

Audition Piece for Richard Noakes

Lady Croom: Mr Noakes!

Noakes: Your ladyship –

Lady Croom: What have you done to me!

Noakes: Everything is satisfactory, I assure you. A little behind, to be sure, but my dam will be repaired within the month ...

Lady Croom: (*banging on the table*) Hush! (*in the silence, the steam engine thumps in the distance*) Can you hear, Mr Noakes?

Noakes: (*pleased and proud*) The Improved Newcomen steam pump – the only one in England!

Lady Croom: That is what I object to. If everybody had his own I would bear my portion of the agony without complaint. But to have been singled out by the only Improved Newcomen steam pump in England, this is hard, sir. This is not to be borne.

Noakes: Your Lady...

Lady Croom: And for what? My lake is drained to a ditch for no purpose I can understand, unless it be that snipe and curlew have deserted three counties so that they may be shot in our swamp. What you painted as forest is a mean plantation, your greenery is mud, your waterfall is wet mud, and your mount is an opencast mine for the mud that was lacking in the dell. (*pointing through the window*) What is that cowshed?

Noakes: The hermitage, my lady?

Lady Croom: It is a cowshed.

Noakes: Madam, it is, I assure you, a very habitable cottage, properly founded and drained, two rooms and a closet under a slate roof and a stone chimney...

Lady Croom: And who is to live in it?

Noakes: Why, the hermit.

Lady Croom: Where is he?

Noakes: Madam?

Lady Croom: You surely do not supply a hermitage without a hermit?

Noakes: Indeed, madam...

Lady Croom: Come, come, Mr Noakes. If I am promised a fountain I expect it to come with water. What hermits do you have?

Noakes: I have no hermits, my lady.

Lady Croom: Not one? I am speechless.

Noakes: I am sure a hermit can be found. One could advertise.

Lady Croom: Advertise?

Noakes: In the newspapers.

Lady Croom: But surely a hermit who takes a newspaper is not a hermit in whom one can have complete confidence.

Noakes: I do not know what to suggest my lady.

Lady Croom: Is there room for a piano?

Noakes: (*baffled*) A piano?