

ON A DAY IN SUMMER IN A GARDEN

by Don Haworth

[written for radio 1975]

[playwright and theatre director, 1931 -]

CHARACTERS: Dick [Grandad] Jim [Uncle] Jack [youth] Woman Man

Birds: A dawn chorus.

DICK: Nice morning.

JIM: Grand.

(Bullocks low and sheep bleat in the distance. Birds near and far dive and tweet. The conversation is leisurely. These country sounds are heard behind it and during the quite long pauses)

JIM: Nippy though.

DICK: Morning mist. Morning mist and morning dew. Going to be hot today, young Jack.

JACK: Is it, grandad?

DICK: When the sun strikes through on a hot day, early summer, there's no better thing in creation than to be a dock plant in this garden.

JIM: Because we fear nothing.

DICK: Correct.

JACK: What is there to fear, uncle Jim?

DICK): Nothing.

JIM): Encroachment.

JACK: What's encroachment, uncle Jim?

JIM: The other plants encroaching.

DICK: But we don't fear it.

JIM: Attempting to choke us.

DICK: Because we're more than equal.

JIM: Sometimes.

DICK: Always, Jim.

JIM: Not always, Dick. A large number of dock plants have been lost through the years.

DICK: You're here, I'm here, young Jack's here. This is our patch of the garden.

JIM: We've tried to teach them that.

DICK: Well then, it's finally sunk in.

JIM *(laughs)*: I don't think those daisies will come again.

JACK: What's daisies?

DICK: Surface leaf, white flower, close up at night. We throttled them.

JIM: Choked their life out.

DICK: And before that the charlock.

JIM: And before that the cornflower.

DICK: And before that the hoary pepperwon.

JIM: Forget-me-not.

DICK: Nettle annual.

JIM: Bramble.

DICK: Wild turnip and shepherds needle.

JIM: Pennycress and sowthistle.

DICK: The creeping buttercup.

JIM: The deadly nightshade.

DICK: And was the poppy before that?

JIM: And when was the groundsel?

DICK: And the tares and the dandelions.

JIM: And the thistles and treacle mustard.

DICK: It's hard to remember which came in what year. We've choked them all in our time.

(Pause - country sounds)

JACK: Grandad, are there years when other plants don't encroach?

DICK: Many.

JACK: Then you must be very old grandad, you and uncle Jim.

JIM: Been here since this garden began.

JACK: And what was before that, uncle Jim?

JIM: That was the beginning, I suppose, the first season ever.
 JACK: But before that.
 JIM: There could be nothing before that, could there, Dick?
 DICK: I've forgotten, Jim. It's not quite so straightforward. I did have an explanation of it once.
(Pause - country sounds)
 JACK: Grandad.
 DICK: Son?
 JACK: I hope they don't encroach this year.
 DICK: No.
 JACK: The other plants.
 DICK: They won't. And what if they do? We're firmly rooted.
 JIM: We've got a good grip.
 DICK: Tenacious. Steadfast.
 JIM: We've got our taproots down, knotted round the limestone.
 JACK: But I haven't, uncle Jim, not limestone, only soil. They might —
 DICK: They won't, Jackie. *(aside)* Why did you have to mention that?
 JIM *(aside)*: I didn't think.
 DICK *(aside)*: Rattling the young chap.
 JACK *(in alarm)*: The other plants, they could encroach on me. They'll have me up, whisk me out.
 DICK: Not remotely. You're with us. Me and your uncle Jim have defeated all encroachers from the beginning of time. And we're ready, aren't we, Jim?
 JIM: Yes.
 DICK: To give a repeat performance.
 JIM: Yes.
 DICK: Any season, upon any plant, herb, weed or growth of any pestiferous species whatsoever that has the audacity, the temerity, the utter crass and reckless folly to invade our patch of the garden.
(JACK laughs reassured)
 DICK: So there.
(He laughs briefly, pauses, then lets out a sigh, long and contented)
 Aahhhh. A grand feeling, the mist dispersed and the sun warming the dew from your fronds.
 Ohhhh it's grand to be alive.
(A buzz of bees. Birds close. Sheep and bullocks in the distance, fade. Silence)

JIM *(alarmed)*: What was that?
 DICK: What?
 JIM: Noise.
 DICK: What noise?
 JIM *(alarmed)*: It was his tank.
 JACK *(alarmed)*: What's a tank, uncle Jim?
 JIM: A tank, his spraying tank.
 JACK: What's a spraying tank, grandad?
 DICK *(calmly)*: Nothing. Something the persons have
 JACK: What for?
 DICK: Spraying.
 JACK: What's spraying?
 DICK: A kind of rain.
 JACK *(relieved)*: Rain's all right.
 JIM: In moderation.
 DICK *(affably)*: Your uncle Jim doesn't like it. That's why he grows up the wall side.
 JIM: It suits me.
 DICK: You're dusty, Jim.
 JIM: No.
 DICK *(bantering)*: Grubby. You could do with a clean up If he spots you *(laughing)* he'll let you have it with the spray.
 JIM: Now that's not a joke, that's not funny, that's not in good taste.
 JACK: What is the spray?
 JIM: It's what he brings and —
 DICK: All right, Jim, all right.
 JACK: But what is it, grandad?
 DICK: Like I said, like rain.
 JIM: You're bringing the lad up on lies.

DICK: I'm bringing him up to be intrepid.
 JIM (*ridiculing*): Intrepid.
 DICK: Yes, intrepid. Not cowering against the wallside for fear of the rain.
 JIM: I've seen you miserable enough in the rain, Dick, sodden there and drooping.
 DICK: Nonsense. You're dusty, Jim, from cowering against that wall. You're asymmetric.
 JACK (*making the peace*): But he's quite tall, grandad.
 JIM: Considerably taller than your grandad.
 DICK: He's got next to no leaf.
 JIM (*ironically*): And your granddad, Jack, has some lovely broad fronds.
 DICK: I do at least look like a dock plant, not crawling up the wallside like the nettles.
 JIM (*laughs, ridiculing*): You look like a clump of rhubarb.
 DICK (*angry*): I what? I what?
 JACK (*distressed*): Uncle Jim. Grandad, please —
 DICK: All right, Jack. (*Pause*) Let's not spoil a nice day. I apologise, Jim.
 JIM (*after a pause*): All right. (*Pause — then by way of explanation*) I'm dusty because the wind twists up the loose soil and tosses it against the wall. Can't help it.
 DICK: Understood, Jim.
 (*He pauses, waiting for Jim to speak, then, as Jim doesn't speak —*)
 And as to your allusion?
 JIM: Allusion?
 DICK: Comparison?
 JIM: Comparison?
 DICK: Of me to — you know.
 JIM: Do I — what?
 JACK (*whispers*): Rhubarb, uncle Jim.
 JIM: Oh yes. I withdraw, Dick. You don't resemble a clump of rhubarb.

(Country sounds, fade. The voices of the man and woman are at a distance)

WOMAN (*asking a question*): Hobble trebble babble settle?
 MAN (*replying*): Base trough rough rass.
 WOMAN: Hebble trebble ten.
 MAN: Base trough.
 JIM: He's going to the field.
 (*Clang of a gate closing*)
 JACK: Grandad.
 DICK: Hm. Hm.
 JACK: The noises the persons make — are they talking?
 DICK: I suppose, in a way.
 JIM: Communicating.
 DICK: In a general sort of way.
 JIM: Same as the animals. The bullocks low and the sheep bleat — I suppose there are different ways of lowing and bleating, Dick, and each will express something different.
 DICK: Simple things, I suppose, Jim — anger, warning, things like that. Contentment.
 (*A distant bullock lows long and contented*)
 All animals can convey what they feel to some extent.
 JIM: But not actually converse.
 DICK: No.
 JIM: Not hold a conversation.
 DICK: Not an intelligent conversation.
 JIM: Like us.
 JACK: And the persons, grandad?
 DICK: Much the same, I suppose.
 JIM: Communicating.
 DICK: But nothing precise. The bullocks low and the sheep bleat and the persons, one of them babbles and one burbles.
 JACK: Why are there two, grandad?
 DICK: Everything comes in numbers. There's three of us here.
 JIM: And there used to be many more.
 JACK: What happened to —
 DICK (*overriding the question*): And there's a number of docks by the pond and all that mob over there.
 JIM: Common lot. They tolerate anything there. There's some curly leaf docks amongst that lot.
 JACK: What are curly leaf docks, uncle Jim?

JIM: Foreigners, riff-raff. Blown in from miles away.
DICK: The older persons that once lived in the house used to tip tins amongst them. They'd perform undignified tricks like growing through the bottom.
JIM: Common lot.
JACK: What happened to the older persons?
DICK: Taken away in a vehicle.
JACK: Why?
DICK: I can't say, Jack.
JIM: Well the persons when they're dead don't rot down like plants, do they?
DICK: Is that it? That sounds a very likely explanation, Jim.
JACK: What's 'dead', grandad? What's 'rotting down'?
JIM: Docks rot down when they're dead.
JACK: Will I be dead? Will I rot down?
DICK: No. Get a firm grip with your taproots, Jackie. Be tenacious. They'll never shift you.
JIM: They've come at us with all sorts of things in our time.
DICK: The sickle. Lopped us with the sickle.
JIM: And uprooting.
DICK: Spade, fork and the other thing.
JIM: The pick.
DICK: That's right. The pick. Came at us bald-headed with the pick. Stones, worms, soil, insects, everything tossed into the air and the old person tugging at us with the pick, bellowing imprecations, wasn't he, Jim (*Jim agrees*) with the dew running off him and a stinking mist enveloping him.
JIM: He gave off the most noisome exhalation, the older person.
DICK: He collapsed.
JIM: He did. Something in him cracked.
DICK: And they took him off in the vehicle.
JACK: Will they come at me with the pick?
DICK: No. No. Get your taproots down, then no matter how much they tug and snap you, you're there again next spring.
JIM: To salute the season.
DICK: Precisely.
JACK: But when they snap you, you've lost the sky and the birds and the trees and the bullocks.
DICK: You have, you have. You're in the darkness of the soil. You've missed a bit of summer. It's like an early onset of the winter.
JIM: Except the soil is still warm.
DICK: That's so.
JIM: And it feels odd. Quite odd. We've experienced it a number of times, haven't we, Dick?
DICK: We have, at their hands.
(*Sound of sheep, bullocks and birds. Fade*)

JACK: Grandad.
DICK (*sleepy*): Hm, hm.
JACK: The persons.
DICK: Hm, hm.
JACK: Why do they live in the house?
DICK: I've never thought.
JIM: It's to make the little ones grow fast.
DICK: Is it, Jim?
JIM: Yes, like the plants in the glass frame.
DICK: Plants in the glass frame grow whitish instead of green.
JIM: And the little people, all whitish. The house forces their growth.
DICK: Very unhealthy.
JIM: And it's said they stay above ground all winter.
DICK: That can't possibly be healthy.
JIM: Remember when we went into the house, Dick?
DICK: I do.
JACK: Into the house?
JIM: Us and the other plants.
DICK: The persons had gone away.
JIM: In through the window frames and the cracks in the walls.
DICK: The nettles did well.

JIM (*deprecating*): For nettles.
DICK: Clumps of them growing inside the house.
JIM: And bindweed. And the grasses perched on high ledges.
DICK: And do you remember that dock, Jim — what was his name — growing out of the top of the chimney pot?
JIM: I do. And all of the docks pressing against the window panes from the inside.
DICK: We shall take possession again. We'll drive the persons out. We'll shove into every crevice. We'll topple the house down, oh yes.
JACK: Why grandad? Why should we want to do that?
DICK: Eh? I've never really thought. It's self-evidently desirable wouldn't you say, Jim?
JIM: Oh yes, a much more natural state of affairs.
DICK: Quite so. Quite so.
(*Country sounds. Fade. Clang of gate*)

JIM: He's back.
MAN (*calling*): O-pal.
WOMAN: Treble boffhip.
MAN: O yump wippy tip.
WOMAN: Deep tip in bode.
MAN: Yump hen.
(*Door closes*)

JACK: Grandad. The persons are two.
DICK: I've explained. Things come in numbers.
JIM: But persons are two, Dick. The old persons, two, and these persons, two.
DICK: Yes. Now I do remember something —
JIM: It's perhaps —
DICK: Just let me think. (*Pause*) It's something to do with them not going to seed.
JIM (*puzzled*): That there are two?
DICK: Yes, that there has to be two.
JIM: How?
DICK: I can't quite remember. I did have an explanation of it once.
(*Country sounds, then: a bluster of wind. A loud cushioned fall. Dick laughs*)
Caterpillar.

JIM: Where? Where's it landed?
DICK (*laughs*): On you.
(*JACK joins in Dick's laughter*)

DICK: Breeze blew it out of the tree.
JIM: Where on me, where?
DICK: You'll know when he starts his dinner.
(*DICK and JACK laugh*)
Listen.
(*A slow, heavy crunching sound which continues. DICK and JACK laugh*)

JACK: Where is he, grandad?
JIM (*indignant, not alarmed*): Get off. Get off.
DICK: On your uncle Jim's top frond.
JIM: Get off. Get off.
(*DICK and JACK laugh*)

DICK: Look up, Jackie. Can you see where he's gnawing through?
JACK (*laughs with delight*): A patch, a light green patch. It's growing lighter still.
JIM: Get off. Go back where you came from.
JACK (*excited*): It's eaten through. There's a hole, grandad. I can see the sky and the clouds.
DICK: It'll be a dry, dusty dinner for Mr Caterpillar. He'll have a thirsty afternoon.
JIM: That's uncalled for. Get off. Get off. (*A bluster of wind*) That's shifted him.
JACK: Where's he gone?
JIM: Blown somewhere.
(*The slow heavy crunching is heard again. JIM laughs*)

JACK (*happily*): What is it, uncle Jim? What is it?
JIM (*laughs*): He's landed (*he laughs*) on your grandfather.
(*JIM and JACK laugh*)

DICK: All right. All right.
JIM: He'll get a sloppier dinner now.
DICK (*laughing a little*): All right, all right, all right.

(JIM and JACK. laugh and DICK, despite himself, joins in. The crunching sound fades under their laughter which continues merrily until JIM cuts it short)

JIM *(alarmed)*: What was that?
 DICK: What?
 JIM: It was his tank, wasn't it, the spraying tank.
 DICK: It wasn't. He's going to the field again. *(Gate clangs closed)*
 JACK: Granddad, if it had been the spraying tank —
 DICK: It wasn't.
 JACK: But if it had been.
 DICK: We should have remained unaffected. Your uncle Jim's gone as soft as an elder bush growing against that wall.
 JACK: But what is the spray?
 JIM: A leprous distilment. A poisonous and pestiferous exhalation. A noxious and deadly cloud.
 DICK: Rarely encountered. Rarely encountered.
 JIM: An ever-present threat.
 DICK: Everything's an ever-present threat, Jim. Life is lived in ever-present threats.
 JACK *(anxiously)*: But if the spray is noxiferous, granddad —
 DICK: The spray is nothing. *(Diverting him)* The creeping buttercup, now then, to me that's far more insidious.
 JACK: And more noxiferous?
 DICK: By far. You don't see it coming. Do you remember when we didn't see it coming, Jim?
 JIM *(sulkily)*: Hm.
 JACK: But how does it arrive, granddad, if you don't see it coming?
 DICK: Insidiously, that's the point. Pushes out green creepers and flat leaves, lying below sight and choking the life out of the grasses and plants as it approaches. Nothing to see, then suddenly they've arrived, yellow all along the horizon, the flower heads. *(JACK shrieks)*
 Brilliant yellow. Brighter than the sun. You could be blinded and paralysed and it's exactly then that you've got to remember it's not the flower heads that kill, it's the creepers and the flat green leaves, and the moment you can see the flower heads it's almost too late because the creepers operate forward of them. They could finish you while you're staring aghast at the nodding flowers.
(JACK makes an appalled and fearful sound)
 JIM: Dick, if you wanted to scare the lad stiff, you've succeeded.
 JACK: Have they come at you like that, granddad?
 DICK: They have and this is the point: we're still here. I'm not alarming him, Jim, I'm teaching him life's lesson. I want him to grow up intrepid.
 JACK: I don't know whether I'll ever be that, granddad.
 DICK: You will. At times like that, when the creeping buttercup comes, remain calm, rely on your tap roots. Be tenacious. Stand your ground. They came. They've gone. We remain.
 JIM: Some of the other docks —
 DICK: What others?
 JIM: A whole patch of others.
 DICK: No, docks are perennial. Docks are indestructible.
 JIM: It's not the same thing,
 JACK: But there must have been others, granddad.
 DICK): How?
 JACK): Of course.
 JACK: When the docks took possession of the house and grew out of the chimney pots. There must have been many growing then that are not here now.
 DICK: Well, yes. *(Pause)* It's quite true, the house became re-infested.
 JACK: What's that mean, granddad?
 DICK: The persons came back.
 JIM: And drove the plants out.
 JACK: What happened to the plants?
 DICK: I don't know. Jack. *(Pause)* It's just that sometimes the spring arrives and a plant you've known for many years doesn't come up again.
 JACK *(reflective and serious)*: I see.
(Birds, bees and distant country sounds are heard)
 DICK *(more brightly)*: But then sometimes a summer breeze springs up like the breeze that's blowing now and whisks a seed from the stem of a dock plant and drops it in the warm soil.
 JACK: Does it?

DICK: Then the next spring, though some of the old ones might not arise again, you find to your utter surprise a young 'un growing, like yourself.

JACK (*laughs with a thrill of pleasure*): Like me.
(*JACK laughs. DICK and JIM laugh*)

JIM: So there, young Jack.

JACK: I'm glad I'm here with you, grandad, and uncle Jim.

DICK: And so are we.

JIM: There were some cantankerous knotted old plants. It was time we had new growth.

DICK: Like Jack.

JIM (*congratulatory*): Exactly like Jack.
(*JACK laughs self-consciously with pleasure. Pause — distant country sounds. Birds*)

JACK: Grandad?

DICK: Jack.

JACK: Next spring, you will come up again?

DICK: Of course.

JACK: And you, uncle Jim?

JIM: Every time.

JACK: We'll always come up, won't we, all of us every spring.

DICK: Of course. We're perennial.
(*Distant sheep, bullocks, birds, closer the wind blusters, then the gate clangs*)

DICK: Back from the field. Too breezy for him.

JACK: Grandad.

DICK: Son?

JACK: Grandad, the persons move and the buttercups creep and we — well, we're rooted, aren't we?

DICK: We are indeed. Steadfast.

JACK: Why do the persons move?

JIM: It's to get out of the way of the bullocks.

DICK: I never heard that, Jim.

JIM: Yes. The docks in the field, the bullocks bogged on them.

DICK: They did, last summer.

JIM: Flattened them under a right sloppy load.

JACK: Is that more dangerous than the creeping buttercup, uncle Jim?

JIM: By no means. It's merely unpleasant, caked with dung, and dust accumulating and flies buzzing round.

DICK: Distasteful more than anything.

JIM: Yes, distasteful.

JACK: I was asking about the persons moving.

JIM: That's the explanation. They move so they don't get bogged on by the bullocks.

JACK: But the bullocks can move too, uncle Jim.

JIM: Yes.

JACK: So that if the persons move the bullocks can also move and bog on them where they've moved to.

DICK: That's right, Jim.

JIM: Perhaps. It doesn't seem to work out like that in practice.

JACK: Perhaps that's why he closes the gate.

JIM: How?

JACK: So the bullocks can't follow into the house and bog on him there.
(*Distant lowing of bullocks. Sheep, birds*)

JIM (*suddenly and alarmed*): Now that was the tank, that was his tank. Listen.
(*Sound of tap water drumming into container*)

DICK: He can't spray today, not with this breeze blowing

JIM: Is it blowing? It's dropped.

DICK: Of course it's blowing, it blew the caterpillar. You miss half the happenings of life under the shelter of that wall

JACK: Why can't he spray if it's blowing?

DICK: It'd blow the spray over him. He'd go orange and purple and mottled. He'd crack like a rotten stick

JACK (*alarmed*): Is that what happens when you're sprayed, granddad?

JIM (*frightened*): Yes, it is.

DICK: And quite apart from the breeze, it's clouded over. It's going to rain. He can't spray today.
(*Door closed*)

JIM (*frightened but ironic*): He doesn't seem to have your grasp of the subject, Dick. He's about to commence.
(*Distant clank of the tank*)

DICK: Where is he?

JIM: Over there, at the far wall.
(*Hiss of spray at some distance*)
(*In panic*) O-O-O. O-O-O. I can't go through that again.

JACK (*in panic*): Again?

JIM: Every year.

DICK (*loudly*): Pull yourself together, Jim. Two seasons, three seasons, what are ten seasons? They'll tire and we'll not tire and we'll be into the house again next year or the year after or in a thousand years.

JIM: We shan't see a thousand years. We shan't see the autumn.
(*JACK starts to wail*)

DICK: Jack.

JACK: Grandad, I don't want to go orange and purple.

DICK: You won't, son.

JACK: I don't want to go mottled. I don't want to crack like a rotten stick. I don't want to wither and rot down and die. You promised we'd all be here again in spring.

DICK: We will.

JACK: I've seen nothing, grandad. I've never known an autumn. I was looking forward to what you said once, a snug winter in the soil.

DICK: And you shall have it, lad.

JIM: You said that last summer to Tom.

JACK: Tom?

JIM: And Henry.

JACK: Henry?

JIM: And Bill and John and Joseph, and Tony and Alfred and Robert in the couch grass, and Stanley and Eric and Archie and Fred by the footpath, and Jack and Arthur and Martin and Roy and Peter and Graham and Philip and Dennis.
(*During this roll-call Dick, trying to calm and quieter him, keeps saying —*)

DICK: All right. All right. All right.
(*JIM exhausts his list with a weary groan and JACK wails*)

DICK: Jack, he's old and hysterical and silly. Now listen. Where there's danger some succumb and some survive, and you and I will survive. And Jim, despite his lack of character will also survive.

JACK: But grandad, how can you tell?

JIM: He can't tell. They wouldn't even need to take the spray to you, nipper. They'd whisk you up with the hoe.
(*JACK wails*)

DICK: That is rotten, Jim, that really is rotten.

JIM: But truthful. They threw your intrepid in your face last year when they were swelling and writhing and their roots twisting up through the cracking soil.
(*JACK wails with greater force*)

DICK: Jack.
(*JACK continues to wail*)

DICK (*sharply*): Jack!
(*JACK stops*)

DICK (*confidently*): He is not going to come here today. (*JIM gives a bitter and hollow laugh*)
He is not going to come here for two reasons, first, that the breeze being where it is he can't spray into this wall side without getting the spray back over himself. Second, that even if he could we're too small a clump to catch his eye.

JIM (*bitterly and mournfully*): We are now.

DICK: And a third reason, now just be quiet a moment and feel. (*pause*) What do you feel?

JACK: Frightened, grandad.

DICK: No, on your fronds, what do you feel?

JACK: Moisture, grandad? Moisture?

DICK: It's starting to rain.
(*DICK laughs*)

JIM: It's not.

DICK (*laughs with an assumed confidence*): Rain is coming.

JIM (*in the calm tone of terror*): I can see what it is that's coming.
(*Pump and hiss of spray*)

JACK: Where is he? Where is he?
 JIM: On the far side, by the pond, advancing behind that silver cloud.
 DICK (*amazed*): It's rolling back off the wall. The breeze is blustering the fumes round his head. He can't go on like this much longer.
 JIM: Plants are perishing already.
 DICK: The rain'll come and swill it off.
 JIM: It won't rain today — it's too windy.
 DICK: All right then, windy. Unsuitable for spraying. If he knew his business —
 JIM: But he doesn't, Dick. That's why we're all going to catch it today. (*Pump and hiss of spray*)
 JACK: Granddad, if the noxious cloud envelops me —
 DICK: Noxious or pestiferous, Jackie, those are the correct words.
 JIM: Meaning lethal.
 DICK: Meaning unpleasant, highly unpleasant. The buttercup is worse and the bramble is worse, to say nothing of being bogged on by the bullocks.
 JACK: But granddad —
 DICK: Shhh. Listen.
 (*Pause. Only the distant country sounds are heard*)

JACK: He's stopped. He's gone.
 DICK: Yes.
 JACK: He has stopped, uncle Jim.
 JIM: Quiet. Listen . . . Yes, he has.
 DICK (*laughs*): Too windy, rain hanging about, should never have commenced.
 JACK (*laughs*): I was frightened, uncle Jim.
 JIM: Me too, I don't mind admitting it. I'm not as young as I was.
 DICK: Quite so. But try and be calmer, Jim. It must be harmful to your constitution to get worked up like that.
 JIM: I haven't been too well this season.
 DICK (*sympathetically*): No.
 JIM: I wasn't always in a state.
 DICK: No, you weren't, Jim.
 JACK: I hope I grow up intrepid like you, granddad.
 DICK: You will, son, have no fear ... Ah well, not a bad afternoon. Bit chillier though as the day wears on. (*He laughs*) Uncle Jim's nodding off.
 (*JACK laughs. DICK silences him*)
 DICK: Shhh.
 (*JACK gives a little pleased chuckle*)
 JACK (*quietly and with affection and admiration*): Granddad.
 DICK (*quietly and warmly returning the affection*): All right, Jack lad?
 JACK (*laughs*): All right.
 DICK (*with exhaustion and contentment*): Ahhhh.
 (*Distant country sounds and birds near and far are heard and held. Suddenly the pump and hiss of the spray*)
 (*JIM wakes up with a tremor of terror*)

JIM: Oo-oo. Ah-ah-ah.
 JACK: Granddad! Granddad!
 DICK (*roused*): Umph?
 JACK: It's started. He's spraying again.
 JIM: Oo-oo. Ah-ah-ah.
 DICK: Jim, pull yourself together. Where is he?
 JIM: Oo-oo.
 DICK (*insistently*): Where is he, Jim?
 JIM: Over there. Advancing on that big clump.
 DICK: Which big clump?
 JIM: The ones with the tins and the curly dock amongst them. He's letting them have it now.
 (*From the distance of the clump: pump and hiss of spray. Drumming patter of falling droplets, like rain on canvas. From the attacked clump of docks a crowd shout: protest, indignation, abuse, stream of insults, threats, orders to clear off in vulgar terms*)

DICK: Common lot that.
 (*From the distance of the clump: pump, hiss and fall of droplets. Further shouts from crowd. The sounds of the spraying (pump, hiss and fall) competes with the shouting of the crowd. The shouting grows hoarse but at a high volume*)

JIM (*timorously*): He's got 'em.
(From the distance of the clump: the sound of the spraying continues as the shouting becomes hoarse and panting)

JIM: They're rising up in the sky like contorted worms, they're swelling like melons.

JACK: Oh, grandad.
(From the distance of the clump: the last hoarse cries of anger and hatred turn to strangled moaning. The spraying stops. The crowd moaning becomes feebler. A separate sudden shout of agony)

JIM: Look at that, that chap writhing up, his head purple and orange and — oh, it's burst open.
(Distant: sharp cry, then feeble mass moaning which fades under the dialogue)

JACK (*whimpering*): Grandad, they *have* turned orange and purple. They *have* swelled and reared up and burst apart.

DICK: He'll turn orange and purple. He'll burst apart. It's blowing all over him.

JACK (*pleading in fear*): Grandad, please grandad.

DICK: He'll not come here, Jack.

JIM (*mocking*): Because we're too small a clump. Look what he's taking aim at now. A solitary plant.
(Pump, hiss and fall of spray. JACK wails)

DICK: It's all right, it's commencing to rain. The rain'll swill it off. Just a bit of burning, that's all.

JIM: Tell that clump over there it's commencing to rain. They'd like to hear it's commencing to rain.
(Distant and low hoarse groans, final expiring gasps. A moment of silence)

JIM (*in panic*): Ah-ah-ah. He's coming, he's coming, he's coming. This is it now.

DICK: Steady, Jack lad.
(Boots approach through grass and stop. Pause: distant country sounds heard)

MAN (*close*): Bubble stubble runt beg.

WOMAN (*distant*): Be tinketer fister wobble.

MAN (*close*): Yump hen. *(His boots go away. DICK lets out a long sigh)*

DICK: Close shave.

JACK (*weary with fear and relief*): Oh, grandad.

JIM: He'll come back. He's gone to refill his tank.

DICK: He's gone to die. It was blowing all over him.

JIM: He'll come back.

DICK: Not now, it's raining.

JIM: It's not raining.

DICK: It's hanging about. It's in the atmosphere.

JIM: There's only one thing I can see in the atmosphere.

JACK: What, uncle Jim?

JIM: The tap roots of that big clump over there.
(JACK makes weak sounds of distress)

DICK: They were rabble. They got preoccupied with growing through tins. They didn't get their taproots down. When he comes at you with the spray you need character, tenacity.

JACK: But will he come back, grandad?

DICK: Yes, he will sometime, Jackie. Not necessarily today, not this year perhaps, but sometime, and then you've simply got to hold on. Be tenacious. It's them or us, and if we're steadfast we'll see them all die and taken off in the vehicle and one day, perhaps a very distant day when you're as old as me and uncle Jim are now, we'll be back into the house and eventually — and you may live to see it — we'll crack and tumble the walls and spread ourselves across a rather pleasing mound where the house once stood and the sun will shine on us and the breeze lift our fronds and our roots will take the firmest purchase among the stones of the ruins.
(JACK gives an exhausted little laugh.)

JACK: It's good to be a dock plant, grandfather.

DICK: It is, lad.
(Distant country sounds. They are abruptly cut by a door opening. Boots approach along a concrete path)

JIM (*in panic*): He's coming.
(Boots stop)

DICK: He's stopped. He's leaning against the house wall. His ears have gone purple.

JACK: Ears?

DICK: Those two fronds besides his head.

JIM: They're always that colour.

DICK: Not that deep tint, Jim. Not quite that hue. Look, his head's drooping, he's sagging.

JACK: He is, uncle Jim, he's sagging.
(Pause — country sounds)

JIM *(in alarm)*: He's straightened up now.

DICK: He's in pain.
(Clank of metal)

JIM: He's hoisted his tank. *(In panic)* He's spotted us.
(Close: three footsteps in grass. Pump and hiss of spray. Droplets rattle loud and close on the leaves like rain hitting canvas)

JIM)

DICK *(in alarm)*: Ahhhh.

JACK)

JIM: He's hit us.

DICK *(shouts angrily at man)*: Get out of it. We'll wreck your house. We'll overrun you. We'll strangle your life out.

JACK *(frightened)*: Oh grandad, grandad.

JIM *(in panic)*: It's beginning to burn, it's burning.

DICK *(angrily at man)*: The bullocks will bog on you. We finished the old one off. Get back in your cold frame where you belong.

JACK: Grandad, grandad. *(Pump, hiss and drumming patter of spray hitting leaves.)*

JACK)

JIM) *(in pain)*: O-O-O..

DICK)

JIM: We're finished, we're done for.

JACK *(wails)*: Grandad. Grandad.

DICK *(suffering)*: Hold on, lad, hold on.

JIM *(suffering)*: I can't go through this again.

DICK *(suffering)*: Hold on, Jim. Keep your roots tight round the limestone.

JACK *(wails in pain)*: I've got no limestone, grandad, only soil.

DICK *(suffering)*: Hang on in the soil then, Jack. Hang on in the soil, lad.

JIM *(in panic)*: Here it comes again. *(Pump, hiss and drumming patter of spray hitting them again)*

JIM)

DICK) *(in pain)*: O. O-O-O-O. O.

JACK)

(They gasp and groan. Clank of tank, boots move away)

DICK *(suffering)*: He's done here.

JIM *(suffering)*: He's done for us.
(They all groan with pain, then suddenly JIM shrieks in panic): I'm swelling.

DICK: You're not.

JIM *(hoarsely)*: I'm twisting, I'm climbing. What's this, what's this? It's the lichen. I'm up the wall top.
(More hoarse) I'm dry, I'm dry, Dick. I'm choking.

DICK *(suffering, beginning to be hoarse and in a quietened voice)*: Grip with your tap roots, Jim. Hold on to your limestone.

JIM *(hoarse and panting)*: Can't, can't.

DICK: If you can. If you conceivably can, Jim.

JIM: It's all up. My number's up.

JACK *(weakly)*: It hurts, grandad. It burns.

DICK *(hoarsely and struggling with his own pain)*: Only a little burning. Jack lad. Like the sun.

JACK *(weakly)*: Not like the sun, grandad.

DICK *(hoarsely)*: It'll pass. Jackie, it'll pass.

JACK *(weakly and fading)*: The autumn, grandad. I've never seen an autumn, nor known a winter in the soil.

DICK *(hoarsely but urgently)*: Jack. Jack. Jack. Rouse lad, fight, hold on.
(JIM lets out a long hoarse moan)

JIM: The aching, the aching. *(Groans)*

DICK *(hoarsely and weakly)*: Hold on, Jim.

JACK *(weakly)*: Grandad.

DICK *(weakly)*: Hold on, son.

(Distant country sounds. Then a patter, continuous and much more gentle than the spray. It continues under dialogue)

JACK *(weakly)*: Grandad.

DICK *(in pain)*: Son?

JACK *(weakly)*: Grandad, there's something more falling on us now.

DICK: No, son. He's finished. There's nothing falling.

JACK (*weakly*): Grandad, it is. Grandad, it's the, it's the (*weeping and half laughing*) it's the rain.

DICK (*weakly and hoarsely, not believing*): Yes, lad.

JACK: It is, grandad, it is.

DICK (*hoarsely and surprised*): It is. It is. It is the rain indeed. The rain is falling.
(*The rain falls in the clear*)

JACK (*tired*): Oh grandad, oh grandad. The rain's so cool.

DICK (*makes sounds of suffering a pain which is becoming endurable*): Oo. Ah. Eh. Whee. Jim, Jim, Jim, the rain.

JIM (*feebly*): Where?

DICK: The rain, it's falling, Jim.

JIM: No rain.

DICK: It's falling, Jim. It's falling. It'll swill the pain away

JIM: No rain.

DICK: It is, Jim.

JACK: Not on uncle Jim, grandad.

DICK: Everywhere.

JACK: Because he's in the shelter of the wall.

DICK: Jim, hold on, Jim. It'll drip on you in time.

JIM (*puzzled*): In time?

DICK: In short time.

JIM (*reminiscently*): I remember the beginning of time.

JACK: He's pale, grandad. He's contorted.

JIM: The house.

DICK (*comfortingly*): Yes, Jim.

JIM: The bullocks are stepping out of the chimney pots, the clouds are passing beneath the soil.

DICK (*urgently to arouse him*): Jim! Jim!

JIM (*quite calm now and lucid in a distant memory*): Dick. What happened to Edward that grew in the incinerator?

DICK: That was long ago, Jim.

JIM: Was it?

DICK: Yes, long ago, Jim, in the very first season of this garden, only shortly after the beginning of time.

JIM (*having been answered*): Oh. (*A metallic clatter*)

JACK: The person's dropped the tank, grandad. He's leaning against the house wall again.

DICK: He is. He is, Jim. His ears are purple. Jim, they're swelling.

JACK: And his toes, grandad, they're bursting out like melons.

DICK: Jim, Jim, listen, Jim. He's done himself in. The poison, Jim, he's poisoned himself with his pestilential cloud.

JACK: His limbs, grandad, they're writhing.

DICK: He's growing up the drainpipe like bindweed.

JACK: He's burning and swelling now, grandad. Will the rain avail him?

DICK: No, it won't. Jim, he's burning and swelling and the rain won't avail him.

JIM (*feebly*): My tap roots, my tap roots.

DICK: What, Jim?

JIM: Gone numb, can't feel them. I'm keeling over.

DICK: Not now, Jim. The rain will run on you any moment now.

JIM (*feebly*): Yes. (*He makes a weak sound of pain. The creaking and breaking sound of roots coming up through the soil is heard. JACK shrieks in panic*)

JACK: Grandad, the soil's cracking round uncle Jim's stem.
(*JIM groans feebly. The roots continue to creak and break*)

DICK: Jim, Jim. Just hold, Jim.

JACK: The earth's cracking, grandad. The little stones — (*A cascade of gravel*)

JACK: And the worms and insects tossed into the daylight and (*cry of horror*) —

DICK: Look away.
(*A final anguished groan from JIM. The final creaking of the roots and the sudden small shift of running earth and stones*)

JACK (*soberly*): Those were his tap roots, grandad, gone black

DICK (*soberly*): Yes.
(*Fall of rain. Tinkle of rivulets*)

JACK: And the person, grandad, his toes have burst. His head's gone black.

DICK (*exhausted*): Bask in the rain, Jack. (*Rain and rivulets briefly in clear*)

JACK: Are you all right, grandad?

DICK (*exhausted*): I will be. I need more time than young 'uns. (*House door opened*)

JACK: The other person, grandad. The other person's coming.
(Woman's footsteps on concrete path. They stop. At a higher note than we have heard from the plants the woman screams. The rain falls heavily and the rivulets flow. Fade.)

(The rain has stopped. It is evening and the distant sounds of the bullocks, sheep and birds are more widely spaced. Doors of a vehicle bang. The vehicle drives slowly away. The conversation, at the end of a tiring day, is slow and reflective)

JACK: So that's what's meant by taking him away in the vehicle, grandad.

DICK (*restored but tired*): Honour's even at the end of the day.

JACK: Quite a nice evening, grandad.

DICK: We needed that rain.

JACK: You all right now, grandad?

DICK: Yes, fine. And you, son?

JACK: Fine.

DICK: We needed that rain, even without — ah well. (*He stops. Distant peaceful country sounds*)

JACK: Grandad, the other person and all the little persons they turned black.

DICK: They do when one of them dies.

JACK: But we aren't black, grandad, and uncle Jim's died.

DICK: It doesn't work the same way.

JACK: Am I mottled, grandad?

DICK (*laughs*): A bit.

JACK: Orange and purple?

DICK: Slightly. It'll pass. You'll come up fresh next spring.

JACK: And I'll be bigger then and better able to withstand things.

DICK: Yes.

JACK: I tried to be tenacious.

DICK: You were, son.

JACK: Am I intrepid, grandad?

DICK (*warmly*): You are.
(JACK laughs with pleasure)

(Distant country sounds, widely spaced. Separate bird notes. Gnats are heard)

JACK: It seems a pity, though, doesn't it, grandad?

DICK: What, lad?

JACK: Well, we're never going to take possession of the house and ruin it, not really.

DICK: You can't tell.

JACK: And they're not ever going to finish the dock plants off.

DICK: They're certainly not.

JACK: It's a pity then, isn't it, granddad — encroachment and the spray, uncle Jim rotting there with his broken roots in the air and the person taken away in the vehicle.

DICK: I suppose it is.

JACK: Well, why do we do it, grandad? Why do they?

DICK: I suppose because it's natural, inevitable.

JACK: How, grandad?

DICK: I don't know. Jack ... I did have an explanation of it once.

JACK: I see.

DICK: He should never have said what he said. He should never have likened me to a clump of rhubarb. He should never have said that.

JACK: No.

DICK: He'd become dried out growing under that wall.

JACK (*yawns*): Been a long day, grandad.

DICK: It has, Jackie. (*Pause*) Nice evening though now. Fresh.

JACK (*sleepily, in agreement*): Ah, ah.

DICK: Nice calm evening.
(Separate distant bird notes)

DICK: Grand night.
(Owl hoots)

DICK: Grand clear night beneath the stars. * * * * *

A PARABLE: is a succinct, didactic story, in prose or verse, which illustrates one or more instructive lessons or principles. It differs from a fable in that fables employ animals, plants, inanimate objects, or forces of nature as characters, whereas parables have human characters. A parable is a type of analogy.

Some scholars of the canonical gospels and the New Testament apply the term "parable" only to the parables of Jesus, though that is not a common restriction of the term. Parables such as "The Prodigal Son" are central to Jesus' teaching method in both the canonical narratives and the apocrypha.

Etymology: The word parable comes from the Greek *parabolē*, meaning "comparison, illustration, analogy." It was the name given by Greek rhetoricians to an illustration in the form of a brief fictional narrative.

History: Parables are favoured in the expression of spiritual concepts. The best known source of parables in Christianity is the Bible, which contains numerous parables in the gospels section of the New Testament (Jesus' parables). The Old Testament includes the parable of the ewe-lamb (told by Nathan in 2 Samuel 12:1–9) and the parable of the woman of Tekoah (in 2 Samuel 14:1–13).

Characteristics: A parable is a short tale that illustrates a universal truth; it is a simple narrative. It sketches a setting, describes an action, and shows the results. A parable often involves a character who faces a moral dilemma or one who makes a bad decision and then suffers the unintended consequences. Although the meaning of a parable is often not explicitly stated, it is not intended to be hidden or secret but, on the contrary, quite straightforward and obvious. The defining characteristic of the parable is the presence of a subtext suggesting how a person should behave or what he should believe. Aside from providing guidance and suggestions for proper conduct in one's life, parables frequently use metaphorical language which allows people to more easily discuss difficult or complex ideas. Parables express an abstract argument by means of using a concrete narrative which is easily understood.

[The **allegory** is a more general narrative type; it also employs metaphor. Like the parable, the allegory makes a single, unambiguous point. An allegory may have multiple non-contradictory interpretations and may also have implications that are ambiguous or hard to interpret. As H.W. Fowler put it, the object of both parable and allegory "is to enlighten the hearer by submitting to him a case in which he has apparently no direct concern, and upon which therefore a disinterested judgment may be elicited from him, ..." The parable is more condensed than the allegory: it rests upon a single principle and a single moral, and it is intended that the reader or listener shall conclude that the moral applies equally well to his own concerns.]

A FABLE: is a succinct fictional story, in prose or verse, that features animals, mythical creatures, plants, inanimate objects or forces of nature which are anthropomorphized (given human qualities such as verbal communication), and that illustrates or leads to an interpretation of a moral lesson (a "moral"), which may at the end be added explicitly in a pithy maxim.

A fable differs from a parable in that the latter excludes animals, plants, inanimate objects, and forces of nature as actors that assume speech and other powers of humankind.

History: The fable is one of the most enduring forms of folk literature, spread abroad, modern researchers agree, less by literary anthologies than by oral transmission. Fables can be found in the literature of almost every country.

Aesop's fables: The varying corpus denoted Aesopica or Aesop's Fables includes most of the best-known western fables, which are attributed to the legendary Aesop, supposed to have been a slave in ancient Greece around 550 BCE. Many familiar fables of Aesop include "The Crow and the Pitcher", "The Tortoise and the Hare" and "The Lion and the Mouse".

Modern era: In modern times, while the fable has been trivialized in children's books, it has also been fully adapted to modern adult literature. Felix Salten's *Bambi* (1923) is a Bildungsroman — a story of a protagonist's coming-of-age — cast in the form of a fable. James Thurber used the ancient fable style in his books of *Fables for Our Time* (1940 and 56), and in some of his stories. George Orwell's *Animal Farm* (1945) similarly satirized Stalinist Communism in particular, and totalitarianism in general, in the guise of animal fable.