



Penguin Modern Classics

Samuel Beckett Malone Dies



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MALONE DIES

Samuel Beckett was born in Dublin in 1906 and educated at Trinity College, Dublin, but his upbringing was Irish protestant in character. He went to live in Paris during the twenties and was a lecturer in English at the École Normale Supérieure from 1928 to 1930. From 1930 to 1932 he was a lecturer in French at Trinity College, Dublin, and then returned to France where he has generally lived since. He was regarded as an extremely promising young writer by James Joyce, his intimate friend, but although he published verse, novels, and short stories he had little success until his first play, *Waiting for Godot*, was performed in 1953 and became an immediate success in Paris. It has been produced in London and had an immense success throughout the world. He has published five further plays – *End Game* (1957), *Krapp's Last Tape* (1959), *Happy Days* (1961), *Play* (1964), and *Eh Joe and other writings* (1967). His novels include *Murphy* (1938), *Watt* (1944), *Trilogy* (1959) – consisting of *Malone Dies*, *Molloy* and *The Unnamable – How It Is* (1964), and *Come and Go* (1967). His other books include *Poems in English* (1961), *Proust and the Three Dialogues with Georges Duthuit* (1965), *Imagination Dead Imagine* (1966), and *No's Knife – Collected Shorter Prose, 1947–66* (1967). An anthology of his work, *Samuel Beckett Reader*, was published in 1967. Samuel Beckett, who writes with equal facility in French and English, won the Prix Formentor in 1961 as an outstanding contributor to world literature, and the Nobel Prize for literature in 1969.

Samuel Beckett

MALONE DIES

A novel translated from the French
by the author



PENGUIN BOOKS

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I SHALL soon be quite dead at last in spite of all. Perhaps next month. Then it will be the month of April or of May. For the year is still young, a thousand little signs tell me so. Perhaps I am wrong, perhaps I shall survive Saint John the Baptist's Day and even the Fourteenth of July, festival of freedom. Indeed I would not put it past me to pant on to the Transfiguration, not to speak of the Assumption. But I do not think so, I do not think I am wrong in saying that these rejoicings will take place in my absence, this year. I have that feeling, I have had it now for some days, and I credit it. But in what does it differ from those that have abused me ever since I was born? No, that is the kind of bait I do not rise to any more, my need for prettiness is gone. I could die today, if I wished, merely by making a little effort, if I could wish, if I could make an effort. But it is just as well to let myself die, quietly, without rushing things. Something must have changed. I will not weigh upon the balance any more, one way or the other. I shall be neutral and inert. No difficulty there. Throes are the only trouble, I must be on my guard against throes. But I am less given to them now, since coming here. Of course I still have my little fits of impatience, from time to time, I must be on my guard against them, for the next fortnight or three weeks. Without exaggeration to be sure, quietly crying and laughing, without working myself up into a state. Yes, I shall be natural at last, I shall suffer more, then less, without drawing any conclusions, I shall pay less heed to myself, I shall be neither hot nor cold any more, I shall be tepid, I shall

die tepid, without enthusiasm. I shall not watch myself die, that would spoil everything. Have I watched myself live? Have I ever complained? Then why rejoice now? I am content, necessarily, but not to the point of clapping my hands. I was always content, knowing I would be repaid. There he is now, my old debtor. Shall I then fall on his neck? I shall not answer any more questions. I shall even try not to ask myself any more. While waiting I shall tell myself stories, if I can. They will not be the same kind of stories as hitherto, that is all. They will be neither beautiful nor ugly, they will be calm, there will be no ugliness or beauty or fever in them any more, they will be almost lifeless, like the teller. What was that I said? It does not matter. I look forward to their giving me great satisfaction, some satisfaction. I am satisfied, there, I have enough, I am repaid, I need nothing more. Let me say before I go any further that I forgive nobody. I wish them all an atrocious life and then the fires and ice of hell and in the execrable generations to come an honoured name. Enough for this evening.

This time I know where I am going, it is no longer the ancient night, the recent night. Now it is a game, I am going to play. I never knew how to play, till now. I longed to, but I knew it was impossible. And yet I often tried. I turned on all the lights, I took a good look all round, I began to play with what I saw. People and things ask nothing better than to play, certain animals too. All went well at first, they all came to me, pleased that someone should want to play with them. If I said, Now I need a hunchback, immediately one came running, proud as punch of his fine hunch that was going to perform. It did not occur to him that I might have to ask him to undress. But it was not long before

I found myself alone, in the dark. That is why I gave up trying to play and took to myself for ever shapelessness and speechlessness, incurious wondering, darkness, long stumbling with outstretched arms, hiding. Such is the earnestness from which, for nearly a century now, I have never been able to depart. From now on it will be different. I shall never do anything any more from now on but play. No, I must not begin with an exaggeration. But I shall play a great part of the time, from now on, the greater part, if I can. But perhaps I shall not succeed any better than hitherto. Perhaps as hitherto I shall find myself abandoned, in the dark, without anything to play with. Then I shall play with myself. To have been able to conceive such a plan is encouraging.

I must have thought about my time-table during the night. I think I shall be able to tell myself four stories, each one on a different theme. One about a man, another about a woman, a third about a thing, and finally one about an animal, a bird probably. I think that is everything. Perhaps I shall put the man and the woman in the same story, there is so little difference between a man and a woman, between mine I mean. Perhaps I shall not have time to finish. On the other hand perhaps I shall finish too soon. There I am back at my old aporetics. Is that the word? I don't know. It does not matter if I do not finish. But if I finish too soon? That does not matter either. For then I shall speak of the things that remain in my possession, that is a thing I have always wanted to do. It will be a kind of inventory. In any case that is a thing I must leave to the very last moment, so as to be sure of not having made a mistake. In any case that is a thing I shall certainly do, no matter what happens. It will not take me more than a quarter of an hour at the most. That

is to say it could take me longer, if I wished. But should I be short of time, at the last moment, then a brief quarter of an hour would be all I should need to draw up my inventory. My desire is henceforward to be clear, without being finical. I have always wanted that too. It is obvious I may suddenly expire, at any moment. Would it not then be better for me to speak of my possessions without further delay? Would not that be wiser? And then if necessary at the last moment correct any inaccuracies. That is what reason counsels. But reason has not much hold on me, just now. All things run together to encourage me. But can I really resign myself to the possibility of my dying without leaving an inventory behind? There I am back at my old quibbles. Presumably I can, since I intend to take the risk. All my life long I have put off this reckoning, saying, Too soon, too soon. Well it is still too soon. All my life long I have dreamt of the moment when, edified at last, in so far as one can be before all is lost, I might draw the line and make the tot. This moment seems now at hand. I shall not lose my head on that account. So first of all my stories and then, last of all, if all goes well, my inventory. And I shall begin, that they may plague me no more, with the man and woman. That will be the first story, there is not matter there for two. There will therefore be only three stories after all, that one, then the one about the animal, then the one about the thing, a stone probably. That is all very clear. Then I shall deal with my possessions. If after all that I am still alive I shall take the necessary steps to ensure my not having made a mistake. So much for that. I used not to know where I was going, but I knew I would arrive, I knew there would be an end to the long blind road. What half-truths, my God. No matter. It is playtime now. I find it hard to get used to that idea. The old fog calls.

Now the case is reversed, the way well charted and little hope of coming to its end. But I have high hopes. What am I doing now, I wonder, losing time or gaining it? I have also decided to remind myself briefly of my present state before embarking on my stories. I think this is a mistake. It is a weakness. But I shall indulge in it. I shall play with all the more ardour afterwards. And it will be a pendant to the inventory. Aesthetics are therefore on my side, at least a certain kind of aesthetics. For I shall have to become earnest again to be able to speak of my possessions. There it is then divided into five, the time that remains. Into five what? I don't know. Everything divides into itself, I suppose. If I start trying to think again I shall make a mess of my decease. I must say there is something very attractive about such a prospect. But I am on my guard. For the past few days I have been finding something attractive about everything. To return to the five. Present state, three stories, inventory, there. An occasional interlude is to be feared. A full programme. I shall not deviate from it any further than I must. So much for that. I feel I am making a great mistake. No matter.

Present state. This room seems to be mine. I can find no other explanation to my being left in it. All this time. Unless it be at the behest of one of the powers that be. That is hardly likely. Why should the powers have changed in their attitude towards me? It is better to adopt the simplest explanation, even if it is not simple, even if it does not explain very much. A bright light is not necessary, a taper is all one needs to live in strangeness, if it faithfully burns. Perhaps I came in for the room on the death of whoever was in it before me. I inquire no further in any case. It is not a room in a

hospital, or in a madhouse, I can feel that. I have listened at different hours of the day and night and never heard anything suspicious or unusual, but always the peaceful sounds of men at large, getting up, lying down, preparing food, coming and going, weeping and laughing, or nothing at all, no sounds at all. And when I look out of the window it is clear to me, from certain signs, that I am not in a house of rest in any sense of the word. No, this is just a plain private room apparently, in what appears to be a plain ordinary house. I do not remember how I got here. In an ambulance perhaps, a vehicle of some kind certainly. One day I found myself here, in the bed. Having probably lost consciousness somewhere, I benefit by a hiatus in my recollections, not to be resumed until I recovered my senses, in this bed. As to the events that led up to my fainting and to which I can hardly have been oblivious, at the time, they have left no discernible trace, on my mind. But who has not experienced such lapses? They are common after drunkenness. I have often amused myself with trying to invent them, those same lost events. But without succeeding in amusing myself really. But what is the last thing I remember, I could start from there, before I came to my senses again here? That too is lost. I was walking certainly, all my life I have been walking, except the first few months and since I have been here. But at the end of the day I did not know where I had been or what my thoughts had been. What then could I be expected to remember, and with what? I remember a mood. My young days were more varied, such as they come back to me, in fits and starts. I did not know my way about so well then. I have lived in a kind of coma. The loss of consciousness for me was never any great loss. But perhaps I was stunned with a blow, on the head, in a forest perhaps, yes, now that I speak of a

forest I vaguely remember a forest. All that belongs to the past. Now it is the present I must establish, before I am avenged. It is an ordinary room. I have little experience of rooms, but this one seems quite ordinary to me. The truth is, if I did not feel myself dying, I could well believe myself dead, expiating my sins, or in one of heaven's mansions. But I feel at last that the sands are running out, which would not be the case if I were in heaven, or in hell. Beyond the grave, the sensation of being beyond the grave was stronger with me six months ago. Had it been foretold to me that one day I should feel myself living as I do today, I should have smiled. It would not have been noticed, but I would have known I was smiling. I remember them well, these last few days, they have left me more memories than the thirty thousand odd that went before. The reverse would have been less surprising. When I have completed my inventory, if my death is not ready for me then, I shall write my memoirs. That's funny, I have made a joke. No matter. There is a cupboard I have never looked into. My possessions are in a corner, in a little heap. With a long stick I can rummage in them, draw them to me, send them back. My bed is by the window. I lie turned towards it most of the time. I see roofs and sky, a glimpse of street too, if I crane. I do not see any fields or hills. And yet they are near. But are they near? I don't know. I do not see the sea either, but I hear it when it is high. I can see into a room of the house across the way. Queer things go on there sometimes, people are queer. Perhaps these are abnormal. They must see me too, my big shaggy head up against the window-pane. I never had so much hair as now, nor so long, I say it without fear of contradiction. But at night they do not see me, for I never have a light. I have studied the stars a little here. But I cannot

find my way about among them. Gazing at them one night I suddenly saw myself in London. Is it possible I got as far as London? And what have stars to do with that city? The moon on the other hand has grown familiar, I am well familiar now with her changes of aspect and orbit, I know more or less the hours of the night when I may look for her in the sky and the nights when she will not come. What else? The clouds. They are varied, very varied. And all sorts of birds. They come and perch on the window-sill, asking for food! It is touching. They rap on the window-pane, with their beaks. I never give them anything. But they still come. What are they waiting for? They are not vultures. Not only am I left here, but I am looked after! This is how it is done now. The door half opens, a hand puts a dish on the little table left there for that purpose, takes away the dish of the previous day, and the door closes again. This is done for me every day, at the same time probably. When I want to eat I hook the table with my stick and draw it to me. It is on castors, it comes squeaking and lurching towards me. When I need it no longer I send it back to its place by the door. It is soup. They must know I am toothless. I eat it one time out of two, out of three, on an average. When my chamber-pot is full I put it on the table, beside the dish. Then I go twenty-four hours without a pot. No, I have two pots. They have thought of everything. I am naked in the bed, in the blankets, whose number I increase and diminish as the seasons come and go. I am never hot, never cold. I don't wash, but I don't get dirty. If I get dirty somewhere I rub the part with my finger wet with spittle. What matters is to eat and excrete. Dish and pot, dish and pot, these are the poles. In the beginning it was different. The woman came right into the room, bustled about, inquired about my needs, my wants. I

succeeded in the end in getting them into her head, my needs and my wants. It was not easy. She did not understand. Until the day I found the terms, the accents, that fitted her. All that must be half imagination. It was she who got me this long stick. It has a hook at one end. Thanks to it I can control the furthest recesses of my abode. How great is my debt to sticks! So great that I almost forget the blows they have transferred to me. She is an old woman. I don't know why she is good to me. Yes, let us call it goodness, without quibbling. For her it is certainly goodness. I believe her to be even older than I. But rather less well preserved, in spite of her mobility. Perhaps she goes with the room, in a manner of speaking. In that case she does not call for separate study. But it is conceivable that she does what she does out of sheer charity, or moved with regard to me by a less general feeling of compassion or affection. Nothing is impossible, I cannot keep on denying it much longer. But it is more convenient to suppose that when I came in for the room I came in for her too. All I see of her now is the gaunt hand and part of the sleeve. Not even that, not even that. Perhaps she is dead, having predeceased me, perhaps now it is another's hand that lays and clears my little table. I don't know how long I have been here, I must have said so. All I know is that I was very old already before I found myself here. I call myself an octogenarian, but I cannot prove it. Perhaps I am only a quinquagenarian, or a quadragenarian. It is ages since I counted them, my years I mean. I know the year of my birth, I have not forgotten that, but I do not know what year I have got to now. But I think I have been here for some very considerable time. For there is nothing the various seasons can do to me, within the shelter of these walls, that I do not know. That is not to be learnt

in one year or two. In a flicker of my lids whole days have flown. Does anything remain to be said? A few words about myself perhaps. My body is what is called, unadvisedly perhaps, impotent. There is virtually nothing it can do. Sometimes I miss not being able to crawl around any more. But I am not much given to nostalgia. My arms, once they are in position, can exert a certain force. But I find it hard to guide them. Perhaps the red nucleus has faded. I tremble a little, but only a little. The groaning of the bedstead is part of my life, I would not like it to cease, I mean I would not like it to decrease. It is on my back, that is to say prostrate, no, supine, that I feel best, least bony. I lie on my back, but my cheek is on the pillow. I have only to open my eyes to have them begin again, the sky and smoke of mankind. My sight and hearing are very bad, on the vast main no light but reflected gleams. All my senses are trained full on me, me. Dark and silent and stale, I am no prey for them. I am far from the sounds of blood and breath, immured. I shall not speak of my sufferings. Cowering deep down among them I feel nothing. It is there I die, unbeknown to my stupid flesh. That which is seen, that which cries and writhes, my witless remains. Somewhere in this turmoil thought struggles on, it too wide of the mark. It too seeks me, as it always has, where I am not to be found. It too cannot be quiet. On others let it wreak its dying rage, and leave me in peace. Such would seem to be my present state.

The man's name is Saposcat. Like his father's. Christian name? I don't know. He will not need one. His friends call him Sapo. What friends? I don't know. A few words about the boy. This cannot be avoided.

He was a precocious boy. He was not good at his lessons, neither could he see the use of them. He attended his classes with his mind elsewhere, or blank.

He attended his classes with his mind elsewhere. He liked sums, but not the way they were taught. What he liked was the manipulation of concrete numbers. All calculation seemed to him idle in which the nature of the unit was not specified. He made a practice, alone and in company, of mental arithmetic. And the figures then marshalling in his mind thronged it with colours and with forms.

What tedium.

He was the eldest child of poor and sickly parents. He often heard them talk of what they ought to do in order to have better health and more money. He was struck each time by the vagueness of these palavers and not surprised that they never led to anything. His father was a salesman, in a shop. He used to say to his wife, I really must find work for the evenings and the Saturday afternoon. He added, faintly, And the Sunday. His wife would answer, but if you do any more work you'll fall ill. And Mr Saposcat had to allow that he would indeed be ill-advised to forgo his Sunday rest. These people at least are grown up. But his health was not so poor that he could not work in the evenings of the week and on the Saturday afternoon. At what, said his wife, work at what? Perhaps secretarial work of some kind, he said. And who will look after the garden? said his wife. The life of the Saposcats was full of axioms, of which one at least established the criminal absurdity of a garden without roses and with its paths and lawns uncared for. I might perhaps grow vegetables, he said.

They cost less to buy said his wife. Sapo marvelled at these conversations. Think of the price of manure, said his mother. And in the silence which followed Mr Saposcat applied his mind, with the earnestness he brought to everything he did, to the high price of manure which prevented him from supporting his family in greater comfort, while his wife made ready to accuse herself, in her turn, of not doing all she might. But she was easily persuaded that she could not do more without exposing herself to the risk of dying before her time. Think of the doctor's fees we save, said Mr Saposcat. And the chemist's bills, said his wife. Nothing remained but to envisage a smaller house. But we are cramped as it is, said Mrs Saposcat. And it was an understood thing that they would be more and more so with every passing year until the day came when, the departure of the first-born compensating the arrival of the new-born, a kind of equilibrium would be attained. Then little by little the house would empty. And at last they would be all alone, with their memories. It would be time enough then to move. He would be pensioned off, she at her last gasp. They would take a cottage in the country where, having no further need of manure, they could afford to buy it in cartloads. And their children, grateful for the sacrifices made on their behalf, would come to their assistance. It was in this atmosphere of unbridled dream that these conferences usually ended. It was as though the Saposcats drew the strength to live from the prospect of their impotence. But sometimes, before reaching that stage, they paused to consider the case of their first-born. What age is he now? asked Mr Saposcat. His wife provided the information, it being understood that this was of her province. She was always wrong. Mr Saposcat took over the erroneous figure, murmuring it over and over to him-