi mi.

(*There is a pause*)

GORMLESS. Fifteen stone ten pounds.

(KIRBY moves impatiently c, turns the music stand to face the machines R and taps with his baton)

KIRBY (*his baton raised; confidently*) Doh me soh doh'soh.

NUMBER TWO (*in a sweet soprano*) Doh me soh doh'soh.

(*There is repeated antiphonally several times, acquiring a kind of jaunty, flirtatious rhythm until, suddenly recollecting himself, KIRBY pulls it up short by two sharp taps on the music stand*)

KIRBY. Doh me soh doh'soh.

(NUMBER TWO and NUMBER THREE respond together. NUMBER THREE in a fruity baritone, an octave lower than Kirby)

NUMBER TWO } (together) Doh me soh doh'soh.
NUMBER THREE }

(*This is repeated, then KIRBY crosses and fixes his attention sternly on Gormless*)

KIRBY (*leaning forward; forcefully*) Mi mi mi mi mi mi mi mi mi mi mi mi mi mi.

(*There is silence*)

(*He tries to coax a response*) Mi mi mi mi mi mi mi mi mi mi mi mi mi mi.

(*There is silence*)

(*He takes out a tuning-fork, strikes it and listens to it*) Mi mi mi mi mi mi mi mi mi mi mi mi.

(*There is silence. KIRBY drops his arms to his sides and turns away a step.*)

ROBERT BARNES enters in the darkness down R, and stands looking on. He is a well-built man in his middle thirties. He has a friendly, casual, confident manner—a police sergeant, perhaps, off-duty. He wears a sports jacket and grey trousers. He is on neighbourly terms with both the Groom-kirbys and the audience, and throws out remarks in an informative, conversational way)

GORMLESS (*suddenly*) Fifteen stone ten pounds.

(A spotlight comes on, illuminating Barnes down R. With sudden decision, KIRBY returns to the music stand, faces R and gives two sharp taps)

BARNES. Works like a slave on this. Every night. As soon as he gets in.

KIRBY (with baton poised) Doh! (Very rapidly) Doh'doh' doh' doh' doh' doh' doh' doh' doh' doh'. Doh'.

NUMBER TWO } (together) Doh me soh doh'soh la doh' soh fa
NUMBER THREE } me doh doh ti doh.

(There is a pause)

BARNES. It's a form of escape, of course. Escapism.

(KIRBY taps the music stand)

NUMBER TWO } (together; muted) Doh me soh doh'soh la doh'
NUMBER THREE } soh: fa me doh doh ti doh. Re me doh doh—

(A row of five weighing machines is projected on to the screen)

—re me doh doh, re me soh doh doh doooooh.

(There is a pause)

BARNES. He's got big ideas eventually. Massed choirs and that sort of thing.

(KIRBY turns the stand to face up stage, taps and raises his arms, facing the screen)

CHOIR. Ha-llelujah!

(More weighing machines appear)

Ha-llelujah!

(More weighing machines appear)

Hallelujah! Hallelujah!

(Countless weighing machines appear, as far as the eye can see)

(A glorious avalanche of sound) Ha—a—llelu—u—jah!

(The vista fades. KIRBY, after the sound has died away and the vista has faded, stands transfixed in triumphant ecstasy, with arms outstretched)

BARNES (nonchalantly) Delusions of grandeur they call it, don't they?

GORMLESS (metallic and mechanical as ever) Fifteen stone ten pounds.

(KIRBY deflates slowly but perceptibly as the LIGHTS dim to BLACK-OUT, the screen is raised, the weighing machines and music stand are removed.)

KIRBY exits.

When the LIGHTS come up, MABEL GROOMKIRBY, Kirby's mother, is on her knees, dusting the books at the cupboard down R. She is aged about forty-

five. She takes in her stride most of what happens indoors, and is only marginally concerned with anything that may happen elsewhere. She moves briskly and would rather get things done herself than wait for other people to do them. SYLVIA GROOMKIRBY, her daughter, is sitting languidly in her armchair LC, reading a magazine. She is not yet nineteen, but with a permanent air of premature disillusionment about her. Her clothes are casual, neither conventional nor exceptionally bizarre)

BARNES. Good long way to go yet.

MABEL (*looking sharply round*) What?

BARNES (*gesturing upwards*) Hallo, Mrs Groomkirby. I was just talking about Kirby up there.

MABEL (*reverting to the dusting*) Oh, it's you, Mr Barnes. I wondered who it was.

BARNES. Won't have to worry about hiring the Wembley Stadium, just yet awhile.

MABEL (*without looking round*) Still having trouble with Brother Gormless up there, is he?

BARNES. Running his head up against a brick wall there, if you ask me.

MABEL. The whole thing's ridiculous. Why he can't use records . . .

BARNES. The lazy man's way, Mrs Groomkirby. Besides—you don't know what's behind it.

MABEL. No. Neither does anybody else. I don't think he knows himself.

BARNES. Wait till he's got all five hundred of them up to concert pitch.

MABEL. Well, as far as that goes, if we've got to *have* five hundred weighing machines in the house, I'd just as soon they did sing. Especially if they've got nothing more to say for themselves than Gormless.

BARNES. True enough.

MABEL (*rising*) Fifteen stone ten all day long—it gets a bit monotonous after a time.

BARNES. I should imagine it does. (*He pauses*) Is it all right if we come in, by the way?

MABEL (*looking sharply at Barnes and then suspiciously into the auditorium*) If who come in?

BARNES. Unless you'd rather we went off and came back later?

(MABEL gives Barnes a meaningful glance, closes the cupboard, moves to the sideboard and dusts on top of it)

MABEL. Like living on the pavement.

(*There is a pause*)

BARNES. I'll bring them in, then, shall I, Mrs Groomkirby?

MABEL. Yes, I suppose they'd better come in if they're coming. (*She crosses below the table towards the armchair LC*)

(*The telephone, off, rings. BARNES crosses above the table to L of it*)

There's the phone, Sylvia. (*To Barnes. Without looking round*) They'll have to take it as they find it. (*She moves to the kitchen door*) I haven't got time to go round scrubbing and polishing for them.

(*MABEL exits to the kitchen. SYLVIA rises and crosses to the door R*)

BARNES. Oh, no, they won't expect anything like that.

(*SYLVIA exits R, leaving the door open. As she opens the door KIRBY'S voice can be heard singing "Mi mi mi mi . . .", and this is repeated in metallic tones*)

SYLVIA (*off; in a bored, disenchanted voice*) Yes? . . .

BARNES. Still at it. (*He gently closes the door and moves to R of the table*) He's just above here. He's got the room over this one. (*In a mildly inquisitive way he glances at the titles of the books on the table. As an after-thought*) This is the living-room, of course. (*More loudly*) Where's Arthur this evening, Mrs Groomkirby?

MABEL (*off*) Need you ask?

BARNES. Across at the library again, I suppose?

MABEL (*off*) I wonder he doesn't take his bed there and have done with it.

BARNES (*to the audience; informatively*) Mr Groomkirby. He makes a bit of a hobby of the law. Gets a lot of books out of the library and one thing and another. They're all legal books—all this lot. (*He reads out some titles*) "Every Man His Own Lawyer. Legal Procedure for the Layman." Actually he's an insurance agent or something, I believe, when he's working. (*He drifts to the bookshelf up R*) There's some more of them over here. This is his great hobby at the moment.

(*MABEL enters from the kitchen with some cutlery which she puts on the sideboard*)

MABEL. Hobby. I don't know about a hobby. He spends more time on that than he does on anything else.

(*MABEL exits to the kitchen*)

BARNES (*taking down a book that has caught his eye and thumbing through it*) Gets a bit single-minded about it at times, doesn't he?

MABEL (*off*) Cluttering the place up. What with Kirby upstairs and him down. Never speaking to each other from one week's end to the next.

BARNES (*putting the book back and running his finger along the titles*) "Perjury for Pleasure. Out and About on Circuit. Teach Yourself Torts." Cabinet making? (*He looks in an intensely puzzled way in the vague direction of the audience and then back at the shelf*) What does he want with a book on cabinet-making? "The Complete Cabinet Maker and Joiner. Do's and Don't's for Dovetailers. Ways With Wood." What's going on? (*Loudly*) He's not taking up carpentry now, is he? As well?

MABEL (*appearing at the kitchen door*) Who?

BARNES. Arthur. (*He moves above the table and picks up a book from the floor*) He's got enough books here on it. There's another one down

here. "*Noah's Ark: The Supreme Achievement in Wood*". What's he up to, Mrs Groomkirby?

MABEL (*withdrawing*) Don't ask me. Something else for me to dust, I expect.

BARNES. Well, if he's got ideas about building Noah's Ark in a room this size, he'll find he's bitten off a bit more than he can chew.

MABEL (*off*) As long as we don't have to be knee-deep in shavings while he's finding out.

BARNES. I shouldn't worry too much. It probably doesn't amount to anything, Mrs Groomkirby. (*He sits on the downstage edge of the table*) I just happened to see them there. He's probably had them for years.

(MABEL enters from the kitchen, pushing a wheel-chair with AUNT MILDRED sitting in it. MILDRED is a little older than her sister. Her hair and her clothes, which are nondescript, combine to suggest something remote and fey about her in a down-to-earth way. But she is not overtly eccentric)

MABEL. He's seen them lying about somewhere and picked them up thinking he'd got hold of something else. He doesn't know what day it is half the time. (*She places the wheel-chair down L, in the position it quite clearly occupies regularly*)

(MILDRED sits placidly gazing at the floor some ten feet in front of her. MABEL settles Mildred in an impersonal, business-like way, then goes to the sideboard, picks up a large coloured travel brochure and takes it to Mildred)

BARNES (*aside to the audience with a nod towards Mildred*) Aunt Mildred. (*He pauses*) Never think they were sisters, would you?

(MABEL puts the brochure on Mildred's lap, unceremoniously in passing, like a waitress putting a menu on a table)

(*With a nod*) Travel brochure.

(SYLVIA enters R, crosses without a word to the armchair LC, throws herself down in it and reads her magazine. As SYLVIA enters KIRBY's voice can be heard singing "doh me soh doh soh . . .", and this is repeated in metallic tones)

MABEL (*moving briskly to the kitchen door and without looking at Sylvia*) Who was that?

SYLVIA (*without looking up*) Stan.

(MABEL exits to the kitchen. There is a pause)

BARNES (*half to himself, half to the audience and dubiously shaking his head*) Noah's Ark in there. I hope he knows what he's doing. (*He pauses, then crosses as though to exit L*)

MILDRED (*quoting indignantly from the brochure*) "By rail to Outer Space!" And here I am sitting here.

(BARNES checks)

BARNES (*with a sly glance at the audience; very slightly humouring her*) Perhaps you go on the wrong train, Aunt Mildred.

MILDRED. Of course I was on the wrong train. I knew the moment I heard the man say "Outer Hebrides" that I was on the wrong train.

BARNES. She's got this bug about transport. (*He moves slowly L*) Wants us all moving about. Don't you, Aunt Mildred? Plenty of destinations—so we can feel as if we're getting somewhere. She's probably right. Nothing like a good old destination for giving you a sense of purpose. Till you get there, of course. Then you have to start looking round for another one. That's why you need plenty of them. Can't have too many, can you, Aunt Mildred?

(MILDRED is silent)

Too wrapped up in her brochure. Just want to slip upstairs for a moment. I'll be back in a minute.

(BARNES exits down L. There is a pause.)

MABEL enters from the kitchen and collects a cruet from the side-board)

MABEL (*without looking at Sylvia*) I thought you weren't seeing Stan any more?

SYLVIA (*without looking up*) I didn't say I was seeing him.

(MABEL exits to the kitchen)

MABEL (*as she goes*) As long as you don't expect *me* to be all over him when he comes.

(There is a pause.)

MABEL enters from the kitchen with a tray on which a snack is laid out)

(*She puts the tray on the table*) Here you are, Sylvia. If you're not doing anything you can take this upstairs to Kirby.

(SYLVIA looks momentarily up and goes back to her magazine)

SYLVIA (*after a pause*) Can't he come down for it himself?

MABEL. You know very well he's busy up there.

(MABEL exits to the kitchen)

(*As she goes. Indicating the tray*) Don't let that get cold, Sylvia.

SYLVIA (*reluctantly stirring herself*) Why can't he get records or something and play those—like anybody else? (*She rises and moves to the table*) Instead of this everlasting "mi mi mi mi" all the damn time. (*She picks up the tray and crosses to the door R*) I suppose that's something else that's against his principles. He'd rather go through all this pantomime. (*She opens the door*)

(*As SYLVIA opens the door KIRBY's voice can be heard singing "doh me soh doh soh me soh doh soh . . .", and this is repeated in metallic tones*)

Listen to it.

MABEL (*off*) It's only until he gets them all trained properly, Sylvia.

(SYLVIA closes the door and cuts off the sound)

SYLVIA. Gets them trained. I can't wait. (*She reopens the door*) Then, I suppose, we shall have Handel's *Messiah* driving us all up the wall every time there's anything on the telly.

(SYLVIA exits R, closing the door behind her.)

MABEL enters from the kitchen with a basket of laundry which she puts R of the kitchen door)

MILDRED. What's happened to my tricycle, Mabel?

(MABEL exits to the kitchen)

MABEL (*as she goes*) You know perfectly well it hasn't come yet, Aunt Mildred.

(*There is a pause*)

MILDRED. I shall be too old to ride it if it doesn't come soon. (*She pauses. Loudly*) Do you remember the trouble Maud had with that tricycle of hers, Mabel? (*She pauses*)

(MABEL enters from the kitchen, goes to the table and transfers the vase of flowers to the sideboard)

She went by bus in the end. (*She pauses*)

(MABEL collects some of the books from the table)

It didn't take her long to change from one to the other. She never stuck to anything for any length of time. Wheelbarrow, roller skates, rickshaws—I think she's tried practically everything at one time or another.

(MABEL bangs the books down in the corner up R and exits to the kitchen)

I can remember when it was camels. (*Loudly*) Do you remember that, Mabel? I can remember the time when she wouldn't go anywhere without her camel. If she wasn't up on top of it she was walking along beside it. (*She pauses*) She rode to hounds on it more than once. (*She pauses*) Until it threw her. Then she went on to roller skates. (*She pauses*) Now it's buses. She wouldn't hear a word at one time against that camel. "My ship of the desert", she used to say. But not any longer. Not since it threw her. (*She pauses*) I told her they were treacherous. But she wouldn't listen. (*She pauses*) She was perfectly all right till that time the police stopped her when she was driving Dr Picklock's ambulance. (*She pauses*) Do you remember that, Mabel? In the middle of the night.

(MABEL speaks as she crosses the kitchen past the open door, but without looking in)

MABEL. She was committing a nuisance with it, Aunt Mildred.

(There is a pause)

MILDRED. It was only through the kindness of Dr Picklock that she had an ambulance to commit a nuisance with.

(There is a pause. MABEL crosses back)

In any case it was empty.

(MABEL enters from the kitchen carrying a large tray laden with food and large empty bowl, which she puts on the sideboard)

MABEL (without looking at Mildred; impatiently) We know it was empty, Aunt Mildred. But she knocked down Dr Picklock with it. (She clears the remaining books from the table)

MILDRED. Knocked down a doctor? With an ambulance? How could she?

(MABEL crosses to the kitchen door)

It's a contradiction in terms.

(MABEL checks and turns to look for the first time straight at Mildred's back)

MABEL (in angry impatience) He was six weeks in plaster, Aunt Mildred.

(MABEL exits to the kitchen.)

SYLVIA enters from the hall. As she enters, KIRBY's voice can be heard singing "Mi mi mi mi mi mi mi". MABEL checks momentarily, then continues out)

SYLVIA (crossing to the armchair LC) Listen to it out there. It's going to drive me up the wall before long.

MABEL (off) For goodness' sake don't you start, Sylvia.

SYLVIA (sitting in the armchair LC) Mi mi mi mi-ing all over the place. (She takes up her magazine) He's been at it now since I don't know when and he still isn't any further.

MABEL (off) He's got to go at the pace of the slowest. You know that, Sylvia, as well as I do.

SYLVIA. He's got four hundred and ninety-nine others, for goodness' sake! He doesn't have to hold everything up just for the sake of Gormless. If he goes at the pace of Gormless he'll still be mi mi mi-ing in six months' time.

MABEL (off) That's Kirby's affair, Sylvia. I've got quite enough to do down here moving your father's stuff about all over the place before I can get on with anything—without bothering about what Kirby's doing or isn't doing. (She pauses) If you gave a hand now and again it might be a help. (She pauses) What with you moaning and Aunt Mildred on all the time.

SYLVIA. Why? What's wrong with her?

MABEL (*off*) Nothing. Don't for heaven's sake start her off.

(*There is a pause*)

SYLVIA. I don't know what she's doing there in the first place.

(*MABEL enters from the kitchen with a tablecloth which she spreads on the table*)

MABEL. You know perfectly well she got on the wrong train, Sylvia.

SYLVIA. Cluttering up the place.

MABEL. We're not getting rid of her, if that's what you're leading up to. We've been over this before.

SYLVIA. Great old-fashioned thing in the living-room.

MABEL. Yes. Well, she's staying where she is. (*She pauses and transfers the tray of food from the sideboard to the table*) Did you ring Kirby's bell when you came down? (*She moves to the kitchen door*) Because I didn't hear it if you did.

(*MABEL exits to the kitchen. SYLVIA throws down the magazine in exasperation, rises and crosses to the cash register*)

SYLVIA. I don't know what he wants a bell rung every time for.

MABEL (*off*) You know he won't start eating till he's heard it.

SYLVIA (*uncovering the cash register*) What happens when this thing wears out? That's what I want to know. (*She pauses with her fingers poised over the keys*) What is it—"No Sale"?

MABEL (*off*) Surely you know by now, Sylvia. Yes.

SYLVIA. Starve to death, I suppose. (*She rings up "No Sale"*)

(*There is a pause during which SYLVIA re-covers the cash register*)

He was perfectly all right till he heard about Pavlov and those stupid dogs. (*She turns to the table and sees all the food*) What's all this for, Mum, for goodness' sake? Not Mrs Gantry again?

MABEL (*off*) Somebody's got to eat the food up, Sylvia.

SYLVIA (*crossing to the armchair LC*) Oh, no! Not her *again!*

MABEL (*off*) It's no use leaving it to mount up. I've only got the one larder, Sylvia.

SYLVIA (*sitting in the armchair LC*) Couldn't she have come some other night? She would have to be here on the one night I've got Stan coming.

(*MABEL appears at the kitchen door and looks pointedly in Sylvia's direction for a moment before speaking*)

MABEL. I thought you weren't seeing Stan.

SYLVIA. Trust her to choose tonight of all nights.

(*MABEL does not reply and withdraws. There is a pause*)

What time's she going to be here?

(MABEL enters from the kitchen, goes to the table and transfers the food from the tray to the table. She then gets a knife, fork and spoon from the sideboard and puts them on the table)

MABEL. I don't know, Sylvia.

SYLVIA. It's eight o'clock now gone. Stan's supposed to be coming at quarter past nine.

MABEL. You haven't got to both sit there and watch her, have you?

SYLVIA. What are we supposed to do, then?

MABEL. If you were to do your proper share of the eating between you, instead of leaving it all to me, I shouldn't have to have Mrs Gantry in anything like so often. (She pauses, and takes four half-filled packets of cereal from the sideboard cupboard) Paying out good money all the time. (She pauses and empties the contents of the packets into the bowl on the table) If it weren't for what your father makes out of his parking meters we just shouldn't be able to run to it. Then we should have to get it eaten ourselves.

MILDRED. Twenty-five years since I left St Pancras—

MABEL. Be quiet, Aunt Mildred!

MILDRED. —and here I am still sitting here.

MABEL. It's all very well for you, Sylvia, to sit there carrying on. It's your father who has to stand out there hour after hour in all weathers, in front of his own parking meters at sixpence a time, trying to get enough together to pay the bills with. (She pauses, puts the empty packets on the tray, then gets three bottles of sauce from the sideboard cupboard and puts them on the table) If you don't want to stay in, there's nothing to stop you going out, is there? You're not going to sit there saying nothing all the evening, both of you, are you?

SYLVIA. I don't know what we're going to do yet. If she's coming we haven't got much choice. I can't take him upstairs with the Mastersingers going full blast up there, can I?

MABEL. No, you certainly can't, Sylvia. And while we're about it, let's get one thing clear. I don't mind Stan coming here, as long as he's not under *my* feet all the time. But we can get one thing settled here and now—he's not being taken upstairs. That's quite definite. (She gets a cruet from the sideboard and puts it on the table)

MILDRED. It isn't at all how I envisaged it, Mabel.

MABEL. That's one thing I do draw the line at. (She pauses and looks at the skull on the mantelpiece) If that's yours on the mantelpiece, Sylvia, you might put it away somewhere before Mrs Gantry gets here.

(MABEL picks up the tray with the empty packets and exits to the kitchen. SYLVIA glances up momentarily then resumes her magazine. There is a pause)

MILDRED. Not even a luggage rack for my things, Mabel.

SYLVIA. She's off again, Mum.

MABEL (off) For goodness' sake leave her alone. I can hear she is.

(There is a pause)

MILDRED. It hardly seems like travelling. *(She pauses)* I wouldn't mind if I could feel I were moving towards something.

(MABEL enters from the kitchen carrying four plates and two half packets of sliced bread which she puts on the table)

MABEL. You can hardly expect to have a luggage rack in the Outer Hebrides, Aunt Mildred.

SYLVIA. Pity she can't be in the Outer Hebrides.

(MABEL unpacks the bread. There is a pause broken by a series of regular thuds as of someone rolling a heavy, angular weight across the floor overhead. MABEL looks up, then across to SYLVIA who does not react in any way at all, then briefly up again before reverting with a resigned sigh to unpacking the bread)

MABEL *(after a pause)* You haven't done anything about that yet, have you, Sylvia? It isn't exactly an ornament to have about the place.

SYLVIA. Why? What's wrong with it? It's only a death's head.

MABEL. A dirty old skull on the mantelpiece.

(MABEL picks up the bread wrappings and exits to the kitchen. There is a pause, then she re-enters, carrying a tray of tea-things for one, with three half-full packets of tea and a saucer with butter and knife)

I should have thought you could have found something better to do with your money than spend it on a thing like that. *(She puts the tray on the table)*

SYLVIA. As a matter of fact it's a *memento mori*, if you really want to know.

MABEL. Oh? And what's a "*memento mori*" for heaven's sake? *(She transfers the items from the tray to the table)*

SYLVIA. Stan bought it for me. You carry it round with you.

MABEL. It looks like it. Stuck up there.

SYLVIA. You don't *have* to carry it round. As long as it's somewhere where you can see it. It's supposed to remind you of death.

(There is an eloquent pause)

MABEL. And does it? *(She tips the contents of the tea packets into the teapot)*

SYLVIA *(looking up)* Does it what?

MABEL *(without looking round)* I thought it was supposed to remind you of death.

SYLVIA *(shrugging)* Oh. *(She glances at the skull and resumes reading)* Not all that much.

(There is a pause. MABEL puts the empty packets on the tray and picks it up)

MABEL (*moving to the kitchen door*) I think you'd better tell Stan he's been done over that, then, Sylvia.

(MABEL *exits to the kitchen. SYLVIA affects indifference and resumes reading. There is a pause, again broken by a series of thuds, slightly louder and slightly slower, as though the weight this time was a heavier one*)

MILDRED (*after a pause*) If only I could feel I had a proper destination. (*She pauses*) And proper transport to take me there.

SYLVIA. Oh, for goodness' sake shut her up, Mum.

MABEL (*off*) Be quiet and leave her alone, Sylvia.

(*There is a pause.*)

MABEL *enters from the kitchen with a plate of jelly which she puts on the table*)

MILDRED. We should be a very static lot without any transport to take us from one destination to another.

MABEL (*in desperation*) We don't have to be obsessed with it, Aunt Mildred.

(MABEL *exits to the kitchen. There is a long pause, again broken by a third series of thuds, louder and slower. MABEL appears at the kitchen door*)

What's he up to?

SYLVIA. For goodness' sake stop fussing! He's only moving his weights about.

MABEL (*crossing to the door R*) He'll be rupturing himself up there. (*She opens the door*)

(*The thuds become slightly louder. The LIGHTS dim except for the light in the hall R and a strip of lighting across the front of the stage. MABEL is seen standing in the doorway, and looking up the stairs*)

(*She calls*) Are you all right, Kirby?

(KIRBY *enters down R, rolling an enormous weight. He rolls it across the front of the stage and exits with it L*)

I suppose he's all right.

(*The hall light goes out. As the weight disappears off stage a final louder thud is heard. There is a short pause then the sound of a small, male voice choir is heard rather self-consciously singing the nursery rhyme "Rock-a-bye, baby"*).

MABEL *closes the door R, crosses and exits to the kitchen.*

KIRBY *reappears down L and retreats backwards from L to R, conducting imaginary singers with his baton. He exits R on the words "Down will come baby, cradle and all". There is a short pause, then a reverberating crash, followed by another pause*)

GORMLESS (*off; in the familiar tones*) Fifteen stone ten pounds.

(*The LIGHTS come up on the living-room. MABEL, with a tea cloth in*

her hand, appears at the kitchen door, alarmed and uncertain for the moment. She suddenly recollects herself, wipes her hands on the cloth and crosses to the door R)

MABEL. Don't just sit there, Sylvia!

SYLVIA. He's only knocked his weights down. *(She pauses)*

(MABEL opens the door R)

Or tripped over them or something.

(MABEL checks and turns back into the room)

MABEL. He's probably waiting up there to fall back unconscious. *(She goes to the cash register, tears off the cover, throws it down and rings up "No Sale")*

(A sharp single thud is heard)

I thought as much.

(MABEL rushes out R and goes up the stairs)

GORMLESS *(off)* Fifteen stone ten pounds.

(There is a long pause)

MILDRED. Four hundred and seventy-nine destinations and not so much as a tricycle to take me to one of them.

(There is a long pause.)

BARNES enters casually down L and is illuminated by a spotlight)

BARNES. Everything under control? *(He crosses to C and notices the door R is open)* What's happened to the music?

(MABEL enters down the stairs, and comes into the living-room)

MABEL *(crossing to the kitchen door)* He's lying there stunned.

(MABEL exits to the kitchen. BARNES, puzzled, tries to pick up the lost threads)

(Off) It won't hurt him to stay there for a little while. The rest might do him good.

(The front-door bell rings off R. There is a very short pause.)

MABEL enters from the kitchen and crosses briskly to the door R)

(With heavy sarcasm) Don't bother to answer it, Sylvia, will you?

(MABEL exits R, leaving the door open)

SYLVIA *(rising)* If that's Mrs Gantry, Mum, I shall be out here washing some things through.

(SYLVIA exits languidly to the kitchen. BARNES reacts strongly to the name "Gantry" and moves down L)

BARNES *(confidentially)* I think perhaps this is where we'll quietly

scarper. Before we get caught. (*He collects his coat down L and puts it on*) We'll go outside and have a breather for a minute or two.

MABEL (*off R*) Hello, Myra.

MYRA (*off*) I hope I'm not too early, Mabel?

MABEL (*off*) Of course not, Myra. Let me hang that up here for you.

(BARNES collects his hat down L)

BARNES (*crossing rapidly from L to R*) Come on. (*As he passes Mildred*) Excuse us, Aunt Mildred. We're leaving you to it for a little while. (*He lights a cigarette*)

(MABEL enters R)

MABEL (*at the door*) I've got everything set out ready for you.

BARNES (*checking down R*) Here she is. The fifteen stone wonder.

(BARNES exits down R.)

MYRA GENTRY enters R. *She is enormously fat through eating in a vocational capacity. She gives her services professionally, but has acquired a somewhat special status in the Groomkirby household through the regularity of her visits. She crosses to R of the table*

MABEL. We're just waiting for the kettle. (*She pushes in the drawer of the cash register which she previously left out*)

(*The cash register gives a slight "ping"*)

GORMLESS (*off; as though in response to the "ping" from the cash register*) Fifteen stone ten pounds.

(*MYRA checks in surprise which has begun to turn to indignation, when the LIGHTS quickly fade except for a strip of lighting across the front of the stage.*)

BARNES enters down R)

BARNES. I stand corrected.

(*During the following scene, MABEL, in the darkness, sets up the ironing-board and iron L of the table. MYRA strikes the bowl of cereal, and all the bread except four slices, and exchanges the teapot for a pot of properly made tea.*)

ARTHUR GROOMKIRBY, *Mabel's husband, enters down L, pushing a small handcart stacked precariously with oak panelling. ARTHUR is an ineffectually self-important man in his middle forties, who sets far greater store by being master in his own house than he would if he were. He takes for granted the overriding importance of everything he himself is engaged on. BARNES stares in amazement, his cigarette poised half-way to his lips. He watches the handcart well on to the stage in its progress from L to R*)

ARTHUR (*stopping, peering round the load and seeing Barnes*) Is that you, Bob?

BARNES. Hello, Mr Groomkirby. What's it all in aid of?

ARTHUR. I've been an hour and a half with this lot. (*He starts*

pushing again) Getting it up here. Traffic lights and what not.

BARNES. You've got about twice as much on here as you can manage. (*He crosses to c*)

ARTHUR (*pushing the cart to R*) Oak. Good, solid stuff.

BARNES (*watching him*) You're not thinking of trying to get that whatever it is set up indoors, are you, by any chance?

ARTHUR. Why not?

BARNES. Good God! She'll have a fit. (*He shakes his head despairingly at Arthur*) Can I give you a hand?

ARTHUR. It's all right. I've only got to get it round the back now.

BARNES. You should have made two journeys with it

ARTHUR. No, I didn't want to do that. I just made the one journey and went the long way round.

(*ARTHUR exits with the cart down R. The LIGHTS come up on the living-room. MYRA is seated R of the table, where her ravages are already apparent. MABEL is at the ironing-board, L of the table, ironing*)

MABEL. They go round in circles with it.

MYRA. Men always do.

BARNES (*aside*) I think I'll just go round and see what's going on out at the back. (*He gestures to the living-room*) Good luck to you.

(*BARNES exits down R. There is a pause*)

MABEL. It's the same with his parking meters.

MYRA. Like Mr Gantry with his.

MABEL. Five of them altogether he's got out there, in different places. Round the lawn and up by the rockery. But once he's put his sixpence in there's no budging him. He'll stand there like a statue till his hour's up.

MYRA. Mr Gantry generally takes a book out there with him.

MABEL. Instead of going away after he's stood there for ten minutes or so and having sixpenn'orth in front of one of the others. What's the good of *having* five? And the consequence is, of course, that when he goes round to empty them all at the end of the month he's got practically nothing to show for hours of waiting. And he's out in all weathers.

MYRA. It's the only way they can save anything.

MABEL. He's afraid of anything that's got the least suggestion of overcharging about it. Unless he gets his full hour once he's put his sixpence in, he feels he's been done in some way. He's frightened he'll end up losing his own custom.

MYRA. If you don't speculate you don't accumulate.

MABEL. I tell him, by the time it came to losing his own custom—if it ever did—he could have made enough overcharging himself to pay somebody to stand in front of them twenty-four hours a day. And make his fortune practically. But he can't seem to see it.

MYRA (*scooping potatoes and carrots on to her plate*) They don't,

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