

Do Not Go Gentle

*An Opera on the Last Days of Dylan
Thomas*

Music by Robert Manno
Libretto by Gwynne Edwards



Credit: Rollie McKenna 1953

LIBRETTO

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An Opera on the Last Days of Dylan Thomas

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**New York City Opera – VOX 2008 VIDEO INTRODUCTION:
<http://www.nycopera.com/calendar/view.aspx?id=13017>**

Why Dylan Thomas and Caitlin Thomas as the subjects of an opera?

The answer is very simple. Dylan and Caitlin Thomas' documented life together is replete with all the necessary ingredients for great theatre: Poetry, Love, Comedy, Sex, Infidelity, Jealousy, Violence, and Death; to name just a few.

Dylan Thomas' short, tragic life with his wife Caitlin Thomas was supremely “operatic” in every respect, and it has been thoroughly documented in many biographies and through many eyewitness accounts.

The actual scenes from their life together require no additional dramatization or embellishment. Their story is tailor made for the stage and for a very strong musical treatment.

By today's standards, both Dylan and Caitlin would likely be considered “alcoholics”.

This coupled with their many extra-marital affairs and indifference to monetary concerns led to many violent scenes and outrageous behaviour, especially on the part of Caitlin, a wild, untamed provocateur.

Dylan Thomas was an extraordinarily gentle man with no sense of malice, a childlike presence who needed to be mothered, pampered and spoiled.

He never owned a car and could not deal with monetary affairs.

He had an extraordinary comic sense and loved the company of ordinary people, especially if there was drink at hand.

He was one of the foremost poets of the 20th Century, and his incredible poetry is full of music and song. To have heard him read his own poetry and prose, as well as the poetry of others, was an unforgettable experience. He truly sang the words and revelled in the love of the sound of words. Fortunately there are many recordings of Thomas reading.

There is so much extraordinarily stage-worthy material in these two lives that it became more a question of what to leave out rather than what to put into the dramatization.

The choice has been made to limit the time period to 1953, which is the last year of Thomas' life. Many of the scenes in the opera (all taken from real life), which might have occurred a few years earlier, have been telescoped into this one period. Much of the actual dialogue has been taken from letters, writings and eyewitness accounts found in various biographies. The story has been told in large part through Dylan and Caitlin's own words.

The opera has a Short Prologue, 2 Long Acts and a Short Epilogue.

Act One takes place in Laugharne, a beautiful, quaint sea-coast village in Southwest Wales where Thomas lived for most of his adult life.

Act Two takes place in New York City, on board ship to Wales and ending in Laugharne.

Do Not Go Gentle

Cast of 19 (32 Roles with 9 taking 2 roles, and 2 taking 3 roles)

Main Characters (4):

Dylan Thomas, baritone, age 39, poet

Caitlin Macnamara Thomas, soprano, age 40, wife of Dylan

John Malcolm Brinnin, tenor age 38, Dylan's American agent

Elizabeth ("Liz") Reitell, mezzo-soprano age 35, Brinnin's assistant and Dylan's mistress

Supporting Cast (28 characters but with many doubles):

Llewellyn Thomas, boy soprano age 13, Dylan and Caitlin's son

Aeronwy Thomas, soprano age 10, Dylan and Caitlin's daughter

Bronwyn, soprano age 10, friend of Aeronwy

Billy, boy soprano age 10, friend of Aeronwy

Phil Richards, tenor, age 38, drinking friend of Dylan (doubles Gilbertson)

Howard Dark, bass, age 35, friend of Dylan and Caitlin's lover (doubles Feltenstein)

Richard Hughes, baritone, age 53, writer, friend of Dylan (doubles Arthur Miller & Ship's Captain)

Ebbie Williams, tenor, age 50, proprietor of Brown's Hotel (doubles Chaplin & McVeigh)

Ivy Williams, soprano, age 50, proprietor of Brown's Hotel (doubles Oona Chaplin)

Rollie McKenna, soprano, age 34 (doubles Pearl Kazin)

Charlie Chaplin, tenor, age 64 (doubles Ebbie Williams)

Oona Chaplin, soprano, age 40 (doubles Ivy Williams)

Shelley Winters, mezzo-soprano, age 31 (doubles Rose Slivka)

Marilyn Monroe, soprano, age 27

Arthur Miller, baritone, age 38 (doubles Richard Hughes/Ship's Captain)

Pearl Kazin, soprano, Dylan's former mistress, age 35 (doubles Rollie McKenna)

William (A Servant) spoken role (doubles Sailor #1)

Joe DiMaggio, spoken role age 39 (doubles Sailor #2)

John Berryman, baritone, age 39 poet (doubles Ship's Bartender)

Rose Slivka, mezzo-soprano, wife of David (doubles Shelley Winters)

Dr. Milton Feltenstein, bass, age 48, Dylan's personal physician (doubles Howard Dark)

Dr. William McVeigh, tenor, age 28, Resident at St. Vincent's Hospital (doubles Ebbie & Chaplin)

Dr. Frank Gilbertson, tenor, age 29, Resident at St. Vincent's Hospital (doubles Phil Richards)

Dr. William Guitierrez- Mahoney, baritone, age 50, Head Physician, St. Vincent's Hospital

Ship's Captain, bass-baritone, age 45 (doubles Arthur Miller/Richard Hughes)

Ship's Bartender, baritone (doubles John Berryman)

2 Sailors, spoken roles, aged in mid-twenties (double William and DiMaggio)

Additional Small Parts (7) 2 singing, 5 mute (Cast from Chorus and Supernumeraries):

Greta Garbo, mezzo-soprano age 48 (cast from chorus)

David Slivka, baritone, age 39 sculptor and Dylan's friend (cast from chorus)

Marlene Dietrich, mute role, age 52
Lotte Lenya, mute role, age 55
Katherine Hepburn, mute role, age 46
E. E. Cummings, mute role, age 59
Colm Thomas, mute role, age 4, Dylan and Caitlin's son

Chorus SATB (16 singers):

Patrons of Browns Hotel, Audience at Poetry Reading, Chaplin Party Guests

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Running Time: Act One: 68 min. Intermission: 30 min. Act Two: 72 min. Total: 2 hours 50 min.

Synopsis

Orchestral Prelude (approx. 7 minutes)

PROLOGUE: Darkened Stage, No Scenery (circa 1993) (6 minutes)

Caitlin as an old woman in Italy remembering her life with Dylan.

Based on Caitlin Thomas' "Leftover Life to Kill" and "Caitlin" (with George Tremlett).

ACT ONE:

Scene 1: The Estuary at Laugharne. Late Summer 1953 (12 minutes)

(Dylan's Writing Shed is upstage right, Cliff Walk is upstage mid-stage, the Shore is downstage and the Boathouse (2 or 3 levels) is Up-Stage Left).

a. Scene opens with children playing outside shed as Dylan is inside intoning various lines of poetry and the children mimic his incantations. Caitlin is gathering fish at the shore.

b. The children run from the shed to the Boathouse and down to the shore-line playing around the hole in the Cliff wall. Dylan intoning while Caitlin and the children banter back and forth.

c. Scene shifts to the Boathouse, wild family scene with frantic children and some conflict between Dylan and Caitlin.

Scene ends with all playing happily, joyous ending but still with an undercurrent of conflict between Dylan and Caitlin.

Scene 2: Brown's Hotel in Laugharne that same evening (15 minutes)

A raucous and bawdy scene with Dylan holding forth with the clientele at the pub. Much banter with the pub mates and off-colour remarks by Dylan who is already quite soused. Caitlin enters and quickly consumes too much drink while she ridicules Dylan's buffoonery and flirts mercilessly with some of the men. This leads to a violent encounter with Dylan in front of everyone.

Scene 3: Cliff Walk on the Way to the Boathouse (10 minutes)

Dylan heads home with Phil Richards, Howard Dark and Richard Hughes singing Welsh tunes but then Caitlin appears and breaks up the camaraderie. Richard and Phil exit as Dylan falls asleep on the ground. Caitlin and Howard engage in a sexual encounter by the wall of Cliff Walk as Dylan sleeps soundly. Then they both begin to carry Dylan to the Boathouse.

Orchestral Interlude (3 minutes)

Scene 4: The Boathouse the next day (15 minutes)

Dylan, Caitlin and the children are around the breakfast table as Brinnin enters, initially the scene is calm enough but then Caitlin becomes more and more agitated and abusive as Dylan and Brinnin plan yet another gruelling reading tour to the U.S. Act One ends with the photographer Rollie McKenna taking a posed family photograph outside the Boathouse.

Intermission (30 minutes)

ACT TWO: October-November 1953 New York City

Scene 1: Backstage and Onstage at the YMHA Auditorium, New York (15 minutes)

a. Brinnin and Reitell trying to sober up Dylan backstage before his poetry reading
b. Dylan reading on stage in front of an audience including “An Irreverent Introduction”...”O blimey....etc.” (Based on the Recording by Thomas) much comic back and forth with audience prior to the actual poetry reading. The scene ends seriously with Dylan “reading” one of his poems, which becomes: “Dylan's Aria”, a full-blown setting of Thomas’ “In my craft or sullen art.”

Scene 2: Party Afterwards: Charlie Chaplin’s “Westchester Estate” (15 minutes)

A comic scene (with tragic overtones) at Chaplin’s “Westchester Estate” in New York with all the glitterati of the day in attendance, including many women admirers. Along with Dylan, both Pearl Kazin and Liz Reitell are there as well as Brinnin, Arthur Miller, Charlie and Oona Chaplin, Shelley Winters, Marilyn Monroe, Joe DiMaggio, Greta Garbo, Lotte Lenya, Katherine Hepburn, E. E. Cummings. (Based on various party scenes as described by Brinnin, Tremlett, Shelley Winters et al, including the one at Charlie Chaplin’s home in Los Angeles).

Scene 3: White Horse Tavern, Greenwich Village the Next Afternoon (9 minutes)

Dylan, Brinnin, Liz, Dave and Rose Slivka, John Berryman and patrons. Dylan is depressed, debauched, bitterly comic and quite ill. He tries to offer drinks to the entire bar but is dissuaded by Slivka. Disgusted by his behaviour, each of his friends leaves.

Scene 4: Dylan’s Room at the Chelsea Hotel that Same Evening (8 minutes)

Liz has returned to the room without Dylan and is sobbing as Dylan enters thoroughly inebriated and quickly becomes violently ill and delusional. Liz calls Feltenstein who arrives shortly and administers various shots. (The scene as described by Brinnin and Tremlett). Immediately after Feltenstein leaves, Dylan goes into a coma and Liz calls down the hall to intercept Feltenstein. He returns to the room and phones St. Vincent’s Hospital for an ambulance.

Scene 5: St. Vincent’s Hospital the Next Day

(as described in many accounts, especially Tremlett) (13 min.)

a. Dylan (comatose), Liz, Brinnin, Feltenstein, Berryman, Dave Slivka, Drs. McVeigh, Gilbertson, Mahoney. The doctors debate the cause of Dylan’s condition (see Tremlett’s account) with Feltenstein, McVeigh, Gilbertson and Mahoney in violent disagreement.
b. Caitlin enters thoroughly inebriated and has a violent “mad” scene (as described in Brinnin and Tremlett’s accounts). After Caitlin is taken away strapped to a wheelchair, Dylan gasps his last breath.

Scene 6: A Few Days later On Board Ship to Wales (2 Levels Deck and Hold) (8 min.)

On deck, Caitlin demands a single cabin and becomes abusive. The captain has her thrown into the

hold because of bad behaviour. There she finds a group of sailor's playing cards on top of Dylan's coffin. The sailors, followed by Caitlin carry the coffin to....

Epilogue: Dylan's Funeral Procession: St. Martin's Church, Laugharne, Wales (4 min).

A pantomime re-enactment of Dylan's Funeral with the sea in the distance.

Caitlin soliloquizes on her life with Dylan.

PROLOGUE 1993

Caitlin as an old woman, living out her life in Italy.

Darkened Stage with Italy Sea Coast Background

CAITLIN: In those long ago days...those mad...wrongly romanticized, unpardonable days, we wanted to get ourselves noticed at any cost, to show off like crazies, to gain attention. So we used shock tactics.

We knew only too well that it is much easier to get oneself noticed in a bad light.

You see, it was necessary to give people a legend....

Ours was not so much a love story proper, it was more a story of drink....

For without the first aid of drink it could never have got onto its rocking feet.

The first time we met was in a pub –the Wheatsheaf in London.

I was sitting on a stool, Dylan was standing nearby entertaining people with a story.

And then, quite suddenly, I can't explain it – his head is in my lap,

And he's telling me that he loves m...And, Oh he was so irresistible,

So sweet and innocent....and I? I was a wild Irish rose, taken with the Romantic idea of marrying a penniless poet! My God! I had some half-baked Ideas then! We thought it would last forever. But in the end, our life together Became little more than raw, red, bleeding meat....a torment of mutual infidelity.

And then, when I least expected it, he died, so far away from me.

So far, so far from Laugharne, so far...far from our

Lazy, little black magical bedlam by the sea.

Forty years have passed since then...

Scene fades into the Estuary at Laugharne

ACT ONE SCENE 1

Laugharne, Late Summer 1953

- (a) Upstage Right and Center: On the Cliff Path, outside the shed, Dylan's workplace. Dylan is inside, declaiming the lines of a poem. Three children enter and stop outside the shed. Two are local children, a boy and a girl. The third is Aeronwy, Dylan and Caitlin's second child. They are all aged about ten.**

BILLY: Let's go to the beach. We can go for a swim.

BRON: I can't. I haven't brought my bathing costume.

BILLY: Never mind. I won't look. Are you coming, Aeronwy?

AERONWY: Yes. I'll be like my mother. She just doesn't wear one.

BILLY: Oh, I've seen her. She wasn't wearing anything!

BRON: So where were you when you saw her, Billy?

BILLY: In the rocks, minding my own business.

BRON: Come on, Billy. Pull the other one! You're a no good boyo, you are!

BILLY: No I'm not! I'm a little innocent.

Dylan's voice, booming inside the shed.

DYLAN: 'In my craft or sullen art,
Exercised in the still night when only the moon rages....'

BILLY: Listen, Aeronwy. Your father's shouting.

AERONWY: Don't be silly, Billy!

Bronwyn bursts out laughing.

BILLY: What's so funny? There's nothing to laugh about.

BRON: Oh, yes there is. She told you not to be so silly, Billy.

But you can't help it, 'cus that is what you are – a silly Billy!

DYLAN: 'And the lovers lie abed,
With all their griefs in their arms...'

BRON: What's he doing, Aeronwy? My Dad doesn't do that.

AERONWY: He's writing a poem.

BRON: Like 'Jack and Jill went up the hill'?

AERONWY: Yes, but much more grown up.

BILLY: But why's he shouting? My Mam and Dad only shout at each other.

AERONWY: Oh, mine do that as well. I'll be glad when school starts again.

BILLY: Oh, I shan't. What teacher have you got?

AERONWY: I don't know yet. I'm going away to school.

BRON: Oh, where to?

AERONWY: Mother says it's called the Arts Educational School, in England.
(“God Save the Queen” musical quote)

BILLY (nose in the air): Oh, that sounds posh!

BRON: So why are you going there?

AERONWY: She wants me to learn to dance, like her.

BRON: Oh, I wish I could go there too!

Bronwyn does a little dance.

BILLY: You'd look more stupid than ever!

BRON: Who's stupid? You look stupid! As well as silly!

And you can't dance!

BILLY: So you're stupid too!

BRON: No I'm not!

BILLY: Yes you are!

BRON: Stupid and silly!

They grapple with each other as girls and boys of their age do.

DYLAN: (writing) "I labour, I labour..." **suddenly shouting** You children!

Stop making such a racket! Go and play somewhere else!

Billy and Bronwyn stop squabbling.

AERONWY: Come on, we'd better go!

BILLY: Before he comes after us!

BRONWEN: He's very angry.

BILLY: It's your fault!

BRONWEN: No it's not!

AERONWY: Let's go down to the beach.

BRON: There'll be no reciting poems there.

BILLY: Last one there's a stupid donkey!

BRON: Makes no difference if you're stupid anyway!

They run off screaming.

(b) Downstage: The shoreline. The light comes up on Caitlin who has

Placed four or five fish on the sand. Dylan's voice can still be heard.

DYLAN: '...Not for ambition or bread,
or the strut and trade of charms on the ivory stages...'

CAITLIN: For God's sake, stop that meaningless rubbish, those empty words.

She picks up a small fish and looks at it.

CAITLIN: Lot's of women think that he's a catch. I did so myself once.

She throws the fish away.

Not now! Not any longer! I've had enough, of him, of

Laugharne...of everything. What am I but a nursemaid and
A servant, waiting hand and foot on three ungrateful,

Complaining children...and him...more useless and ungrateful.

But worst of all, unfaithful...in London, America, and

God knows where...a gaggle of whores lying at his feet

Adoringly, listening to his endless booming!

I thought I'd pay him back...infidelity repaid with infidelity!

But in the end so pointless... a grope in the dark, the smell of

Cigarettes and beer! All of it as empty as this endless stretch of sand!

DYLAN: '.... But for the common wages of their most secret heart....'

The children rush onto the beach and play around the hole

In the cliff wall. They begin to chase each other.

BILLY: You can't catch me!

BRON: Yes I can. You're as slow as a snail.

BILLY: And strong as an ox. I can pick you up.

He grabs her, tries to pick her up.

BRON: No, don't!

BILLY: Alright! Then here's a kiss!

He kisses her.

BRON (screaming): Nooooo!

She runs away. He chases her.

AERON: Silly Billy, silly Bronwyn, Oh, so silly!

CAITLIN (watching them): So young and innocent!

**She begins to perform a few, slow dance movements,
Recapturing her past but somewhat awkwardly.**

AERONWY: Mother, you look silly too!

CAITLIN: I couldn't care less. It's what I used to do.
It's what you'll learn to do at school.

AERONWY: But I don't want to. I want to learn to cook.

CAITLIN: And be tied to the kitchen sink, as I am now?
Dance will make you free as air, free as a bird in flight.

DYLAN: 'Not for the proud man apart,
From the raging moon I write....'

AERONWY: You know, mother, you and father are very strange people.
Everyone says so. **(Caitlin pauses, shrugs)**

Billy and Bronwyn re-enter.

BILLY: Aeronwy, look what I've got!

**From behind his back, he produces a crab. He moves
towards the girls.**

BILLY: Look at its claws! It'll pinch your bum!

Bronwyn produces a crab from behind her back.

BRON: Look, Billy! I've got one too. It'll grab your willy!

She advances towards him, he runs away.

Caitlin continues to dance.

In the background the children stop and imitate her movements.

Dylan walks from the shed to the Boathouse, still booming.

DYLAN: 'Nor for the towering dead,
With their nightingales and psalms...'

CAITLIN (imitating him mockingly):

‘With their nightingales and psalms.....

(Calling out) Aeronwy! Time to go home!

Caitlin leaves. Aeronwy follows her. Billy and Bronwyn run off.

(c) Upstage Left: Living-room of the Boathouse. Dylan has Just returned from the shed. He is exhausted after Struggling with the new poem. He picks up a newspaper, Puts his feet up on the table. Enter Caitlin and Aeronwy.

CAITLIN: Dylan, feet!

Dylan goes on reading.

CAITLIN: We don’t really fancy feet! Not when we’ve got the

Cake I’ve made. Aeronwy, fill the kettle.

Dylan removes his feet. Caitlin places a tablecloth on the Table, cuts the cake into slices.

CAITLIN (calling out): Llewelyn! Tea-time!

AERONWY (tasting the cake): Ugggh! **(Rushing to the sink)**

It tastes like sawdust!

CAITLIN: Well, there’s nothing else. I’ve no money to go to the shop.

Not when your father spends it all on horses, beer, cards...

and other women! **(Calling out again)**

Llewelyn! Tea-time! What are we supposed to live on?

Have you seen the cupboard? Mother Hubbard’s bears no comparison.

DYLAN: Not to worry, my Cat! Money will soon be coming in. The advance on ‘Adventures in the Skin Trade’ Four publishers fighting for ‘Milk Wood’

And I'll be writing the opera with Stravinsky!

Dylan does a little dance.

We'll be rich and as fat as walruses!

Dylan comically pirouettes and falls to the floor.

CAITLIN: Oh, that will be the day! We are living on air.

Tradesmen on my back; Llewellyn almost thrown

Out of school because you didn't pay!

Enter Llewellyn, now thirteen years old.

LLEWELYN: If you like, I won't go back. I hate it anyway. I'd rather

Live with granny, or stay here with my tribesmen.

AERONWY: Why don't you go to Africa?

Better than pictures on the bedroom wall!

LLEWELYN: You only want my bedroom! But you can't have it. It's mine!

AERONWY: I don't see why you should have your own room.

LLEWELYN: Because I'm older.

AERONWY: That's no reason.

CAITLIN: Both of you, stop it!

AERONWY: He started it.

LLEWELYN: No I didn't.

AERONWY: Yes you did.

(The sound of Colm crying in another room).

CAITLIN: Look what you've done! Do I have to live in a madhouse?

Caitlin goes out to see to Colm. Llewellyn helps himself to some cake, takes a bite, rushes to the sink.

DYLAN: I ask myself the same question. But here I am, with

My odious warm slippers, observing my equally odious
Brood, basking in the vituperations of my golden,
Loathing wife. I have become as domestic as my slippers!

Enter Caitlin with Colm.

CAITLIN: But not as domestic as a housewife, nanny, carer, cook,
Nose-wiper, arse-wiper and remover of the tops of
Boiled eggs for people who are incapable of doing it.
When the children are back in school,
I shall go to Elba and take Colm with me.

DYLAN: Do you mean you are going into exile, a second Napoleon?

CAITLIN: What's good for the goose!
You go to America for flattery, idleness and infidelity.
I shall go to Elba for sea and sunshine. (O Sole Mio musical quote)

DYLAN: And a room at the inn?

CAITLIN: Don't be ridiculous! Giovanni was a perfect gentleman.
He was being polite, as Italians are.

DYLAN: Polite – synonymous with smarmy, smiley, slippery,
Smoothing the way into his bed.

CAITLIN: I'm sure you won't be alone. Your Margaret Taylor
Can come around and bring you sweets into your bathtub!

DYLAN: I don't really fancy a cold rice-pudding!

Caitlin quite irritated moves upstage looking

Disapprovingly at Dylan and the children.

LLEWELYN: Father, this is really boring.

AERONWY: Yes, let's play a game!

DYLAN: Alright, Why not? Shall we play charades?

AERONWY: That's much too hard.

DYLAN: Then what about draughts?

LLEWELYN: That's just too easy.

DYLAN: Then Snakes and Ladders?

AERONWY: Yes, yes, Snakes and Ladders.

LLEWELYN: Where is it?

DYLAN: (playfully) In the cupboard?

AERONWY: No.

Dylan runs around and starts chasing the children as they laugh.

DYLAN: Under the settee?

LLEWELYN: No!

DYLAN: In the drawer?

AERONWY: No, it's not there!

DYLAN: Then there's nothing for it. A game of cards!

Dylan throws a deck of cards into the air as they all laugh.

Caitlin is not amused.

SCENE 2

The bar of Brown's Hotel, Laugharne, the same evening. Ivy and Ebbie Williams,

Howard Dark and Phil Richards are waiting for Dylan to make his nightly appearance.

HOWARD DARK: So where's Dylan? He's late tonight.

EBBIE WILLIAMS: Maybe they've had another fight.

They squabble like cats and dogs nowadays.

IVY WILLIAMS: It's all her fault. He's an educated gentleman.

And she's like a cat with a scalded tail.

PHIL RICHARDS: Ah, well, Ivy. We know how fond of him you are.

IVY: We only talk about literature!

PHIL: Hey, Ebbie. You'd best brush up on your reading.

Then you could have some interesting pillow-talk.

EBBIE (placing him arm around Ivy): You be quiet, Phil.

Gossip can get you into trouble!

PHIL: I was only teasing. What kind of gossip? Not about me, I hope.

EBBIE: Oh, I don't know, Phil. All the locals get into mischief, especially after **dark**.

They all laugh, looking towards Howard Dark, the local draper.

HOWARD: Why look at me?

PHIL: Oh, Dark by name and nature. I was driving in my car the other night.

I'm sure I saw you and Caitlin in the headlights.

At least, I thought it was you.

Whoever it was, was being very sympathetic towards her!

IVY: And nowadays she's got some very nice bits and bobs.

HOWARD: Well, not from me she hasn't! There's only one woman in my life.

PHIL: (condescendingly) Of course there is, Howard. We all know that. But you know what

Women are... Perfect paradise! It isn't true that Adam was

Kicked out of it when Eve gave him the apple.

Enter Dylan and Richard Hughes in a rainstorm.

IVY: And here come our literary giants now!

DYLAN: What? Five feet six at the outside? As the years go by,

My growth has become more horizontal. **(laughter)**

RICHARD: Oh No, Dylan, you are like your writing. More solid! And improving with age!

(to all assembled): Such horrid, ghastly weather?

DYLAN: (magnanimously) Oh no, Richard!

The sun always shines in Laugharne! **(General Laughter)**

EBBIE: (wagging his finger at Dylan) Nay, nay Dylan. The sun only shines on the righteous!

PHIL: (high pitched laughter, then to Ivy) Let's have some pints for Dylan and Richard!

DYLAN: (ecstatic) Oh Yes! Cold Beer, the Love of My Life! **(with sexual innuendo)**

Oh, I love the taste of beer, its brass bright depth.

The sudden world through the wet brown walls of the glass, the tilted

Rush to the lips and the slow, swallowing down to the lapping belly, the

Salt on the tongue, the foam at the corners. Cold Beer is Bottled God! **(applause)**

EBBIE: So what's this play you've written, Dylan? I've heard it's all about Laugharne.

Is it true, we're all in it?

DYLAN: Ebbie, you shouldn't believe what people tell you.

EBBIE: You mean it's not about Laugharne?

PHIL: And we aren't in it?

DYLAN: It's about a small town that never was, a town beneath a wood
In a never-never Wales. A lovely town that I imagine whenever
I'm in London or America. Anyway, you'll be pleased to know
I've written another play, to be broadcast soon on the BBC.

EBBIE: So what are you telling us?

DYLAN: It's about Laugharne.

PHIL: A Laugharne that never was?

DYLAN: No, no, a Laugharne that is. At least, what I think it is.

EBBIE: Well, isn't that great! Ivy, drinks all round!

She fills the glasses. They drink to Laugharne.

PHIL: Come on, Dylan. How does it go?

IVY: Aye, give us a sample.

DYLAN (drinks some of his beer): All Right. It's something like this.

Laugharne has a ruined castle, Brown's Hotel...

And not much else!

PHIL: Oh come on Dylan, Be fair!

EBBIE: And what about us?

DYLAN: Well....I've been living here now for fifteen years, on and off.

Although I'm a foreigner, I'm hardly ever stoned in the

Streets, and I can claim to be able to call several of the inhabitants,

And a few of the herons, by their Christian names.

HOWARD: Here, here, Dylan!

DYLAN: Some live in Laugharne because they were born here...

IVY: That'll be most of us.

DYLAN: Others arrived here to escape the international police, or their wives.

And there are those who do not know, and never will

Why they are here in the first place.

PHIL: Quite right, my boy. Nail on the head!

DYLAN: As for myself, I came one day.

Got off the bus and forgot to get on again.

EBBIE: As people do.

DYLAN: So here am I, in this timeless, beguiling town

With its seven public houses, one chapel in action, one church,

One factory, two billiard tables, one St. Bernard without the

Brandy, one policeman, three rivers, a visiting sea, one Rolls

Royce selling fish and chips, one cannon (cast-iron),

And so many birds!

ALL: That's great Dylan! Here! Here!

CHORUS: This is great! It's so great! That's our Dylan!

DYLAN: Laugharne, according to outsiders, is a lazy black
Bedlam by the sea, but it's where I intend to live forever...!

IVY & CHORUS: That's wonderful, Dylan!

IVY: We'll have tourists by the busload.

EBBIE: Let's give him a knighthood!

CHORUS: A knighthood!

HOWARD: Dylan, What would you like to be called?

DYLAN: Sir Dylan of Laugharne.

CHORUS: "Sir Dylan of Laugharne!"

HOWARD: Very well. Please kneel.

Dylan kneels. Howard touches

Him on both shoulders with his pint of beer

They all applaud.

CHORUS: Sir Dylan, Sir Dylan, etc.

ALL: Oh let us sing together: "God bless Sir Dylan of Laugharne!"

PHIL: Aye, then! Let's have one of our old songs!

EBBIE: What about 'The Chimbley Sweep'?

ALL: Aye, come on, 'The Chimbley Sweep'!

EBBIE: 'In Pembroke City when I was young,
I lived by the Castle Keep'.

HOWARD: 'Sixpence a week, that was my wage,

For working for the chimbley sweep’.

IVY: ‘Sweep, sweep, chimbley sweep,
I swept through Pembroke City’.

DYLAN: ‘Poor and barefoot in the snow,
Till a kind young woman took pity’.

RICHARD & HOWARD: With her titty.

ALL: Poor little chimbley sweep,
Black as the ace of spades.
Oh, nobody’s swept my chimbley
Since my husband went his ways’.

EBBIE: Come and sweep my chimbley!

PHIL & HOWARD (together): Come and sweep my chimbley,
She sighed to me with a blush.

ALL: Come and sweep my chimbley!
Come and sweep my chimbley!
Bring along your chimbley brush!

As the song reaches its conclusion,

Caitlin enters drinking from a flask. She is already slightly tipsy.

CAITLIN: Not that disgusting song again! You men, all you think about is sex!

PHIL: Every ten seconds, so they say.

CAITLIN: More like five in Dylan’s case. So who’s going to buy me a drink?

IVY: On the house, Caitlin. What’ll you have?

CAITLIN: A gin and tonic. No, on second thought, a gin without the tonic.

EBBIE: Are you quite sure, Caitlin? You’ll never make it back to the
Boathouse not along that dark, narrow path!

CAITLIN: Oh I'm sure that someone will help me. **(She flirts with Howard Dark)**
What about you, Howard?

HOWARD: I don't know, Caitlin. You've got a husband there.
Why don't you ask him?

CAITLIN: A husband...where? I've no husband! He's always away, you see...in
London, or in America.... In any case, he prefers the company of other women!

DYLAN: Caitlin, please don't make a fool of yourself!

CAITLIN: Fool of myself? You've been making a fool of me for years!

DYLAN: My Cat, I love you and always will, whether here in Brown's, the Cross House,
Sir John's Hill, in London or New York, in bed, in any place at any time....

CAITLIN: Oh I've heard all this before!

IVY: Caitlin, we don't want any trouble here.

CAITLIN: Since when is telling the truth trouble?
(To Phil) You believe me, don't you, Phil? I could fancy you, and Howard.
You both can take me home. The poet that once was can stay where he is!

PHIL: Caitlin, give it a rest!

CAITLIN: I wish I could. It's what I need, a nice long rest. But I'm a mother.
And I come second to poetry and dolled-up American tarts!

DYLAN: It's not true! I go to America for....

CAITLIN: You go to America 'for flattery, idleness and infidelity'.

IVY: Caitlin, that's enough! You should go home.

CAITLIN: If I had a home! I've never had a home. A rotten summer-house in Oxford.
A stinking cottage in South Leigh. A flat in London that reeked of cat-piss.
And now the Boat House, property of Margaret Taylor,
Who just longs for dear Dylan!

DYLAN: And I'm so desperate for her that I didn't turn up when
She wanted to elope with me!

CAITLIN: But you did for that American girl, that Pearl, or whatever she's called.
(To the others) He cares so little for me that he left
Her letters in his pocket, for me to find....

DYLAN: (cutting her off) She meant nothing to me! No one else does!

CAITLIN: I don't know what they see in him. Look at him!
A sloth and a turnip! Gap-toothed, balding, gout in his foot,
Phlegm on his chest, booze in his head!

RICHARD: (embarrassed) I think I'll be on my way.

Things to do and ... **(Howard cuts him off)**

HOWARD: Me too, Richard. I'll come with you.

CAITLIN: No, no! You can't go yet. We haven't had the performance.

PHIL: What performance?

CAITLIN: Not by me, if that's what you think. By that fat little man, the poor
Man's Charles Laughton, as he likes to be called. The one who
Likes to boom into American girls' briefs and bras. Come on, Dylan!
Let's hear it! Boom for us just like you do for them! Rant those rubbish
Poems! I don't know why people bother to listen. No one can
Understand them. He so likes the sound of his own voice. He could
Substitute for a bloody foghorn. The voice that sank a thousand
Ships! 'Now as I was young and easy under the apple boughs'.
'The force that through the fuse drives the flower'.
'Do not go gentle into that dark night'.

DYLAN: 'Good night'.

CAITLIN: What?

DYLAN: The word is 'good', not 'dark'.

CAITLIN: It ought to be 'dark'.

DYLAN: I ought to know. I bloody wrote it!
'Do not go gentle into that good night'. 'Good! Good! Good!'

CAITLIN: And I wish it was bloody good night to you!
She hurls herself at him.

EBBIE: Caitlin! Enough! Time to go home!

CAITLIN (bristling): I might have known! You're all on his side! I'm not one of you!

IVY: We don't want a row! It's not the time or place!

CAITLIN: Oh, yes, I know. You like him, don't you, Ivy?
You'd like to go to bed with him, if you haven't done it already!

EBBIE: Caitlin! I want you to leave! Now!

CAITLIN: I'm going. I wish I could leave this town forever!
She storms out.

SCENE 3

Cliff Walk, later that night. Dylan, Phil Richards, Howard Dark, Richard Hughes, two of them are helping Dylan along.

RICHARD: We'll make sure you get home safely.

DYLAN: There's no need. I know the way.

PHIL: Oh, yes there is. You went down back there like a ton of bricks.

HOWARD: Has it happened before? You should see a doctor.

DYLAN: It's alright, boys. It's gone now.

RICHARD: So what was it?

DYLAN: Everything went black and I was out. It happened the other day.

PHIL: You need to eat, Dylan, get plenty of food inside you.

DYLAN: I would if Caitlin could cook. The other day she tried to cook a rabbit.
It might have been alright if she'd removed the fur.
I can still feel it, tickling in my stomach!

RICHARD: At least it's a full moon. We can see the path.

DYLAN: The proper time for werewolves.
There's a lot of them in Laugharne, you know.

Phil runs to the side and mimics a dog howling in the distance.

DYLAN: There! I told you so! You know old Jones the Blacksmith?
He turns into a werewolf every full moon. Sucks virgins' blood!

PHIL: That's vampires, Dylan! Vampires suck blood.

DYLAN: You're right. I'm getting my vampires confused with my werewolves.

HOWARD: So what do werewolves do?

PHIL: The same as wolves. Tear you to bits.
I prefer Frankenstein and the monster!

**He adopts the pose of the monster, his shadow thrown on the road
By the light of the moon.**

DYLAN: My God! What is that?

HOWARD: Not to worry, Dylan. It's only Phil, pretending to be the monster.

RICHARD: Art imitating life, or the other way round.

PHIL: Yes, it's only me. **(He fools around a bit more)**
Come on, lads, the Chimbley Sweep!

DYLAN: YES! Chimbley!

RICHARD AND HOWARD: No, No! Cwm Rhondda!

Phil and Dylan start to sing Chimbley Sweep while

Howard and Richard simultaneously sing Cwm Rhondda.

All four are quite soused. It dissolves into shouting and laughter.

DYLAN: Listen! When we get to the shed, we'll pretend it's an Allied look-out! We'll spot the German submarines coming up the estuary.

PHIL: Right, and we'll let them have it!

**Phil pretends to be a machine-gunner,
Spraying the approaching submarines.**

RICHARD: Hey, there's something up there! Look! A light!

HOWARD: Coming towards us.

DYLAN: Let's pretend not to be here!
**They lie down at the side of the road, trying to make
Themselves inconspicuous.**

PHIL: It could be a German scout, sent to reconnoitre the area.

HOWARD: Someone from a submarine.

DYLAN: The commandant of a prisoner-of-war camp.
The approaching stranger stops in front of them.

HOWARD: No, it's Caitlin!

DYLAN: The commandant....

CAITLIN (shining the torch on Phil): I might have known! Dylan! Where are you?

DYLAN (in a weak voice): I think I'm here.

CAITLIN: Come on! On your feet! I'm taking you home.

DYLAN (making an effort to get up): I can't. I can't get up.

CAITLIN: Howard, come, help me!
They haul Dylan to his feet.

You'll have to come with me.

Phil, Richard....Howard and I can manage now.

PHIL: (knowingly) Right, Caitlin, we'll be off, then.

RICHARD: (poking Dylan) See you tomorrow, Dylan!

DYLAN⊗ **slurred speech, falling asleep)** Good. Come to the house. You can meet Brinnin.

RICHARD: You mean the American?

CAITLIN: He means another artistic asshole!

RICHARD: (laughing) Well, I just might do that.

Phil and Richard stagger off into the darkness.

CAITLIN: He's out cold. Thank God it's not too far. Take one arm, Howard.

Caitlin and Howard begin to haul Dylan along the path.

He has now fallen completely asleep.

HOWARD: He's a hell of a weight. We'll both be knackered.

CAITLIN: You can stay the night if you wish. Dylan won't mind.

I'll tire you out even more.

Still propping up Dylan, they exchange a long kiss.

Then drop him in a slump

HOWARD: Not in the boathouse, Caitlin. Come tire me out now...

Howard and Caitlin move to the wall.

They engage in quick, feverish love making in the half light.

HOWARD: Oh, that was sweet, Caitlin.

CAITLIN: Yes....

HOWARD: Come Caitlin, I'll help you carry him home.

As the lights begin to fade they gather Dylan up

And begin to carry him to the boathouse.

SCENE 4

The Boathouse, the next day. Dylan and Caitlin are inside.

Rollie McKenna and John Brinnin are talking outside.

CAITLIN: So why has he come? You know I don't trust him.

DYLAN: You heard what he said. Oh, God, my head aches!

CAITLIN: I know what he said. But it may not be what he's thinking.

DYLAN: It's a profile for an American magazine, *Mademoiselle*.

CAITLIN: What?

DYLAN: The name of the magazine.

CAITLIN: Isn't that for teenagers?

DYLAN: No, it's quite well known. And they might want to publish
Milk Wood. Two payments in one!

CAITLIN: I still don't trust him. He might have something else in mind, like
America again.

DYLAN: I've no wish to go again. God, my head aches.
I don't remember last night....what happened?

CAITLIN: Oh, the usual

Dylan unscrews a bottle and swallows a couple of aspirin.

CAITLIN: So who's that woman? His mistress?
Not that I imagine he likes women.

DYLAN (groaning again): Caitlin! Please!

CAITLIN: I'll see to the duck.

She goes over to the oven.

DYLAN: Anyway, you've met her before.

CAITLIN: (shrugs) Really? America made such an impression, I prefer to forget it.

Enter John Brinnin.

BRINNIN: Dylan, this view is quite remarkable. Such peace and tranquillity!

CAITLIN: So where's the mistress?

BRINNIN (taken aback): Excuse me!

CAITLIN: The woman with you.

BRINNIN: You mean my photographer friend, Rollie McKenna.

CAITLIN: Whatever!

BRINNIN: She's gone off in the car.

She wants some photographs of Laugharne, local colour, you know.

DYLAN: Isn't she staying for lunch?

BRINNIN: I don't think so.

CAITLIN: If you stay the night, you'll have to sleep with her.

DYLAN: Caitlin means we've only got one spare bed. You'd have to share.

BRINNIN: It's quite alright. We're going back to London.

We Americans don't mind long distances.

CAITLIN: No, nothing's too much for you Americans.

I've noticed how big your endowments are.

BRINNIN: I beg your pardon!

CAITLIN: At the colleges I noticed how big the endowments are.

Even bigger than the female students' breasts

Which so excited Dylan!

BRINNIN: Yes, of course.

CAITLIN: So why are you here, to seduce Dylan back to America again?

DYLAN: Caitlin, please!

CAITLIN: (cutting him off) I'd like to hear it from the horse's mouth.

BRINNIN: Well, not specifically. I'm writing a profile.

CAITLIN: (mimicking Brinnin) He's writing a profile!

So what does 'not specifically' mean?

BRINNIN: If he wanted to come, it's a possibility.

CAITLIN: He doesn't, and it isn't!

DYLAN: Caitlin, let's have lunch.

The duck must be cooked by now.

BRINNIN: That sounds delicious!

DYLAN: Caitlin's an excellent cook when she puts her mind to it.

Dylan and Brinnin sit at the table. Caitlin goes to the door.

CAITLIN: Llewellyn, Aeronwy! Colm! Dinner!

The children enter.

DYLAN: Children, this is Mr Brinnin. He's come from America.

Caitlin begins bringing the food to the table, first a bowl of vegetables,

Then some water and bottles of beer, and finally the duck.

BRINNIN: Hello to you all. I've heard a lot about you.

Your parents must be very fond of you.

AERONWY: Yes, that's why they send us away to school.

CAITLIN: Aeronwy!

LLEWELYN: Are there really Indians in America?

BRINNIN: Yes, of course!

LLEWELYN: Do they come from the hills and attack the trains with tomahawks?

BRINNIN: They used to do that. But nowadays they're much more peaceful.

LLEWELYN: Oh, that's so boring.

CAITLIN: Llewellyn, that's enough! Sit down!

She begins to carve the duck. As soon as she does so, it spurts blood.

She continues carving, oblivious to all around her.

She puts slices of the duck on each plate.

LLEWELYN: Mother, it's still alive!

AERONWY: Careful, mother! It might fly away!

Colm giggles throughout this scene.

DYLAN: Caitlin, you've undercooked the bloody thing!

LLEWELYN: 'Bloody's' the right word, father!

BRINNIN: Oh! Let's give it a try. It should be fine.

AERONWY: I'll die if I taste that. I'd rather die than taste that!

DYLAN: Caitlin, take it away!

BRINNIN: No, I'm sure it's fine. Let's try it.

They begin to eat, chewing hard on the duck.

Dylan and Brinnin pretend to enjoy it.

Llewellyn and Aeronwy pull faces.

The children start to giggle uncontrollably.

CAITLIN (annoyed): Alright, all of you! Leave the table!

The children rush outside laughing, only too eager to leave the table.

CAITLIN: Those bloody children need to learn some manners!

She exits.

DYLAN: Sorry about the food, John.

BRINNIN: That's quite all right. Tell me, Dylan, what are you working on?

DYLAN: Nothing much.

(Dylan gets up and looks out at the estuary....almost in a trance)

I stare across the flat, sad estuary sands, watch the herons
Waddle like women poets, listen to the gab of gulls,
I walk as far as Brown's, come back, go for another walk.
For a whole year I've written nothing at all but one tangled sentimental
Poem as a preface to poems written many years ago. I must get away.

BRINNIN: Another lecture tour? I could arrange one.

DYLAN: The thought of another tour? I couldn't face it.

And Caitlin would never agree to it.

She thinks I should be writing, not performing,

Even though she calls my poems rubbish. And she hates being

Left with the children, especially in Laugharne.

She thinks the locals hate her. And we're very short of money.

BRINNIN: But Dylan, on the last tour you earned quite a lot!

DYLAN: Slipped through my fingers like sand. Caitlin went mad!

BRINNIN: Then you should do another tour.

And you must meet with Stravinsky!

DYLAN: Even though there's no commission yet.

BRINNIN: We could do *Milk Wood* again.

That could be quite profitable.

DYLAN: True enough... Tell me about Liz. Does she miss me?

BRINNIN: I'm sure she does.

Even so, I can't say I approve.

DYLAN: Of what?

BRINNIN: Of you and Liz. I'm rather narrow-minded in that respect.

DYLAN: John, you need to understand. She's the most wonderful woman.

At first I thought her cold. But now I find her warm and affectionate.

I don't know why and I don't know what she sees in this lazy,

Fumbling, tousled little Welshman. But I know I love her.

BRINNIN: She says you haven't been in touch.

DYLAN: If she writes to me, Caitlin will find out.

She's got a nose like a bloodhound...

Anyway, she's back. Not a word about Liz!

Enter Caitlin.

CAITLIN: What are you up to? Heads together like two little sheep!

DYLAN: Not much....

BRINNIN: (cutting Dylan off) To be quite honest, Caitlin,

I've suggested that Dylan do another tour.

CAITLIN (angrily): Just as I suspected!

DYLAN: But it's not as it seems.

CAITLIN: I'm sure it's **exactly** as it seems. And you aren't going!

BRINNIN: But we think you should come too. The Poetry Centre will pay
Your fare. Dylan goes first and does some readings, you join him later.

And then a holiday with Stravinsky in Los Angeles.

Remember, he's adding a room to his house for

Dylan to work on the opera.

DYLAN: Los Angeles, Caitlin! That wonderful weather!

We'll be the toast of Hollywood!

CAITLIN: And what about the children?

DYLAN: Aeronwy, Llewellyn, away at school.

Colm can stay with Dolly.

CAITLIN: I don't know. But I know you, Dylan.
I've seen what happens in America.
All those women! Those wives of academics and their
Stuffed-shirt husbands. They make me sick!

DYLAN: I promise! I'll stay away from them!

CAITLIN: If I decide to come, you'll be on the tightest leash you've ever known.
She goes outside.

BRINNIN: Well, at least she hasn't said no.

DYLAN: I don't fancy a tight leash. The trip would be hell.
Enter Rollie McKenna.

ROLLIE: Well, I'm back! So nice to see you, Dylan!

DYLAN: Good to see you.

BRINNIN: Any success?

ROLLIE: Oh, yes! I've got some wonderful photographs.

BRINNIN: Dylan might be coming to New York once more.

ROLLIE: Oh, that's great!
Dylan, may I take a family photograph?

DYLAN: Sure, everyone's right outside!
He goes to the door, calls out.

DYLAN: Caitlin, Llewellyn, Aeronwy! We're taking a picture!
Come inside! Come on Colm!
They all enter.

DYLAN: Caitlin, this is Rollie McKenna.

ROLLIE: So nice to meet you again.
Dylan tells me he may be coming to New York again.

CAITLIN: He well may do, but if he does,
I'll be with him every step of the way!

ROLLIE: Well, OK, I look forward to seeing you there...Now, could you all
Just stand over here, the children in the middle? Yes that's it!
They assume their positions as in the published photographs.
That's fine! Now everyone smile. That's Excellent!
One big happy family!
Large flash from camera then blackout.

ACT TWO

SCENE 1A

**Backstage at the YMHA Auditorium, New York. Brinnin
and Liz Reitell are trying to sober up Dylan prior to a poetry reading.
Brinnin and Liz are smartly dressed, Dylan more rumpled and casual.**

LIZ: Dylan, please! It's almost time! You've got to go on stage!

DYLAN: A drink! I need another drink!

BRINNIN: Not another drop! You drink too much.

DYLAN: John you're just so narrow-minded. It's just a bit of fun.
Here, have a drink! Let's forget the reading!
(Grabbing Liz) Liz and I could go on stage and really
give them a show. **(Dylan drinks from a bottle).**

LIZ: Dylan, please! Be sensible! **(She takes the bottle and pulls away)**

BRINNIN: And more responsible. Remember, there's a contract.
And think of your pride as an artist.

DYLAN: I have no pride. Because of you, I am nothing but a voice on wheels!

The endless round of readings!

This never-ending rant of poems!

BRINNIN: Liz, he isn't listening.

DYLAN: All I am is an entertainer, the poor man's Charles
Laughton, a scrubby Welshman with a three-week hangover.
Once I was a poet, I can't remember when....

Knock at the door.

VOICE: Five minutes, Mr Thomas... Your five-minute call.

LIZ: He needs coffee, John, strong and black.

BRINNIN: Yes, I'll get it right away.

Brinnin exits.

DYLAN: I don't need coffee. What I need is my darling Liz. My dearest
Darling, naked Liz, keeping me safe in the warmth of her bed.

LIZ: (patronizingly) Of course, Dylan! We'll keep our troubles at arm's length.

DYLAN: We'll keep old Brinnin at arm's length. Have you ever seen such a
Desiccated frog? Oh, Liz! I think he fancies me.

(Brinnin enters with the coffee).

BRINNIN: Your coffee, Dylan. What were you saying?

DYLAN: What was I saying? I can't remember. Give me a clue!

BRINNIN: That I fancied someone?

DYLAN: Oh, no. I was saying that Caitlin fancies you, but

She's mine and you can't have her.

And even if you could, it might be tricky, don't you think?

BRINNIN (to Liz): This is ridiculous. The man's raving!

LIZ: Dylan, drink the coffee. You'll soon feel better.

DYLAN: I know I shall. I want to go on for ten more years at least.

BRINNIN (curtly) You can start by going on stage. The place is sold out. You can't let them down.

DYLAN No need to remind me. I'll be Houdini once again.

Hopelessly trapped, but I shall escape.

SCENE 1B ONSTAGE AT THE YMHA

Dylan stumbles downstage. The chorus, as audience, takes up their position, seated on either side of the stage. Liz and Brinnin are near the back. Dylan places his script on a lectern, looks at the microphone which emits static and feedback. He taps it gently.

DYLAN: O Blimey! This always happens, a microphone that doesn't work!

Ha. And here I am mouthing away, not a bloody soul can hear me...

One of those Kafka dreams... Can you hear me, or shall I shout?

CHORUS: (Interjections of 'can hear', 'can't hear')

DYLAN: You CAN'T hear me! I knew it would happen.

I'm used to booming with the worst. Fat poets with slim volumes,

Lyrical one-night-standers... myself among them.

Well, this isn't a LECTURE. It's only a reading of poems.

Can you hear me? Is this damn thing working?

CHORUS: (Interjected shouts of "No, No")

DYLAN: All right! Let's do without these damn gadgets!

(Brushes microphone aside as it falls to the floor... Applause and Laughter).

DYLAN: Well this is a reading of poems all chosen because they are direct and clear,

And, I hope, HEARD (**Laughter**) And even my mother couldn't say

That mine were direct or clear. What do I mean EVEN my mother?

ESPECIALLY my mother. And, by the way,

I hope no one's going to ask any questions. **(Laughter)**

I don't mind answering, but I can't. **(Laughter)**

Even to such simple questions that I can only stammer and blush, such as,

Uh, what is the relation, **(book falls from table)** damn that book.

What is the relationship of a poet to society, uh, in the

Pre-hydrogenous age. **(titters in audience)** I'd like to be able to answer

Questions fluently, but as soon as I start, as soon as

I gauchely and inarticulately fog, bury and stitch myself in a sentence

That I know I can never finish, just like the sentence I've just begun,

I find myself thinking of, of, uh, such subjects as:

The influence of W. C. Fields on Virginia Wolff. **(Laughter)**

Or: If every hermaphrodite were a schizophrenic, which half would you take?

(Laughter) (Dylan suddenly turns serious)

Now I know that the printed page is the place in which to

Examine the works of the poet. And the platform, however high,

Is the place in which to give the poems their true worth.

So now a poem of my own....to the lovers of the world,

DYLAN: My Caitlin...and all of you....

The audience, now motionless, is in half-light.

A spotlight is on Dylan. ("Dylan's Aria.")

In my craft or sullen art

Exercised in the still night

When only the moon rages

And the lovers lie abed

With all their griefs in their arms,
I labour by singing light
Not for ambition or bread
Or the strut and trade of charms
On the ivory stages
But for the common wages
Of their most secret heart.
Not for the proud man apart
From the raging moon I write
On these spindrift pages
Nor for the towering dead
With their nightingales and psalms
But for the lovers, their arms
Round the griefs of the ages,
Who pay no praise or wages
Nor heed my craft or art.

**The scene is frozen. After the diminuendo of the last chord in the
Orchestra, the scene slowly fades.**

(Scene Change in Silence).

SCENE 2

**A Party at Charlie and Oona Chaplin's house at their "Westchester Estate" outside New York.
In addition to Charlie and Oona, the guests include Liz Reitell, John Brinnin, Pearl Kazin,
Arthur Miller and Greta Garbo. Dylan, Marilyn Monroe and Shelley Winters have not yet
arrived. As the scene begins Chaplin is at the piano playing the theme from *Limelight*.**

(This scene is based upon an actual party at Chaplin's Los Angeles home)

OONA CHAPLIN: He should be here by now. Where is he?

BRINNIN: I've no idea. We arrange his readings, not his days off.

OONA: Let's hope he makes it.

A sudden sound of screeching brakes, followed by a loud bang.

Chaplin stops playing briefly, shrugs and continues. The guests freeze.

BRINNIN (at the window): It's Dylan! He's demolished the tennis court!

OONA: What do you mean?

BRINNIN: Well, He's never driven a car in his life. He's with two women.

OONA (at the window): Oh that's not so bad. At least he seems alright.

(To the guests): Alright, everyone. Nothing to worry about. I wonder why he's come with them?

BRINNIN: Who are they?

OONA: Marilyn Monroe and Shelley Winters!

BRINNIN: My God, I don't believe it!

SERVANT: Mr Dylan Thomas, Miss Marilyn Monroe, Miss Shelley Winters.

Dylan comes shooting into the room. Marilyn and Shelley

Follow him in, both of them rather flustered. Dylan trips and

Ends up on the floor as Oona shakes hands with him.

OONA: Mr Thomas, so nice to meet you! I'm told that poets often arrive with a bang.

Oona, Marilyn and Shelley help Dylan to his feet.

SHELLEY: (out of breath) Sorry Oona... Dylan tried to help with the steering.

I'm afraid your tennis court is a little damaged.

OONA: Not to worry, dear. I'd be more concerned if someone was

Hurt. Are you alright, Mr Thomas?

DYLAN: Oh, just a few broken bones. If I seem a little unsteady, it's all because
Of these two goddesses. They've left me somewhat intoxicated.

OONA (to a servant) William, please take their coats.

**They give the servant their coats. Dylan's is quite ragged. The servant
Looks at it disapprovingly and notices an odour.**

Chaplin finishes playing as the guests applaud.

OONA: Ladies and gentlemen, I'd like to introduce a special guest... an
English poet who's visiting the US, I think for the fourth time.
Mr. Dylan Thomas, who is also an excellent actor, as his entrance suggests.

Charlie rises from the piano and goes over to Dylan.

CHAPLIN: Mr Thomas, welcome! I'm Charlie Chaplin.

DYLAN: I don't know what to say, Mr Chaplin.

CHAPLIN: Please call me Charlie.

DYLAN: Oh, I can't believe it... I've always been such a fan of your films.

CHAPLIN: Judging by your entrance, you could well have appeared in one.

But never mind. Your poetry is magnificent.

Come, have a drink... what brings you to America?

DYLAN: To meet you, of course, Mr Chaplin. And to look for naked

Women in wet mackintoshes.

CHAPLIN: Ah, well, I think we've satisfied the first (**glancing at Marilyn & Shelley**)

...and perhaps even the second! There are so many people I want you to meet.

There's E. E. Cummings, and there's Katherine Hepburn.

And Lotte Lenya, and over there's Marlena Dietrich.

Greta Garbo passes by.

CHAPLIN: Ah! And let me introduce you to Miss Greta Garbo.

Greta, I'd like you to meet the poet, Dylan Thomas.

GARBO (ignoring Dylan): Thank you, Charles. I prefer to be alone.

CHAPLIN: Don't take it to heart. That's Greta for you!

Dylan tries to pinch her bottom as she passes.

Chaplin and Dylan start clowning together.

BRINNIN (to Liz): If it starts to get out of hand, we leave at once.

LIZ: You see the woman over there?

That's Pearl Kazin, one of his old flames.

BRINNIN: Yes, I know! I think we'd better leave now!

LIZ: Don't worry! Everything will be fine.

CHAPLIN: Dylan, I'd like you to meet Arthur Miller. I'm sure you'll have much to discuss.

ARTHUR MILLER: It's always good to meet an English writer, to compare notes as it were.

DYLAN: Not English, Mr. Miller! I am a Welshman, and a drunkard

And a lover of the human race, especially women.

Yes, I've lived in London, but I much prefer Wales.

MILLER: You mean you'd had enough of the city life?

DYLAN: Enough of the English, to be precise.

(Dylan is now the centre of attention)

I was on a train from Oxford to London, and there, all about me,

Gloved and mincing.... holding their cigarette holders like

Blowpipes, tall and terrible women neighed....

Women as inaccessible as goat crags, women who rode to the

Shops on their bicycles, their knitted stockings full of old hockey muscles.

And the men, yellow waistcoats, corduroy trousers,

Bleating and fluting in their so posh accents.

It was then I decided I didn't want to be in England.

CHAPLIN: (putting on his fake moustache and mimicking Dylan in an exaggerated accent)

'He didn't want to be in England.'

DYLAN: I wanted to be in Laugharne,

OONA: Excuse me, Dylan. What was that name? It's so unusual.

DYLAN: Laugharne. L, a, u, g, h, a, r, n, e.

But it's pronounced 'Larn'.

MILLER: (with an exaggerated New York accent): LARN!

MILLER: So what goes on there? Lots of excitement?

DYLAN: Excitement? No! I just sit and look at the sea, to make sure it's still there.

I chew my nails down to my shoulders, place bets on horses

With beautiful names, moulder in Brown's Hotel,

Row with my wife, and long to get away.

As for the locals, the women all have webbed feet and cast the

Evil eye, and the men have all retired before they've even started work.

Laughter. The guests disperse a bit and return to their conversation.

Chaplin goes back to the piano. Dylan moves away to be with the guests.

Arthur is with Marilyn and Shelley.

MILLER: So you three know each other?

SHELLEY: Marilyn and I are good friends, Dylan came to dinner.

I did the cooking. Marilyn did the preparation.

MARILYN: Not very well! Shelley told me to wash the salad,

So I scrubbed each leaf with a brillo pad. And when I made the

Apple sauce, I used an entire bottle of Cointreau, which meant

We had to drink the sauce. Arthur, I guess I'm not very practical.

But one day I'd like to marry you... when Joe's had enough of me!

MILLER (laughing): Well, you seem to think you have the gift of prophecy.

Joe DiMaggio appears at the door.

SERVANT: Mr. Joseph Di Maggio!

JOE DI MAGGIO: to the servant: Where's Marilyn? **(The servant gestures across the stage)**

MARILYN: waving across the room Oh Joe!

Pearl Kazin has drifted over towards Liz.

She now engages her in conversation.

PEARL: Hello, I'm Pearl Kazin, I'm told you know Dylan...quite well.

LIZ: Fairly well, yes. I'm John Brinnin's assistant at the Poetry Centre.

I help Dylan with his work and arrange his lectures,

And generally look after him.

PEARL: Dylan and I were quite close. I gave him up, got sick of his drinking.

Good Luck to You!

Pearl drifts away.

Oona with Shelley.

OONA: Tell me, does Dylan always drink so much?

SHELLEY: He certainly drank a lot at dinner.

In the end, we put a straw in his glass to slow him down.

But he got a second straw and drank the stuff twice as fast.

OONA: I'll go get some black coffee.

Maybe you could keep him away from the booze.

SHELLEY: Dylan, I need you to come sit over here.

Shelley leads Dylan to an armchair. She sits him down and

Then sits on his lap. He stares at her ample cleavage.

SHELLEY: Is that alright?

DYLAN: Oh, yes...it's more than alright. In fact, it's doubly alright.

And...I'm wondering....if....

SHELLEY: What?

DYLAN (indicating her breasts): If those are real.

SHELLEY: Of course they're real! You can touch them.

One finger only, dipped in champagne.

Dylan ceremoniously dips his finger into a glass of champagne,

Carefully touches each of Shelley Winters' breasts, then licks his finger.

SHELLEY: So what's your opinion?

DYLAN: I believe I can inform the world that Miss Shelley Winters

Is one hundred per cent genuine and will go far in the cinema!

Dylan knocks back his champagne. Oona arrives with

The coffee. Dylan gets up, making Shelley slide to the floor.

The guests have gathered round once more.

MARILYN: Is this some kind of game you play in Wales? This touching thing?

DYLAN: It goes back centuries! On Saint David's Day, every man in every town and

Village can test the authenticity of every woman's tits!

MARILYN: Oh!

BRINNIN (to Chaplin): You can't always believe what he says. Not only that.

He goes to parties and helps himself to people's possessions.

CHAPLIN: You mean he steals?

BRINNIN: Once a certain lady saw him in the street

With a sewing-machine he'd taken from

Her house. She asked: 'Are you stealing that?'

He replied: 'Of course not', 'I'm taking it to be repaired'.

CHAPLIN: But that's very funny.

BRINNIN: He's also been known to arrive at a party in an old
Coat and leave with a new one.

CHAPLIN (laughing): Even funnier. But we shouldn't judge such a great poet.

Anyway, aren't you his friend?

BRINNIN: I arrange his visits, that's all.

But I doubt I'll arrange any more.

Chaplin goes over to the window

CHAPLIN: What in God's name is that Green Hornet doing
In the middle of our tennis court?

Brinnin does not respond.

DYLAN (buttonholing Chaplin):

Charlie, If you want to know what London is like,

It's the city of the restless dead.

A mad city that fills me with terror!

The grey of the place gets in my eyes,

So when I see a bit of green, it leaves me blind.

CHAPLIN (somewhat circumspect): But I've always found the people very interesting.

DYLAN: The worst are the pseudo-intellectuals I meet at parties.

The best are the women I meet in pubs.

CHAPLIN (lights up): Now that sounds very interesting.

OONA: Charles!

DYLAN (ignoring Oona, warming to the topic): Betty May, otherwise known as 'Tiger Woman'.

Rumour has it she was raised in a Paris brothel. The tiger was her

Personal heraldic beast, and she always wore a coat and hat of
Tiger skin. She had gypsy looks, high cheek-bones, cat- like eyes,
And, though forty years of age, a fantastic figure. I wrote a piece for her,
In her name, for a newspaper. She paid me well, but not in money.

SHELLEY: Dylan, what a Don Juan, a Casanova! Please tell us more!

Chaplin begins to get circumspect of Dylan.

He goes over to the window again.

He then questions Oona in conversation.

Then to the piano to take up the “Limelight” theme again.

BRINNIN (to Liz): We’ve got to get him out of here.

You know what he’s like when he gets up steam.

DYLAN (his behaviour more inappropriate):

Veronica Sibthorp!

She had a wooden leg called ‘Gilbert’. She took it off when we made love,

She’d put it on a chair and hop all around. She called me her

‘Angelic Pig’ and bathed me every day. Oh, and

Wyn Henderson, an extremely large and unshockable woman.

When Caitlin and I got married, she asked if she could pretend to

Be a mattress, so we could make love on top of her!

The guests are reduced to uncontrollable laughter. Chaplin does not join in.

CHAPLIN (drolly from the piano): I’m amazed you’ve survived.

DYLAN: Most of them I met in pubs, they’d ask me to pretend to be a dog...like this....

He drops onto all fours.

DYLAN: And go around barking and biting their ankles.

He makes barking noises and approaches the women’s ankles.

He puts his head under Shelley's skirt and continues to bark.

Chaplin shakes his head in disbelief.

SHELLEY: Dylan I think you've seen enough already!

Dylan is still barking. Chaplin, still seated at the piano stops playing.

General confusion. Chaplin gets up from the piano and slams down the lid.

CHAPLIN: (to Dylan) Even great poetry cannot excuse such rude drunken behaviour!

BRINNIN: That's it! Enough!

LIZ: Come on, Dylan! Time to go!

Brinnin and Liz start dragging Dylan towards the door.

SHELLEY: But we're having such a good time.

MARILYN: And his stories are so much fun!

DYLAN (as he is dragged away): A poem, a poem!

ALL: Yes, yes! Give us a poem!

DYLAN: There was an old bugger called God,
Who put a young virgin in pod.
This amazing behaviour
Produced Christ our saviour,
Who died on the cross, poor sod!

Embarrassed Laughter all round.

Dylan grabs Chaplin's coat and hat as Brinnin and Liz drag him away.

SHELLEY: Look! There!?

CHAPLIN: What's he doing now?!

MARILYN: It looks like he's peeing!

CHAPLIN: (running after Dylan)

On our bloody potted palm! And he's taken my coat and my hat!

SCENE 3

The White Horse Tavern, Greenwich Village. The following afternoon.

Dylan, Brinnin, Liz, Dave and Rose Slivka, John Berryman, various others.

Charlie Parker's recording of "Au Privave" is playing on the juke box.

BERRYMAN (to Dylan): Why don't you have another drink?

Bartender! Another whisky for Dylan!

DAVE SLIVKA: Tell us that story again!

The one about the woman with the wooden leg.

LIZ: He doesn't need another drink. He needs to get to bed!

DYLAN: (to Liz) I'll have a drink if I want one. You're just like my mother.

She'd wipe my nose, give me warm milk, cut the tops off my boiled eggs.

BRINNIN: Dylan, think of what 'Liz does for you.

DYLAN: Well I'd rather not have her wiping my arse.

Why don't you two just go away and fuck each other!

LIZ (to Brinnin): I can't take much more of this!

BRINNIN: He won't be fit for tomorrow's reading. We need to get him out of here.

DYLAN: You know, a doctor once told me I only had four years to live.

DAVE: Why was that, Dylan?

DYLAN: Apparently, he didn't like my eyebrows.

BERRYMAN: And here you are as large as life.

DYLAN: When I cough I sound like a sea-lion.

My bones are so brittle I'm always breaking something.

And with my gout I feel as if I'm walking on my eyeballs.

BERRYMAN: You know what they say: 'It's not the cough that takes you off.

It's the coffin they take you off in'.

Anyway, I always say look on the bright side!

DYLAN: John Berryman, You should take your own advice. As far as I can see,
You're just like your poems, bits here, bits there, all over the place!

BERRYMAN: If you think I'm Humpty Dumpty, a drop of this should put
Me together again! Come on, Dylan, drink up!
Tell us about that Queen of yours!

DYLAN: I was summoned more than once to Buckingham Palace.

DAVE: By royal dictate?

DYLAN: By royal dick something-or-other. I gave the Queen a piece of my
Mind, after which, retreating backwards, I slipped on the carpet and
Shot on my arse right out of her royal presence.

BRINNIN: You expect us to believe that?

DYLAN: Are you casting doubt on my integrity?
As for myself, she asked for me again.

BERRYMAN: What for this time?

DAVE: Did she want to go to bed with you?

DYLAN: First she wanted a poem. So I recited this one:

The last time I slept with the Queen,

I repeatedly muttered 'Ich Dien'.*

She called me a shite,

Said 'Put out the light.

A queen should be served and not seen'.

* NB: "Ich dien" (German for "I serve") is part of the Heraldic Badge of the Prince of Wales

BERRYMAN: So how did she take it? On her back as usual?

DYLAN: Caitlin spoilt it. She went up to the Queen. ‘Did you Like that?’ she said. ‘I didn’t. I think I’ll ask for my money back’.

That’s when they asked us to leave, very politely, of course.

On the way out, I bit one of the Queen’s corgis.

For a long time afterwards I was afraid they might put me in the Tower.

LIZ: Dylan, we should take a walk, get some air...

Get something to eat.

BRINNIN: Well, I have to go. Busy day tomorrow.

Dylan, I’ll pick you up in the morning.

DYLAN (morosely): Fine! All that I’m good for.

Someone to be picked up!

Brinnin Shrugs and Exits shaking his head.

BERRYMAN: So let’s go to my place! I’ve got some good whisky.

We could talk about poetry. Dylan, what do you say?

DYLAN: I say it’s a stupid idea! I’d rather listen to Charlie Parker.

BERRYMAN (obviously upset): Oh! Come on!

DYLAN: Real poets don’t talk about poetry. They write it if they can.

They only talk about it when they can’t, when they’re washed Up, like I am now. I rant the poems I’ve already written, and the more I try to put words on paper, the more frightened I become.

DAVE: It sounds like a case of writer’s block. You’ll soon get over it.

DYLAN: Who knows? In Laugharne my table is heaped with odd lines, single words.

I read the poems I once wrote, but all they tell me is what I should be writing now. I go to London and bluster, come to America and Bluster even more. And I do it for the easy but killing money.

LIZ: Dylan, don't be so hard on yourself! *Under Milk Wood* is a huge success.

DYLAN: increasingly more drunk *Under Milk Wood* is not poetry. Do you know, the worst

Prose is written by ex-poets who can no longer squeeze out a poem.

Under Milk Wood is exactly what I called it – Llareggub - Bugger all!

And what am I? A fat little man, making a fool of myself, as time snails by.

I look in the mirror. What do I see?

Rilke and the Three Little Pigs all rolled into one!

BERRYMAN: For God's sake, Dylan! Do we have to listen to this crap?

DYLAN: No, no! I must stop! Someone's boring me. I think it's me.

Pause. Dylan draws back, suddenly frightened.

DYLAN: (hallucinating) Look! There! Keep it away from me!

ROSE SLIVKA: What is it? What's the matter?

DYLAN: Keep it away from me! Look there! Another one!

DAVE SLIVKA: Another what? There's nothing there! Get a grip on yourself!

BERRYMAN: This is crazy!

DAVE: It's serious, John. We need to get him back to the Chelsea.

BERRYMAN: Forget it! I can't take it any more of this crap.

Berryman Exits. Dylan is on his knees, crawling around like an animal.

LIZ: Dave, Rose, please help me!

They try to help her. Dylan fights them off.

DYLAN: Stay away! Don't touch me! **(Looking at Liz)** Who are you?

LIZ: (in tears) I can't take this anymore. **(She gets up to leave)**

SLIVKA: We'll get him into a cab and take him back to the Chelsea.

Liz quickly exits.

Dave and Rose Slivka tend to Dylan as the scene fades.

SCENE 4

The same evening. Dylan's room at the Chelsea Hotel.

Liz is alone, distraught.

LIZ: Oh God! I just don't know what to do.
He drinks far too much, chases women, makes a fool of himself.
But there's still something so attractive about him.
Don't ask me why, I just love him so. But he loves no one really.
He only sees the darkness inside him, a darkness he cannot escape.

Footsteps in the corridor. Liz gasps.

The footsteps pass by and a door bangs.

Why am I with him? There's no future in this.
The only thing he really loved was writing poetry.
But now he finds it impossible, and he can't love anyone or anything....
Even himself...and he knows it only too well.

**Footsteps in the corridor. This time they stop. Dave and Rose Slivka
escort Dylan to the door, then both leave quietly and dejectedly.**

Dylan enters, staggers into the room and collapses onto the floor.

Liz rushes to the phone, dials Dr Feltenstein's number.

LIZ: Dr Feltenstein? It's Elizabeth Reitell. I'm at the Chelsea Hotel.
You said I should call if Dylan got worse... No, I wouldn't call if it wasn't.
Absolutely urgent! He's just collapsed!...
You'll come immediately? Oh thank you, Doctor!

She puts the phone down and helps Dylan up.

LIZ: I've just called Dr. Feltenstein.

DYLAN: I've just had eighteen straight whiskies... I think that's the record.

LIZ: Are you crazy? You know what Feltenstein said.

You've got to stop drinking. Don't you listen to anyone?

Dylan sits on the edge of the bed. He starts coughing, pressing

His hands to his stomach. His mind begins to wander.

DYLAN: Caitlin! Please forgive me If only she were here now!

You've no idea how beautiful she is! There's an illumination about her, she shines.

My Cat, I am the man you used to say you loved.

I used to sleep in your arms. Do you remember?

LIZ (distraught): Dylan, look at me! I'm the one who looks after you. Can't you see me?

Here, in front of you! I'm the one who loves you!

I'm your nurse and your manager and we must get help for you now!

DYLAN: You're not my nurse...you're not my manager...you're my love.

LIZ (sitting beside him, holding him): Dylan, I just need to take care of you.

That's all. Do you believe that I love you?

DYLAN: Yes, I believe you. Liz, I don't want to die. I love you, but I'm alone....

You know, the men in Laugharne have their arms around

Each other...and they're singing.

LIZ: Your face is so hot. It feels like it's on fire.

She goes to the washbasin, wets a towel, wipes Dylan's forehead.

He draws back in horror.

DYLAN (hallucinating): No! Keep them away! Don't let them touch me! Keep them away!

LIZ: My God! What is it?

DYLAN: Shapes, coming towards me! Horrible creatures coming to get me!

The gates of hell!

LIZ: There's nothing there! Listen to me! There's nothing there!

DYLAN: I saw them die! In the war!

Blood everywhere! Rivers of blood choking me!

I couldn't breathe, I was dying, choking to death...

Dylan has difficulty breathing. He starts to gasp for breath.

A knock at the door. Liz rushes to open it. Enter Feltenstein.

FELTENSTEIN: How long has he been like this?

LIZ: He's just come from the White Horse.

He says he's had eighteen straight whiskies.

FELTENSTEIN: I doubt that very much. But he's very sick. He hasn't listened to my advice.

Dylan! I know you can hear me. Are you trying to kill yourself?

DYLAN: Dr Feltenstein... I don't want to die.

FELTENSTEIN: Of course not. But I can only help if you help yourself. Listen to me,

And listen well. No more alcohol, decent food at regular times.

Fresh air and reasonable exercise. If not, you're going to die.

Do you hear me? In the meantime, I'll give you something to ease the pain.

DYLAN: Oh, the winking needle! Thank you, doctor. I'll do what you say.

Feltenstein injects Dylan.

FELTENSTEIN: Good, I must get back to the hospital

(**To Liz**) Just keep an eye on him. He needs to sleep.

Feltenstein exits. Dylan is quieter now. Liz goes over to him.

DYLAN: Liz, are you there?

LIZ: Yes. Don't be afraid. They do go away, those horrible things.

DYLAN: Yes, I know.... (**Drifting off**).... They do.....

Liz takes Dylan's hand, but she now feels it stiffen,

He starts to gag, his face turns blue, he stops breathing.

LIZ: Dylan! No!

She rushes to the door, and calls out.

LIZ: Dr. Feltenstein! Dr. Feltenstein! He's stopped breathing! Please! Please!

Feltenstein quickly re-enters the room. He only needs to take one look.

FELTENSTEIN: There's nothing more I can do, Miss Reitell.

He picks up the phone and dials quickly.

FELTENSTEIN: (dispassionately) St. Vincent's Emergency? Dr Feltenstein here. I'm at the

Chelsea Hotel...Room 215...I have a patient here, male, just gone into a coma.

Send an ambulance at once. **Sudden Blackout**

SCENE 5

Early morning St. Vincent's Hospital, New York. The stage is split into two

Sections by a plexi-glass partition: the Emergency Room in which Dylan is being treated

And a waiting room. Later these two rooms will become the treatment room and the

Adjacent waiting room on the third floor of the hospital. Two young residents,

William McVeigh and Frank Gilbertson, are discussing Dylan's condition.

GILBERTSON: So what do you make of it?

McVEIGH: It's difficult to be precise. The spinal tap will tell if he's had a cerebral.

Right now I'm more concerned with saving his life.

GILBERTSON: Feltenstein insists the coma's due to excessive drinking.

McVEIGH: He could be right. He says he injected the patient with half a grain of

Morphine for severe stomach pain, vomiting, and delirium tremens.

GILBERTSON: He's quite insistent that his diagnosis is correct.

McVEIGH: And very protective of his patient A real obsessive-compulsive.

GILBERTSON: If only we had his records! As things stand

We can only rely on Feltenstein... and, of course, Miss Reitell.

McVEIGH: And both of them say the patient's quite a fantasist.

GILBERTSON: So we wait for the test results and go from there.

The doctors exit. Liz Reitell enters the waiting room.

She is extremely pale and tired. She sits on a chair, not knowing

What to do, clutching her handbag. A moment later John Brinnin enters.

BRINNIN: How is he? Have I come too late?

LIZ: He's still alive. But they say he could die at any moment.

He can't breathe on his own. They suspect severe brain damage.

Oh, I blame myself!

BRINNIN: But why? You've taken care of his every need, looked after him

Like a child. He's the only one to blame. He's literally drunk himself to death.

LIZ: I should have dragged him out of the White Horse right away.

But I didn't. Can't you see that I'm to blame?

BRINNIN: It's not your fault. Listen to me!

It was bound to happen.

He helps Liz to a chair.

LIZ: Has anyone contacted Caitlin in Wales?

BRINNIN: Not yet, but it must be done. If I try to speak to her by phone

Who knows how she'll react? I'll wait until I've spoken with the doctors.

LIZ (rather dazed): Yes, yes....

There is a sudden flurry of activity. The bed containing Dylan is quickly

Wheeled across the stage by 2 nurses accompanied by Feltenstein.

Dylan's face is covered by an oxygen mask.

LIZ: Dr. Feltenstein! What are they doing?

BRINNIN: Doctor, I'm his agent, John Brinnin. Where are they taking him?

FELTENSTEIN: Just moving him upstairs, to the third floor.

BRINNIN: Is he any worse?

FELTENSTEIN: There's been no change.

But at least we know there's been no cerebral haemorrhage.

LIZ: Thank God! Will we be able to see him?

FELTENSTEIN: In a while. He'll be on the third floor, St. Joseph's Division.

LIZ: You say there's been no haemorrhage. Does it mean

There's no brain damage? Will he recover?

FELTENSTEIN: You realize it's very serious. If you know of any other

Condition he has, it could be helpful.

BRINNIN: He's mentioned cirrhosis of the liver.

LIZ: Gastro enteritis.

BRINNIN: Gout...syphilis at one time. But, as you know, he did like to exaggerate.

FELTENSTEIN: Quite. The cause is definitely alcohol. I have no doubt at all.

It's affected his brain. It's the only possible cause.

LIZ: Are you saying he does have brain damage?

FELTENSTEIN: It's too early to tell. When I know more,

I'll let you know. I have other patients to attend to.

Feltenstein goes off to the side to check his clipboard and briefcase.

LIZ: Oh, God! It's as bad as I thought.

BRINNIN: Let's go to the third floor. They may let us see him.

I'll go phone his London agent right now.

He'll get through to Caitlin.

They Exit. Feltenstein begins to leave as McVeigh and Gilbertson enter.

McVEIGH: Dr Feltenstein, we need to discuss this case with you again.

FELTENSTEIN: Oh, really? It seems quite clear cut.

GILBERTSON: Dr McVeigh and I have checked the initial lab tests. As you
Know, there was no cerebral haemorrhage. But we see that the
Sugar level in Mr Thomas's blood, urine and spinal fluid was
Extremely high: 500 milligrammes against a norm of 100 to 200...

McVEIGH: Which points to diabetic shock.

FELTENSTEIN: Don't be absurd. The coma has been caused by alcohol.
It's perfectly obvious.

GILBERTSON: I'm afraid not. We've conducted further tests and the glucose levels in the
Patient's blood are even higher, and a chest X-Ray shows
Advanced bronchial pneumonia!

McVEIGH: Which means the diagnosis and treatment were incorrect.
If this treatment continues, Mr Thomas will die. See for yourself.

**He gives Feltenstein a print-out of the lab results. Without looking
at the paper, Feltenstein rips it up and throws it to the floor.**

FELTENSTEIN (raging): This is preposterous! You dare to undermine my position!
Mr Thomas is **my** patient! I decide what's wrong with him!
I refuse to be dictated to by a couple of interns still wet behind the ears!

McVEIGH: We only wish to do what's right for the patient.

FELTENSTEIN: Are you suggesting that I do not? Mr Thomas is a celebrity and I'm
Responsible for his welfare. You'll say nothing more of this, least of all to
Those outside. I'll report you both for interference! Do you understand?
Both your careers will be finished! Finished! I'll make sure of it!

Feltenstein storms out.

McVEIGH: (picking up the torn report) My God! The man's gone crazy!

GILBERTSON: We've got to find Dr Mahoney at once!

Exit McVeigh and Gilbertson.

**Enter Liz and Brinnin, accompanied by a nurse who
Shows them to the room where Dylan is being treated.**

LIZ (horrified): Oh, God! His face is almost purple!

BRINNIN: Far worse than earlier.

LIZ: And his breathing! He always said his lungs were weak.

Oh, Dylan, what have you done?

Enter McVeigh. Liz goes off to the side to sit down.

McVEIGH: I'm afraid you'll both have to wait outside.

We need to perform a tracheotomy.

BRINNIN: Will it improve things?

McVEIGH: It should ease his breathing. Otherwise...

BRINNIN: You mean...

McVEIGH: I'm afraid so. His condition is irreversible. If he survives

He'll be blind, speechless, and probably quadriplegic.

There's not much more we can do.

I'm sorry, can you please wait outside?

As McVeigh tends to Dylan, Brinnin realizes this is the end, chokes up,

and does not respond. He then takes Liz to the waiting room.

She is in a virtual state of collapse.

BRINNIN: (choking back tears) Liz, You need to get some rest. You should go home.

LIZ: No. If he dies when I'm not here, I'll never forgive myself...

BRINNIN: (in a monotone) Caitlin arrives tomorrow. She was given the news in
Laugharne and Dylan's agent booked her flight immediately.
It's best if you avoid her. She could get quite hysterical.

LIZ: Yes....

Gilbertson enters the treatment room followed by Dr. Mahoney.

GILBERTSON (to McVeigh): Any change?

McVEIGH: Worse, if anything. Dr. Mahoney, we've done a tracheotomy,
But we think the treatment should be changed.

MAHONEY: But why do that, doctor? He's already receiving the appropriate treatment.

McVEIGH: For alcoholic poisoning, yes. But not for pneumonia and diabetic shock.

MAHONEY: What? I've spoken with Dr Feltenstein.
He's convinced that alcohol's to blame.

GILBERTSON: It's a delicate matter, sir. But we think you ought to know the truth.

MAHONEY: Are you suggesting that Feltenstein is lying?

GILBERTSON: Not so much lying, sir, as negligent. He admitted having
Injected the patient with half a grain of morphine...

McVEIGH: But neglected to test his sugar levels. We did some further tests.
The levels were extremely high, suggesting diabetic shock.
And the X-Rays show advanced bronchial pneumonia.

GILBERTSON: But when we showed the results to Dr. Feltenstein, he refused to even
Look at them, then tore them up and threatened us.

Here is another copy of the report.

(He hands the copy to Mahoney)

Pause. Mahoney scans report and is silent for a few seconds.

MAHONEY: Hmmm, now I understand. You were right to speak to me.

This is a very serious matter. If this gets out the hospital's
Reputation will be dragged through the mud! You'll speak to no one.

I'll handle this myself. The treatment will be changed.

And I'll deal with Feltenstein!

Exit McVeigh, Gilbertson, Mahoney

The light fades. Time passes.

It is the following morning.

Dylan is now in an oxygen tent.

Mahoney, McVeigh & Gilbertson Enter the Waiting Room

Followed shortly by Feltenstein.

FELTENSTEIN: You wish to see me, Dr Mahoney?

MAHONEY: I do indeed, Dr Feltenstein.

FELTENSTEIN: No doubt you've confirmed my diagnosis.

MAHONEY: Tell me, Dr. Feltenstein. Is it the case that you injected
Mr Thomas with half a grain of morphine sulphate?

FELTENSTEIN: I did, to ease his pain, and deal with symptoms of delirium tremens.

MAHONEY: You neglected to tell me that.

Have you ever given a patient so much morphine?

FELTENSTEIN: In my opinion, Mr Thomas needed it. He'd been drinking
Excessively. I'm convinced the coma has been caused by alcohol.

MAHONEY: Alcoholic Poisoning?

FELTENSTEIN: It could not have been anything else.

MAHONEY: Did you test for pneumonia?

Did you test the patient's sugar levels?

FELTENSTEIN: I had asked if he suffered from diabetes.

He said he did not.

MAHONEY: Our tests indicate he may, indeed! But more importantly, our X-Rays Show a case of advanced bronchial pneumonia.

I understand you refused to accept these results.

FELTENSTEIN: I felt they were...mistaken.

Mahoney's manner is icy.

MAHONEY: The mistake, sir, was entirely yours. You say you have no Doubt about the diagnosis. I have no doubt that your Treatment has produced this coma. Furthermore, your failure to test for Pneumonia or diabetes, will have caused this patient's death!

FELTENSTEIN: But I ...

MAHONEY: No, not another word!
You will no longer deal with Mr Thomas, and you will not issue Instructions to the hospital staff, and you will make No comment on his condition to the press! Do you understand?
I have never seen such arrogance and incompetence!
Good day to you, Dr. Feltenstein!

Exit Mahoney and McVeigh. Feltenstein is stunned. He stands For a moment, fumbles with his briefcase and nervously exits, Brushing past Caitlin who has now arrived in the Waiting Room. She enters like a whirlwind, half-drunk.

CAITLIN (to Gilbertson): Well, is the bloody man dead or alive?

Where is he? I want to see him now!

GILBERTSON: You must be Mister Thomas's wife.

CAITLIN: I am...if you can call someone a wife when her husband goes

Off with other women. And who are you?

GILBERTSON: (patiently): Dr. Gilbertson, I'm one of the doctors in charge of your husband.

CAITLIN (approaching him): Hmm...Are you married by any chance?

GILBERTSON: (ignoring Caitlin): Perhaps you'd like to come this way.

CAITLIN: I certainly would. I intend to give him a piece of my mind.

Gilbertson takes Caitlin into Dylan's room.

When she sees him, she is completely taken aback.

CAITLIN: My God! What is all this? These tubes! This thing he's under!

GILBERTSON: Mrs Thomas, he has great difficulty breathing.

"All of this" is intended to help him.

CAITLIN: Really? It looks as if it might finish him off!

She catches sight of Liz who is now standing nervously to one side of the room.

CAITLIN: And who are you?

LIZ: I'm Elizabeth Reitell, John Brinnin's assistant.

I've been here since Mr Thomas was admitted. I was helping him.

CAITLIN: Well it certainly looks like it! Are you sure your name isn't Pearl?

She was **helping** him too!

LIZ: No, it's Elizabeth.

CAITLIN: Well, Dylan wasn't fussy. One tart's just like another.

Anyway, you can leave now. I'll be seeing to everything.

Dismissed!

Liz, anxious to get away from Caitlin, slips out quickly to the Waiting Room.

GILBERTSON: I'll leave you for a while. I imagine you'd like to be alone with him.

Gilbertson exits, and a nurse begins to follow.

He gestures for the nurse to remain in the open doorway.

Caitlin produces a bottle of brandy and drinks from the bottle.

She pauses at the side of the bed.

CAITLIN: My God, Dylan! What are you doing? Say something! Wake up!

You've never been short of words before!

Don't you know how far I've travelled to see you?

She throws herself on top of Dylan, embracing him.

Dylan! Dylan!

NURSE: (moving quickly to Caitlin) Mrs Thomas! Move away! You can't do that!

CAITLIN: Why? Do you want to go to bed with him? Everyone else does.

The nurse pulls her away from Dylan.

CAITLIN: Alright! Get you hands off me!

Caitlin tries to calm herself. She takes out a cigarette and tries to light it.

NURSE: No, no! The oxygen! You'll blow us all up! You must leave this room!

The nurse pulls at Caitlin.

CAITLIN: You mean I can't stay with my husband? I've come all this way to see him,

And all he does is lie there! You'd think at least he'd say 'hello.'

Dylan, don't you love me anymore?

I know! You prefer these tarts over here...all teeth and tits!

The nurse pulls Caitlin toward the Waiting Room.

All right, leave me alone!

Brinnin and Gilbertson have just entered the Waiting Room.

Caitlin spots Brinnin at once.

CAITLIN: Brinnin!

BRINNIN: Caitlin!

CAITLIN: You see what you've done? You are to blame!
You brought him to America, you bastard!
Without waiting for his reply, she flies at him.
Gilbertson gestures to the Nurse who rushes outside to bring Security.

BRINNIN: Caitlin, this is madness! Stop it! Control yourself!
Gilbertson tries to intervene.

CAITLIN: You've killed Dylan! It's all your fault!
**In the ensuing struggle she sweeps pictures from the wall and
Smashes a statue of the Virgin Mary.**
An Orderly and the Nurse arrive with a wheelchair.
Liz remains off to the side quite shaken.

BRINNIN: Caitlin! This is crazy!
Gilbertsen and Brinnin grab hold of her.
The Orderly tries to restrain her. She bites his hand.
He shouts out of pain.

CAITLIN: Better get that seen to. I picked up rabies on the plane.
A mad dog sat next to me.
They all help to strap her into the wheelchair.
The Orderly wheels her out.
The Nurse enters the Treatment room to attend to Dylan.

GILBERTSON: Well it looks as if everything's under control now.

BRINNIN: Provided she doesn't come back.

GILBERTSON: She's going to the Emergency Room.
She'll be sedated.
Gilbertson exits

BRINNIN: (to Liz) Let's stay with Dylan. Now that she's gone, there's nothing to fear.

They enter Dylan's room. The nurse is washing him.

The sound of his harsh breathing has faded.

She checks his pulse.

She looks at Liz and Brinnin, shakes her head and covers him.

Liz and Brinnin stand silently, put their arms around

Each other and begin to quietly weep.

SCENE 5

A Few Days Later, on board the S.S. United States, bound for England.

The stage is divided into two levels. The Ship's Bar is above and the Hold is below.

Dylan's Coffin is in the Hold. It is about 5 o'clock and the Bar is not yet open.

Only the Bartender is present. Caitlin, dressed in black enters and sits on a bar stool.

CAITLIN: Give me five double whiskies.

BARTENDER: Sorry, ma'am. We're not open yet.

CAITLIN: Well, isn't that typical of this bloody ship!

I think I'll throw myself overboard.

BARTENDER: I take it you're not happy with things.

CAITLIN: Damn well not! My husband's dead and I'm taking him back to Wales.

I need a cabin to myself, and your captain has put me with
one of those sophisticated tarts.

Always in front of the mirror... all lipstick and fancy clothes.

BARTENDER: So sorry to hear it, Ma'am. May I ask how your husband died?

CAITLIN: Too much booze! So how about those five double whiskies?

They're not for me, you see. I'm waiting for some friends.

BARTENDER: Well, in that case, maybe we can bend the rules.

He pours out five double whiskies. Caitlin places them in a line on the bar, at which she now sits.

CAITLIN: I couldn't stand that bloody country! All those fawning, flattering Hangers-on! And Dylan, playing the fool, trying his best to please them!

As she broods on the past, she drinks the whiskies.

Can you imagine? They dragged me from the hospital ... put me in a clinic for three days, all because of my grief.

And they call it the land of freedom!

She drinks some more.

And that bloody service in that bloody church!

They were all there, Arthur Miller, John Berryman, E. E. Cummings.

And those so-called friends of his, the ones who plied him with drink,

Flattered and fawned over him, made him perform like a dancing bear.

And all he wanted was to be a poet.

She drinks the last double whisky, stands up,

And sweeps the glasses onto the floor

BARTENDER: Ma'am! Please control yourself!

CAITLIN: Why should I? Would you like to dance?

BARTENDER: Sorry Ma'am, it's not allowed.

The bartender is on the phone.

CAITLIN: I used to be a dancer ... in Paris, then London.

I could bend over backwards.

Look at me now! A housewife gone to seed!

When I was a chorus girl, I could do high kicks!

I think I still can! Let's see!

She does a high kick.

Not bad for a forty-year-old! Dylan couldn't dance, you know...

Couldn't tell his arse from his elbow! I dance à la Isadora Duncan.

It's so wonderful! It's just like an orgasm!

She dances across the room, picking up whatever object is in

Her way, tossing it aside. The Captain enters extremely annoyed.

CAPTAIN: Mrs Thomas! What do you think you're doing?

CAITLIN: Captain! What a surprise! Would you like to dance with me?

CAPTAIN: Just look at this room! You're drunk, and the bar isn't

Even open yet! **(To the Bartender)** I'll speak to you later!

CAITLIN: Oh, don't blame him! He's a very nice boy. **He** wouldn't put me

In a cabin with a tart and I'm not going back there!

CAPTAIN: Of course not, Mrs Thomas! I've other plans for you.

The First Sailor enters.

CAPTAIN: Put her in the hold. Make sure she stays there.

We can't have a crazy woman on the loose!

CAITLIN: Don't call me crazy, you insolent bastard! **(She lunges at him)**

CAPTAIN: Take her away! **(Captain exits)**

FIRST SAILOR: Sorry about this, m'am!

CAITLIN: Oh, not to worry. I always fancied being

Carried off by a sailor. Let's go!

The sailor accompanies Caitlin to the hold.

Another sailor is seated on the floor in front of the

coffin which contains Dylan's body.

He has a pack of cards spread out.

Bottles of beer line the coffin.

On the other side of the coffin is a bunk.

SECOND SAILOR: Hey, hello! What's all this?

FIRST SAILOR: Captain's orders. The lady has to stay with us.

SECOND SAILOR: I've never known him to be so considerate.

FIRST SAILOR: Would you care for a drink, m'am? Only beer, I'm afraid.

CAITLIN: Beer? Dylan would love it! I'll drink for the two of us!

SECOND SAILOR: So who is this Dylan, then?

CAITLIN: Not is... **(Pointing to the coffin)** Was....

FIRST SAILOR: (the sailors move away) My God! We thought it was empty!

SECOND SAILOR: You mean he's in there?

CAITLIN: Yes! Large as life. Don't worry, he won't object.

He can probably smell the beer. His nose is twitching.

SECOND SAILOR: We need to show respect! Clear the bottles!

CAITLIN: No, leave the bottles. I'll have one myself.

She takes a bottle and drinks.

Let's celebrate, like the Irish.

We'll drink to Dylan. An angel and a bastard! To Dylan!

THE SAILORS: To Dylan!

CAITLIN: I fancy he'll outlive us all!

She does a jig around the coffin, whooping,

Jumping around, pouring beer on the coffin.

The sailors drink but are reluctant to join her.

CAITLIN: (ecstatic) Finally I feel free...free...FREE...!

Suddenly Caitlin breaks down as the music changes character.

The lights begin to dim.

The sailors slowly pick up the coffin and carry it off. Caitlin covers herself with a black shawl and moves downstage as in the Prologue.

EPILOGUE

St. Martin's Churchyard, Laugharne, Wales.

The scene should be dream-like, in half-light and through a scrim.

Re-enactment of the funeral procession bearing the coffin

From the church to the grave site.

Based on the actual film footage in the Dylan Thomas Centre, Swansea.

CAITLIN:

If only we'd loved each other as we once did. Life was so simple then.

We were so innocent and so in love. And I shall never forget his words

To me: 'My Cat, I love you, and always will, whether here in Brown's, the Cross House, Sir John's Hill, in London, New York, in bed, in any place, at

Any time, as sure as death is sure, my love for you is everlasting.'

I believed him, and I still do. And I'm grateful for that bit of faith.

But the sudden loss of such a love....

My only....

N.B. The last scene is frozen and the curtain does not

Begin to close until there is silence.