

# *ANGELS AT BAY*

Three Plays

by

**Owen Barfield**

Angels at Bay

I. The Wall

II. The Human Dynamo

III. The Paranoia Wing

By Owen Barfield

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Transcribed from papers in the Owen Barfield Archive at the Bodleian Library, Oxford,  
Shelfmark Dp. c. 1095— carbon copies of typescripts incorporating previous corrections.

Barfield Press  
Oxford, England

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# ***ANGELS AT BAY***

## **I.**

### ***THE WALL***

#### **Characters**

**A Doctor**

**Marjorie Mayne**

**Peter Mayne**

**Mr. Cousins**

*Marjorie's brother*

*A neighbour*

**Remiel**

**Shezef**

**Raquel**

**Kaüret**

**Ramaturel**

**Melaicharos**

**Tashkit**

*An Archangel*

*An Angel*

*An Angel*

*Angel of Henry Mayne, father of Marjorie and Peter*

*Angel of Gertrude, Henry's wife*

*Angel of Marjorie Mayne*

*Angel of Peter Mayne*

**Time:** *The present* [mid-20<sup>th</sup> century].

*Three months elapse between Scenes 1 and 2.*

## Scene 1

*(The living-room of a medium sized suburban house. On one side a few steps lead up to a door opening on an inner room. On the opposite side another door.)*

**Doctor** *(standing with his back to the audience in the open doorway of the inner room and speaking to someone within it)*

Nonsense my dear man! Before you know where you are, you'll be out in the garden. In a deck-chair to start with, you know. And you'd better be getting those golf-clubs cleaned up. Let's see, what's the handicap? Eh? Nonsense! You'll have your ups and downs of course. You must expect that. Well, I really must be getting along now. Good-bye for the present.

*(He comes out and closes the door behind him. As he does so, Marjorie enters from the opposite side).*

**Marjorie**

Well?

**Doctor** *(gravely)*

I'm glad you are here. I wanted to see you before I went. There's no point in upsetting your Mother unnecessarily.

*(She gives him a sudden enquiring look, in reply to which he shakes his head).*

**Marjorie**

Do you mean he can't possibly recover?

**Doctor**

I'm afraid not now, Miss Mayne. Actually I don't think it can last more than a few days.

**Marjorie**

Surely there must be *something* we can do! Another specialist—

**Doctor**

Honestly, it's useless.

**Marjorie**

Do you want *me* to tell Mother?

**Doctor**

I think it will be best.

**Marjorie**

Oh God! Doctor – does he know?

**Doctor** (*shocked*)

Good *lord*, no! *Never* tell a patient anything of that sort. What's the point?

**Marjorie**

Has he ever asked you?

**Doctor**

Whether they ask one or not, the only duty I recognize is to tell my patient what will do him the most good.

**Marjorie**

But you said—

**Doctor**

And when it's too late to do him lasting good, what will make him most comfortable in his mind.

**Marjorie** (*after a pause*)

You know best, Doctor.

**Doctor** (*after a further pause*)

Don't worry too much Miss Mayne. We shall have started keeping him under all the time, well before the end comes. He won't know where he is or what is happening to him.

**Marjorie**

Mercifully!

**Doctor**

Well, good-bye Miss Mayne. I'll be along tomorrow at the usual time. (*exit*)

**Marjorie** (*with one sob*)

Daddy! Daddy!

*(Enter Mr. Cousins)*

**Cousins**

I met the Doctor going out. Well, what's the news today?

**Marjorie**

Oh, Mr. Cousins!

*(She goes up to him and speaks a few words in a low voice).*

**Cousins**

Oh dear, oh dear! I *am* sorry! Poor chap! Shall I go in and see him as usual?

**Marjorie**

I think he'd like it. *(He goes towards the inner door).* Cheer him up, won't you?  
*(Stopping him as he is about to turn the handle).* You won't say anything to distress him?  
He doesn't know, you know!

**Cousins**

No, no of course not! Not for the world! Just the usual little chat about nothing in particular.

*(He goes in, shutting the door behind him. Marjorie goes to the other door and calls through it).*

**Marjorie**

Peter!

*(Enter Peter)*

**Peter**

How is he today?

**Marjorie**

Not so good, I'm afraid.

**Peter** *(He looks at her closely).*

I say, what's the Doctor said? *(She says something to him in a low voice).* Poor-old-boy!  
Mother upset?

**Marjorie**

I don't think she knows. I say, Peter, what shall we do about Mother?

**Peter**

Do?

**Marjorie**

About telling her – and afterwards.

**Peter**

Gosh, it'll nearly kill her. She's got nothing else.

**Marjorie**

*I'll* tell her – tomorrow probably.

**Peter**

We shall have to find ways of keeping her mind off it. The first bit after the funeral will be the worst. We must take her out of herself at all costs. Bridge – parties – anything.

**Marjorie**

*Funeral!* You know how he hated all humbug and ceremony.

**Peter**

Oh we just can't talk about that now. I don't really want a lot of humbug either. I mean when the house is empty.

*(Re-enter Mr. Cousins).*

**Marjorie**

Well?

**Cousins**

Well of course he is weaker – I don't think he wanted me to stay any longer. *(A pause)*  
Miss Mayne, are you sure he doesn't know anything? I began to wonder at one point.

**Marjorie**

Why? What did he say?

**Cousins**

It wasn't what he said. It seemed an effort for him to listen to what *I* was saying. And once or twice I noticed a sort of fixed look in his eyes that rather worried me.

**Marjorie**

You didn't say anything to –

**Cousins**

No, No, of course not. (*A pause*) Once or twice I had a queer feeling that he was rather hoping I *would* talk about it.

**Peter**

Talk about what?

**Cousins** (*uneasily*)

Well – the future.

**Marjorie**

You promise you never will, don't you?

**Cousins**

Of course.

**Peter**

Gosh! I know what you mean though. I've thought once or twice he was going to raise the subject. Made me sweat all over. What *can* one say?

**Marjorie**

What did you say?

**Peter**

Oh, we never actually *got* on to the subject. I managed to make him laugh. Took his mind off it, you know. And we started talking about something else altogether.

(*A pause*)

**Cousins**

Well, I'm afraid I'll have to be getting along. I'm awfully distressed –

(*A noise, between a cry and a moan, comes from the inner room. All look at each other for an instant and Marjorie flies to the door and goes in, leaving the door open. Marjorie's*



*voice and another are indistinctly audible through it. After a short time Marjorie re-appears at the door).*

**Peter**

What did he say?

**Marjorie**

I'm not sure. He mumbled in such a funny way. Seemed to be dreaming he was back at school and then kept asking why the light wasn't left on. *(Closing the door behind her)* Peter, ring up the Doctor and tell him to come back *at once*. He *promised!* I simply can't bear it. He *must* be got to sleep.

*(Curtain falls, as Peter turns to leave the room).*

*(Music)*



**Melaicharos**

Mayne's daughter! My name, Melaicharos;  
Hers, Marjorie. Hail, Master!

**Kaüret**

Oh, this cannot go on! –

**Raquel**

Be calm, Brother! We all know, we all feel, the same dismay.  
How I felt it, when I gathered my soul a year ago!  
For that cause we take care to meet here from time to time:  
For that cause we meet here today.

**Kaüret**

Oh yes, yes! I have heard Angels, heard numbers say the same –  
But, oh Raquel, I never dreamed death could be like this!

**Remiel**

We meet here to share news and shape policy, Kaüret:  
Despair strengthens, kept hidden – once uttered, it weakens will:  
The one speaking and the one hearing, both falter. I bid you cease.

**Kaüret** (*looking round him*)

I crave pardon. But oh, Brothers! . . . You all bid me not despair –  
Have *you* tried to reach souls that are drugged deep and bound to earth  
By vapid thinking, ever down sinking, stone deaf, as mine has been,  
To the pure Sound, and all drowned in the Light round the light of him?  
My poor soul, with his light growing dim!

**Remiel**

Be sure, Brother, we all know, we all weep. This very thing  
Is the stern task, to speak plain, that the times ask. Our Enemy  
From birth-moment to death-moment pours over the souls of men  
Earth-stunning sensation, swift emptiness of thought.  
Our main purpose in so meeting is soul-waking; our greatest need  
Is help coming from earth-dwelling, strong souls. We wait for this,  
But while waiting, we pool knowledge; and act also, where we can,  
With grace ministered, help tendered, deeds done – and all the time  
We plan battle for time still to come.  
Enough then! Begin conference! Tashkit, we call on you!

**Tashkit**

Alas, Brothers, I bring little. Thank God, the soul I guide  
Is a good soul, a soul truthful, not selfish, fairly kind,  
But no more.

**Shezef**

More's needed, much more, would we keep alive  
Man's spirit fast failing. The foe squats everywhere,  
His might spreading, his grip growing: Mansoul is occupied,  
Our own country! Semjaya, the cold-bringer, holds it down  
With his deft hordes, and we, helpless, watch!

**Tashkit**

I know, Brother, and all this, on the deep nights, I whisper while  
He lies sleeping, for heart-hearing, but still, so far, he has not heard.

**Kaüret**

Son-father! In life, friends! Is there no force to throw in here?  
No starved longings, with time turning slowly into ghostly love?

**Tashkrit**

Not yet, Brother. You ask early: have patience – look, with me  
At his will clouded by youth, happiness, hope springing of life to come:  
Hard battle with those burdens half-dreaming his spirit does!  
He loved fairly, as sons do – but think! Think of all the power  
Held over a faint lover by Them! I have nothing yet:  
In time, maybe – ten – twenty years later –

**Shezef**

Too late, too late!

**Raquel**

For the main purpose, I grant: still we must also keep in view  
The far goal.

**Kaüret**

My thanks, Brother!

**Remiel**

Proceed farther: Melaicharos,  
Can you tell any good news of help hoped from the sister soul?

**Melaicharos**

She hates death.

**Remiel**

They all do, the best even.

**Melaicharos**

I mean not that –  
Not her own death in a dim future – she shuns thinking of death at all.

**Kaüret**

She loved deeply: she lived much in him: how can she let him go  
without struggling?

**Melaicharos**

Without struggle? No, No!

**Kaüret**

Then sorrow makes  
Her soul's current set deeper and more strong. He needs that strength  
And I ask for it. Oh, pass it me!

**Melaicharos**

Ah, Brother, I did not say  
Her soul-current set deeper; truth rather says, it flows  
More shallowly.

**Kaüret**

How? Shallowly?

**Melaicharos**

Oh, Brother, the foe is strong!  
On some nights she came near to me – quite near – because of him.  
But day followed, dull custom and light shining on common things,  
And she slipped back, as I groped yearning, with love burning. The Enemy  
Is strong – terribly: whole lives are his grim prey: he has practised her,

Her life through to shun thinking of death! Shrinking back in fear,  
At each try she starts back from the thought, too, of the dead she loves,  
Calls morbid the death-dwelling thought: so his image sinks  
As if drowned in the roar round, in the bright senses' cataract  
Of rapid shock! Lost, lost is he! Deep longings unfulfilled,  
Held pure and faced fearlessly, turn slow to ghostly love,  
    But grief stifled grows little and cold.  
She is less lively, more trivial: light gratifications fill  
The void places of his dear face, use wholly her feeling now,  
My poor soul: the bed-comfort, food-pleasure, blazing-hearth,  
Skin's greeting to silk sheathing it, nerves' thanks to nicotine,  
And that daily, unceasing eye-pasture of printed page!  
For spirit-music – low chuckles of mind's brook meandering through  
The long novel-drugged fancy, death fearing, fails to rise!  
She sleeps well, but far, far from her own Angel – I long to help,  
    But find open no way to near her.

### **Remiel**

Try still! The hour ripens fast. . . let Ramaturel,  
The wife's Angel, join counsel – tell what of gifts he brings.

### **Ramaturel**

Of grief much: of love more: I bow daily before my Soul  
With awe – erring and short-sighted soul! None the less I bring  
In my hands truth and strength, lovely firm fruit of constancy,  
Tough-rinded and sweet-centred; by long years of married life  
Well-ripened – will's habit set, so she cannot help  
But seek selflessly his happiness, his good before her own  
At each moment –

### **Kaüret**

    But how comes it, this great good could be so near  
And no breath of it rise up –

### **Ramaturel**

    I have no power to pass it on!

### **Kaüret**

    Oh dire words! Why, brother?

**Ramaturel**

Will's habit is helpless here.

We can seek only a known thing: she knows nothing, nor seeks to know  
Of his need lately!

**Kaüret**

I fear greatly – feel grief approaching fast!

**Ramaturel**

Hurled back by a huge Wall, her thoughts wander about the past –  
Lamed mind that would fain find rest somewhere –

**Shezef**

I know, I know –

“He liked this; he used that; would have wished (if he were here today)” –  
I know well the dreams, memories, tears, photograph near the bed –  
And oh, never a thought, never a stray fancy for what he likes  
Or wants now, what he feels now, what he now wishes for, hopes and needs!  
I don't ask they should not grieve, or forget quickly the past: I know  
Too well, Brothers, the sweet intimacy that lights up with the to and fro  
Of the bright sense (thin fences, themselves linking the land they part)  
As hand-pressure and voice-timber flick signals from heart to heart.  
If they spared only one corner of the love-weighted thought they weave  
For us – us and their own dead – we could win worlds – you know we could.  
I ask pardon! I came near despairing.

**Remiel**

You speak truth.

*(A pause, during which he looks from one to the other).*

Can none tell of means found to breach that Wall?

*(A pause)*

**Kaüret**

No help? Ah!

**Shezef**

Record, Raquel: Again failure!

**Remiel**

I think not so

To feel helpless is great grief: we are helpless, I grant it, now,  
Till times change and men melt in the Warmth coming. But even so  
Not all wasted our deeds fall. It is our winter. Underground  
The frost grips, and the seed sleeps, but the seed softens as the spirit awakes,  
In the first place our love-union lends strengths to our Brothers here  
To bear woe without weakening: next, all must understand  
That at each meeting our main purpose for time being – reconnaissance –  
Is borne farther. We learn more. Semjaya's secret ways  
Become known. We spy out his main strength and – do not doubt –  
His worst weakness. Have patience! For oh, Brothers, underground  
Our own strength is fast growing – fast growing! This time will come,  
And come soon, to wield all we now gather of truth and will –  
To resist openly – wage active war!

*(A pause)*

So let us seal our union, as before.

**Kaüret**

I will be patient. Make me one of you!

**Remiel**

Now cast we all our burdens in the lap  
Of those Intelligences high, for whom  
Our failures are success, and all our jars  
Are harmony: Dominions, Virtues, Powers,  
And those high Lords of Wisdom, Will, and Love  
Who fill us and we them. And now not less  
We meekly bow our heads to those below  
Through whom we rise, remembering thankfully  
That Man, who labours through his cold and dark,  
Labours for us too, who are filled with light  
And move always in music – in such sort  
That joy is mingled with our fiercest pain.

*(Each Angel places one hand on the shoulder of the Angel next to him and with the others clasps the hand of the one opposite to him).*

**All**

Members one of another  
Filled with the Spheres above,



We bind us, brother to brother,  
To lift Mansoul in Love.

*(Music, while the Angels move, passing in and out of one another, about the stage and eventually return to their places. Towards the close of this movement the music fades, and they recite) –*

**All**

Winged with the Will of God,  
I will carry His making Word  
To Man building a body  
For my Lover and Lord.

*(All the Angels kneel round the rock. Remiel turns his back and raises both his arms).*

**Remiel:**

*Quoniam apud Te est fons vitae.*

*(Light shines down from above on the surface of the rock).*

**All**

*Et in lumine Tuo videbunt lucem!*

**CURTAIN**

## ***ANGELS AT BAY***

### **II.**

#### ***THE HUMAN DYNAMO***

##### **Characters**

<b>Ernest Pratt</b>	<i>Office junior on the staff of The Sunday Universe</i>
<b>Miss Hopton</b>	<i>Private secretary to Sir Charles Ritson</i>
<b>Sir Charles Ritson</b>	<i>Governing Director and effective proprietor of The Sunday Universe, Ltd.</i>
<b>Robert Noakes</b>	<i>Manager of the Football Pools Department of The Sunday Universe</i>
<b>Remiel</b>	<i>An Archangel</i>
<b>Shezef</b>	<i>An Angel</i>
<b>Raquel</b>	<i>An Angel</i>
<b>Armaros</b>	<i>Angel of Sir Charles Ritson</i>
<b>Anpiel</b>	<i>Angel of Robert Noakes</i>
<b>Khif</b>	<i>Angel of Ernest Pratt</i>
<b>Chemalion</b>	<i>Angel of an un-named assiduous reader of The Sunday Universe</i>
<b>Serakel</b>	<i>One of the Angels of the coniferous trees</i>

**Time:** *The present [mid-20<sup>th</sup> century].*

*The times occupied by Scene 1 and 2 are approximately simultaneous, but the end of Scene 2 occurs slightly before the end of Scene 1.*

## Scene 1

*(Scene: A very well-appointed room in the offices of The Sunday Universe. Ernest is dusting and polishing the inkstand and other objects on the large mahogany writing-desk.)*

*(Enter Miss Hopton with papers under her arm.)*

**Miss Hopton**

Hurry up and finish! I want to put these papers down.

**Ernest**

Wattime's the Big Noise coming in?

**Miss Hopton**

Don't be cheeky! Sir Charles may be here any minute now. *(Putting down the papers and looking through them.)* Oh, dear, I wish he'd come to the office *regularly* instead of popping in on us unexpectedly like this!

**Ernest** *(watching her)*

Storm expected! *(She does not answer.)* Old Danvers said outside there was going to be hell all over the office this morning. The Great White Chief's browned off 'cos the circulation hasn't gone up again.

**Miss Hopton**

What are you writing there? and put down Sir Charles's umbrella at once.

**Ernest**

Gar! it's only 'is spare one. I was only making a note where he got it.

**Miss Hopton**

Why?

**Ernest**

Because he know what's what.

**Miss Hopton**

Thinking of buying one like it?

**Ernest**

Not just yet.

**Miss Hopton**

Oh, I know! You see yourself turning into a Sir Charles yourself some day!

**Ernest** (*embarrassed*)

Well, what's wrong with starting right and having a go?

**Miss Hopton**

That's all right, Ernie, there's nothing like ambition. By the way, do you know what the circulation of the *Universe* was when Sir Charles bought it three years ago?

**Ernest**

No.

**Miss Hopton**

300,000. Do you know what it was last week?

**Ernest**

Yes. Same as the week before. 4,000,000 certified. I say, Miss Hopton, who's the bloke that does the certifying, and how much does he get for it?

**Miss Hopton**

Mm! I wonder if you've got the remotest idea that Sir Charles is probably the keenest brain and the finest all-around man in England. You're aiming high enough, young man!

**Ernest** (*singing*)

"I worship the ground you *tread* on. . ."

**Miss Hopton** (*sharply*)

That's enough now! If you've finished you can go.

*(Exit Ernest and, after a final look round, Miss Hopton.)*

*(Enter Sir Charles Ritson. He goes straight to the desk and turns over the papers left by Miss Hopton, then rings a bell, takes off his hat and begins taking off his coat. Enter Miss Hopton.)*

**Miss Hopton**

Good morning, Sir Charles!

**Sir Charles** *(hanging up his coat and returning to his desk)*

Good morning, Miss Hopton, I asked you to have ready on my desk the Costings Analyses, Costings Graphs, Copy Analyses, and Circulation Graphs. The Costings Analyses and Graphs and the Circulation Graphs are here, but not the Copy Analyses. Bring them, please!

**Miss Hopton**

Yes, Sir Charles. I'm very sorry.

**Sir Charles**

I want them quickly please. *(Exit Miss Hopton.)*

*(Sir Charles spreads some of the papers out on the desk. Re-enter Miss Hopton with further papers, which she hands to him. She stands waiting with her notebook open.)*

**Sir Charles**

Thank you, I'll ring. *(Exit Miss Hopton.)*

*(Sir Charles continues examining the papers for a time, then he presses a button, which starts a faint whirring noise in the microphone on his desk. Speaking into the microphone):*

Is that Sports? Give me Mr. Anderson. *(The amplifier attached to the microphone says something indistinguishable.)* Why is he out? Give me the Assistant Dog-Racing Editor! *(noise from the amplifier as before)* I want two more columns on Dogs next week. I'm telling Make-up. Right. That's all! *(He presses the button again, with similar results.)*  
I want Mr. Noakes.

*(Enter Mr. Noakes.)*

**Noakes**

Good morning, Sir!

**Sir Charles**

Oh, Noakes, what staff have we got on Pools now?

**Noakes**

Fifty-one Sir, counting myself.

**Sir Charles**

How many outgoing letters to readers last week?

**Noakes**

Well, I should say –

**Sir Charles**

Don't you know?

**Noakes**

Between ninety and a hundred, Sir.

**Sir Charles**

If I give you ten more clerks and two more columns, can you raise it to seven hundred and fifty in three weeks?

**Noakes**

I can try, Sir Charles.

**Sir Charles**

Very good. That's settled. I'll tell Make-up. (*Exit Mr. Noakes.*)

(*Sir Charles rings the bell. Enter Miss Hopton.*)

Miss Hopton, I want *Maison Chic* – the Advertising Manager – no – get me the Sales Manager, he's got more ginger.

**Miss Hopton**

Yes, Sir Charles. (*Exit*)

(*Sir Charles returns to the desk and the papers. The telephone bell rings.*)

**Sir Charles** (*into the telephone*)

This is the *Sunday Universe*. Ritson Speaking. I want to screw up my advertisements appeal. . . Yes. . . I think we can help each other. Are you prepared to let me see a batch of your drawings, whether accepted or not? . . . Yes. . . I'm going to pick out my own and offer you two-thirds rate for four consecutive insertions. . . this afternoon. . . as many as you like. . . yes, both kinds. . . whatever the *usual* proportions are – no, wait – say 10% off over-and on under-clothes. . . that may be, but *you* want them to sell clothes, *I* want them to sell newspapers. . . Very likely, but it's not only the women I'm thinking of. . . Yes, I know! That's just why I'm offering the 33 & 1/3 % reduction. You can take it or leave it, you know. . . what? Right, right, right. Good man! Good-bye! (*He replaces the receiver and rings the bell. Enter Miss Hopton.*) Miss Hopton, bring me that letter from Atlantic Seaboard Estates.

**Miss Hopton** (*proudly*)

I've got it here, Sir Charles.

**Sir Charles**

Well done! (*taking the letter*) Get on to their London Manager in two minutes' time, will you – not before. The  *Holding Company*, you know! (*Exit Miss Hopton. Sir Charles reads the letter, drumming his fingers as he does so. The telephone rings – into the telephone*): London Manager? Good morning. Your letter. You're asking half a million too much. Thanks! I know just how badly I want those shares and just how much I'm willing to pay. . . That's not the point! I don't want them for investment. I simply want the controlling interest. . . No. I can't possibly do with less than 500 square miles. You say the trees replace themselves in 25 years – by the way, I've still got to check up on that – Ritson Mills say they're buying 2,000 tons of pulp – say 15,000 trees – for each edition – that's at the present circulation level. Don't be pigheaded, man! Half a million off. . . What? Hey, wait a minute! What about talking it over at lunch? Can you meet me at my Club in 20 minutes' time? . . . *The Feudal*, St. James's. . . Right, right. Good-bye. (*replacing the receiver*): Blast the man! (*He rings the bell. Enter Miss Hopton.*) Miss Hopton, what's the name of the man who does religion?

**Miss Hopton**

Mr. Nailsworth, Sir Charles.

**Sir Charles**

Make a note, I want to see him on his cross-headings. Dull. Better have the Sub-editor in with him. No, not this morning. Next time I'm here.

**Miss Hopton**

When will that be, Sir Charles?

**Sir Charles**

How do I know? I'm off now. (*She gets his coat and begins helping him on with it.*) Thanks! And tell Make-up he's got to find two extra columns for Dog-racing and three for Football Pools. There'll be an extra page. Additional Ads for the rest of the space. He'll hear from Ads about that. (*He moves towards the door.*)

**Miss Hopton** (*calling after him*)

Good morning, Sir Charles.

*(Exit Sir Charles. Miss Hopton crosses to the window and opens it, letting in the noise of the traffic. Enter Ernest, crosses to the window and stands beside her.)*

**Miss Hopton**

Hulloa! What have *you* come back for?

**Ernest**

I like to watch him getting into his 400 hp Super Super.

**Miss Hopton**

It's absurd, the Police not letting it wait on this side of the road for the short time he's here! There he goes, striding across the road with his big head down as usual – full of his creative plans! *(screaming)* Oh! *(She turns away from the window through which there is heard a smashing, tearing noise, followed by shouting and what sounds like wild abuse.)* He walked right under it.

**Ernest** *(still looking out of window)*

Gor!

**Miss Hopton**

What's happened? Oh, where is he?

**Ernest**

Just getting into the Super Super. *(turning from the window)* Gor! Did you see that? Walks slap in front of an oncoming car – and if a 'bus going the other way doesn't skid out and stop it just as it's going to get him! I believe he hardly knows anything's happened. Some people have the luck! Gor!

*(Curtain)*

*(Music)*



## Scene 2

*(The curtain rises again, disclosing a scene suggesting an irregular plateau surrounded by rocks with waterfalls visible in the distance through clouds. The whole, including the foreground, is enveloped in a light mist. In the centre a large, low rock, roughly rectangular in shape, makes a sort of natural table with its end towards the audience. On either side of the table, facing each other, stand Shezef and Raquel; at the head, farthest from the audience and facing it, Remiel.)*

### Remiel

The fresh-flowing love springs in my breast, Angels: we greet again,  
As it floods back from your faces –

### Raquel

I love, Master!

### Shezef

I burn, I burn!  
Let us pass swiftly to hand-clasping and name-speaking –

### Remiel

Impart them, then,  
The new Angels, who become members!

*(Enter, ceremonially, Armaros, Anpiel, Khif, Chemalion, and Serakel.)*

### Shezef

Let each utter his own name and the time-name of the Soul he guides!

*(Shezef, Raquel, and Armaros clasp hands.)*

### Armaros

My name Armaros: Charles Ritson's Soul's guardian, servant, guide.

*(Shezef, Raquel, and Anpiel clasp hands.)*

### Anpiel

My name Anpiel: my Soul I name duly Robert Noakes.

*(Shezef, Raquel, and Khif clasp hands.)*

**Khif**

I am called Khif: and guard Ernest Pratt's Soul.

*(Shezef, Raquel, and Chemalion clasp hands.)*

**Chemalion**

Chemalion

Stands here, not himself only but oh, numberless angels, more,  
Whose souls suffer as mine suffers! Soon, Brothers, you will hear  
Their word sounding in my word.

*(Shezef, Raquel, and Serakel clasp hands.)*

**Raquel** *(to Serakel)*

And thou, Brother?

**Serakel**

Serakel!

I, too, am not I only: Aspected in me behold  
Angels of the cone-bearing trees spread over all the Earth.

**Remiel**

We greet all of you. So, Serakel, speak!

**Serakel**

Once there was a time,  
When *we* uttered the Word, sent the sap thrilling through the trees  
With our thinking and ours only: wild woodland flourished free  
With the rain slanting, the light shining, the birds chanting through their leaves.  
As the wind blows, the sap rose in them. All that is changing now!  
Those vast columns, man-planted, where the sun sets beyond Atlantis,  
Are ghosts torn from us.

**Raquel**

How torn? They *live*; therefore the procreant Word  
Informs each of them.

**Serakel**

Ah, Raquel, today, partly, the procreant Word  
Is man-syllabled: Man's planning, man's calculating thought

Of vat, pulping-machine, paper-mill, works – renders the life of trees  
A life lifeless, a sad substance that sends nothing back to earth.

**Raquel**

Can this be?

**Remiel**

He speaks truth.

**Shezef**

Is man ware of it?

**Remiel**

Hardly, yet.

Two thousand years ago Earth suddenly found herself;  
The Word working in wild Nature became flesh – became his own.  
From that moment our influence fades slowly from land and sea,  
And man, wielding the Word, knows it not.

**Raquel**

We grudge not his great glory.

**Serakel**

His great danger – he knows it not!

Wise angels, Word-wielders themselves formerly, watched him grasp  
With will tainted his proud prize, the fresh power to work on Nature:  
Witchcraft he found first – and then Science, snatched from sense –  
Adroit intellect, guessing for gain.

**Remiel**

Your word, Serakel, bites deep. We are moved much. . . Chemalion?

**Chemalion**

I fear chiefly Semjaya's campaign of mental clamour:  
With old strategy made modern he blots out from human life  
All silences, each fruitful pause, whereby *we* of old  
Gained entry to still souls, and grew downward, until at last  
We looked out of their eyes onto their Earth.

**Shezef**

What has brought home to you this danger?

**Chemalion**

One day, in all their seven,  
Is my Soul a dream-dreamer, a thought-thinker – freed from work  
To grow quietly: Ask Armaros! He knows how it spends the time  
Pinned down by long columns of vapid print to a flickering brain,  
Gorged fat on the news paper, the news paper all day long!  
My poor Soul! What can *I* do?

**Shezef**

Alone, nothing: together, much,  
When we all join and attack shrewdly.

**Armaros**

Attack whom?

**Shezef**

Semjaya's hosts.

**Remiel**

At the right hour!

**Shezef**

Not his broad front! We must choose heedfully focal points  
At his base, mark them and make plans – And then. . . forward into battle!

**Remiel**

Shezef! O Shezef! You are all fire! Steady your flame!  
Let us hear Anpiel!

**Anpiel**

My Soul is a bond-slave in a harder way  
To the news paper; a mild Soul, whose heart dwelleth far removed  
From his task: daily his bright fancy floats gaily among the flowers  
Of the small garden he keeps tidy and clean.  
Rich humus he feels like to his own blood alive within  
His dear body – feels dimly the seeds work in the winter months  
Deep under the dark soil, as he looks forward to next spring.

But O Remiel, O Master, I know well that the souls of men  
Are shaped, not by their own choices, their own passions and thoughts alone.

If it *were* so, my work surely were light!

But I know, too, that the lost stream of the unremembered repeated acts  
Is poured into the life-substance – deep under and out of those  
His life gathers its time-shape – the wrong shape – the solid thing  
That one day he will look back and see sadly that he has made!  
One day – from this world – he must gaze backward and see himself,  
His leal service, his hale strength, and the long tale of his labour-days

Used only to make monkeys of men!

This *I* know. It is my burden. But O me! what I say is true  
Not of mine only – alas, how many souls like it we seem to see  
In the place. . . place. . . but my word falters. . . we *souls!* . . . in the part of Earth. . .  
Am I right, Raquel? I crave help – do we all feel – is it taking shape  
Ever less vaguely in our knowing today?

### **Remiel**

Dark forces of Semjaya, above, binding souls to earth,  
Are pin-pointed below. Well for our war! Shezef prophesied.  
We seek sharply an earth-focus. Where Brothers?

### **Raquel**

Armaros,

Reply! Remiel, ask Armaros!

### **Remiel** (*raising his hand in checking gesture*)

First, Khif, we shall hear your word.

### **Khif**

The limbs growing. . . the boy's body. . . the soul opening like a bud  
To Earth-influence, man's influence, sights, sounds and the world of thought. . .  
Men's faces and girls' graces. . . brief wonder, before it died,  
As he breathed into his up-growing the soul-hollowing Prince of Air,  
As he breathed, over his world droning, Semjaya, the Prince of Air. . .  
He is caught now, where work's dignity, full force of creative thought  
Are all aimed to increase emptiness!

How recently he and I –

He running and I round him – see! there! on the way to school!  
The smooth, innocent face – voice of a boy seeming from far away,  
The long, wondering thoughts, fluttering high, seeking in vain for me –

Shot – dragged to the ground – turned into mean greeds. . .

*(He drops his head and rests it on his hand in a gesture of grief.)*

**Raquel**

O Khif, mercy should steel courage! Shall yours only weaken will?  
Look up! Lean on us all! Numberless Hosts, Ministers of Grace,  
Await eager the hour even now! We – are – not – alone.

**Remiel**

And above, far, where the sight falters, Cherubim and Seraphim  
Conspire, subtler than Semjaya himself, warping his anger-deed  
To serve, mocking its own plan, the Throne fanned by their tireless wings.

**Khif**

I find strength in your love, Brothers – but O Master, I burn! What aid  
Can we bring *now* to our Souls caught in a knot? *(A pause)* Answer!

**Remiel**

Armaros!

*(A pause. All turn to Armaros.)*

**Armaros**

You all turned to me, all burned at me, then, too, with eager eyes,  
When Shezef, with his fire, spoke of ‘attack’, hinted at ‘focal points’  
In the Base. Wherefore, I Pray? What can I do?

**Shezef**

Angel! . . . Cut the knot!

**Armaros** *(after a puase)*

You know well I may shoot only at one mark – you know my task  
Is the well-being of my Soul!

**Remiel**

It is true. Ponder, Armaros,  
On its now need! Have you seen dimly the dark gulf that yawns before?  
Have you thought well where the work lies?

**Armaros**

I have tried often so to think,  
But failed ever to find. I despair, Brothers. I need your aid.  
Be near – love me and oh, counsel me!

**Remiel**

Tell truly what you see,  
When you peer deep in his heart, Guardian!

**Armaros**

Wheels, Master, whirring wheels  
Smooth, unctuous, dead, frightening. . . swift, swifter. . . and O my Soul!  
As the years pass, they are self-moved, are impulsed by a will  
Till the door closes in this face, and I seek entry again in vain!

**Raquel**

What drives onward the wheels, Armaros?

**Armaros**

Sights, sounds, and the empty thoughts  
That are twined round them – the brain dancing without ceasing!  
A tale I heard  
Of a poor queen who was kept dancing – swift, swifter – in scorching shoes. . .

**Shezef**

Your own words – not ours, Armaros! Say, how shall the whirring cease  
And the queen rest, till the sights darken, the sounds fade, and the brain. . .

**Remiel**

Alas!  
It is less simple! A time comes, when the swift spinning drops the need  
For the crude thrust from the blood's lust and the nerves' impetus. Souls at death,  
From the weight freed, ascend smoothly – not *here*! Rising unpurified,  
They slip deftly to Semjaya's realm, minded to work his will.

**Shezef** (*to Armaros*)

The time, Angel, is short – maybe is past – graver the burden, then  
On you, surely!

**Armaros** (*who has been plunged deep in thought*)

You speak truly. *(to Remiel)*  
I ask leave to recall my Soul.

**Remiel**

The sealed hour! I feel power from Above fill me to grant it. Go!

*(Exit Armaros: a general murmur of approval, which Remiel checks with raised hand.)*

**Remiel**

It is less simple. Be high hoppers, but strong bearers!

Armaros,

We doubt nothing, will act fealty. But oh, Angels, have you forgot  
What was here spoken – their unbroken strength, our precarious hold?  
With leave granted from Gods higher, on grounds past our gree to know,  
They may act also – Semjaya's hosts – instant to cross our aim!  
I warn only. . . we bless Armaros. . . wait patiently. . . Come  
And let us seal our union as before!

*(A pause, while the angels group themselves.)*

Now cast we all our burdens in the lap  
Of those Intelligences high, for whom  
Our failures are success, and all our jars  
Are harmony: Dominions, Virtues, Powers,  
And those high Lords of Wisdom, Will and Love,  
Who fill us and we them. And now not less  
We meekly bow our heads to those below  
Through whom we rise, remembering thankfully  
That Man, who labours through his cold and dark,  
Labours for us too, who are filled with light  
And move always in music –

*(Re-enter Armaros. All turn to him with gestures of eager enquiry, but he opens his arms in a gesture of emptiness and shakes his head with downcast looks. He takes his place among them.)*

**Remiel** *(continuing)*

in such sort

That joy is mingled with our fiercest pain.



*(Each angel places one hand on the shoulder of the angel next to him and with the other clasps the hand of the one opposite to him.)*

**All**

Members one of another  
Filled with the Spheres above,  
We bind us, brother to brother,  
To lift Mansoul in Love.

*(Music, while the Angels move, passing in and out of one another, about the stage and eventually return to their places. Towards the close of this movement the music fades, and they recite) –*

**All**

Winged with the Will of God,  
I will carry His making Word  
To Man building a body  
For my Lover and Lord.

*(All the Angels kneel round the rock; Remiel turns his back and raises both his arms).*

**Remiel:**

*Quoniam apud Te est fons vitae.*

*(Light shines down from above on the surface of the rock).*

**All**

*Et in lumine Tuo videbunt lucem!*

**CURTAIN**

## ***ANGELS AT BAY***

### **III.**

#### ***THE PARANOIA WING***

##### **Characters**

<b>Professor Paul Tallis</b>	<i>A Doctor of Science</i>
<b>Dr. Hugh Sedlescombe</b>	<i>A Doctor of Medicine</i>
<b>Homer Nasmith</b>	<i>An American Citizen</i>
<b>Derek Hooson</b>	<i>An Industrialist</i>
<b>Maxim Streeter</b>	<i>A Press and Television Tycoon</i>
<b>Joan Holdsworth</b>	<i>A Welfare Worker</i>
<b>Sebastian Minch</b>	<i>A Civil Servant</i>
<b>Tom Green</b>	<i>A Trade Union Leader</i>
<b>Remiel</b>	<i>An Archangel</i>
<b>Shezef</b>	<i>An Angel</i>
<b>Raquel</b>	<i>An Angel</i>

**Time:** *Early in the Twenty-first Century.*

*(A Drawing-room. All the male characters are seated round the room in armchairs, except Streeter who is in a heavy upright chair behind a small table, which has a telephone on it.)*

**Tallis**

Yes, but that is the whole difficulty. It is because so many of them are *not* obviously lunatics that this lodge was founded.

**Sedlescombe**

They are very far from lunatics – apart from this one fixed idea, and all that follows from it. That’s why we never argue with them, if it can possibly be avoided.

**Nasmith**

But surely we must answer reason with some show of reason?

**Tallis**

Oh, if you start treating reason as anything more than a tool of science – a means to further experiment – it may land you anywhere.

**Nasmith**

Yes, but –

**Hooson**

If you are bothered by sympathy, Homer, you can always resign, you know. The oath doesn’t bind you to take any *action* with us.

**Streeter**

That’s the only point. We are essentially an executive, not a debating unit. We are not concerned to persuade. Our aim is practical: to protect the fundamental sanity on which the Western way of life is based.

**Nasmith**

Very well.

**Streeter**

Very well. We happen to be a little more far-sighted than most people. And we are all agreed that this new disease should be tackled quickly, before it has time to spread. We want to scotch it in its infancy. Right?

**Nasmith**

I don’t dispute that.

**Streeter**

Then for God's sake let's proceed to business. The next item is Dr. Sedlescombe's Report on the treatment of necro-neurosis.

**Nasmith**

Necro-neurosis?

**Streeter**

Weren't you at the last Meeting, Homer?

**Nasmith**

No, Mr. Chairman. I haven't been at the last three Meetings. I was way back in Massachusetts.

**Streeter**

Oh, that's *always* the difficulty with us – and we daren't circulate minutes – or even take them! But damn it, man – we've only just this moment been talking about a "fixed idea" and a "new disease". What did you *think* we were referring to?

**Nasmith**

I thought you meant the main delusion – that thought is substantial; that there is a so-called spiritual world, which is the source of the physical one; and that they have some kind of mental access to it.

**Streeter** (*testily*)

You'd call that *new*, would you?

**Hooson**

Mr. Chairman, I do not think our brother is being quite as obtuse as your tone suggests. He has not had the opportunity of hearing the preliminary Report on the growth of necro-neurosis; and, after all, what he has described *was* the threat we were originally founded to meet.

**Nasmith**

Thank you, Derek. I certainly wouldn't want us to waste our time discussing whether or not that threat can properly be described as "new" – which is a relative term anyway. In my Country what they called Transcendentalism began giving some trouble nearly two centuries ago. But they kept it vague in those days. Yes, sir. And the wise guys who took it up tended to retire from the world and become recluses. But the way their successors *participate* – poke their noses into practical affairs –

undermine public confidence in the proper philosophy of science – isn't *that* new? If not, why is it that this lodge has only been in existence for ten years?

**Tallis**

I should be inclined to date it back myself to the time when Homoeopathy first became respectable.

**Sedlescombe**

Is it respectable?

**Tallis**

In the sense that it is taken seriously by a substantial number of educated people – yes.

**Streeter**

All right. Order please. I'm sorry, Homer. I was very anxious to get on. (*looking round*) Do you feel we must go briefly over the ground covered in our last Meetings for Nasmith's benefit?

**Sedlescombe**

I think it may be unnecessary. I believe I can make my Report in a form which will have almost the same effect.

**Streeter**

Good.

**Sedlescombe**

If you agree, then, I will begin by calling in the patient.

**Minch**

The patient?

**Sedlescombe**

The latest admission to my hospital – or at least to the Wing we are all interested in. This time I wanted the brethren to hear what she has to say before the treatment begins. Then, if they see her again later, they can form their own idea of the value of what we are doing.

**Streeter**

Very well. (*looking round*) Is it agreed that we ask Dr. Sedlescombe to proceed in the way he suggests? (*General assent is indicated. Sedlescombe walks to the door, opens it and calls through.*) Bring Miss Holdsworth in!

(*She enters with an Attendant, and as she does so, the light dies very, very slightly.*)

**Sedlescombe**

Good evening, Joan. Sit down, will you. (*She remains standing.*) I'm sure you won't mind answering a few questions these gentlemen and I would like to put to you? (*He pauses for a reply, which is not forthcoming.*) First of all, I would like to be sure we have got our history right. You are Joan Holdsworth, the daughter of John and Marjorie Holdsworth? And I think your mother's name was Mayne?

**Joan**

What right have you got to question me?

**Tallis**

Oh none! None at all. You are quite free –

**Joan**

*Free!*

**Tallis**

Free to answer or not, as you please.

**Sedlescombe**

But haven't we gone into all that? I thought, last time, you told me you had decided, after a great deal of reflection, to co-operate – at least with information.

**Joan** (*very slowly*)

You are right. I did say so. But you have all the cards. . . at present. . . one has to be careful. (*sits down*) Very well. Yes. You are quite right about my parents.

**Sedlescombe**

I thought so. *We* have to be careful too, you know. At all events we try to be. I believe your mother had a rather unusual experience – as a younger woman – before you were born?

**Joan**

Well?

**Sedlescombe**

Before she married your father, in fact. She was not a religious woman, but some years after the death of her own father, whose loss she had felt very bitterly, she became convinced of his survival. Did she ever speak of this to you?

**Joan**

Of course.

**Sedlescombe**

And say that she was in communication with him?

**Green**

Nothing so very unusual about that. Was she a medium? Or did she employ one?

**Joan**

There was nothing of that sort.

**Sedlescombe**

So you told me.

**Tallis**

You mean there was nothing phenomenal? Nothing, as I expect you would put it, through the senses? Thoughts came into her mind, which she was convinced were sent by him?

**Joan**

I see no objection to anything that has been said so far.

**Sedlescombe**

Your mother died about three years ago? (*Joan nods.*) Would you like to tell us anything of what followed? . . . Shall I tell *you* something then? Far more than was the case between herself and your grandfather, she communicates with you. . .

**Joan**

I should have to know what you mean by ‘communicate’.

**Sedlescombe**

I don’t want to put words into your mouth. How would you like me to put it – she “inspires you from the spiritual world”?

**Nasmith**

On a point of order, Mr. Chairman, I fail to see what is to be gained by prying into people's family secrets in this way.

**Streeter**

What do you say, Doctor?

**Sedlescombe**

I don't think it can be called 'prying' where the object is therapeutic. However, the family connection is not the point. It merely happened to be the case here. I won't pursue it farther. Miss Holdsworth, you have conversed with the other patients in the Paranoia Wing. How many of them have the benefit of experiences similar to you own?

**Joan**

Nearly all of them.

**Sedlescombe**

Mostly with deceased relatives?

**Joan**

Oh no. With people they have been connected with in other ways.

**Sedlescombe**

Adherents, for instance, of the same line of thought?

**Joan**

Why do you beat about the bush? I'm quite sure you know very well that nearly everyone kept in the Wing has been actively engaged, in one walk of life or another, or in their spare time, in the pursuit of spiritual science.

**Sedlescombe**

So that it is mainly those who were similarly engaged, and who have lately died, who are the communicators – the inspirers?

**Joan**

Before I answer any more questions, I want to make my position clear, please. I protest with my whole being against the illegal detention of myself and the others there. This is a nightmare. It's unbelievable. You get us, by all manner of tricks,



into the Paranoia Wing of your Mental Hospital; you keep us incommunicado for weeks or months on end; you override or ignore all legislative safeguards for patients, as you call us. How long do you say it can go on? I demand a statutory visit from someone at the Ministry of Health. Unless you intend to murder me, you will have to free me sooner or later. And I warn you I shall publish everything.

**Sedlescombe**

Aren't you forgetting your resolution to co-operate? You will be free soon – and free to publish – if you still want to. And who will believe you? Accusations of that kind are a very common symptom of persecution-mania, you know – as common as, let us say, wild talk about being murdered.

**Joan**

Why are we never visited under the Mental Health Act? Do you intend to give false evidence of visits that never took place?

**Sedlescombe**

Don't be impertinent!

**Streeter**

And don't make a fool of yourself trying to frighten us. You forget the wide discretion in matters of this sort vested in the Joint Committee of the Ministry of Science and the Ministry of Health. It may interest you to know that one of us here is the Convener of that Committee.

**Joan**

Yes; and it may interest the Ritson Press to have a full account of this very interview – even from a certified paranoiac. There will be things about it that will ring true, I fancy.

**Streeter**

Young woman, I *am* the Ritson Press.

**Sedlescombe**

Why won't you make up your mind to help us, instead of striking these attitudes? You see, there really is no hope –

**Joan**

No hope!

*(The light dims a little further. Against the back of the stage the outlines of the landscape of Scene 2 of "The Wall" and Scene 2 of "The Human Dynamo" become faintly visible.)*

**Joan** *(more calmly)*

There may be two opinions about that. *(to the Chairman)* May I ask you a question now? Two questions?

**Streeter**

Oh certainly.

**Joan**

First, are you really so certain that you are all right and we are all wrong? You are afraid of any slackening of confidence in – in – in the narrow mess of tampering and prurient curiosity which *you* think is all that 'science' can ever mean: are you sure it deserves all that confidence?

**Sedlescombe**

Come, come!

**Joan**

One example only, then, from all I could give: what success is your kind – your straight-waistcoated science having with the treatment of cancer? How long has the fabulously expensive research been going on? A century and a half? When I was a child, one in six were still dying of it. Now it is one in five.

**Sedlescombe**

And the second question?

**Joan** *(to Streeter)*

What are you aiming at? Why are you keeping us?

**Sedlescombe**

Purely for the purposes of beneficent observation. That is, as long as you remain reasonably co-operative. We regard that, as I think you know, as the most reliable test of mental health. There was the case of Arthur Cornwall. . . but we should only resort again to remedial injections –

**Joan**

O God, not that!

**Sedlescombe**

I hope it will be unnecessary. (*looking hard at her*) I think it will. But of course it will depend a good deal on what *you* think. . . . Well, thank you for helping us in this way. I don't think we need trouble you any farther at the moment. And Joan – cheer up! Believe me, in a few months' time all this will seem like a bad dream – and a fantastic one at that. Meanwhile if there is anything I can do to make the way straighter for you, do let me know. Good-bye!

**Joan**

You haven't heard what I have to say yet. It is this: It may be that your real purpose is to make away with us –

**Sedlescombe** (*to the others, in a lowered but clearly audible voice*)

Note the characteristic obsession with assassination!

**Joan**

I have ceased trying to understand how it came about that you are able to do as you like with human beings, who I thought were supposed, in this country, to be protected by law. (*Streeter makes signs to Sedlescombe who rises and presses a bellpush.*) But if we *are* killed – whether by design or accident – we shall only help to make stronger those who remain. If it is we who are right, and not you (*the Attendant enters and places a hand on her shoulder*), that follows – doesn't it?

**All** (*genially, as she goes with the Attendant to the door*)

Thank you! Thank you! Good evening! Thank you!

**Joan** (*from the door, intensely*)

Doesn't it?

**Minch**

She seems to know what she is talking about.

**Green**

There was a sort of underlying confidence. . . I say, isn't there some danger in detaining her against her will?

**Nasmith**

In my country her people would be suing out a Writ of *Habeas Corpus* by now.

**Tallis**

Oh yes, we have had that once or twice. But we're a bit better organised over here, Homer. English judges have to accept the evidence of experts, you know. Our standard form of Affidavit was settled by Counsel, and we find –

**Green**

But suppose the judge insisted on seeing her, Professor, and asking his own awkward questions?

**Tallis**

It has already happened before now. They soon get drawn into talking confidently about imponderables. And if there's one thing the Court hates, it's imponderables.

**Minch**

Besides, when a Ministerial discretion has been exercised, the Court cannot go behind the scenes and enquire into the *grounds* on which it was exercised. That was settled long ago.

**Streeter**

You had better proceed with your Report, Hugh.

**Sedlescombe**

It concerns the results we are having with the new drug I mentioned last time.

**Tallis**

Palinkenophrenomide?

**Sedlescombe**

Yes.

**Nasmith**

If I know anything of that young woman, she won't take it!

**Sedlescombe**

She won't know she is taking it. In the few selected cases where we have been trying it out, they took it in their food. To begin with, that is. But it is quite colourless and tasteless and we have since found it more convenient to exhibit in the patient's drinking-water. The results, up to date, are striking – not to say phenomenal.

**Streeter**

Can you tell us in what way?

**Sedlescombe**

I can do rather better than that. I can show you. In the case of. . . (*He consults some notes.*) Oh yes, Alexander Reid, if you had had him before you two months ago, he would have shown exactly the same attitude as Joan Holdsworth did just now – only perhaps a little more aggressively. Indeed, he is one of a small group who specifically claim to remember a previous incarnation during the twentieth century. By the way, we have found an obstinate belief in reincarnation a very common consequence – or accompaniment – of necro-neurosis. I arranged for a tape-recording of the Chaplain's last talk with him.

**Nasmith**

Chaplain?

**Sedlescombe**

Yes, yes. The hospital Chaplain's been most helpful.

**Streeter**

The Church – or at any rate the right part of it – is as concerned as we are about all this.

**Sedlescombe**

What I propose, Mr. Chairman, if you agree, is to play back to you – not of course the whole conversation, but just a minute or two from it.

**Streeter**

I think we should all be most interested.

**Sedlescombe** (*as he walks over to the recording instrument*)

I have marked the place where it gets most relevant. (*He turns a switch and waits while the drums revolve.*) Ah – now! (*He turns a second switch.*)

**1st Voice** (*from the tape*)

Then you don't feel you were mistaken? I thought just now you said you did.

**2nd Voice**

Not mistaken exactly – no. That is just what's so embarrassing. You know how you feel when you suddenly remember an obviously fatuous remark you once let drop in

company? When I remember the sort of things I used to say, they strike me as absolutely meaningless. Almost as if I had never learnt how to use the English language – or any other for that matter.

**1st Voice**

And what your friends have to say about it?

**2nd Voice**

Oh, it's no use talking to them. They are stuck far too well and truly in the old rut. Mind you, I can sympathise with them, because I have been through it myself. It's as if one hadn't been really awake before. One's mind was sluggish. *Now*, when anyone speaks to me, the answers come into my mind almost as soon as they have started talking. I even *see* things in sharper outlines – though, strangely enough, colours are *not* so bright as they used to be.

**1st Voice**

And what about that business of reincarnation? You *were* mistaken about that, I suppose?

**2nd Voice**

Well, no, Sir. I would hardly say 'mistaken'. It's too dignified a word. I don't feel now that I ever got as far as that. There must first be a thing to be mistaken about. Reincarnation, if it meant anything, would mean repeated incarnation; but incarnation is not a thing. It is just a word. How could anyone ever *suppose* it meant anything? What size is it? Where is it kept when not in use? How do you paraphrase it? Something like "a not-body becoming a body", I suppose! Honestly!

**1st Voice**

You are going rather too fast for me. Let us leave incarnation alone and stick to reincarnation. You say – (*Sedlescombe switches off and returns to his chair.*)

**Hooson**

Hum! I don't quite see how even Palinkenophrenomide could produce all that!

**Sedlescombe**

Oh well, of course there are books and lectures to help. But its effect *is* undoubtedly complex. It both numbs the source of phantasy, and thus obliterates the conations – the imaginary experiences, that are at the root of the trouble, *and* at the same time greatly accelerates the patient's cerebral mobility. . .

Mr. Chairmain, I think that really completes my Report – if you will accept it in that rather unusual form.

**Streeter**

Thank you, Doctor. We certainly do accept it and we are most grateful.

**Nasmith**

I'd like to associate myself with that sentiment. May I speak to the Report Mr. Chairman?

**Streeter**

Certainlly.

**Nasmith**

Well, Gentlemen, I guess we are all crystal-clear about one thing: where Palinkenophrenomide can be applied, we are in a position to deal effectively, not only with this necro-neurosis, but also with the more epidemic bug of philosophical Immaterialism – which, as you know, I am much more concerned with, due to its wider implications. But I have these two observations to make: Firstly, I would feel very much easier in my mind if the highly successful experiment of which we have just heard had been carried out with the knowledge and consent of the patient.

**Tallis**

You'd never get their consent.

**Nasmith**

That may well be a fact. The question still remains, what is the right conclusion to draw from the fact. My second observation is, that in any case and with or without consent, the area over which it will be possible to make use of Palinkenophrenomide must in the nature of things remain a strictly limited one. We are still left sitting with the major problem; and I would like to know if any progress has been made with it during my unfortunately absence from the country, or if any brother has brought with him today a fresh contribution towards its solution.

**Streeter**

Thank you. And that really brings us to the principal item in this evening's agenda. There *is* a proposal, and it is one which I intend to move from the chair. It is a serious one. But then the situation we have to meet is serious. Gentlemen, I don't need to remind you that it is our habit to look a long way below the surface and a long way beyond our noses. It is true that nothing spectacular or sensational has yet come out

of what I might perhaps call the ‘camp’ of the Immaterialists; but each of us here has his ear laid to the ground in a different realm of the body politic and we know, and we are all agreed, that beneath the surface Immaterialism *is* growing and spreading very rapidly.

**Nasmith**

Yes sir! We certainly have to take the lead out of our pants.

**Streeter**

There is not time to lose. It is against this background, and let me add after prolonged and very careful consultation not only with Tom and Sebastian as to the probable reactions of operative personnel (whom of course we shall select very carefully), but also with Hugh and Paul as to any risk, however slight, of incidental, physically harmful effects on our people. . . it is against this background that I bring forward my proposal. Well, Gentlemen, (*stirring uneasily in his chair*) you heard Hugh telling us just now that Palinkenophrenomide is most conveniently administered in the patient’s drinking-water. What he did not mention was the very small, the almost infinitesimal quantity of the drug which is required to produce its effect. . . also that it can be regarded to some extent as a purifying agent.

Gentlemen! (*He pauses, and as he does so, the background again becomes faintly visible.*) Brothers! I have made certain investigations and I find that in the Central Authority which is responsible for the purity of this country’s water supply the one or two personalities who count are not unsympathetic with our aims. My proposal is, therefore. . . and of course any action we took would to begin with be regarded as experimental and would be limited to a comparatively small area. Only later, and depending on results, should we expect to cover the whole country. . . my proposal is –

**Nasmith**

Stop!

**Streeter**

Really, Mr. Nasmith! I should have thought – (*The rest is drowned in murmurs of “order, order!” from round the room.*)

**Nasmith**

This is a point of order, Sir. It touches the issue whether you – or any man – are entitled to say what we have reason to believe you were about to say right now. Brothers, I speak to you in all humility and I believe you will forgive me. My country is younger than yours. We have many faults and much crudity. But we do still regard ourselves as appointed guardians of human liberty. Gentlemen, our



ultimate aim here is a noble and benevolent one and I'm not saying we should keep those kid gloves on while we scramble for it. But there is a point at which any conviction that the end justifies the means breaks down. At least there is a point for me. And that point is right here. For any such interference with fundamental human freedom on the scale you are suggesting fills me with unspeakable horror and detestation. I will have nothing to do with it. Not one little bit. I move therefore that we pass to the next item on the agenda.

**Streeter**

Your motion is not accepted.

*(Murmurs of "Hear, hear!" while against the background a single figure, Remiel's, is dimly seen to enter and move to the centre of the stage, where it remains motionless.)*

**Streeter**

The proposal I am now putting to you, Gentlemen, is a simple but far-reaching one. It is –

**Nasmith** *(rising from his seat and raising his arms, with the hand turned palm forward)*

Pardon me! Not to me, I'm afraid. You will please count me out from now on. If my motion is not to be even put to the meeting, I tender my resignation as from this moment.

**Streeter**

I accept it with regret. And I remind you of the oath of secrecy you took when you joined us.

**Nasmith**

I shall consider carefully where my obligation lies. *(He looks round.)* Is no-one coming my way? Very well. I wish you a very good night, gentlemen. *(Exit)*

**Green**

I confess this makes me very uneasy.

**Streeter**

I do not think we need fear an indiscretion. Think how he himself would be compromised – if he was believed!

**Green**

He might decide to face that.

**Hooson**

Would you?

**Green** (*uncomfortably*)

Well, no. I suppose not.

**Streeter**

For the third time, then: I wish formally to propose that we take all steps to adopt the drug Palinkenophrenomide for general application and, with that object, that we – (*the telephone bell rings – into the instrument*): Yes. But he can't possibly speak now. He is in the middle of an important conference. . . oh very well, if you put it that way. (*to Sedlescombe*): For you, Doctor, and it seems to be urgent.

(*Sedlescombe crosses to the table and picks up the instrument*).

**Sedlescombe** (*into the telephone*)

The *what?* The horizontal crane! But it's enormous – you mean the great openwork steel arm – it *couldn't* collapse . . . *overturned!* Well, and what damage – my God! my God! my God! Yes. I shall come straight away of course. Good-bye. (*replaces the receiver*) I . . . hardly know. . . where I am. It was the Hospital. The Paranoia Wing. The big crane that was working on the new addition – fallen and crushed in the roof of the old building. . . they're digging, but they doubt if there will be any survivors. I can't. . . excuse me!

(*He dashes out. The rest look at each other in silence. Against the background two figures, Shezef and Raquel, are seen to enter from opposite sides and approach the central figure, where they remain motionless.*)

**Minch**

But this is appalling!

**Streeter**

It will take some thinking out.

**Green**

It's ghastly! It's horrifying! There must be some –

**Streeter**

And what will the consequences be for our work? Headline news. . . public enquiry. . .

**Tallis**

It's not that kind of consequence I'm thinking of – when I can get my mind off those poor devils enough to think of anything. It may well be the beginning of the end.

**Streeter**

What do you mean by that, Professor? It's bad enough without us losing our heads into the bargain.

**Tallis**

But think, man, think! First of all, there's the shot in the arm that martyrdom always gives to any struggling minority. But that's not all. We don't know yet what Homer is going to do; how the horror of it is going to affect him; what he may be led to say – just at this moment, with everyone's attention focused on the Wing! And even *that* is only the beginning, as I see it. Don't you remember what the Holdsworth girl said. . . “by design or accident”? Can't you feel already how each one of the dead patients will form a new centre – a nexus, a nucleus, a sort of ganglion of necro-neurosis to link up all their friends and supporters everywhere? Oh, it will take time. It will take time. But this moment may well mark the end of the world as we know it, as we have made it, and the beginning of a new dark age!

**Streeter**

Semjaya, help!

**Green**

*What did you say, Streeter?*

**Streeter**

Eh? I wasn't aware that I had said anything. Listen: We are all badly shaken, badly disconcerted. One thing is clear. We *must* have time to think, before we decide anything. Personally I must sleep on it before I can hope to talk any sense. Look! Can you all meet here the first thing tomorrow morning? Say at nine-o'clock? Good. Paul, I rely on you to tell Hugh Sedlescombe and have him here.

*(They turn and go out. While they are doing so, the curtain begins to close, but stops when it has masked the chairs and table, leaving only the background, or part of it, visible. At the same time the light fades from the foreground and brightens on the background, where Remiel is standing behind the rock-table with Shezef and Raquel a little in front of it, one either side, facing inward.)*

**Remiel**

Shezef, the hour you prophesied – the hour  
You pointed to, exhorting us – is here.  
Momently, in this region, the tall Wall  
Crushes, between the living and the dead.  
Across our threshold passings to and fro  
Grow common. Therefore they that are assigned,  
Beings angels, to be escorts of mansoul,  
Take now no part in this Solemnity.  
Half of the mystery of their energy  
They must forego,  
The bliss of inspiration giving way  
For a time to sole expression: they must act  
Unceasingly, we celebrate alone.

We celebrate alone, not for ourselves:  
We act in them, they worship and receive  
In us: we lay their deeds upon this altar,  
They take, through us, His Spirit. Oh, be brief –  
They need Him now!

*(Shezef and Raquel make ceremonial obeisance to one another.)*

**Raquel**

Members one of another  
Filled with the Spheres above –

**Shezef**

We bind us brother to brother  
To lift Mansoul in Love.

*(Music, while Shezef and Raquel again make ceremonial obeisance, first to one another, then to Remiel, who makes the like obeisance to each of them in turn.)*

**Shezef & Raquel**

Winged with the Will of God,  
I will carry His making Word  
To Man building a body  
For my Lover and Lord.

*(Shezef and Raquel kneel. Remiel turns his back and raises both his arms.)*

**Remiel**

*Quoniam apud Te est fons vitae.*

*(Fresh light shines down from above on the surface of the rock.)*

**All**

*Et in lumine Tuo videbunt lucem!*

**CURTAIN**