

**Dylan Thomas, *Under Milk Wood: A Play for Voices* (1954)**

[Silence]

FIRST VOICE (Very softly)

To begin at the beginning:

It is spring, moonless night in the small town, starless  
and bible-black, the cobblestreets silent and the hunched,  
courtiers'-and-rabbits' wood limping invisible down to the  
sloeblack, slow, black, crowblack, fishingboatbobbing sea.  
The houses are blind as moles (though moles see fine to-night  
in the snouting, velvet dingles) or blind as Captain Cat  
there in the muffled middle by the pump and the town clock,  
the shops in mourning, the Welfare Hall in widows' weeds.  
And all the people of the lulled and dumbfound town are  
sleeping now.

Hush, the babies are sleeping, the farmers, the fishers,  
the tradesmen and pensioners, cobbler, schoolteacher,  
postman and publican, the undertaker and the fancy woman,  
drunkard, dressmaker, preacher, policeman, the webfoot  
cocklewomen and the tidy wives. Young girls lie bedded soft  
or glide in their dreams, with rings and trousseaux,  
bridesmaided by glowworms down the aisles of the  
organplaying wood. The boys are dreaming wicked or of the  
bucking ranches of the night and the jollyrodgered sea. And  
the anthracite statues of the horses sleep in the fields,  
and the cows in the byres, and the dogs in the wetnosed  
yards; and the cats nap in the slant corners or lope sly,  
streaking and needling, on the one cloud of the roofs.

You can hear the dew falling, and the hushed town breathing.  
Only your eyes are unclosed to see the black and folded  
town fast, and slow, asleep. And you alone can hear the  
invisible starfall, the darkest-before-dawn minutely dewgrazed  
stir of the black, dab-filled sea where the Arethusa, the  
Curlew and the Skylark, Zanzibar, Rhiannon, the Rover,  
the Cormorant, and the Star of Wales tilt and ride.

Listen. It is night moving in the streets, the processional  
salt slow musical wind in Coronation Street and Cockle Row,  
it is the grass growing on Llaregyb Hill, dewfall, starfall,  
the sleep of birds in Milk Wood.

Listen. It is night in the chill, squat chapel, hymning in  
bonnet and brooch and bombazine black, butterfly choker and  
bootlace bow, coughing like nannygoats, sucking mintoes,  
fortywinking hallelujah; night in the four-ale, quiet as a  
domino; in Ocky Milkman's lofts like a mouse with gloves;

in Dai Bread's bakery flying like black flour. It is to-night  
in Donkey Street, trotting silent, With seaweed on its  
hooves, along the cockled cobbles, past curtained fernpot,  
text and trinket, harmonium, holy dresser, watercolours  
done by hand, china dog and rosy tin teacaddy. It is night  
neddying among the snuggeries of babies.

Look. It is night, dumbly, royally winding through the  
Coronation cherry trees; going through the graveyard of  
Bethesda with winds gloved and folded, and dew doffed;  
tumbling by the Sailors Arms.

Time passes. Listen. Time passes.

Come closer now.

Only you can hear the houses sleeping in the streets in the  
slow deep salt and silent black, bandaged night. Only you  
can see, in the blinded bedrooms, the coms. and petticoats  
over the chairs, the jugs and basins, the glasses of teeth,  
Thou Shalt Not on the wall, and the yellowing dickybird-watching  
pictures of the dead. Only you can hear and see, behind the  
eyes of the sleepers, the movements and countries and mazes  
and colours and dismays and rainbows and tunes and wishes  
and flight and fall and despairs and big seas of their dreams.

From where you are, you can hear their dreams.

Captain Cat, the retired blind sea-captain, asleep in his  
bunk in the seashelled, ship-in-bottled, shipshape best  
cabin of Schooner House dreams of

#### SECOND VOICE

never such seas as any that swamped the decks of his \_S.S.  
Kidwelly\_ bellying over the bedclothes and jellyfish-slippery  
sucking him down salt deep into the Davy dark where the fish  
come biting out and nibble him down to his wishbone, and  
the long drowned nuzzle up to him.

#### FIRST DROWNED

Remember me, Captain?

#### CAPTAIN CAT

You're Dancing Williams!

#### FIRST DROWNED

I lost my step in Nantucket.

## SECOND DROWNED

Do you see me, Captain? the white bone talking? I'm Tom-Fred the donkeyman...we shared the same girl once...her name was Mrs Probert...

## WOMAN'S VOICE

Rosie Probert, thirty three Duck Lane. Come on up, boys, I'm dead.

## THIRD DROWNED

Hold me, Captain, I'm Jonah Jarvis, come to a bad end, very enjoyable.

## FOURTH DROWNED

Alfred Pomeroy Jones, sea-lawyer, born in Mumbles, sung like a linnet, crowned you with a flagon, tattooed with mermaids, thirst like a dredger, died of blisters.

## FIRST DROWNED

This skull at your earhole is

## FIFTH DROWNED

Curly Bevan. Tell my auntie it was me that pawned he ormolu clock.

## CAPTAIN CAT

Aye, aye, Curly.

## SECOND DROWNED

Tell my missus no I never

## THIRD DROWNED

I never done what she said I never.

## FOURTH DROWNED

Yes they did.

## FIFTH DROWNED

And who brings coconuts and shawls and parrots to \_my\_

Gwen now?

FIRST DROWNED

How's it above?

SECOND DROWNED

Is there rum and laverbread?

THIRD DROWNED

Bosoms and robins?

FOURTH DROWNED

Concertinas?

FIFTH DROWNED

Ebenezer's bell?

FIRST DROWNED

Fighting and onions?

SECOND DROWNED

And sparrows and daisies?

THIRD DROWNED

Tiddlers in a jamjar?

FOURTH DROWNED

Buttermilk and whippets?

FIFTH DROWNED

Rock-a-bye baby?

FIRST DROWNED

Washing on the line?

SECOND DROWNED

And old girls in the snug?

THIRD DROWNED

How's the tenors in Dowlais?

FOURTH DROWNED

Who milks the cows in Maesgwyn?

FIFTH DROWNED

When she smiles, is there dimples?

FIRST DROWNED

What's the smell of parsley?

CAPTAIN CAT

Oh, my dead dears!

FIRST VOICE

From where you are you can hear in Cockle Row in the spring,  
moonless night, Miss Price, dressmaker and sweetshop-keeper,  
dream of

SECOND VOICE

her lover, tall as the town clock tower, Samsonsyrup-gold-maned,  
whacking thighed and piping hot, thunderbolt-bass'd and  
barnacle-breasted, flailing up the cockles with his eyes  
like blowlamps and scooping low over her lonely loving  
hotwaterbottled body.