

Y Tŵr libretto – ENGLISH translation

Act 1

Dawn breaks slowly, filling the room with warm light. When the light has reached its strongest a young girl sweeps in wearing a light summer dress. She is laughing and out of breath.

Girl: At last, I'm here!

The girl calls over her shoulder.

Girl: Hurry!

Where are you?

I'm here. Come inside. Come inside to me.

Boy: *(Off)* I'm coming!

Girl: Come on!

The Lad shows his face in the doorway.

Girl: There you are!

Boy: Here I am...

Girl: There you are...

And here am I!

I'm intoxicated by the warmth of the sun.

Come here to my arms!

Boy: *(More hesitantly)* What if someone came?

We'd better go back
to the gang, where it's safe.
Or up there!
The higher the better,
Out of everyone's way
no-one spying.

Girl: Come on!

Boy: We'll be safe!

Girl: I don't want to be safe!

Here is where we're supposed to be.
This is our time.
Come on...
Hold me tight
More!
Squeeze me!
Open the back of my dress
Come on!

*The girl wildly kisses the Lad, but he remains emotionless.
She becomes frustrated and pushes him away.*

Girl: I might as well love a lump of suet pudding!

Boy: There's a time and a place for everything.

Girl: How much time do you need? What kind of bloody place?

Boy: Quiet! Is somebody here?

There's a storm on the way.

Black clouds over Ben Foel.

Girl: What bloody place?

How much time do you want?

Boy: The forecast was for thunder since first thing.

A thunderstorm – it'll be good for the crops.

The first thunder sounds. The girl takes fright, paralysed. The Lad wraps his arms around her manfully, enjoying his new-found strength.

While holding each other for a while, they sing and hum while the storm dies away.

Boy: Midsummer storms never last long.

It's moving away.

.

Girl: It's getting cold,

Night is falling slowly over Ben Foel.

The Lad places his jacket over the Girl's shoulders.

Girl: I feel safe with you.

Boy: You don't want to feel safe!

That's what you said.

The Girl looks for bed linen and finds a blanket and pillows in a chest. She arranges these to form a bed on the chest.

Girl: I'm afraid, like everyone else.

Not afraid of dying, but afraid of pain.

Afraid of extending life, like Mum, poor dear.

The girl sits beside the bed, imagining her Mother lying there.

Poor Mum, being fed

On lies, empty talk, pretence.

Everyone talking about summer holidays

That will never come.

Promise me that you'll be honest with me at the end.

Boy: I promise.

Girl: Honest?

Boy: Honest.

Girl: To each other?

Boy: No hiding

Girl/Boy: No secrets

The Lad stands and stares through the window while meditating.

The Girl become curious.

Girl: I wonder what you're thinking about.

Or who?

A girl, hot-arsed.

A girl from work;

Tight short skirt. Heels and scent.

Her breasts smiling,

through her blouse...

The Lad gives a lazy smile that angers the girl.

Girl: You smile back!

Your hands...

fingering the buttons...

sliding like silk up her skirt...

kneading her skin like warm dough...

All the things you won't do to me,

The Girl grabs the Lad, waking him from his daydream.

Filthy sod!

The Lad awakes and notices the girl's anger.

Boy: What the hell...?

Girl: There's no point in you denying it!
You were dreaming about her.

Boy: About who?
Dreaming about who?

Girl: Stop pretending!
I saw your lust so clearly.
Your satisfaction in having her.
What's her name?
The one you were fondling
In your dream?

Boy: Suzuki. Suzuki.

Girl: I might have guessed!
Some young little "cow" from overseas!

Boy: From Japan!
Suzuki 500.

Girl: You filthy sod. A whore!
You've got another girl.

Boy: No, not a girl... a motorbike!
92 miles an hour!

The truth dawns on the girl and she hesitates.

Girl: 92 miles an hour...

Boy: You can't have been thinking...

The Lad laughs

Girl: I couldn't stand thinking
Of someone else in your arms.

The Lad turns serious on hearing this, and comes to a new realisation.

Boy: I couldn't stand anyone else anyway.
No-one but you.

Girl: No-one but me.

Boy: No-one but you.

The Lad approaches the girl and embraces her from behind, while she melts under his touch. But as the embracing becomes more passionate she pulls away.

Girl: No! Not now!
Not here – it's not safe here.
Come on – let's go up to the next room,
It's high time for us to climb.

Boy: What's the hurry?

I'm beginning to enjoy myself.

The Lad offers his hand, encouraging the Girl to approach him. She hesitates, looking longingly at the stairs, but finally yields.

The Girl undresses slowly and steps out of her frock. She walks up to the Lad in her petticoat. She lies down beside him. He draws a sheet over them and they make love.

A train is heard in the distance and the girl is delighted.

Girl: A train!

Both relax in a lazy embrace

There's something pleasant about the sound of a train

Far off in the night!

The Lad gets up irritably while the Girl enjoys lounging. After a while the Lad manages to voice what is bothering him.

Boy: We've got to be honest with each other;

Completely honest, totally open

Without hiding, without secrets!

He hesitates.

Boy: You knew exactly what you were doing.

Girl: Shhhhh!

Did you hear that?

Pause as they both listen.

Girl: Something...
Someone...
Calling.

The Boy goes to the ground door, opens it and listens.

Girl: No! Close it!
We won't go down that way again.

The girl looks up the stairs.

Girl: Never again.

The Lad notices the girl is looking towards the top of the stairs.

Boy: You think it came from up there?
I don't hear anything.
These roof-beams swelling, most likely;
It happens in the heat of the sun.

Girl: It wasn't the sound of a 'thing',
But somebody.
Somebody calling.

I had a dream last night;
I was running through a cornfield
Chasing a butterfly,
I lost sight of it... and then... I spotted it again.
It had landed on someone's face.
The face of someone lying in the corn.
It was fluttering its wings
In the little hollow between the nose and the cheek.
And I reached out for it very slowly,
My hands cupped together...
To catch it...

Boy: I had a dream like that once.

Know what I caught?

With (un)suitable gestures

Girl: What?

The Lad jumps on the Girl, squeezes/tickles her. The two race about the room, doubled with laughter with the Lad intent on catching the Girl.

Boy: A stark-naked stunner

With tits like two milk churns!

The Girl jumps onto the stairs. The Lad stands stock-still, paralysed by fear.

Girl: Who's going to catch who, then?

Come on!

Come on if you dare.

The Girl backs slowly up the stairs.

Boy: Don't! Come down!
You don't know what's there.

Girl: We'll go up. You and me.
Hand in hand, together.

Boy: Don't! Come down.
I'll come, I promise,
What's the rush?

The Girl stands still, halfway up the stairs.

Girl: You've changed your tune!
When we reached this place
You were mad keen to go up.

Boy: No, not mad keen to go up,
But mad keen to leave.
I know this place now.
I understand things here.
But once we go up there
there'll be no turning back.

Girl: There's no turning back.

Boy: Let's make the most of this place,
Taste everything while we've got the chance.
Our blood hot in our veins.
Loving until it hurts,
Hurting until it's love,
The first dip of the season,
The water cold enough to freeze your balls off,
Undressing in the heather,
The smell of sweat in desire,
Feeling the skin smooth and hot.
(As if in a trance) We won't get another chance like this...
Not ever!

The Girl comes down the stairs to beg the Lad

Girl: But we've got to talk.
Arrange things.

Deaf to the Girl's words.

Boy: I might buy a new motor-bike,
A brand spanking new one;
A Suzuki 500!
Two helmets and goggles;
You behind me, speeding off.

Girl: I won't come.

Boy: The wind whipping at our cheeks,
92 miles an hour!

Girl: But I won't come!

Boy: Doing a ton!

Girl: I'm pregnant.

Boy: Brand spanking new!

Girl: I'm Pregnant!

The Girl's words sink slowly into the Lad's consciousness. He is paralysed.

Boy: Do you think you're mistaken?

Girl: I was never so certain of anything.
Loving until it hurts,
Hurting until it's love,
The first dip of the season...

Boy: I don't know.
I'll never know, never be sure.

Girl: There never was anybody after you.
I didn't want anybody after you.

The Lad turns his back on the Girl. Having opened her heart, she is now overcome by disappointment, but finds renewed strength from the life in her womb.

Lullaby: the Girl slowly climbs the stairs

Girl: We'll go up, you and me,
Hand in hand together,
Not afraid, no regrets,
Tomorrow is a golden adventure before us,
Without regret.

Boy: Is there another way?
You're sure that's what you want?

The Girl continues to climb the stairs.

Boy: Wait!

Hesitatingly the Lad hurries up the stairs, while glancing back longingly at what he leaves behind.

End of Act 1.

Act 2

The sunset is slowly becoming dusk. The Woman comes in. She has become slower and heavier. She lights a lamp, her clothes suggesting an evening of luxurious dining. She looks around the room; disappointment.

The Man comes in, a little tipsy; he is greying and putting on weight.

The Woman sits before a mirror. She takes off her earrings and jewellery while staring at her reflection: disenchantment.

The Man stands where he is, steadies himself and belches loudly.

The Man laughs; he loosens his tie and belches again. The Woman bites her tongue.

Man: That's better!

A good night.

A night to remember!

The Man takes out an expensive hip flask from the breast pocket of his jacket.

Man: A gift from The Boss himself!

How could I refuse?

Come on – shame to waste

D.J.'s best whiskey!

The Man offers a sip to the Woman; she ignores him while unpinning her hair before the mirror. The Man swigs at the hip flask before raising it in a toast; he is becoming expansive.

Man: "Mates!" that's what he said!

D.J., between the prawn cocktail and lasagne.

"Mates!"

Not a colleague
Not a twopenny halfpenny skivvy,
a member of staff,
but "Mates!"
Friend!
Partner!

Woman: *(Without conviction)* Partner?

Man: We were like that tonight *(crossing his fingers)*
Him and me; understanding each other,
trusting each other;
no secrets;
putting the world to rights.
Laughing!
He laughed at every one of my jokes!

Woman: Ha ha ha!

The Man ignores the Woman and becomes more heated.

Man: Who else could he get?
Who else but me?
That bighead ponce – Price?
Arse-licker, conceited,
all balls and College!
Straight into Admin in a pink shirt
with nice little matching socks?
No! Not bloody likely!
A hard man with experience,
One of the lads;
that's what D.J. wants.
People like me are the backbone of the company!

(The Man drinks another toast to himself.)

Woman: Except that it's not "backbone"
he wants this time . . .
but brains.
A mind.
A brainbox!

Man: *(accusingly)* How do you know what he wants?

Pause.

Woman: You're drunk.

The Woman makes to move but he grips her arm to prevent her.

Man: I saw him!

Woman: Let me go.

Man: I saw him!

He grips her still.

Woman: You're hurting me!

Man: Tonight!
Playing kneesies with you
under the table!

Pause.

Woman: You saw him?

Man: I saw him.

The Woman feels more disappointment in her husband than guilt at her own behaviour.

Woman: Why didn't you
tell him to stop?
Throw bloody prawn cocktail in his face?
And pour your lasagne
over his bald head?
But no . . . you wouldn't dare
tweak the nose of
your dear D.J.!
And it's paid you well
for your wife to be nice to him
all these years!

Pause. The man has no answer to this. He slumps.

She goes to stand before the mirror.

The Man looks around the room and shakes in a spasm of terror.

Man: What a hell of a place this is . . .
Draughts everywhere.

Suddenly the Man looks up towards the upper room.

Man: What was that?

Pause as they both listen.

Woman: I heard nothing.

Man: Some sort of sound.

Woman: *(Nostalgically)* Someone's voice calling?

Man: No, not someone, but something.
A chime.
Or a knell.
A bell!
A signal perhaps?
Let's climb up!

Woman: No, not now.
We've got to be sensible,
Not rush like last time.

Man: You were sure before . . .
knew the exact moment!

Woman: *(Sadly)* I thought I knew!

The Man looks up towards the upper room.

Man: Things are bound to be different
up there.

Woman: I'll be just the same . . . you'll be just the same.
The Woman keeps staring coldly without expression at her reflection in the mirror.

Man: I wonder?

He walks up to her and stands behind her.

Man: Things can change . . .

He lifts his hand as if to touch her. He has doubts and hesitates

Man: I remember a time . . .

He nearly places his hand on her shoulder . . .

Pause. He draws his hand back and looks at his watch.

The Woman walks to the window and looks out. The Man restrains himself from following her. He stands at a distance peering through the window over her shoulder.

Man: A fine night!
Full moon.
Smell of fallen leaves.

Woman: Smell of death!
Everything dying.
I hate the autumn.

During the following the Man gradually, step by step, approaches the Woman.

Man: Do you remember going up Snowdon
to see the sunrise?
Saturday of the nine light nights!
Hell of a gang;
ten o'clock bus to Llanberis,
bellyful of chips
and up we went,
remember?

No response.

Man: You lost your shoe.
And I carried you on my back.

Woman: On your shoulders!
You tripped a few times.

Man: Damn, so I did!

And you putting your skirt over my head
every step!

Woman: You carried me quite a distance, fair play to you.

Man: I didn't feel the weight.
Felt nothing
except your thighs pressing warm
around my neck . . .

The two are close enough to touch. They look at each other but there is still a gulf between them.

During the series of images that follows the passage of time is conveyed by the music.

The Man takes a sip from his hip flask and finds to his disappointment that it is now empty.

The Woman takes off her shoes and slips into bed.

The Man takes off his shoes, swallows three tablets and slips into bed.

As soon as he is still, the Woman gets up, puts her shoes on and walks to the mirror. She puts on her makeup and jewellery.

The Man gets up, swallows three tablets and puts his shoes on.

The Woman moves to the window and stares out, as if waiting for something or someone.

The Man sits hunched over his laptop, working.

The Woman returns to her mirror and takes off her makeup and jewellery.

The Man sips at his hip flask and is once more disappointed to find it empty.

The Woman takes off her shoes and slips into bed.

The Man takes off his shoes, swallows three tablets and slips into bed.

As soon as he is still, the Woman gets up as we hear the noise of a train clattering along in the distance.

Woman: A train!

The Man awakes.

Woman: Hold me.
Squeeze me!
Squeeze me tight!

She puts her arms about him. He does likewise but he seems uncertain and shy.

Woman: There's something sad
in the sound of a train
far off in the night.
Goodbyes . . .
Tears . . .
Going somewhere . . .
Leaving . . .

Man: Or arriving!
Remember that school trip to London?
Starting before the crack of dawn.
You in your purple silk frock
With the sun behind you
and me seeing the complete shape of your body

through it!

Woman: See-through!
That's why I wore it!
You were delighted!

Man: Delighted!
Until I realized
that the other sods
could see the same thing as me;
see your whole body!

The Man turns his back, sits on the edge of the bed and swallows three tablets. The Woman senses the Man's disappointment and tries to rescue the memory.

Woman: That was why you took me
to the empty carriage . . .
far from all the others,
just us two.

Man: Fumbling buttons . . .

Woman: Tasting . . .

Man: Fingering...

Woman: Satisfying . . .

The Man suddenly plays the part of the Headmaster.

Man: What do you think you're doing?

Woman: Nothing, Headmaster Sir!

Man: I'll see you
in my office
first thing Monday morning!

Pause, the Man circling the Woman authoritatively. The Woman's mischievous manner recedes and she is left quiet and innocent.

Man: Don't deny it!
I know what I saw.
Have you no shame?

Woman: Have *you* no shame, Sir?
Putting your hand down my blouse . . .
Undoing all the buttons . . .
and touching my breasts . . .
Sir?

Pause

Man: (*Shock*) He didn't . . .
Are you serious?

Woman: Are you serious, Sir?
Do you like me?
Really like me?

She takes his face between her hands and gives him a tender little kiss. A long charged pause. The Woman is beginning to enjoy the memory.

Man: What did he do next?

Woman: Kissed me passionately,
dementedly!
My face . . .

my hair . . .
my neck . . .
all over me!

Man: Filthy sod!
If only I'd bloody known!

Woman: Why?
What would you've done?

*The Man is floored, his machismo in pieces. He starts to focus on some work.
The Woman returns to the window and stares through it as before.*

Woman: Perhaps the train will bring him home;
our Gwyn.
This weekend.

Man: Specification for Rio Tinto . . .
Where is it?

Woman: If he comes . . .
We'll all go for a walk,
to Park Woods.
Gather blackberries
as we used to do in the old days.

Woman: Remember how he used to be?

Man: I've promised to finish it
over the weekend

Woman: (*Lost in her reverie*)
Wanting to play cowboys,
running between the trees,

falling flat on his face into the cow-shit
his curls all yellow slime!
Taking him home and putting him straight in the bath
in his clothes.
God he was a sight!

Another pause with smiles, which then turn into sadness.

Woman: It all went so quickly,
Crossing a field . . .
climbing stairs . . .
I don't even remember
when he stopped being a baby
and started being a boy.
When did he become a man?
Do you remember?

The Man is still lost in his work.

Man: **Wait, wait.**
Here it is – thank God!

Woman: Do you remember?!

Man: It'll be on D.J.'s desk
first thing Monday morning!

The Woman stares at the Man in disbelief and disappointment.

The Man takes off his shoes, swallows three tablets and slips into bed.

The Woman lies motionless on the bed and falls into an uneasy sleep. She awakes suddenly.

Woman: The same dream I had before.
I was running through a field of corn
After a little butterfly,
It had settled on someone's face.
The face of a person who was lying in the corn.
And I reached out for it very slowly,
My hands cupped . . .
To catch it . . .
To hold it!
Feel its wings
tickling the palm of my hand.

The dream turns into a nightmare.

Woman: But I couldn't draw my hands back again!
They were . . .
stuck to the skin of the face!

She stares at her Husband, who is still sound asleep. The Woman gets up slowly, panicking, taking the utmost care not to wake him. She looks up towards the head of the stairs.

She hums the tune of the lullaby 'Awn ni fyny' (We'll go up) as in Act 1 as she slowly and deliberately approaches the stairs.

The Man stirs . . . then raises his head suddenly as if sensing that something is wrong. He turns his head slowly towards the stairs. He stares at the Woman for a second or two as if astonished. He watches her stepping carefully onto the first step . . .

Man: What are you doing?

The Woman freezes on the spot, without climbing any higher.

Man: Did you hear something?

The Man becomes agitated, puts on his shoes and moves eagerly towards the stairs.

Man: Best if I go first.

The Woman stands at the bottom of the stairs, motionless.

Woman: What about D.J.?
Specification for Rio Tinto?
You at his desk Monday morning
licking his boots?

The Man hesitates a moment, undecided.

Man: But . . .
It won't count!
D.J. . . .
Price
D.J. Electrics . . .
The bloody job!
They won't exist
up there!
Fresh start . . .
clean slate!
The top room is the last room . . .
That's the reward for climbing the tower!
Throw off your cares.
Relax.
Rest!

The Woman quivers as if someone has walked over her grave.

Woman: I'm not ready.

Man: *(Challenging)* Well I am!

Woman: *(With a hint of panic)* It's much too soon for us.

Man: Why do you get to decide every time?

Woman: I can feel it in my bones.

Man: And I say we're going – now!

Woman: Go then.

Man: You serious?

Woman: I was never more so . . .

The Man smiles in his excitement. He starts to climb the stairs . . . before sensing that the Woman is not following him. He turns to look at her.

Man: What's wrong with you?
 You said just now that . . .

Pause

Man: Without you?

No response.

Man: We've gone together
 every time!

Pause.

Man: You think I won't go
on my own?
Well I will go, for you to know.
I'm bloody well going.
D'you hear me?
I'm serious.

He doesn't move.

Woman: I've told you – go!

The Man climbs the first step and stops. Then he begins walking slowly up the stairs. The Woman does not take her eyes off him while he does this. After reaching about half-way he stops and turns to look at his Wife.

Man: I'll give you one more chance.

There is a touch of fear in his voice. The Woman does not answer nor move a muscle.

Man: Come on . . . quickly now before I go.

The Woman does not react – simply staring at him.

The Man begins to weaken.

Man: It's with each other that it's been
every time!
We've never gone up separately.
Never!

An uncomfortable truth dawns on the Man.

Man: You want to get rid of me?

Be honest!
Admit it!
You can do things afterwards.
You've wanted that a long while, haven't you?

The Woman does not react.

The Man comes slowly and tiredly down the stairs as if in total defeat. He sits and starts his work again as if he has realised at last that this is his penance for all eternity.

While the Man is anchored to the spot and imprisoned by his work pattern the Woman gradually finds a new energy and freedom. A little at a time her steps become livelier until eventually she is striding energetically in a circle around him, full of intent and a new busyness. She carries her handbag.

Then the Man reads a letter. The news is devastating.

Man: A bloody wheelbarrow.
A bloody wheelbarrow rusting on a scrapheap.
The unprincipled bastards!
Reorganisation . . .
Reorganisation my foot!
I gave the shits a whole life.
And for what?
For you to keep me?
What the hell are you doing?

The Man sees that the Woman is preparing to go out. He gets angry.

Man: Having a laugh at me?
What are people saying?
"He won't starve;
his wife keeps him, you know . . ."

good girl . . .
capable girl . . .”

The Man tries to snatch the Woman’s handbag from her but she will not yield.

Woman: Stop it!

In a rage, the Man snatches the handbag and empties its content on the floor in his temper. He hurls the bag forcefully to the floor. The two are still. The Woman stares at a gold cigarette lighter that has fallen to the floor. Tension. Slowly, deliberately, she picks up her purse and puts it back in the bag, while the Man watches every move like a hawk. The Woman is about to pick up the lighter but the Man’s hand gets to it first. The Man picks up the gold, expensive-looking lighter and fingers it – it is familiar, and yet he cannot remember why or how – a conundrum.

Man: A lighter . . .
Since when do you smoke?

He ignites the lighter . . . and in the light of the flame a hideous realisation dawns on the Man..

Man: D.J.’s lighter . .

The Man stares at the Woman for a moment. Then he throws the lighter to the floor, grasps her by the arms and squeezes her painfully.

Man: Whore!

Woman: Stop it!
You’re hurting me!

Man: With D.J.?!

Woman: Stop!

Man: With the boss!
How long?

Woman: How long what?

Man: How long have you and him . . .

Woman: How long have we what?

Man: How could you?

Woman: You're hurting me. Don't.

Man: How long?

Woman: Please stop!

Man: Since when?

Woman: Since ages!

A second, then the Man strikes the Woman hard across her face. She falls to the floor. When she speaks there is no trace of bitterness in her voice, but only sincere sadness and disappointment.

Woman: And you never suspected a thing.

The Man sways and falls to his knees, slack and powerless. Then the disgrace, the shame and the anger simmers slowly inside him. He stares at the Woman. The disgust he feels towards her and towards himself is too much for him. He approaches her like an animal about to set upon its prey. He grips her arms like a leech and nails her to the floor so that she cannot move.

Man: You whore!

He pulls up the Woman's skirt, opens his flies and thrusts himself forcefully against her in an attempt to rape her . . .

Man: You bitch!

But the Man fails. He collapses in a tearful heap beside the Woman, broken.

Man: I'm good for nothing!

The Man looks to the top of the stairs and reaches a decision. He tidies himself a little and puts on his coat. The Woman watches him in silence.

Woman: Where are you going?

Wait!

Don't leave me!

She starts climbing the stairs after him.

Woman: Wait a minute for us to talk.
Please!

I don't want anyone else.

You don't understand!

The Woman is still staring up the stairs after the Man.

End of Act 2

Act 3

The light comes up weak and wintry on the room, which is as it was before. The Old Man walks in slowly, exhausted after climbing the stairs. He sits, takes a bottle of tablets from his pocket and swallows one.

The Old Woman follows him, also having aged and short of breath after her climb. She looks at the Old Man with concern.

Old Woman: You all right?

Pause

Old Man: You came?

Pause

Old Woman: I told you not to rush.

Pause

The Old Man notices the staircase.

Old Man: What the hell do we need more stairs for?

He puts his head out through the window and looks up.

Old Man: There's nothing above.
 We're at the top of the tower!
 It's nothing but a bloody . . .
 Ornament!

He throws his coat over the bannister. The Old Woman goes to the window and leans out to see.

Old Woman: I can't see anything but mist.
There's a chill of snow coming.
I hate snow.
Eats into your bones.

The Old Man goes to the window and gets as excited as a child.

Old Man: Little flakes!
Many a mickle . . .
Come along!
Down you come!

Old Woman: What about Gwyn and the children?
They won't come if there's snow.

She goes to the window and looks out.

Old Woman: Damn! Damn!

She is exasperated.

Old Man: Look . . .

The Old Man goes to her to comfort her. He takes her to sit.

Old Man: Gwyn won't disappoint us.
Nor the children.
Remember taking them to pick winberries?
And falling into that cow-pat?
Remember?
Was it the boy then?

Or was it the girl...

Old Woman: It wasn't Gwyn's children with us
but Gwyn himself.
And we weren't picking winberries on top of the Mount
but picking blackberries in Park Wood.

Old Man: You sure?

Old Woman: How the hell would cows get to the top of the mountain?

Old Man: Youv'e got a point

Old Woman: And with no cows
there'd be no cowshit, would there?

*The Old Man starts to laugh, then the Old Woman joins in; a moment of warmth.
There is a stillness and a comfortable silence between the two. The Old Woman sets
about getting cups and plates.*

Old Woman: What will you have for supper? Will Oxo do?

Old Man: Where's my newspaper?

Old Woman: Do you want me to make something for you?

Old Man: I had it a moment ago.

He searches about.

Old Woman: For the last time, what d'you want?

Old Man: Bloody paper!

Old Woman: For your supper!

The Old Woman drops the milk jug to the floor and it shatters. She looks at the mess as if it was a ghost.

Old Woman: What's happening . . .
What's happening to me?

The Old Man comes to her to help pick up the pieces.

Old Man: No need to be upset . . .
some old jug . . .
not much use to anyone.

Old Woman: Not the jug . . .
You don't understand . . .
Me! . . .
Me!

The Old Man goes to her to comfort her. He takes her to sit.

Old Woman: I can't close my fist!
One minute I'm holding something . . .
feeling it hard in the palm of my hand . . .
Then nothing . . .
Not a thing.

The Old Man takes her hand.

Old Man: Let me see.

He rubs it.

Old Man: There you are.

He kisses the palm of her hand; a second of tenderness.

Old Woman: What's happening to us?
 Withering . . .
 Cracking . . .
 That's why that staircase is there.
 it's there for me.

They both gaze at the stairs.

Old Woman: Everything gone so quickly . . .

Old Man: Slipping through your fingers . . .

Old Woman: They were us, weren't they?
 Came into that lowest room
 one hot summer's day.

Old Man: *(Smiling)* They were us. . .

Old Woman: I remember lying on that bed
 and lifting up my legs
 between myself and the light
 and saying . . .
 They're mine . . .
 Mine . . .
 but some day
 they'll be shrunken all over

Pause.

Old Woman: That was only yesterday . . .

She starts crying softly.

Old Man: Look . . . don't upset yourself.

Old Woman: You promise, don't you?
The truth . . .
Always the truth.

Old Man: I promise.

Old Woman: On your oath!

Old Man: On my oath!

Old Woman: I don't want to suffer.
Don't want to be eaten alive.
When the time comes,
when there's nothing left,
no hope . . .
I want to go.

She takes his hand and looks right into his eyes.

Old Woman: Letting me go . . .
With dignity . . .
No deceit . . .
No talk of holidays that won't ever come.

Old Man: Look, listen –

Old Woman: No! You listen.
I won't have anybody but you then.
You'll be the only one to let me go . . .
For ever!

There is a long pause as the two try to take in the significance of what has just been said.

Then the Old Man livens up hugely, as if he has solved the problem.

Old Man: Decorate!
That's what we'll do!
Christmas decorations everywhere!

Old Woman: Much too soon for that.

.

Old Man: Here we are!

He drags a sizeable box into view. The Old Man takes one end of a paper chain from the box and hands it to the Old Woman. A magical moment as the chain opens out between the two of them; they exchange a look of wonder.

Old Man: We'll plaster the place . . .
From top to bottom.
And you won't recognise that . . .
We'll bury it!

The Old Man approaches the staircase nervously, the paper chain in his hand. He throws the chain over the bannister. They both stand motionless, as if expecting the place to explode. A long pause.

The Old Woman picks up another paper chain from the box of decorations and offers it to him fearfully. He indicates that she should throw the chain over the bannister

Very carefully the Old Woman throws the paper chain over the bannister. They both stand and stare. After a while the Old Man starts smiling, then he laughs lightly, then he laughs heartily. The Old Woman gradually joins in with him.

The Old Man rushes to the box and starts throwing more decorations over the stairs.

The Old Woman follows suit.

Then the Old Man takes a step up the stairs.

Old Woman: *(Suddenly serious)* Don't! No further!

Old Man: Come along here.

Old Woman: No.
 You'd better come down.

Old Man: For a minute,
 Come on,
 We're calling the tune!
 No need to be afraid!
 I wasn't afraid of anyone!
 And that little shit Price knew it too.
 And D.J.
 That's why I got the job!

The Old Woman sits down, a look of sadness on her face. She knows differently.

Old Man: Who got the job?

The Old Woman does not answer.

Old Man: Who got the bloody job?

Old Woman: You, who else?

Old Man: By Christ I did!
 "I'm the boss now" I said to D.J.
 "and I want fair play for the workers . . .

You treat them like dirt . . .
But we've suffered enough . . .
We're out!
And I'm alongside them, see,
To the bloody end,"
and gave him that!

He raises two fingers, starting to get worked up

Old Man: "Stuff your job!" I said.

By now he is shouting.

Old Man: Stuff your bloody job!

He starts coughing and choking . . . then slips on the stairs.

The Old Woman runs towards him. The Old Man starts scrabbling and dragging himself up the stairs, choking, but the Old Woman grabs him.

Old Woman: No!
He shan't have you . . .

She puts his head on her breast and embraces him

Old Woman: Not now, my lad.

The Old Woman encourages the Old Man to sit up. She puts her arm around him to comfort him.

Old Man: It'll be different next time.
Only one will be going up
next time.

Old Woman: Not one step.

The Old Man takes her hand.

Old Man: You promise?

The Old Woman sits in a chair beside the bed.

Old Woman: I promise.

They both fall asleep, the Old Man in the bed and the Old Woman in her chair.

Old Woman: A butterfly . . .
and my hands stuck to the skin of the face!
One quick pull
(*She shudders*)
And the skin of one side all comes off . . .
peels away
until there's nothing left
but red bones
and empty, black holes!

The Old Man awakes, choking and coughing hard. The Old Woman rubs his back and offers him water to drink. The Old Man drinks some water with difficulty. The Old Woman dries the drops from his lips.

Old Woman: That's it . . .
Better now.

But although the cough has slackened, we can see that the exertion has weakened the Old Man considerably. The Old Woman gets a bowlful of baby food; she too is slower on her feet.

Old Man: Can't understand . . .

why Gwyn didn't come.

Old Woman: There was a bit of snow.

She feeds him like a baby.

Old Man: It makes me sick . . .

Old Woman: It's baby food,
won't hurt you.

The Old Man spits it out.

Old Man: I'm not a bloody baby!

He makes a sound as if he were in pain and she rushes for a nearby towel, holding it so that he can throw up into it. The Old Woman comforts him like a child. She wipes his mouth. Then she offers him a drink.

The Old Man shakes his head.

Old Man: Can't . . . keep . . . anything down.

Old Woman: You'll get over it.

Pause.

Old Man: Before the summer, you think?

The Old Woman hesitates.

Old Woman: Oh . . . definitely before the summer.

Pause.

Old Man: I'd like a proper holiday this year . . . Somewhere nice and hot, like that place . . . we went in the old days. . . Toro . . . remember? Toro . . .

Old Woman: Toromolinos.

Pause.

Old Man: D'you think I'll be well enough to go somewhere like that this next summer?

Old Woman: Of course you will. We'll have a really nice holiday.

The Old Woman takes the Old Man's hand and looks him straight in the eye.

Old Man: On your oath?

Old Woman: On my oath.

Pause.

The Old Man puts his hand out for the bottle of tablets but cannot reach it. The Old Woman reaches for the bottle and offers him a tablet with a glass of water.

The Old Man puts it in his mouth and swallows it. The Old Woman offers him another one. He looks at her enquiringly.

Old Woman: It'll do you good.

The Old Man takes the second tablet and swallows it.

Pause

They both look up towards the stairs.

Old Man: What's there, I wonder. . .
Just a staircase, perhaps . . .
Climbing for ever.

Old Woman: It's been so hard . . .
there's sure to be a reward.

Old Man: Or a punishment!
I didn't do anything . . .
not a bloody thing.
A failure . . .
That's what I am . . .
A bloody wheelbarrow!

Old Woman: Not bloody likely . . . You didn't give up.

Old Man: And that's enough?

Old Woman: It's enough for me. You and me it's been all along. Together . . .
Supporting each other.

Old Man: We're here . . .

Old Woman: That's what counts.

Old Man: Nothing else counts.

Old Woman: And if I could start all over again, right down there in the bottom .
. . I wouldn't change one second.

The Old Woman takes his hand and kisses it.

Old Man: D'you remember me carrying you on my shoulders at Borth Fair?

Old Woman: That was on top of Snowdon.

Old Man: And you had a new frock . . . I could see through it.

Old Woman: That was a school trip to London.

Old Man: Not that I was never tempted, mind . . . more than once.

Old Woman: I don't want to know . . .

Old Man: That sexy little bitch at work. Tight little skirt, heels and scent . . .

Old Woman: Don't . . .

Old Man: "Why did you put your hand down my blouse?" she said.

Old Woman: What?

The Old Woman looks at him dumbfounded; she is not sure whether he is rambling or not.

Old Man: "Just now . . .
and you undid all my buttons . . ."
"Get out of here, you bitch . . ."

The Old Man suddenly becomes disturbed, as if seeing something at the foot of his bed.

Old Man: What do you want, damn you?
Get the hell out of it . . .
And you too.
Beat it!

Do you hear me?

He suffers a severe bout of coughing, and the Old Woman hurries to his side.

Old Woman: There you are . . . Don't work yourself up.

She helps him to lean back. His speech is becoming slurred.

Old Man: Hughie Stables . . .
He can stay . . .
Griff Lleinia . . . Hell's bells . . .
The boys are here . . .

Old Woman: Nothing to be afraid of . . . there's no-one here.

Old Man: Of course they're here . . .
long gone . . .
and come again.

He winces in pain.

The Old Woman puts her hand under his shirt and rubs his stomach, which quietens him a little.

Old Woman: There you are . . .
Better now.

Old Man: *(In a near whisper)*
Dignified.

Old Woman: What did you say?

Old Man: You . . . you said it . . . don't want to suffer . . . be eaten alive . . .

Old Woman: Don't talk nonsense . . .

The Old Man reaches a shaking hand for the bottle of tablets. The Old Woman helps him to swallow one, then puts the lid back on the bottle. The Old Man clutches her wrist.

Old Man: You're the only one to let me go.

The Old Man stares into his wife's eyes.

Old Man: Peace . . .
For ever . . .
With dignity!

Slowly the Old Woman once more takes the lid off the bottle and tips another tablet onto the palm of her hand. She hesitates.

A groan is heard from deep inside the Old Man's innards.

The Old Woman tips another tablet onto her palm and helps the Old Man to swallow the two.

Old Woman: You'll be better after these.

Slowly, and with the full cooperation of the Old Man, The Old Woman continues to feed him the tablets tenderly, one after another..

Old Man: And if . . . if it's fine in Toromolinos . . .

He leans back.

Old Man: A filthy great glass of Bacardi and Coke . . .
and the sun . . .
shining . . . warm . . . on my belly . . .
in the full bloom . . . of health . . .

He shuts his eyes to sleep.

Old Woman: Sleep, my boy.

The Old Woman draws the blanket up to the Old Man's chin.

Old Woman: Sleep well.

The Old Man turns on his side and gives a sigh of pleasure as he nestles under the blankets.

The Old Woman takes the bottle of tablets in her hands once more, and holds it as if she has something very dear to her in her hands. She stares ahead meditatively.

Old Woman: Cross a field . . .
climb a staircase . . .
slipping between your fingers . . .
and all of it . . .
for this?

Shortly the Old Man gets out of bed and walks straight to the window and stands before it. He is no longer old, young nor middle-aged

The Old Woman does not turn her head to look at him, but stays staring ahead as if in a dream.

Old Man: You ready, then?

He climbs the stairs but stops half way up and looks down at the Old Woman.

Old Man: Let's get out of here . . .
outside to the fresh air . . .
Taste everything while we've got the chance . . .

loving until it hurts . . .
first dip of the season . . .
braving the cold . . .
feeling the skin smooth and hot.

He reaches the top of the stairs and turns once more.

Old Man: You coming?

He vanishes to somewhere above.

*The Old Woman still stares ahead. Then the sound of a train is heard in the distance.
A faint smile appears on her face.*

Old Woman: A train!

D A R K N E S S