

“THE BOY AT THE EDGE OF THE ROOM”

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TONY: intense and other-worldly

MOTHER: Tony’s Mother

FATHER: Tony’s Father

STORY: Slips in and out of various neighbours/villagers/egg-man/preacher and narration

DEALER: a brooding powerful presence, somehow alluring and terrifying

CASTING: *This play was first produced with a cast of just three actor-musicians. Four or more will give more scope, add texture and create fuller world for audiences.*

‘The Boy at the Edge of The Room’ is a free adaptation of Lucy Lane-Clifford’s 1882 short story ‘Wooden Tony’. Written some sixty years before the word was coined, it seems to be the first cultural statement on what we now call ‘autism’. This text has been created through research with many people on (or which children on) the autistic spectrum. I would like to thank all those who took the time to assist.

‘Wooden Tony’ is, in its own right, an astonishing (and much neglected) gothic-gem. If you would like to read it, just contact me and it can be sent on.

Tony’s song plays an important part in this tale; each production will have to imagine what that wordless vocalisation might be like. Lucy Lane-Clifford clearly meant it to be arresting and unique, powerful and ethereal – I can offer no more hint than that,

PRE-PROLOGUE:

TONY: How do the starlings know which way they will turn in the air? When to rise and when to fall, to swoop this way or that without a plan or a word? How do they decide, so silently, which tree they will land in? Where do they come from, where do they go to? Do they eat flies? Why do the flies come into our house and bang against the windowpane? I have to be as far from them as possible. I cannot have a fly in the house. I do not know how others can stand them. If it were possible never to have a fly in the house again, I would be happy. If a fly sits on some food, then that food must never be eaten. How can other people eat food from the same plate where it has all been thrown together? A dish for each food and the right dish for the right food makes more sense. Food which is perfectly edible in a white bowl must not be eaten from a brown plate. Mother knows this but father refuses to understand. He says, ‘you would eat porridge from a brown bowl soon

enough if you were starving'. He does not know that I would rather starve than eat green beans from a brown plate. I mean what I say. Why do people say what they do not mean – father does not mean he has really worn *his fingers to the bone*, nor that his feet are actually *blocks of ice*, yet he says it. He says it often. He even looked up last week at a picture hanging in the town hall and said 'she's no oil painting' but she was...*she was an oil painting* plainly and clearly. And mother says that *the bread or the soup or the stew is on the table*, yet it never is, it is always on a plate or a board or in a bowl. Others know what is meant but I am none the wiser. There is a trick in it that I am blind to.

What does 'love' mean and where does it come from and where does it go? Is love like starlings? Father loves mother but he is ruder to her some days than he ever is to a stranger in the street – to them he is always polite. To me he is harsh, but he is supposed to love me. I love my mother but if I had been born to another woman, surely, I would love this new person, this other woman who I do not even know, and the woman who is now my mother would mean nothing to me.

Why do other people not know what I am thinking. And why do they forget so much when I remember everything. They are lazy with their thoughts, how they remember what they see, hear, feel. I remember everything. They say they see 'a field with a tree in it', but what is before them is actually a field of grass just going to seed with six sheep sitting in the shade of the hedge, which is as high as my head, with a single gate in it, five bars on the gate, one broken, hinge on the left, latch on the right. The sun is high and a cloud is just about to pass before it, there are poppies in the field, and the church tower is in the distance, but not on the horizon, behind the tree, which is oak, which has a rotten branch, and a nest in its crown – I see all this and a hundred other things, yet they still claim to see 'a field, a tree'. Do they, like beasts, wear blinkers which I do not have? I see and I remember, and my head crowds with pictures. Perhaps others can throw out memories like scraps or like a worn-out coat. I cannot. Is that a curse, is that a blessing? I do not know. What happens to starlings when they die, why are the fields not littered with little black corpses? Do other animals eat them, the cats, the foxes,

the badgers – and if they do, what happens when *they die*? I do not see their little bodies in the fields and the bushes. Do they all die in their dark little spaces? Do their souls float up, into the highest reaches? Are angels real, do they have wings and harps and halos like in the pictures? Do angels die? What happens to them if they do? The miller died in the square, I was there, I saw it all, every moment and I remember it, I can see it whenever I want. I stared and I stared while the others all ran round calling for water, for brandy, but I stood still and watched and remembered – and I looked for something to rise from him as he breathed his last, some sort of ‘miller-with-wings’ but nothing flew up. (thinks) Perhaps it went *down!*? It looked like something within him, some wires, levers, hinges just stopped, snapped. (looks at his own hand) What is there inside me which makes my fingers close when I ask them to? Are there strings? Are there wires?

Does flesh have rings as timber does, laid down year on year father says getting ever larger. I have not seen rings in the flesh of the animals the butcher cuts.

Why does the butcher rub his hand on his vest when he had wiped his nose with it? Does he think it cleans his hand? Is he a fool? And the blacksmith makes spit on his lip when he speaks, and it is for this reason that I cannot even walk down the lane where the forge is. How can others bear to look at him?

Do animals have souls? Pigs, cattle, sheep? Why can others bear to have wool on their skin when it itches so badly? Wool is for sheep and that is where it should stay. Why do others feel the cold so when it is nothing to me? I can walk barefoot in the snow for a mile, would rather walk barefoot in the snow for ten miles than wear wool, or look at the blacksmith. Do flies have souls? I hope not. I hope they die and are eaten by spiders and rats.

What other lands do the starlings see? Father says that some live here all their life, but others come and go, fly over the cities and the sea. Whose life is the better for that?

FATHER: (calling from a distance) Tony!? (Tony instantly falls silent, turns to the sound of the voice and cowers a little)

MUSIC/LIGHTS

PROLOGUE:

**BOTH PARENTS ARE PACKING CAREFULLY AND SILENTLY AS IF TO GO ON A TRIP
A CLOCK TICKS...WHIRS INTO ACTION AND CHIMES. THEY SEEM ALMOST TO EXIST
IN SEPARATE WORLDS**

MOTHER: No one could have foretold that he was to come
We were simple people

FATHER: *Are* simple people

MOTHER: I think no one like him had ever been before

FATHER: Nor will be

MOTHER: What to say of him, now he is no longer with us...

FATHER: Was he ever with us?

MOTHER: It hurts some days more than others, I want to scratch the limb that is no longer there. His memory is a splinter in my heart

FATHER: He would watch the clock, waiting for the chime with such.... I think of him then. Every hour a is quiet reminder.

MOTHER: His birthday is hard, always will be.

FATHER: Boys have dreams and his came true, we should give thanks

MOTHER: He was not like other boys.

MOTHER: He belonged to nature's firstness

He was from us and not from us

He was with us and not with us

He saw us and did not see us

I think of him now, so different and strange

Like a prince from another place, borrowed from some other time

Perhaps he was never ours and we were never his

I see him when I close my eyes, like seeing the sun's mark left behind
the lids

FATHER: He was not one to ever be truly understood, not properly known.

MOTHER: To know him was to hold wood-smoke in your hands
To understand him was to catch water as it falls from a jug

FATHER: He was strange

MOTHER: And beautiful
Was he an angel?

FATHER: No angel, I'll say that. He was a burden.

MOTHER: A beautiful burden.

FATHER: A strange sort of beauty.

MOTHER: And I, for one, have never seen another angel to measure him against.

FATHER: It is easy enough now to forget his demon-days, now we do not live
through them anymore.

MOTHER: Gone so long. A year now and nothing but silence.

FATHER: Silence is not bad news.

MOTHER: Was it a test? Did I fail?

FATHER: Boys have dreams and his came true.

MOTHER: (she speaks to him, but we know he does not hear) How can you
understand? Men comprehend so little of the world, we all know this to
be true, well half of us do. God was surely making up for something
when he created you so strong of limb, for in the heart....(she breaks off)
Anyway, the thing that you *most know nothing of*... is a mother's love. It
is a thing you are blind and deaf to.

(a new tone) Look at me now – a dried-up husk of lost hope. I could
never have known it would be like this. I could not have foretold what
was to come, not back then...our salad days, him so handsome, so shy,
so much ahead of us....

A WHIRL OF IMAGES OF LIFE AND ENERGY:

**THE MAN & WOMAN AS YOUNG PEOPLE MEETING WHILST GOING ABOUT THEIR
WORK... AT A DANCE... COURTING... SELLING TOYS TO THE DEALER...**

MARRIAGE...

WE SEE (BEAUTIFULLY, SIMPLY AND QUICKLY) A FEW YEARS TURN AS THE

MOTHER SITS, HER FACE HARDENED FROM HER FORMER 'JUST MARRIED' JOY.

MOTHER: How can something so simple for others, simple even for the animals you look after, escape *us*.

FATHER: It will happen.

MOTHER: Am I asking for too much?

FATHER: And if it does not happen...

MOTHER: It will happen.

FATHER: But if it does not.

MOTHER: I won't hear of 'does not'.

FATHER: But it might be wise to face facts.

MOTHER: Facts can change.

FATHER: It is not the be all...

MOTHER: Bless you. It is only because you are what you are, a man, that I can forgive what you say. Because *it is the be all*. It is what I was put here to do. What my mother did and hers did and so on. It's a need beyond words that you can't know of. It pushes everything else from my head. It crowds out all other thoughts. It eats at me to be so...useless.

FATHER: It is just time, more time...

MOTHER: I pray.

FATHER: Praying is good.

MOTHER: To saint Anthony, patron of all lost things.

FATHER: Lost?

MOTHER: This child is lost to me.

FATHER: You make it sound like this child is somewhere, hiding behind the clouds...

MOTHER: ...waiting to be caught by me if he flies low enough? That is exactly how I feel some days. (a beat) I do not want to be a bitter old woman. Like the widow on the hill.

FATHER: She is bitter because she is a widow.

MOTHER: That's not the sadness of a lost husband. Any woman can bear that. (realising she has slighted him) It is true. No... I see it in her. She throws sticks at the children if they play too close to her door. That is not to do with widowhood, that is to do with a loss (clutches her heart) here, an

emptiness which she can't even put into words. It gnaws at her bones.

Do you think a day goes by that she doesn't think about it?

FATHER: You will not be a bitter old woman. She will come.

MOTHER: You promise?

FATHER: I... hope. (he exits)

MOTHER: Not 'she'. He. (looking up to the sky) I dream of you. I see you in my sleep. I can wait.

**MORE TIME PASSES – A SUDDEN JOYFUL GASP FROM THE MOTHER AS SHE
CLUTCHES HER BELLY**

FATHER: Look at that, sticking out like a mantelpiece. It is a girl sure enough if it juts out.

MOTHER: It is the other way round.

FATHER: A boy if it hangs low, a girl if it juts out, like a shelf. My mother could rest her plate on where my upturned feet were...

MOTHER: And you were...

FATHER: A boy! That is it, *a boy juts out – a girl hangs low*.

MOTHER: I know it, have always known it. Our boy. So long waited for, prayed for. He will be special.

FATHER: Always.

MOTHER: In all ways.

FATHER: That is your wish?

MOTHER: It is.

FATHER: All I wish is that he helps me in the fields and tends to the herd and make his way in the world one day.

MOTHER: All I wish is that he stay by my side.

FATHER: A name?

MOTHER: Anthony was kind to me.

FATHER: This little one is not lost to you now, nor ever will be.

MOTHER: Not while I breathe.

FATHER: (trying it out) Anthony. (unwrapping something) Look, I have carved this...

MOTHER: For the tourists, for the summer?

FATHER: For you. For now, forever. (hands over a small carved child)

MOTHER: Beautiful. He will be just like this, delicate and perfect...
FATHER: And silent? I doubt it.

A CHANGE IN TONE, THEY ARE OLDER AGAIN, REFLECTING

FATHER: (he is examining one of his toys, wrapping it) There was nothing in that time, when he was inside her, or the day he was born, which gave any clue. The sky did not darken. There was no storm. No cloud in the shape of a beast as an omen. No lightening strike or tremor underfoot. It was just as every other year. I saw people tend beasts, fatten and slaughter some - deliver others from fat bellies with milky teats. I saw our neighbours turn soil, sow seed, raise crops and fell them and stack them. I made my wooden toys for the visitors to our mountain to buy or to be collected (the dealer enters, collects the toy (and others) passes over a few pennies and leaves) and sold in the city. It was just like every year I had ever seen, since my boyhood – since my father's boyhood.

MOTHER: (cupping her belly) I often think that that must have been the last time he may have been truly happy, the last time he had no fear.

FATHER: All babies want their mother's breast, that much I know, but not Tony.

MOTHER: Did we wish for too much? Were we brought down by our own high hopes?

FATHER: Just like all days here, it was quiet until he came.

MOTHER: He took that first breath...

FATHER: Arched his back like a hunter's bow, like he was stuck with pins.

MOTHER: One long quiet breath in...

FATHER: He was many things back then, *but silent he was not*.

MOTHER: And then...

A SCREAM

STILLNESS FROM MAN & WOMAN

THE NEIGHBOUR STANDS AS IF HEARING THE SCREAM WHILST WORKING IN THE FIELDS, ADDRESSES THE AUDIENCE

STORY: That was the first they in the village knew of him. Of course they saw the growing bulge, the heavy breast of his mother, but then he was part of

her. When he was his own creature...that was a different tale. We can't tell all the tale, we have not the time. Fragments and shards is all we can offer. But like a house, built of many pieces of stone and timber but yet one thing, whole and complete - perhaps our pieces will make a whole.

(somehow we see Tony grow from baby to boy through this speech)

Now...some said "Every hamlet has a fool..." or "Every village must have its idiot..." But they were wrong. Tony was no idiot. He had all I have and all you have but somehow differently...arranged. Like a suit of clothing with arms and legs and collars and buttons. But a suit with buttons at the back, or sleeves where legs should be is useless. With Tony there were fears where a simple pleasure should be, he shook at a loving touch, but something which you or I would be afraid of would go un-noticed by the lad. He was a scythe with the blade at the handle – everything was there, but not in its proper place. He was a house with roof tiles for windows. He was... (almost presenting the boy Tony to us) ...snow in August.

FATHER: The boy does nothing to help this family. Younger boys than him are a help to their parents.

MOTHER: All children are not the same. All men are not the same.

FATHER: He seems to fear the world around him and all that is in it!

MOTHER: We all fear something – you fear the spiders that live in the eaves.

FATHER: Because they might drop in my mouth when I sleep. That at least makes good sense.

MOTHER: Better sense for the spiders to fear your mouth, I think.

FATHER: We must find a use for him, he must help in this world, or else what use is he?

MOTHER: He is of use to me in this house, in this room.

FATHER: This room which he skulks at the edge of, scurries around like a mouse.

MOTHER: Why would he come forward to hear your scolding, I'd be at the edge of the room if you didn't need someone to stand up to you.

FATHER: Such nonsense.

MOTHER: And you have stood at the edge of many a room yourself, let's not forget.

FATHER: What rooms?

MOTHER: The dance hall in the village. I don't remember you standing full centre where the girls were. I remember you there with a look just like your son has. You did not look so brave or worldly then. But there was nothing to fear except the girls of the village and let me tell you they were not about to drop in your mouth. Skulking like a mouse you were then, while we girls stood full centre talking and laughing

FATHER: You must know that a dance hall can strike fear in any man, and that the laughter of girls is enough to... The edge of the room is the safest place – all men know that which is why they hover there...

MOTHER: *Hide there.*

FATHER: 'Hide' if you will. 'Hide' is not such a bad word in such a situation. I'm not ashamed of it. A dance at a village hall for a man is just like a battlefield. You survive longest if best hid.

MOTHER: You may be right. And if you are, then perhaps Tony will outlast us all.

FATHER: He'll not wear out through hard work, that much is for sure! While I, I am off to look after animals, clear and mend paths, fix fences...and tonight, by the dim glow of a candle I will carve the toys, the puppets and dolls which the tourists buy - all while I'd rather be sat just where he is, gazing out at the clouds with the sun falling on my face or looking upon the stars with the evening wind in my hair. His life is one I'd trade for my own in a moment.

MOTHER: Then perhaps he is more like his father than his father might like to believe. (father exits)

STORY: It seemed that he did not see the world through the same eyes as us...
 Didn't feel it through the same skin...
 Hear it with the same ears...
 It is said that it takes a village to raise a child, but the villagers were not kind. They were not all they could or should have been to that boy.
 (becoming the villagers) "The laziest boy in the whole county."
 "Whole country more like!"

“No use to anyone”

“The kind of child only a mother could love”

And love him she did, with all her heart. But still she tried to make him work:

MOTHER: Son of mine, look out at the world. All the other boys of your age are happy to chop wood, gather flowers, look after goats and cattle; carry parcels for the tourists, guide them on short expeditions; there they are, out on the hills, earning a few pennies for their families.

NEIGHBOUR: But Tony would do none of these things and when his mother said:

MOTHER: You must try to make yourself useful!

NEIGHBOUR: - he looked so frightened that at last, and over time, she left him alone and let him do as he pleased. Gradually he grew to look quite foolish, as if his wits had left him altogether.

STORY: She heard the voices – “Timber limbs” – “The boy with sap in his veins” – “Wooden-head!” But his mother tried not to listen. For there is no one as kind as a mother, no one so understanding or forgiving. So quick to see the good and so slow to find fault. On her best days, on his best days, she called him:

MOTHER: My precious one, my strangeling, beautiful boy, my cherished child, my treasure...

STORY: Or just –

MOTHER: Tony. My Tony.

STORY: But on the days when she had no strength for him, on the days when he got wrong everything that could be got wrong, she called him -

MOTHER: Idiot, clumsy fool, clot, simpleton....

ALL VOICES: ...wooden head!

STORY: On those days her tongue was a lash, but it was one which seemed to hurt and terrify her as much as him...if not more
The thickest of walls are thin enough when a voice is raised in anger and there were few secrets in a small world like theirs...

“He's no use at all to you.”

“A burden on his poor parents.”

“A lead weight”

“A dead weight”

“A millstone around your neck”

“Like the albatross in the old book”

“As useful as the dolls your husband carves.”

“Those at least are sold for ready money.”

“True. Just as much use as a rough-hewn log.”

“That at least you can burn for heat.”

“True, and a log does not eat your soup and stew and bread.”

EGG-MAN: (arriving at the door) Look at him...poor little Wooden-head! No use to anyone...

MOTHER: (whist paying him) Have you so little to do in your life that you need spend time sharing your few thoughts on my son with me?

EGG-MAN: (looking at Tony who is gently rocking & stimming) I am only saying that he is as good as useless – they boy barely speaks a word.

MOTHER: He won't speak to you, that's for sure. But why should he?

EGG-MAN: He barely speaks to anyone, I know that for a fact.

MOTHER: That's no fact, because he speaks to me often and perhaps that is all that matters.

EGG-MAN: Is it?

MOTHER: Besides, perhaps he *thinks* more than he cares to *say*.

EGG-MAN: But he never tells us of what he thinks; and a thinker who says nothing is like a signpost that points to nowhere, and has nothing written on it to guide those who look up.

MOTHER: Well, a signpost has to be made before it can be written on and perhaps the talking *that is worth listening to* only comes after a lot of thinking. Perhaps lots of talking done by many people is worth very little indeed. Just so much noise and wasted breath. (indignant) He'll tell us enough some day.

STORY: But 'will he' she wondered? 'Will he'?

EGG-MAN: Have you a word for me Tony? Have you anything at all to say to your neighbour. I, who have seen you grow all these years. Come on lad, come here...

TONY WALKS TOWARDS THE NEIGHBOUR WHO REACHES OUT TO RUFFLE HIS HAIR, TONY WITHDRAWS, HIDES BEHIND HIS MOTHER

MOTHER: He does not like to be touched.

EGG-MAN: Strange.

MOTHER: You would think it odd if I ruffled your hair. There's nothing strange in it.

EGG-MAN: But I am full grown.

MOTHER: And he is not – it is no difference to him.

EGG-MAN: Come on lad. Have you a word? Any at all? Say...something...

TONY: You have had that boil on your nose for weeks now – does it hurt? It looks sore.

EGG-MAN: What did you say?

TONY: I said... 'you have had a boil on your nose for..'

EGG-MAN: I heard what you said!

TONY: Then why did you ask me to -

EGG-MAN: Enough! Hush child!

MOTHER: You asked him to speak, and he spoke. If you do not like what he says, it is no fault of his.

EGG-MAN: That...that is just plain rude!

MOTHER: Ah! *But he speaks*. Remember...you asked for this.

TONY: Why are you so fat when your wife is so thin? I have often wondered that.

EGG-MAN: Insolence!

MOTHER: But not *silence*.

TONY: I can smell the hen house on you, did you clean your chickens out this morning?

EGG-MAN: (proudly) I did.

TONY: But you did not clean yourself afterwards?

EGG-MAN: The cheek!

MOTHER: He speaks as he finds. When he wants to speak at all.

EGG-MAN: Rudeness – just plain rudeness.

MOTHER: Just plain plainness, that is all. He cannot tell a lie.

EGG-MAN: Politeness is not lying.

MOTHER: To him it is the same thing.

EGG-MAN: We do not say all that we think, where would we be then?

MOTHER: It seems you would rather he was silent again.

EGG-MAN: Impertinence. What have you brought him up to be?

MOTHER: Honest. And he is probably not wrong, his nose is sensitive (sniffs

closer) indeed, you smell of chicken shit.

EGG-MAN: I do not!

MOTHER: You do.

EGG-MAN SMELLS HIMSELF

EGG-MAN: I smell of *honest toil*.

MOTHER: You smell of one who has *honestly toiled* in chicken shit. Now if you'll excuse me, my son and I have housework to be getting on with and clearing this floor of unwanted rubbish is first on the list. (she sweeps the EGG-MAN out). We have work to do Tony. Will you help me son? Will you take up the broom Tony? Will you hold it with me?

HE HOLDS A PIECE OF CLOTH AND RUBS IT, SHE TAKES THIS AND HE GRABS A COIN, ROLLS IT IN HIS FINGERS. SHE TAKES THIS, LEAVING HIM WITH NOTHING TO FOCUS ON. SHE HOLDS HIS FACE CLOSE TO HERS

I love you dearly, my little son, I love your pale face and wide-open eyes. It looks as if you expect to see heaven's door creak on its hinges so that you would know what paradise looks like. But who, besides me, will care for you if you are silent and useless? If you remain this way, who will want you or need you?

TONY WALKS TO THE FRONT DOOR TO VIEW THE WORLD, HESITANTLY

TONY: Mother, could I be with you but still be far off. I long to be far off.

MOTHER: But son, why would you wish to be far off? What is there that you want?

TONY: If I were far off, as far off as the trees on the ridge, as far off as the tower on the church, then I would be little. I would be so, so small and could lie in your arms, I could be held in your hand, and no one would want me to do the things that I cannot do, or I forget to do.

MOTHER: But how would being far off make you little, my son? No matter how far you go, it would not make you an inch smaller than you are now!

TONY: But I have been watching, and I see that all the people are small when they are far off. So small I could hold them in my hand, so small I could put them in my pocket. I watch the people as they come down the pathway, down the hillside. They grow bigger and bigger as they come near; they pass the door and then they are as big as you or as big as

father and then they pass on, getting smaller and smaller until they are as little as the people that father carves from pieces of wood in the winter, smaller even. You see mother, I would like to be the same as them, I want nothing more than to be small and far off. Then no one would think to ask me to do the things I cannot do.

MOTHER: But son, you know your father and I are never smaller nor bigger than we are now, it is only the distance which makes it seem so. If you went near to the small people who are far off, you would see they had not grown either smaller or larger.

TONY: I can only believe my eyes, and they seem little to me. And if I went far off, I would be little to you as I was, when I was a baby, and then neither you or father would always be asking me to do this thing or that thing and be angry at my forgetting.

MOTHER: But what is it, my son, that stops you from doing such simple things?

TONY: (going back to where he was) Mother, there are so many things in my head that come before my eyes and make my hands useless.

MOTHER: All things and all people have a reason to be, and the reason for most of the young and strong to be in the world is that they are useful. Perhaps you have some other reason to be, one that I, as yet, do not understand. Son...son?

TONY: (staring up, blissfully ignoring her) Someday I will go far off, and I will be very little...

MOTHER: My dear child. You're no fool despite of your strange words, and your voice is sweeter than the talk of the wisest of men. Will you sing for me son?

TONY BEGINS TO SING

There is not room for an evil thought anywhere within the sound of your song. While I listen to you,

I could forgive all the squabbles and quarrels with your father, with the neighbours, with the people who visit our village. Perhaps, if you have a reason to be in this world at all, perhaps your song is it.

THE SONG CONTINUES AND VILLAGER & NEIGHBOURS STOP AT THE SOUND, TURN THEIR HEAD TO IT, ENTRANCED. WHEN IT IS FINISHED, THEY GO BACK TO NORMAL LIFE

STORY: Tony, his mother and father, and all in the village, lived high, high up in the mountains - a simple life, a good life. The valley below Tony's cottage was full of meadows and winding pathways and at the far end of it the river that ran through the valley erupted into a waterfall. Tony used to watch, rooted to the spot for the longest time he watched as the water fell...

TONY: ...like a dream forgotten before waking... the spray falls down and down, but it never reaches the bottom, it scatters itself in the sunshine and is lost.

STORY: Tony used to watch the falling water, and I think he sometimes felt as it felt - caught by the breeze and carried away in its arms. Sometimes he could almost feel himself journeying with it

TONY: - on and on -

STORY: until he lost all sense of himself, and, meeting the great winds, he became part of them, and swept...

TONY: - on and on -

STORY & TONY: ...over the far-off sea.

STORY: Tony spent whole days gazing blankly at the river, the wind in the grass, the clouds or the starlings in the sky – he did not trouble about the world around him, but rather - silent and lonely - let the days and nights slip by as one that swims with just enough movement to keep oneself from drowning. Tony seemed to swim through time, and he found each day as difficult to remember from the one that went before, or came after it, as he would have found it to tell one mile of sea from another. (starts to become the tourist) The world happened around Tony, not *to him*, and he, most certainly, never *happened to it*.

TOURIST EMERGES, TREADING CAREFULLY SO AS NOT TO FALL ON THE SNOW & ICE, ALMOST SLIPS MAKING A LOUD SOUND

TONY: It is the season, the time has come around again for the people who come from far away to visit our mountain. (he circles the TOURIST with sure steps and remains unobserved) These people are not like us. They do not look like us and they do not sound like us. I do not know if they come from one place or many places but they are surely strange. They

all visit the grand house higher up and mother says they do not cook for themselves or clean for themselves. I wonder what they do at home. Maybe they are stupid or lazy, it seems strange to me that they come to our home because they love to see the things we see every day, just the hills and valleys, the snow, the goats and the wildflowers, the sunshine and the stillness. Is it really for these that the visitors come? If that is the case then they could simply stay and live here forever, and that way they would never need to see anything else. Even I can work that out. Nothing is simpler. I think they are from the city, people from the city speak strangely. Perhaps they are delicate, easy to break, as they step around these hills as if about to plunge to their deaths at any moment. They take an age to slowly work their way up the steps cut into the ice and snow which I can trip up as fast as the goat can. They must have no courage, as they say they love this place, but they are scared to be alone in it. Father says it is good that they are so afraid because they pay him sometimes to guide them through these hills lest they get lost. How lost can they get on a hill? How they live in a city I do not know, they must be lost at every turn. Yes, they must be easy to break. Like one of father's toys. I would not like to see them fall – perhaps their arms and legs would come apart and fly in all directions. I have seen that happen to a doll when it fell from a shelf. I did not knock it, but father looked at me as if I did. I remember seeing it in pieces and I know it did not hurt because mother said that something made of wood could not feel pain, but still, with its arms here and its legs there...it looked....

There are houses higher up the hill which are built on sturdy wooden legs and father says it is so if the snow falls down the hill it does not take the house with it. But I used to be so scared of them, I would not walk near them, in the summer they looked ready to turn towards me and stride after me on those long legs. Even I would not have escaped...

TOURIST: (speaking in a foreign language) Hello. (tony stands stock still, terrified)
Good day....greetings...how...are...you...? (remembers a guidebook, takes it out of a bag to find Tony gone) Oh. (almost slips, exits)

STORY: Many days, while his father was away, Tony stayed in the cottage watching his mother scrub and clean and wash and make the soup ready for his father at night. Or he would sit by the doorway, listening to the falling avalanche, and letting the warm sun fall on his face. Happy Tony! The trees made pictures, and he saw them, the wind blew and he understood.

MOTHER: (looking at him) Surely you are closer to the wind and the trees than to the other boys of the valley?

NEIGHBOUR: Tony felt he belonged to the wind and the trees, and had once been part of them? And he thought...

TONY: Why should I trouble to work?

NEIGHBOUR: His mother was right when she said 'perhaps he thinks more than he cares to say' because Tony's head was full of thoughts. His mind was like a storeroom which has a thousand handy objects in it, each useful, each valuable, but the storeroom which was Tony's mind was so crammed full, each thing jammed in beside and crammed on top of another as to make nothing of any use any longer. He had more thoughts than he *could* say. He had thoughts he had no words for. He thought:

TONY: Did I journey into this world from the mists beyond it?

NEIGHBOUR: He thought:

TONY: Was I very little once when I started on that journey?

NEIGHBOUR: He thought:

TONY: One day, when I have done with resting on the mountain, I will go into that distance and be very little once more.

NEIGHBOUR: But he could not speak the thoughts in his head. It was sometimes too hard for him to speak the simple words of daily life. 'Bread', 'table', 'chair', 'home', 'father', 'mother'.

FATHER: (entering as if from a hard day) I tell you I've had it with taking travellers who don't have the sense they were born with here and there. And for pennies! Pennies! See how they do without me for a day and then see

how happily they would part with their money for my work. And the days when there are none to ferry around are worse because then there is not even a penny in the pot for so much as some meat for the plate. This thin soup is all I get after a day working or searching for work while others have nothing more to do than watch the clouds and listen to the wind in the trees.

MOTHER: I'm not idle, I wash and fetch and carry and cook and dig and sew...

FATHER: It's not you I mean wife, I mean the boy. The boy who neither works with me nor with you – the boy is idle, bone idle!

MOTHER: Do not be hard on him, he is like a person who has been woken before his sleep has satisfied him, and his dreams overtake his waking hours.

FATHER: Nonsense!

MOTHER: Let him get his dreaming done and perhaps he will rouse to work as others do in the morning time.

FATHER: Any of us can dream the day away if we are too stupid to wake and too idle to work.

MOTHER: Please!

FATHER: I mean it! The patience that I'd have with a babe in arms, even though it might be useless, is endless. To be useless at this age, to sit and stare nod and rock, and rock and nod – it is too much. He is...against nature.

MOTHER: 'Against'...?

FATHER: My father was good and wise, and he said there is no waste in nature. No bird which falls from the sky which is not food for some other creature. No cat which does not catch mice. No part of the animals we tend which we cannot use for meat, milk, leather...even the bones for our soup before even they are passed on to the dogs. We harvest the wheat and the straw left behind has a hundred uses, but him? Him? He has no use in this world, no part in this life.

MOTHER: He has a part - while I am alive.

FATHER: The boy is like one of the toys I sell, one of my puppets, but with him when you lift the string to make the doll wave it kicks its foot, when you pull the string for it to sit, it tips its hat.

MOTHER: And that makes him a fool? Perhaps he is just different.

FATHER: He is certainly that.

MOTHER: And perhaps special.

FATHER: (remembering) You wished for 'special'.

MOTHER: All mothers wish for that, this was never in my prayers.

FATHER: It's no matter, because to be special, he needs to be useful – great poets and leaders are special because they have a use.

MOTHER: His song has a use.

FATHER: Has it?

MOTHER: As much use as any poem.

FATHER: (softening) Perhaps.

MOTHER: And what if we see ourselves when we look at him?

FATHER: What?

MOTHER: We sowed those seeds. And you would be quick enough to claim 'see how like his father he is' if he were some genius, some golden child.

FATHER: There is little of my side of the family in him. He has your eyes.

MOTHER: But your mouth.

FATHER: Your hair.

MOTHER: But your nose.

FATHER: None of that matters, it is what goes on inside him which baffles me.

MOTHER: We sowed those seeds too.

FATHER: I did not sow seeds of 'this food must be on this plate' or 'I shall scream the house down If you move this thing or that thing' – that is not my doing. In fact, I heard you as I left this morning screaming at the lad – 'you do not get what you want by screaming' – think about that.

MOTHER: If you say so. I'm sure you are right. It is all me. (scheming, changing tone) I thought, tonight...we'll have lamb.

FATHER: What?

MOTHER: Tonight. Lamb. Supper.

FATHER: Tonight is Friday.

MOTHER: It is.

FATHER: But we have fish on Friday.

MOTHER: But we do not have to.

FATHER: But we do.

MOTHER: We do.

FATHER: We always do.

MOTHER: Not tonight. Tonight, we'll eat lamb, there's a good piece ready. And I shall sit in this chair...

FATHER: What?

MOTHER: (picking up a mug) ...and drink from this cup.

FATHER: But you know that is my chair, my cup.

MOTHER: And if we eat lamb and I sit here and drink from this...will the heavens fall, will the earth crack open?

FATHER: Of course not, but I will be...

MOTHER: What? Uncomfortable, ill-at ease?

FATHER: Fish on Friday! It is tradition!

MOTHER: But is it? Is it 'tradition' or just habit...something that makes us feel good because we know what's coming. There's a comfort in that.

FATHER: (slowly realising) Oh... I get your meaning! I see the line you draw. But it is not the same. It is different. Ask any man, any sane man, and that's how it is, and it is no bad thing, you saying this cannot make it so. Sometimes... a man must have things...right.

MOTHER: Things must be just so?

FATHER: Precisely. Just so. The goatherd says that a goat in a high place is a goat in a happy place – each creature has a way things are which makes them feel best.

MOTHER: So you are like an old goat?

FATHER: Perhaps I am.

MOTHER: And none of this is not like Tony with 'this food on that plate' or 'I cannot bear a fly in the room'...?

FATHER: He takes things too far. Things which in me are...

MOTHER: Normal?

FATHER: Exactly. (a sudden thought after a stand-off moment) And! And....who is it who cannot have the sheets piled on the towels in the cupboards?

MOTHER: What?

FATHER: Is that normal?

MOTHER: It is. Because the sheets *belong* in one pile and the towels in another.

FATHER: And if the two mixed, the heavens would fall, and the earth would crack open? I may be an old goat, but I am married to an old hen who will only be happy when things are a certain way.

MOTHER: Everyone is allowed something about which they are...particular.

FATHER: And the teaspoons in the drawer, they must be placed just right...(mimes putting them in) this way. With the bowl of the spoon here...not here.

MOTHER: That is not true.

FATHER: It is.

MOTHER: I do not mind if the bowl is here... or here.

FATHER: You do! You know you do!

MOTHER: But it must be the same for all the spoons.

FATHER: And the knives and the forks!

MOTHER: Yes! For all of them. Some cannot not be this way when others are the other.

FATHER: (laying down an ultimatum) You feed me lamb tonight, you sit in my chair tonight or drink from my cup tonight and I will set the towels amongst the sheets and wreak a chaos in the cutlery drawer!

MOTHER: And next time your aim is poor in the outhouse, I'll...I'll.... (she can't think what she will do)

FATHER: Well, the next time you say 'I will be five minutes' I will take you at your word and I will not wait for half an hour!

MOTHER: And when you walk across this swept floor with your muddy boots, I shall throw them in the stream - whether you are in them or not.

FATHER: Then do not expect to put your cold feet on me in the night.

MOTHER: I shan't. And I only do so because you chatter in your sleep, and I am kept awake.

FATHER: And don't be taking food from my plate after you have said that you 'only want a little'.

MOTHER: When did I last do that!?

FATHER: This morning!

MOTHER: But before that...when?

FATHER: Does it matter?

MOTHER: (reflecting) Does any of it matter? This is not about Tony.

FATHER: But it is. Somehow everything is about Tony – every frustration –

MOTHER: Every joy...

FATHER: - every small irritation.

THEY LOOK AT TONY WHO LOOKS TERRIFIED

MOTHER: But I'll say it again – perhaps he is more like us than we think.

**MOTHER GOES TO REASSURE HIM, TONY STARTS TO SING AND HIS FATHER
SOFTENS**

FATHER: That voice. I wish he had got that from me. But I have no tune in my throat. He is like you in that. Imagine, the best of him is not from me.

FOR A MOMENT IT IS A TENDER AND UTTERLY 'NORMAL' SCENE

**FATHER WALKS UP TO TONY AND HUGS HIM AS ANY FATHER WOULD – TONY
SCREAMS AND KICKS – FATHER TRIES TO KEEP THE EMBRACE TOO LONG IN THE
HOPE THAT TONY WILL CALM, ONLY MAKING THINGS WORSE – EVENTUALLY
RELEASES HIM, TONY WITHDRAWS, KNOCKING THINGS OVER IN
HIS ATTEMPT TO GET AWAY TO THE EDGE OF THE ROOM WHERE HE GLOWERS**

FATHER: What kind of child is it that runs from an embrace!

MOTHER: You startled him.

FATHER: What!? I startle my own son by holding him?

MOTHER: You were too sudden, too rough.

FATHER: 'Too rough'!? The things we find ourselves saying! 'Too sudden'!? Perhaps I should issue a warning – 'I will embrace you in one minute – I will embrace you as the sun meets the horizon'!

MOTHER: Mock if you will, but Tony would love that, for then Tony would know, for some, a surprise is nothing but a shock...

FATHER: Listen, you may be right. There are things in him which we have handed down, and his song is certainly not from me, because it, at least, is beautiful and pure, but apart from that... it is too much...

**A CRACK OF THUNDER AND SUDDEN SOUND OF RAIN ON THE ROOF & LANE
OUTSIDE. ALMOST IN A REVERIE, TONY RUSHES OUTSIDE TO STAND IN THE RAIN,
ENJOYING THE FEELING ON HIS SKIN, WHOOPING, CATCHING IT WITH HIS TONGUE
– HE SINGS**

MOTHER: (looking out at him) While the other children hide in doorways or under trees...

FATHER: As they should! As they should! It is normal to hide from the rain. But this...this is...(softens a little) If he did not have that song I tell you, I would have no patience left for him at all! (exits)

MOTHER: (shouting after him) You would have stood once, in rain like this, when you were a child - I know you must have, just for the wonder of it, the joy

of it! You have forgotten the wonder of it, that is all, and Tony has not – who is to say that he is not the normal one and it is we are strange for forgetting to wonder at the world now and then!

**A MOMENT AS SHE WATCHES, BOTH HAPPY AND SAD, HER SON SINGING IN THE
RAIN**

STORY: A strangeling child is a millstone to a marriage. But worse than no child? Only a mother, or one who would be a mother, can answer that.

STORY: The strange thing about Tony's song was that no-one knew how he had come about it.

MOTHER: (as if saying it for the tenth time) Tony (he looks at her)
...basket...flowers...now...

STORY: It was a song which no one taught him, and no one else knew anything of.

MOTHER: ...just the white ones, you know where they grow, too high for my legs or your fathers.

STORY: He had learnt it the way a solitary bird might, from its own little lonely heart.

MOTHER: You collect, I'll tie in bunches, and the visitors will pay their pennies which will make soup on the table and your father smile.

**TONY TAKES THE BASKET AND HEADS OFF – SOMEHOW WE SEE THE WHOLE DAY
TURN DURING HIS SPEECH**

TONY: Why are the white flowers more valuable than the others? The meadows are full of flowers, but it is the hard-to-reach ones which the travellers pay most for. Why not just walk up here themselves and gather them? Mother says they have more money than sense. I understand that because I know that they have little sense. Sense or senses. They do not stop to feel things, really feel them, or smell or taste or touch or hear – they cover up their faces instead of feeling the wind on it – why? What is the wind for if it is not to be felt on the face. I would feel it on my whole body if mother did not say it is bad for me to be without clothes when I am out of the house. Who invented clothes? Why do we wear them when we are

not cold? There is no point in good weather. Others feel the cold when I could go around as naked as a piglet. And I can sit so close to the fire that mother says 'you will roast like this piece of beef' but I know that she knows I will not actually roast.

Mother has books for me which I will not even look at because they have animals in clothes in them. To me, this makes no sense, because none of the animals I see have a stitch on them. And even if I am asked to believe that there is a world where some animals dress in coats and shoes, then it still makes little sense as some of the other animals go naked. And even those that wear a jacket and shoes have no trousers – a jacket and a bare behind is a strange way to go about. And some creatures speak while others are mute – the children who enjoy those sort of books must be simple. Up here I could wear a jacket and no trousers as there is no one to see my bare behind anyway. Up here I see the villages and towns below and they are (placing the view in between his finger & thumb) so small that I might put a hundred houses in my pocket or a town in my basket. Nobody scolds me up here. To them I am small and far away. Father says he cannot come up this far any longer as he is not a 'spring chicken'. That makes sense and means nothing all at the same time as, of course, he is not a spring chicken, but then no person is. It is as well to say, 'I am not a goat' or 'I am not a church steeple'. Again, it is the trick I am blind to. (a sudden thought) I could not look upon the blacksmith without clothes! With clothes he makes me feel sick. And the butcher must always wear clothes. It is bad enough that I see things in my mind and they stick, like sap to the hand...*they stick* – if I saw such things in the flesh, I would never shake it from my head. (he is distracted) The buzzard. Does it know it is special? Does it know that it is a buzzard? Do the pigeons feel humble? Do the birds know that they are like the flowers? Some prized and valuable, some ignored and barely tolerated. Father kills pigeons for pie but he would never kill a buzzard. 'Noble creature' he says - 'majestic' he says. When he kills pigeons, he hangs them behind the door and I cannot go in the room if they are there. The eyes still seem to stare. And a hanging carcass invites the flies, and I cannot stand a fly. Is a dove just a pretty pigeon? Father would not think

of 'dove pie' - why is the beautiful more worthy of life than the plain? That is not fair. I could not bear to see a dove behind the door, I would have to leave the house.

HE RETURNS HOME, SITS GAZES OUT, STIMS GENTLY

MOTHER: Tony, you were sent out for flowers. And you return with nothing. Where are the flowers?

TONY: (unnerved) I did not see any.

MOTHER: But they are everywhere son, they cloak the meadow like snow. I can see them from here, high in the fields.

TONY: (haltingly) I see them now. From here, but I did... not...

MOTHER: And my basket...

TONY: It was... I put it... it was... and then I... it looked so... next to the...

HE SHOWS HER A PICTURE OF HER BASKET

MOTHER: (almost spent) No flowers... no basket... but a picture of a basket...

TONY SINGS TO STOP BECOMING AGITATED

MOTHER: Where did you learn this song my son? (Tony does not answer)
Speak son, speak to me. Lord save me from this silence.

PREACHER: (emerging at the door, drawn by the song) It's hard on you, that your son is no more than a fool. Maybe there is some solace in his song, like you might find solace in a caged bird.

MOTHER: He is no fool.

PREACHER: Look at him.

MOTHER: I see him clearly, more clearly than you. But his song is a great solace, there you are right.

PREACHER: But it means nothing.

MOTHER: As the note of a piano means nothing? As a tune on a fiddle means nothing? It means what it is, and it is what it means! No more or less. There's a great deal in the world has meaning that you have no explanation for.

PREACHER: Is that so?

MOTHER: Explain to me how an oak tree bears a thousand acorns - each of which will grow to be a tree which will bear a thousand more. Where is the

plan, where is the knowledge to make such thing happen? How do the stars stay in the sky. What happens to you after your last breath, where does your soul reside?

PREACHER: All you talk of is beyond common knowledge.

MOTHER: As is my boy, right enough... 'beyond common knowledge'.

PREACHER: The lord knows all about acorns and stars and souls.

MOTHER: And you think this lad is not part of the lord's knowledge, his plan?

PREACHER: All I say is, his song has no meaning!

MOTHER: Do you speak another language than this we're speaking now?

PREACHER: Of course I do not, you know I do not.

MOTHER: I know that right enough, because you speak ours poorly enough...perhaps Tony's song is...(thinks).... French.

PREACHER: French!?

MOTHER: For all I know!

PREACHER: But he cannot tell even where he learnt his song!

MOTHER: He learnt it in the clouds, from the wind, high on the mountain side, higher than our feet can climb. Tony is without fear out on the hills, he does not totter as you do, even on the firmest of paths. He goes beyond where others dare. What there might be at such heights only the like of Tony can tell! (Preacher exits, she begins to raise her voice) He is not useless, he is not a fool, he is not wooden-headed, he may be beyond common knowledge, but he is not (shouting out the door to the world) against God or nature. (she quietens) To my eyes Tony, you sometimes seem to be the best of nature, her clearest and purest creation.

STORY: That was before he had grown so silent, before the time when the great cobweb of silence seemed to have wrapped him round, before he had wandered into a dream and shut the door on the waking world.

MOTHER: Will you someday awaken son? You surely must, or this world will not know what to make of you or offer you a place within it. There is always a place for you in the world while I am in it, but you have no idea that I shall not always be here. Or how one day, when I am frail and broken from hard work and age, I shall need you more than you need me. What, my son, shall we do then? What shall we do then?

STORY: But from that time Tony forgot more and more of the things he was told to do, and lived among his dreams, which grew so tangled that even he could not tell the sleeping from the waking ones.

In the winter, when the travellers who came to the hills stayed home, when the cattle were in the barn and when the snow was too deep for crops or flowers the villagers hunched in their homes for warmth and made best use of the time. Tony used to watch his father cutting bits of wood: chip by chip he seemed to take away the walls that held the little animals and men and women in their timber prison. In Tony's mind the things that emerged had always been there, had been lying...waiting. He did not realize that his father's sharp knife and precise eye shaped the toys. It was just for the sake of the money they would bring that his mother placed them so carefully in a drawer until the dealer from the city came to buy them, or till it was time to put them on a tray outside the cottage door so that the strangers might see and pay good money for them. One winter there was a dark knotty piece of wood in the corner of the room which both seemed to draw him to it and yet repel him all in the same instant.

FATHER: Good wood this, enough there for a whole new creation. Fine grained and well seasoned. Something special will come forth from you, I think.

**WE SEE DAYS PASS AS THE FATHER CHOOSES WHAT TO CARVE, TONY SEEMS
UNABLE TO TAKE HIS EYES FROM IT**

FATHER: (taking it up) What shall we discover deep within you then?
You will be no animal, I think. No donkey, no bird, no exotic creature from the East or from the warmer climes... (cuts)
And you'll not be some flight of fancy, no fairy or elf, no dragon, nor mermaid...(cuts)
And you are no little man, you are not the wood for that, so fine and smooth...(cuts)

MORE DAYS TURNING AS THE PUPPET EMERGES, AND TONY'S

FASCINATION WITH, AND FEAR OF, HER

FATHER: (perusing her) Yes, nice. Good work. Good enough to make it look as if you would set your eyes on your maker and ask what his will is. I am proud of you, little one. You will make someone happy. But I am afraid, my own creation, that now I have neither the wood nor the time to make you any little friend. You will have to, for now, go through life quite alone. (turns the puppet towards Tony) Unless, of course, Tony here will provide you with some company. What do you say son, do you have a new companion? One who doesn't speak nor expects anything from you. Perhaps there is nothing more you could want in any other person. She too has a wooden head - perhaps she is perfect for you.

TONY SHRINKS BACK IN FEAR.

MOTHER: She is only wood, lad.

FATHER: Only a wooden head – of little use! Fear not! She is nothing but a toy, a plaything, a puppet! (almost to himself) She is nothing but an imitation of life. You, lad, should know what that is like.

MOTHER: Enough! (to Tony) Later, she will be sent to the dealer who lives far off in the city, so there is nothing to be afraid of. She cannot move, and no danger comes from things that cannot move. Only things that live and move have the power to frighten us, but not this bit of wood that has been shaped by your father's knife.

FATHER: (gently) Your mother is right – she can't harm you look!

**HE PLACES THE PUPPET/DOLL ON A CHAIR, BOTH MOTHER AND FATHER RETREAT
AND TONY INTERACTS WITH IT. WE NEED TO SEE *HIS FEAR OF AND HIS
ATTRACTION TO IT***

**HE BEGINS TO ANIMATE THE WOMAN AND HE ENDS UP DISPLAYING SOME KIND
OF SMALL INTIMACY (PERHAPS JUST A HUG OR KISS) WHICH MAKES HIS MOTHER
STEP FORWARD**

MOTHER: Son?

TONY RUNS OFF

STORY: And off Tony ran into the soft snow, high into the hills leaving the little wooden girl far behind, her eyes still wide and staring in the cottage.

FATHER: (to the doll) What have you awoken in him?

MOTHER: I don't know if I want to know.
FATHER: So frightened of you but so drawn to you.
MOTHER: I do not recognise it.
FATHER: I do. Many a man would.
MOTHER: He will freeze.
FATHER: He'll come home before he freezes, the simplest of beasts know to take shelter before death takes them...(a look from the mother) I'm only saying...
MOTHER: (calling) Come back Tony.
FATHER: Though they say there is a kind of joy, an ecstasy, which takes hold of those freezing, just before they breathe their last...though how they know that...
MOTHER: (calling) It is safe.
FATHER: It was always safe!
MOTHER: (calling) You can return!
FATHER: She is gone.
MOTHER: (as Tony comes closer) She is packed away, you need not look on her face again. She was nothing more than the handiwork of your father, the skill of his hands.
FATHER: (grumbling, but kindly) But she'll earn money to put food in this mouth!

TONY HUGS HIS MOTHER

MOTHER: And now she and all the other carvings will be taken by our neighbour, to the city.
FATHER: (carefully, to Tony) I do not mean to startle or shock, I am giving you fair warning...I will not be rough.

HE JOINS THE OTHER TWO IN AN EMBRACE

MOTHER: You need not be afraid of the little girl anymore, you can forget all about her.
STORY: And forget is what Tony did. Tony forgot because the winter waned, and the spring came and the year turned and the sun rose and set and the fields filled with flowers and the herds grazed. And all year Tony swam through time and barely knew his waking dreams from his sleeping ones. And Tony sang his song and learned nothing new, he became a year

older without working for so much as one day. And the winter came, and his father carved again.

MOTHER: (doing so, explaining to Tony) And like every year, we take each carving, with care and we lay them, wrapped in soft paper, for the dealer from the city to view when he visits. And those he does not want we shall place in a drawer until the summer when the travellers might want them.

FATHER: Lucky things. For they are only wood, no one shall ever ask them to work! Their joints will never ache, their hands will never blister and crack.

MOTHER: These are small and delicate and will be handled gently and tenderly.

FATHER: They may be small, but they will, one way or another, see more of the world than we shall.

MOTHER: It is true they are lucky. In their way.

**TONY HAS BEEN LOOKING ALMOST JEALOUSLY AT THEM. HIS PARENTS HAVE
EXIT**

TONY: If I were but like one of them, to be always little, to be handled tenderly and put to sleep in a drawer till the summer, and then to be warmed though by the sun. Just think...to have legs that never ache and hands that never work?

**SOMEHOW, HE TRIES TO MAKE HIMSELF LIKE THEM, PERHAPS COVERING
HIMSELF IN TISSUE?
A BEAT, A NEW TONE**

STORY: It was a cold morning when the dealer came, the eager ones saw him from far "He's coming – he's coming!"
"You must want to buy my dried flowers, a beautiful addition to any home..."
"My pictures of the mountains in springtime, a fine lady said they were the best she'd seen..."
"My delicate lace, no one makes lace like this, not now, not anywhere..."
"Knitted clothes for the little ones, wool made from the sheep that roam these hills, these will last you three or four children they will..."
"Polished stones set into rings and things, nature made better I like to think..."

**THE DEALER IS A BROODING, MALEVOLENT PRESENCE, BUT SOMEHOW WITH A
SUDECTIVE QUALITY**

A MOMENT OF STILLNESS BEFORE TONY'S MOTHER APPROACHES

MOTHER: And here, as every year, the little animals and people of wood crafted by the skill of my husband's knife and the skill of his hand. I think these may be his best.

DEALER: And where is he? (*a hint that perhaps the father fears the dealer*)

MOTHER: In the hills, with his animals.

DEALER: (picking up the girl puppet), You are right. Good work, fine work. Work which I can surely use. (perusing each) Good... Nice.... Lovely... (noticing Tony) And who...

MOTHER: Who?

DEALER: ... is this? Another of his creations?

MOTHER: No. Well, yes. His finest, in my eyes. This is his son...our son. Tony.

DEALER: Tony...who has emerged fully formed and grown in a single year?

MOTHER: At every other visit from you he has stayed hidden in our kitchen, peeking from the window.

DEALER: Such a face...

MOTHER: Indeed. His father would say that he has little about him that anyone would want or need.

DEALER: A shame... (looks from tony to the toys) now...a price.

MOTHER: But I say his song is something...whatever use a song may be.

DEALER: (we see a shift in him) A 'song' you say?

MOTHER: He sings...his song is special, it has value all of its own.

DEALER: Surely *this* is not the boy they speak of?

MOTHER: 'Speak of'? Who speaks of him? We speak of little else – 'Tony this – Tony that'...

DEALER: Could it be? The goatherds, and the drovers, they say there is a boy who sings a song which was, how did they put it, *learned in the clouds*?

MOTHER: It may be. It is true that Tony's song is known all down the valley and over the mountain too.

DEALER: Though no one knows it's meaning.

MOTHER: Or needs to. Meaning is not everything in life.

DEALER: A traveller came to me in the city once, he spoke about it, and tried to sing it...

MOTHER: (amazed) The city?

DEALER: ...but he could not sing it how it was heard in the mountains. Try though he might he could not...‘catch it’ as he knew it should be. It eluded him, slipped from his head even as he tried to share it. But he knew, I knew, it was something special. Just the fragments, just the suggestion of it was enough to know that... (looking at Tony) ...*and from this boy?*

MOTHER: His Father says he is only a fool, who will not use the hands and feet which nature gave him, but don’t judge him harshly. It is true that most are made to use their hands and some their feet, but for some it might be just their hearts to feel and lips to speak which is their best work. Does he not sing a song he has fetched from the clouds? Let the song travel instead of his feet and let the song work instead of his hands.

DEALER: Is this the boy they also call ‘wooden-head’ around these parts...

MOTHER: Some do...

DEALER: No song like that ever came from wood.

MOTHER: And a song has sometimes lived longer than the strongest hands that ever worked and travelled farther than the sturdiest feet that ever walked.

DEALER: (looking closely at Tony’s face) There is much of your husband in him.

MOTHER: He is from him. They are alike. My husband reveals creatures that were hidden in a block of wood, just as Tony’s song was hidden in his heart.

DEALER: It is hidden no more.

MOTHER: We have neighbours who say he would be better without his song...that he might dream less and work more! But I say...

DEALER: (brusque) But this is not about you. It is about this boy. This song. Its fate, its destiny. (after a pause) Let him go - to the city - with me –

MOTHER: (in shock at the thought) Leave us?

DEALER: The others here say there is little to him, but they are wrong?

MOTHER: Yes!

DEALER: And you say he has much to offer?

MOTHER: Yes.

DEALER: (pointedly) *Then I will take you at your word.* Let him go to the city....
and I will take the song from his lips...

MOTHER: But the city?

DEALER: ...and send it over the world.

MOTHER: But why?

DEALER: Up here in this place his song is like your toys and puppets still in their
wooden tombs. A song should be heard, should it not?

MOTHER: It... should.

DEALER: To keep it from the ears of people across the world is...

MOTHER: Is...?

DEALER: *Against nature.*

MOTHER: We cannot pay.

DEALER: I will have payment enough. Do not worry about pennies. The song itself
will pay his way.

MOTHER: Pay his way with a song? (hesitantly) Not so useless then? Tony...would
you like to go to the city...away from me?

DEALER: All boys wish to leave for the city.

MOTHER: To be 'very small and very far off'. It is his only wish.

DEALER: Well, there you are.

MOTHER: But I have heard it said that a wish and the granting of that wish can
often find themselves strange company. You will be small and far away,
but you will not be held in my arms while you are there.

DEALER: But no one here will ask him to work again.

MOTHER: But...away from me?

DEALER: There is a world beyond that horizon.

MOTHER: One which he has hidden from for years and I have scolded him for it,
tried to make him take a place in it.

DEALER: And now...his chance.

MOTHER: You may go if you wish it, my dear boy, there is so much in the world. It
is bigger and wider than you or I know. (to the dealer) I would rather you
took my right arm...

DEALER: But this is not about you. No son should stay forever with his mother, no
man is made that way...

MOTHER: He has always needed me so...

DEALER: Surely, we are not talking about you *needing to be needed*?

MOTHER: No!

DEALER: No?

MOTHER: This is not about me.

DEALER: As I have said. Then you would not hold him back?

MOTHER: No.

DEALER: Hide him away?

MOTHER: No!

DEALER: Then...there we are.

MOTHER: Will he be safe?

DEALER: Under my watch, my care...I think so. But there are no guarantees, life is full of risk.

MOTHER: There was little risk in our home, on these hills.

DEALER: Little risk, *little life*.

MOTHER: Son...there is much in the world I know I will never see, and I would not keep you from seeing it. I will not keep you here to satisfy my own longings...if it were your wish to go. Is it your wish...?

DEALER: You will be so far off and so small as to be not even a speck in the distance.

MOTHER: Is it your wish?

DEALER: You will leave these people behind...far behind.

MOTHER: Son...?

DEALER: There will be no one to call you 'Wooden Head' in the city.

MOTHER: Is it your wish?

A NOD FROM TONY, A HANDSHAKE FROM THE DEALER & MOTHER

DEALER: It is decided.

A BEAT, A CHANGE IN TONE

STORY: The next day they all came out of their cottages and watched one of their own leave for the city.

"Look how he walks as if we are not here."

"He moves like he's in a dream."

"There is not a thought in that wooden head, not a single thought."

But there was. Too many thoughts. Too few words.

"He does not even look back to wave."

"I have a feeling he is leaving this village forever."

"He was barely here at all."

"That's right, that's Tony... 'the boy who was barely there'. (exit chuckling)

MOTHER: Good luck my son.

FATHER: You have got your wish.

MOTHER: (cold, aside, to the father) *And you have got yours.* I will come to see you. Wherever you are. I will find you and I will come to see you. That is a promise.

FATHER: We will both visit you in the world.

MOTHER: We shall follow your song to you. It is a promise from a mother to a son.

FATHER: We will always know where you are.

MOTHER: No promise is stronger.

STORY: And Tony and the Dealer, having far to travel, set off apace. But the mother carried the emptiness within her back to home at the speed at which she would walk through a graveyard.

STORY: And on they walked, the boy and the man. (becoming the dealer) And nothing was said.

DEALER: I kept my eyes on the boy and they boy kept his eyes on the long, straight road.

STORY: Nothing was said.

SHADOWS OF TREES FALL ACROSS THEM

TONY: I wonder if, in the trunks of these trees by the road, there are many little figures dwelling, like the one my father carves, just waiting to be set free. What happens to them if no one carves them into the light, chips them from their prisons. Do they stay forever, still, held fast, staring into darkness? What if they stay in there until the tree falls in some terrible storm? What if the tree is felled and chopped for the fire? Does the kindling, do the logs know what they might have been, the life they could

have had? Do they know that they could have been made to walk, to dance, to tilt their head so that they could almost be alive?

DEALER: Stop. Look. (points back the way they came) That light, so small, so far off, is your home. See it once more before you turn your back on it.

**TONY SEES THAT HE CAN PUT THE WHOLE OF HIS VILLAGE BETWEEN HIS FINGER
& THUMB**

DEALER: Now...Sing.

**TONY SINGS, COMPLIANTLY
THE DEALER PULLS OUT A RUDIMENTARY INSTRUMENT AND BEGINS TO,
IMPERFECTLY, REPLICATE THE TUNE**

DEALER: Walk.

THEY MOVE ON

DEALER: Stop. (he tries the tune again on his instrument)

TONY: (his train of thought is slowing) I know that it is the breeze in the moonlight makes the trees sway in this way, but still, it looks as if they reach out to me. I have said I will go to the city, and I will, for I must. I have said so and I will do so. But I would like to walk into those trees, walk among them – they hold out their arms as friends do. I have seen mother do it a hundred times. And they whisper, they whisper. And because I do not know what it means, that does not mean that it does not mean anything – the visitors to our mountain talked and talked and I knew not a word of it, yet it meant something. (to the trees) Perhaps I could learn your language, perhaps I could know your secrets?

DEALER: Sing. (he sings) Stop. On. We walk now until morning.

TONY: It will not matter that the trees will be wrapped in darkness, I will know they are there.

TIME PASSES

DEALER: See in the growing light, see a form growing. Those are mountains which you have never seen. Not your mountain. The mountains beyond which lies the city.

TONY TURNS

There is nothing back there. You will see neither your mountain nor your village. Everything, *everything* for you lies this way. Sing. (tony sings) Do you hear, boy, how your song is different, see how it comes no longer

from your heart but only from your lips. Your song is yours alone no longer, it has gone from you on its journey into the world.

THE DEALER PLAYS THE SONG ACCURATELY AND BEAUTIFULLY

But you do not care; you feel nothing very much. You are not tired, or warm, or cold, or glad, or sorry, but more in a dream than ever before. Your legs grow rigid, you will find your feet are hard, yet somehow lighter to lift than they had been. Do not be scared, your whole body will feel light, and it will move in a new way which, at first, will feel strange.

TONY: Day and night, and day and night again, through villages and towns. I look at the people and feel, more than ever a closeness to what mother said - 'things that belonged to nature's firstness' – with the sky and the lake and the trees.

Towards the people of the towns, I feel a strangeness fill up my heart - between them and I the separation, begun long ago is now complete. They seem to be made of a different texture, of different flesh and blood from myself and they – these people – seemed so tall. They crowd me so...there is only enough space in my head to wonder if my wish – has - been – granted.

THE DEALER PLAYS THE SONG SMOOTHLY AND ARTICULATELY

DEALER: Sing.

TONY BEGINS BUT DOES NOT KNOW THE SONG NOW, JUST MAKES INCOHERENT RANDOM NOTES

DEALER: It is done.

TONY'S SONG PLAYS AROUND HIM, ONLY HIS EYES ACKNOWLEDGE IT. THE DEALER MANIPULATES HIM, AS HE WOULD A PUPPET OR MANNEQUIN, TONY HAS NO CONTROL. FINALLY, THE DEALER IS ABLE TO CONTROL THE RIGID BODY WITHOUT EVEN TOUCHING IT. STILLNESS. TONY ROCKS SLIGHTLY

DEALER: Come. Now the many miles of road are behind you and the sights and sounds of the city are before you. But you, you will scarcely notice it. Notice this, boy, look upon your shadow as it falls on the street before you, see how you have got your wish as your mother said.

TONY: Far off.... and... very little.

DEALER: Stop. Our walking is done. Sit. Now, see who we have here. (uncovers the doll/puppet/toy) You must know her, I see that you do. You know the hand that made her – you and she share a maker. But, perhaps she seems to be not so little now. Your place is with her, perhaps you always knew that. You and she will never be apart again, consider this something like... a marriage.

NARRATION: And suddenly all about him was wooden – wooden houses and people and animals – he knew that he was a prisoner, but it did not matter, he did not care. A door opened and he entered.

THE CLOCK CHIMES

THE MOTHER & FATHER ARE PACKING A LAST FEW THINGS

MOTHER: I should have loved him for what he was, not for what I hoped he would one day be, what I saw in my mind's eye. I mourned for what I did not have, when I should have cherished what he was, *for he was*. The child I mourned for never was, never would be. It was my foolishness, I should have loved him for himself, nothing more or less than that. After all, no one like him had ever been before

FATHER: Nor shall be

MOTHER: What to say of him, now he is no longer with us... Was it a test? Did we pass?

FATHER: Was he ever with us?

MOTHER: I grieve for what we had.

FATHER: And I for what we never had

MOTHER: He belonged to nature's firstness. He was her clearest and purest creation.

But perhaps he was never ours and we were never his

FATHER: We have his memory, that is something.

MOTHER: (a new thought) I have heard it said that a swift blow to the head, a kick from a horse say, can leave you with your wits yet rob you of your memory.

FATHER: It happened to a man in the valley. Had to get to know his wife and his life all over.

MOTHER: How nice it would be to start again, to have forgotten what I have lost. To not know that there was ever a boy at the edge of this room, watching the wind in the trees, the starlings roosting, feeling the sun on his face.

FATHER: But you would also have forgotten your childhood days...our marriage...?

MOTHER: A small price to pay.

FATHER: But to forget him altogether, to wipe him from your life...? Surely not?

MOTHER: No. Better to have the stab of remembering than nothing. Just to remember his face, that is a comfort. Some things are too painful to ever be put aside.

FATHER: (he talks to her, but we know she does not hear) Poor Tony looked, every day, all day, as if he teetered on the edge of some black abyss, some dark hole, which might swallow him up. How strange then, that when he left, it was you who fell in. And I? I live on the edge of that hole each day, I stare into it, feel pulled towards it at every moment.
(to his wife) He was a boy whose wish came true, and it is surely the proper place of a mother or a father to help a son's wishes become a reality.

MOTHER: Not this time. Not this wish. His wish was not to *run to*, but *away from*, from this village, from us, from the world. Such a wish should not be granted. (the father starts to hum, inaccurately, Tony's song) That is not quite as it should be.

FATHER: I am no singer, you know that.

MOTHER: It is more than that. Because I too try to capture his song in my head, on my tongue, but it won't come. It is never quite right. At each attempt I miss some note, some rise or fall, and it escapes me. It gets further from me each day. One day there will be nothing left.

FATHER: No one could sing it but him. Do you think it meant anything to him?

MOTHER: It meant comfort, it meant not having to think of those things which scared him so. I shall always remember his words... *'Mother, there are so many things in my head that come before my eyes and make my hands useless'*. What those things were, or are, we'll never know now.

FATHER: So much of him I never knew, even then.

MOTHER: What to say of him, now he is no longer with us?

FATHER: (speaks to her though she does not hear) There is so much to say, so much that I think of while in the fields. And on days like this we say it, you and I speak it out, as if to take a medicine, but most days, indeed from one week, one season to another, we cannot bear to say the name out loud. This house is often silent. The lack of him makes more of a mark on our lives than the having of him. We did not have this heavy silence then.

MOTHER: Was it a test? Did I fail? (picks up a random object) I used to hold *him*, now I just hold things which hold something of him.

FATHER: We will see him.

MOTHER: A whole year since he has gone.

FATHER: We will find him.

MOTHER: A whole year since he walked away.

FATHER: And we will walk the same way - follow his song and see him again. Are you ready?

MOTHER: I am.

**THEY COMPLETE THE PACKING THEY WERE ENGAGED IN RIGHT AT THE START
THEY GATHER UP THEIR LUGGAGE AND HEAD OFF**

DEALER: Can you hear the music Tony, can you hear what the people play, what they whistle as they walk the streets? I am a man of my word. I have brought all wishes to their fulfilment. Your parent's wishes to have your song in the world, in the ears and on the lips of so many.

WE HEAR HIS SONG PLAYED BY A FULL BAND IN THE DISTANCE

Perhaps your song is as your life has been, simple and somehow beautiful; something to touch every heart. But it is not only yours any longer, for you have given it away, it was the price you paid. And your wish? As you can see, you have all you ever desired, your life has gone into your song, and you now want for nothing. Nor ever shall.

Now you enter a new part of your life. It will always be the same, as the people of the town look on, you will see their faces, with their gurning and their grimaces and their frowns and their smiles their lifeless toy's eyes and they will mean, as they always have, nothing to you. But now those

faces, those faces that seem like dolls or puppets or clowns to you, they neither need nor want anything from you. You are free of them. Free in your tiny and regular and bounded world - day after day, week after week, month after month, in light and dark, in heat and cold. Spring and summer and autumn and winter – you will take your turn and play your part, the same, again, again, again.

STORY: After a time, after a full year since Tony left his small home, two weary travellers who had walked the same miles through the same woods and mountains and villages toward the same city made their way through its streets, to its very heart.

MOTHER: (bustling in, exhausted, but excited, hearing his song in the air) It is Tony, it is Tony. He is close.

FATHER: He may be.

MOTHER: It is his song. I hear it everywhere.

FATHER: It is his song – that is right enough.

MOTHER: If it is here, he is here.

FATHER: It is everywhere... *He* may have gone on.

MOTHER: The Dealer said ‘the city’ –

FATHER: But we cannot know where -

MOTHER: I made a promise, and here I am!

FATHER: But what if –

MOTHER: Enough!

FATHER: It is possible that –

MOTHER: I have not travelled this far on feet this painful with bags this heavy to think that I may not see him! My son...I just want to see my son!

SUDDENLY THE NOISES BEGIN AGAIN, SOMETHING IN THE MUSIC IS OF TONY’S SONG.

MOTHER: My son...!

A BELL TOLLS.

MOTHER AND FATHER LOOK UP

THE WHOLE SET IS NOW THE CLOCK IN WHICH TONY WILL SPEND THE REST OF HIS DAYS

TONY AND THE PUPPET GIRL ARE PART OF A CLOCK MECHANISM, THEY WALK IN THEIR STILTED WAY OUT ONSTAGE, AS THE CLOCK CHIMES.

MOTHER: It is Tony, it is Tony, it is his song; there beside him is the woman you made, and he is wooden too - he is wooden.

FATHER: You are dreaming – Tony is gone into the world. And we must go and seek him.

MOTHER: His song has gone into the world, but he is here – our boy.

FATHER: This is no boy – he is wooden – *he is wooden!*

MOTHER: The boy and the girl, you made them both.

FATHER: You said yourself that his song would work instead of his hands, and journey instead of his feet.

MOTHER: There is no comfort in that for anyone who loved him, I want my son, Tony who sat by the door and sang, or by the fire watching the wood smoulder – and now he is here.

FATHER: This is not our boy – we will find him... another year.

THE CLOCK FINISHES IT'S CHIMING - TONY AND THE GIRL BOW, KISS, BOW, TURN AND RETURN.

STORY: And ahead of the man and woman lay the long road and the weary miles that led back to their village and their home. From where they stood it seemed very small and very far off.

BLACKOUT