

# **Selections from the Writings of Lord Dunsay eBook**

## **Selections from the Writings of Lord Dunsay by Edward Plunkett, 18th Baron Dunsany**

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# Page 1

I

Lady Wilde once told me that when she was a young girl she was stopped in some Dublin street by a great crowd and turned into a shop to escape from it. She stayed there some time and the crowd still passed. She asked the shopman what it was, and he said, 'the funeral of Thomas Davis, a poet.' She had never heard of Davis; but because she thought a country that so honoured a poet must be worth something, she became interested in Ireland and was soon a famous patriotic poet herself, being, as she once said to me half in mockery, an eagle in her youth.

That age will be an age of romance for an hundred years to come. Its poetry slid into men's ears so smoothly that a man still living, though a very old man now, heard men singing at the railway stations he passed upon a journey into the country the verses he had published but that morning in a Dublin newspaper; and yet we should not regret too often that it has vanished, and left us poets even more unpopular than are our kind elsewhere in Europe; for now that we are unpopular we escape from crowds, from noises in the street, from voices that sing out of tune, from bad paper made one knows not from what refuse, from evil-smelling gum, from covers of emerald green, from that ideal of reliable, invariable men and women, which would forbid saint and connoisseur who always, the one in his simple, the other in his elaborate way, do what is unaccountable, and forbid life itself which, being, as the definition says, the only thing that moves itself, is always without precedent. When our age too has passed, when its moments also, that are so common and many, seem scarce and precious, students will perhaps open these books, printed by village girls at Dundrum, as curiously as at twenty years I opened the books of history and ballad verse of the old 'Library of Ireland.' They will notice that this new 'Library,' where I have gathered so much that seems to me representative or beautiful, unlike the old, is intended for few people, and written by men and women with that ideal condemned by 'Mary of the Nation', who wished, as she said, to make no elaborate beauty and to write nothing but what a peasant could understand. If they are philosophic or phantastic, it may even amuse them to find some analogy of the old with O'Connell's hearty eloquence, his winged dart shot always into the midst of the people, his mood of comedy; and of the new, with that lonely and haughty person below whose tragic shadow we of modern Ireland began to write.

II

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The melancholy, the philosophic irony, the elaborate music of a play by John Synge, the simplicity, the sense of splendour of living in Lady Gregory's lamentation of Emer, Mr. James Stephens when he makes the sea waves 'Tramp with banners on the shore' are as much typical of our thoughts and day, as was 'She dwelt beside the Anner with mild eyes like the dawn,' or any stanza of the 'Pretty girl of Lough Dan,' or any novel of Charles Lever's of a time that sought to bring Irish men and women into one nation by means of simple patriotism and a genial taste for oratory and anecdotes. A like change passed over Ferrara's brick and stone when its great Duke, where there had been but narrow medieval streets, made many palaces and threw out one straight and wide street, as Carducci said, to meet the Muses. Doubtless the men of 'Perdonaris that famous city' have such antiquity of manners and of culture that it is of small moment should they please themselves with some tavern humour; but we must needs cling to 'our foolish Irish pride' and form an etiquette, if we would not have our people crunch their chicken bones with too convenient teeth, and make our intellect architectural that we may not see them turn domestic and effusive nor nag at one another in narrow streets.

### III

Some of the writers of our school have intended, so far as any creative art can have deliberate intention, to make this change, a change having more meaning and implications than a few sentences can define. When I was first moved by Lord Dunsany's work I thought that he would more help this change if he could bring his imagination into the old Irish legendary world instead of those magic lands of his with their vague Eastern air; but even as I urged him I knew that he could not, without losing his rich beauty of careless suggestion, and the persons and images that for ancestry have all those romantic ideas that are somewhere in the background of all our minds. He could not have made Slieve-na-Mon nor Slieve Fua incredible and phantastic enough, because that prolonged study of a past age, necessary before he could separate them from modern association, would have changed the spontaneity of his mood to something learned, premeditated, and scientific.

When we approach subtle elaborate emotions we can but give our minds up to play or become as superstitious as an old woman, for we cannot hope to understand. It is one of my superstitions that we became entangled in a dream some twenty years ago; but I do not know whether this dream was born in Ireland from the beliefs of the country men and women, or whether we but gave ourselves up to a foreign habit as our spirited Georgian fathers did to gambling, sometimes lying, as their history has it, on the roadside naked, but for the heap of straw they had pulled over them, till they could wager a lock of hair or the paring of a nail against what might set them up in clothes again.



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Whether it came from Slieve-na-Mon or Mount Abora, AE. found it with his gods and I in my 'Land of Heart's Desire,' which no longer pleases me much. And then it seemed far enough till Mr. Edward Martyn discovered his ragged Peg Inerney, who for all that was a queen in faery; but soon John Synge was to see all the world as a withered and witless place in comparison with the dazzle of that dream; and now Lord Dunsany has seen it once more and as simply as if he were a child imagining adventures for the knights and ladies that rode out over the drawbridges in the piece of old tapestry in its mother's room. But to persuade others that it is all but one dream, or to persuade them that Lord Dunsany has his part in that change I have described I have but my superstition and this series of little books where I have set his tender, pathetic, haughty fancies among books by Lady Gregory, by AE., by Dr. Douglas Hyde, by John Synge, and by myself. His work which seems today so much on the outside, as it were, of life and daily interest, may yet seem to those students I have imagined rooted in both. Did not the Maeterlinck of 'Pelleas and Melisande' seem to be outside life? and now he has so influenced other writers, he has been so much written about, he has been associated with so much celebrated music, he has been talked about by so many charming ladies, that he is less a vapour than that Dumas *fills* who wrote of such a living Paris. And has not Edgar Allen Poe, having entered the imagination of Baudelaire, touched that of Europe? for there are seeds still carried upon a tree, and seeds so light they drift upon the wind and yet can prove that they, give them but time, carry a big tree. Had I read 'The Fall of Babbulkund' or 'Idle Days on the Yann' when a boy I had perhaps been changed for better or worse, and looked to that first reading as the creation of my world; for when we are young the less circumstantial, the further from common life a book is, the more does it touch our hearts and make us dream. We are idle, unhappy and exorbitant, and like the young Blake admit no city beautiful that is not paved with gold and silver.

## IV

These plays and stories have for their continual theme the passing away of gods and men and cities before the mysterious power which is sometimes called by some great god's name but more often 'Time.' His travellers, who travel by so many rivers and deserts and listen to sounding names none heard before, come back with no tale that does not tell of vague rebellion against that power, and all the beautiful things they have seen get something of their charm from the pathos of fragility. This poet who has imagined colours, ceremonies and incredible processions that never passed before the eyes of Edgar Allen Poe or of De Quincey, and remembered as much fabulous beauty as Sir John Mandeville, has yet never wearied of the most universal of emotions and the one most constantly associated



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with the sense of beauty; and when we come to examine those astonishments that seemed so alien we find that he has but transfigured with beauty the common sights of the world. He describes the dance in the air of large butterflies as we have seen it in the sun-steeped air of noon. 'And they danced but danced idly, on the wings of the air, as some haughty queen of distant conquered lands might in her poverty and exile dance in some encampment of the gipsies for the mere bread to live by, but beyond this would never abate her pride to dance for one fragment more.' He can show us the movement of sand, as we have seen it where the sea shore meets the grass, but so changed that it becomes the deserts of the world: 'and all that night the desert said many things softly and in a whisper but I knew not what he said. Only the sand knew and arose and was troubled and lay down again and the wind knew. Then, as the hours of the night went by, these two discovered the foot-tracks wherewith we had disturbed the holy desert and they troubled over them and covered them up; and then the wind lay down and the sand rested.' Or he will invent some incredible sound that will yet call before us the strange sounds of the night, as when he says, 'sometimes some monster of the river coughed.' And how he can play upon our fears with that great gate of his carved from a single ivory tusk dropped by some terrible beast; or with his tribe of wanderers that pass about the city telling one another tales that we know to be terrible from the blanched faces of the listeners though they tell them in an unknown tongue; or with his stone gods of the mountain, for 'when we see rock walking it is terrible' 'rock should not walk in the evening.'

Yet say what I will, so strange is the pleasure that they give, so hard to analyse and describe, I do not know why these stories and plays delight me. Now they set me thinking of some old Irish jewel work, now of a sword covered with Indian Arabesques that hangs in a friend's hall, now of St. Mark's at Venice, now of cloud palaces at the sundown; but more often still of a strange country or state of the soul that once for a few weeks I entered in deep sleep and after lost and have ever mourned and desired.

## V

Not all Lord Dunsany's moods delight me, for he writes out of a careless abundance; and from the moment I first read him I have wished to have between two covers something of all the moods that do. I believe that I have it in this book, which I have just been reading aloud to an imaginative young girl more French than English, whose understanding, that of a child and of a woman, and expressed not in words but in her face, has doubled my own. Some of my selections, those that I have called 'A Miracle' and 'The Castle of Time' are passages from stories of some length, and I give but the first act of 'Argimenes,' a play in the repertory of the Abbey Theatre, but each selection can be read I think with no thoughts but of itself. If 'Idle Days on the Yann' is a fragment it was left so by its author, and if I am moved to complain I shall remember that perhaps

not even his imagination could have found adventures worthy of a traveller who had passed 'memorable, holy Golnuz, and heard the pilgrims praying,' and smelt burned poppies in Mandaroon.



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Normandy 1912.

W. B. Yeats.

### THE GODS OF THE MOUNTAIN

#### ACT I

*Scene:* The East. Outside a city wall; three beggars seated on the ground.

OOGNO These days are bad for beggary.

*Thahn* They are bad.

*Ulf* (an older beggar but not grey) Some evil has befallen the rich ones of this city. They take no joy any longer in benevolence, but are become sour and miserly at heart. Alas for them! I sometimes sigh for them when I think of this.

OOGNO Alas for them. A miserly heart must be a sore affliction.

*Thahn* A sore affliction indeed, and bad for our calling.

OOGNO (reflectively) They have been thus for many months. What thing has befallen them?

*Thahn* Some evil thing.

*Ulf* There has been a comet come near to the earth of late and the earth has been parched and sultry so that the gods are drowsy and all those things that are divine in man, such as benevolence, drunkenness, extravagance and song, have faded and died and have not been replenished by the gods.

OOGNO It has indeed been sultry.

*Thahn* I have seen the comet o' nights.

*Ulf* The gods are drowsy.

OOGNO If they awake not soon and make this city worthy again of our order, I for one shall forsake the calling and buy a shop and sit at ease in the shade and barter for gain.

*Thahn* You will keep a shop? (Enter Agmar and Slag. Agmar, though poorly dressed, is tall, imperious, and older than Ulf. Slag follows behind him.)

*Agmar* Is this a beggar who speaks?



OOGNO Yes, master, a poor beggar.

*Agmar* How long has the calling of beggary existed?

OOGNO Since the building of the first city, Master.

*Agmar* And when has a beggar ever followed a trade? When has he ever haggled and bartered and sat in a shop?

OOGNO Why, he has never done so.

*Agmar* Are you he that shall be first to forsake the calling?

OOGNO Times are bad for the calling here.

*Thahn* They are bad.

*Agmar* So you would forsake the calling.

OOGNO The city is unworthy of our calling. The gods are drowsy, and all that is divine in man is dead. (To third Beggar) Are not the gods drowsy?

*Ulf* They are drowsy in their mountains away at Marma. The seven green idols are drowsy. Who is this that rebukes us?

*Thahn* Are you some great merchant, Master? Perhaps you will help a poor man that is starving.

*Slag* My Master a Merchant! No, no. He is no merchant. My Master is no merchant.

OOGNO I perceive that he is some lord in disguise. The gods have woken and have sent him to save us.

*Slag* No, no. You do not know my Master. You do not know him.



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*Thahn* Is he the Soldan's self that has come to rebuke us?

*Agmar* (with great pride) I am a beggar, and an old beggar.

*Slag* There is none like my Master. No traveller has met with cunning like to his, not even those that come from Aethiopia.

*Ulf* We make you welcome to our town, upon which an evil has fallen, the days being bad for beggary.

*Agmar* Let none that has known the mystery of roads, or has felt the wind arising new in the morning, or who has called forth out of the souls of men divine benevolence, ever speak any more of any trade or of the miserable gains of shops and the trading men.

OOGNO I but spoke hastily, the times being bad.

*Agmar* I will put right the times.

*Slag* There is nothing that my Master cannot do.

*Agmar* (to Slag) Be silent and attend to me. I do not know this city, I have travelled from far, having somewhat exhausted the city of Ackara.

*Slag* My Master was three times knocked down and injured by carriages there, once he was killed and seven times beaten and robbed, and every time he was generously compensated. He had nine diseases, many of them mortal....

*Agmar* Be silent, Slag.... Have you any thieves among the calling here?

*Ulf* We have a few that we call thieves here, Master, but they would scarcely seem thieves to you. They are not good thieves.

*Agmar* I shall need the best thief you have.

(Enter two citizens richly clad, Illanaun and Oorander)

*Illanaun* Therefore we will send galleons to Ardaspes.

*Oorander* Right to Ardaspes through the silver gates.

(Agmar transfers the thick handle of his long staff to his left armpit, he droops on to it and it supports his weight, he is upright no longer. His right arm hangs limp and useless. He hobbles up to the citizens imploring alms.)

*Illanaun* I am sorry. I cannot help you. There have been too many beggars here, and we must decline alms for the good of the town.



*Agmar* (sitting down and weeping) I have come from far. (Illanaun presently returns and gives Agmar a coin. Exit Illanaun. Agmar, erect again, walks back to the others.)

*Agmar* We shall need fine raiment, let the thief start at once. Let it rather be green raiment.

*Beggar* I will go and fetch the thief. (Exit)

*Ulf* We will dress ourselves as lords and impose upon the city.

OOGNO Yes, yes; we will say we are ambassadors from a far land.

*Ulf* And there will be good eating.

*Slag* (in an undertone to Ulf) But you do not know my Master. Now that you have suggested that we shall go as lords, he will make a better suggestion. He will suggest that we should go as kings.

*Ulf* (incredulous) Beggars as kings!



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*Slag Ay.* You do not know my Master.

*Ulf* (to Agmar) What do you bid us do?

*Agmar* You shall first come by the fine raiment in the manner I have mentioned.

*Ulf* And what then, Master?

*Agmar* Why then we shall go as gods.

*Beggars* As gods?

*Agmar* As gods. Know you the land through which I have lately come in my wanderings? Marma, where the gods are carved from green stone in the mountains. They sit all seven of them against the hills. They sit there motionless and travellers worship them.

*Ulf* Yes, yes, we know those gods. They are much revered here; but they are drowsy and send us nothing beautiful.

*Agmar* They are of green jade. They sit cross-legged with their right elbows resting on their left hands, the right forefinger pointing upwards. We will come into the city disguised, from the direction of Marma, and will claim to be these gods. We must be seven as they are. And when we sit, we must sit cross-legged as they do, with the right hand uplifted.

*Ulf* This is a bad city in which to fall into the hands of oppressors, for the judges lack amiability here as the merchants lack benevolence ever since the gods forgot them.

*Agmar* In our ancient calling a man may sit at one street corner for fifty years doing the one thing, and yet a day may come when it is well for him to rise up and to do another thing, while the timorous man starves.

*Ulf* Also it were well not to anger the gods.

*Agmar* Is not all life a beggary to the gods? Do they not see all men always begging of them and asking alms with incense, and bells, and subtle devices?

OOGNO Yes, all men indeed are beggars before the gods.

*Agmar* Does not the mighty Soldan often sit by the agate altar in his royal temple as we sit at a street corner or by a palace gate?

*Ulf* It is even so.



*Agmar* Then will the gods be glad when we follow the holy calling with new devices and with subtlety, as they are glad when the priests sing a new song.

*Ulf* Yet I have a fear.

*Agmar* (to Slag) Go you into the city before us, and let there be a prophecy there which saith that the gods who are carven from green rock in the mountain shall one day arise in Marma and come here in the guise of men.

*Slag* Yes, Master. Shall I make the prophecy myself? Or shall it be found in some old document?

*Agmar* Let someone have seen it once in some rare document. Let it be spoken of in the market-place.

*Slag* It shall be spoken of, Master. (Slag lingers. Enter thief and Thahn)

OOGNO This is our thief.

*Agmar* (encouragingly) Ah, he is a quick thief.

*Thief* I could only procure you three green raiments, Master. The city is not now well supplied with them; moreover it is a very suspicious city, and without shame for the baseness of its suspicions.



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*Slag* (to a beggar) This is not thieving.

*Thief* I could do no more, Master. I have not practised thieving all my life.

*Agmar* You have got something: it may serve our purpose. How long have you been thieving?

*Thief* I stole first when I was ten.

*Slag* When he was ten!

*Agmar* We must tear them up and divide them amongst the seven. (to Thahn) Bring me another beggar.

*Slag* When my Master was ten he had already had to slip by night out of two cities.

OOGNO (admiringly) Out of two cities!

*Slag* (nodding his head) In his native city they do not now know what became of the golden cup that stood in the Lunar Temple.

*Agmar* Yes, into seven pieces.

*Ulf* We will each wear a piece of it over our rags.

OOGNO Yes, yes, we shall look fine.

*Agmar* That is not the way that we shall disguise ourselves.

OOGNO Not cover our rags?

*Agmar* No, no. The first who looked closely would say 'These are only beggars. They have disguised themselves.'

*Ulf* What shall we do?

*Agmar* Each of the seven shall wear a piece of the green raiment underneath his rags. And peradventure here and there a little shall show through; and men shall say 'These seven have disguised themselves as beggars. But we know not what they be.'

*Slag* Hear my wise Master.

OOGNO (in admiration) *He* is a beggar.

*Ulf* He is an *old* beggar.



## ACT II

*Scene:* The Metropolitan Hall of the city of Kongros. Citizens, etc.  
Enter the seven beggars with green silk under their rags.

*Oorander* Who are you and whence come you?

*Agmar* Who may say what we are or whence we come?

*Oorander* What are these beggars and why do they come here?

*Agmar* Who said to you that we were beggars?

*Oorander* Why do these men come here?

*Agmar* Who said to you that we were men?

*Illanaun* Now, by the moon!

*Agmar* My sister.

*Illanaun* What?

*Agmar* My little sister.

*Slag* Our little sister the Moon. She comes to us at evenings away in the mountain of Marma. She trips over the mountains when she is young: when she is young and slender she comes and dances before us: and when she is old and unshapely she hobbles away from the hills.

*Agmar* Yet she is young again and forever nimble with youth: yet she comes dancing back. The years are not able to curb her nor to bring grey hairs to her brethren.

*Oorander* This is not wanted.

*Illanaun* It is not in accordance with custom.



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*Akmos* Prophecy hath not thought it.

*Slag* She comes to us new and nimble remembering olden loves.

*Oorander* It were well that prophets should come and speak to us.

*Illanaun* This hath not been in the past. Let prophets come; let prophets speak to us of future things. (The beggars seat themselves upon the floor in the attitude of the seven gods of Marma.)

*Citizen* I heard men speak to-day in the market-place. They speak of a prophecy read somewhere of old. It says the seven gods shall come from Marma in the guise of men.

*Illanaun* Is this a true prophecy?

*Oorander* It is all the prophecy we have. Man without prophecy is like a sailor going by night over uncharted seas. He knows not where are the rocks nor where the havens. To the man on watch all things ahead are black and the stars guide him not, for he knows not what they are.

*Illanaun* Should we not investigate this prophecy?

*Oorander* Let us accept it. It is as the small uncertain light of a lantern, carried it may be by a drunkard but along the shore of some haven. Let us be guided.

*Akmos* It may be that they are but benevolent gods.

*Agmar* There is no benevolence greater than our benevolence.

*Illanaun* Then we need do little: they portend no danger to us.

*Agmar* There is no anger greater than our anger.

*Oorander* Let us make sacrifice to them, if they be gods.

*Akmos* We humbly worship you, if ye be gods.

*Illanaun* (kneeling too) You are mightier than all men and hold high rank among other gods and are lords of this our city, and have the thunder as your plaything and the whirlwind and the eclipse and all the destinies of human tribes, if ye be gods.

*Agmar* Let the pestilence not fall at once upon this city, as it had indeed designed to; let not the earthquake swallow it all immediately up amid the howls of the thunder; let not infuriate armies overwhelm those that escape if we be gods.

*Populace* (in horror) If we be gods!



*Oorander* Come let us sacrifice.

*Illanaun* Bring lambs.

*Akmos* Quick, quick. (Exit some.)

*Slag* (with solemn air) This god is a very divine god.

*Thahn* He is no common god.

MLAN Indeed he has made us.

*Citizen (A woman)* (to Slag) He will not punish us, Master? None of the gods will punish us? We will make a sacrifice, a good sacrifice.

*Another* We will sacrifice a lamb that the priests have blessed.

*First Citizen* Master, you are not wroth with us?

*Slag* Who may say what cloudy dooms are rolling up in the mind of the eldest of the gods. He is no common god like us. Once a shepherd went by him in the mountains and doubted as he went. He sent a doom after that shepherd.



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*Citizen* Master, we have not doubted.

*Slag* And the doom found him on the hills at evening.

*Second Citizen* It shall be a good sacrifice, Master. (Re-enter with a dead lamb and fruits. They offer the lamb on an altar where there is fire, and fruits before the altar.)

*Thahn* (stretching out a hand to a lamb upon an altar.) That leg is not being cooked at all.

*Illanaun* It is strange that gods should be thus anxious about the cooking of a leg of lamb.

*Oorander* It is strange certainly.

*Illanaun* Almost I had said that it was a man spoke then.

*Oorander* (Stroking his beard and regarding the second beggar.)  
Strange. Strange certainly.

*Agmar* Is it then strange that the gods love roasted flesh? For this purpose they keep the lightning. When the lightning flickers about the limbs of men there comes to the gods in Marma a pleasant smell, even a smell of roasting. Sometimes the gods, being pacific, are pleased to have roasted instead the flesh of lamb. It is all one to the gods: let the roasting stop.

*Oorander* No, no, gods of the mountain!

*Others* No, no.

*Oorander* Quick, let us offer the flesh to them. If they eat all is well. (They offer it, the beggars eat, all but Agmar who watches.)

*Illanaun* One who was ignorant, one who did not know, had almost said that they ate like hungry men.

*Others* Hush.

*Akmos* Yet they look as though they had not had a meal like this for a long time.

*Oorander* They *have* a hungry look.

*Agmar* (who has not eaten) I have not eaten since the world was very new and the flesh of men was tenderer than now. These younger gods have learned the habit of eating from the lions.



*Oorander* O oldest of divinities, partake, partake.

*Agmar* It is not fitting that such as I should eat. None eat but beasts and men and the younger gods. The Sun and the Moon and the nimble Lightning and I, we may kill, and we may madden, but we do not eat.

*Akmos* If he but eat of our offering he cannot overwhelm us.

*All* O ancient deity, partake, partake.

*Agmar* Enough. Let it be enough that these have condescended to this bestial and human habit.

*Illanaun* (to *Akmos*) And yet he is not unlike a beggar whom I saw not so long since.

*Oorander* But beggars eat.

*Illanaun* Now I never knew a beggar yet who would refuse a bowl of Woldery wine.

*Akmos* This is no beggar.

*Illanaun* Nevertheless let us offer him a bowl of Woldery wine.

*Akmos* You do wrong to doubt him.

*Illanaun* I do but wish to prove his divinity. I will fetch the Woldery wine. (Exit)



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*Akmos* He will not drink. Yet if he does, then he will not overwhelm us. Let us offer him the wine.

(Re-enter Illanaun with a goblet.)

*First beggar* It is Woldery wine!

*Second beggar* It is Woldery!

*Third beggar* A goblet of Woldery wine!

*Fourth beggar* O blessed day!

MLAN O happy times!

*Slag* O my wise Master! (All the Beggars stretch out their hands, including Agmar. Illanaun gives it to Agmar. Agmar takes it solemnly, and very carefully pours it upon the ground.)

*First beggar* He has spilt it.

*Second beggar* He has spilt it. (Agmar sniffs the fumes.)

*Agmar* It is a fitting libation. Our anger is somewhat appeased.

*Another beggar* But it was Woldery!

*Akmos* (kneeling to Agmar) Master, I am childless, and I....

*Agmar* Trouble us not now. It is the hour at which the gods are accustomed to speak to the gods in the language of the gods, and if Man heard us he would guess the futility of his destiny, which were not well for Man. Begone! Begone! (Exeunt all but one who lingers.)

*One* Master....

*Agmar* Begone! (exit one) (Agmar takes up a piece of meat and begins to eat it: the beggars rise and stretch themselves: they laugh, but Agmar eats hungrily.)

OOGNO Ah, now we have come into our own.

*Thahn* Now we have alms.

*Slag* Master! My wise Master!

*Ulf* These are the good days, the good days; and yet I have a fear.



*Slag* What do you fear? There is nothing to fear. No man is as wise as my Master.

*Ulf* I fear the gods whom we pretend to be.

*Slag* The gods?

*Agmar* (taking a chunk of meat from his lips) Come hither, Slag.

*Slag* (going up to him) Yes, Master.

*Agmar* Watch in the doorway while I eat. (*Slag* goes to the doorway) Sit in the attitude of a god. Warn me if any of the citizens approach. (*Slag* sits in the doorway in the attitude of a god, back to the audience)

OOGNO (to *Agmar*) But, Master, shall we not have Woldery wine?

*Agmar* We shall have all things if only we are wise at first for a little.

*Thahn* Master, do any suspect us?

*Agmar* We must be *very* wise.

*Thahn* But if we are not wise, Master?

*Agmar* Why then death may come to us ...

*Thahn* O Master!

*Agmar* ... slowly. (All stir uneasily except *Slag* motionless in the doorway.)

OOGNO Do they believe us, master?

*Slag* (half turning his head) Someone comes. (*Slag* resumes his position.)

*Agmar* (putting away his meat) We shall soon know now. (All take up the attitude. Enter one.)



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*One* Master, I want the god that does not eat.

*Agmar* I am he.

*One* Master, my child was bitten in the throat by a death-adder at noon. Spare him, Master; he still breathes, but slowly.

*Agmar* Is he indeed your child?

*One* He is surely my child, Master.

*Agmar* Was it your wont to thwart him in his play, while he was strong and well?

*One* I never thwarted him, Master.

*Agmar* Whose child is Death?

*One* Death is the child of the gods.

*Agmar* Do you that never thwarted your child in his play ask this of the gods?

*One* (with some horror, perceiving Agmar's meaning) Master!

*Agmar* Weep not. For all the houses that men have builded are the play-fields of this child of the gods. (The man goes away in silence not weeping.)

OOGNO (Taking Thahn by the wrist) Is this indeed a man?

*Agmar* A man, a man, and until just now a hungry one.

## ACT III

Same room. A few days have elapsed. Seven thrones shaped like mountain-crags stand along the back of the stage. On these the beggars are lounging. The Thief is absent.

MLAN Never had beggars such a time.

OOGNO Ah, the fruits and tender lamb!

*Thahn* The Woldery wine!

*Slag* It was better to see my Master's wise devices than to have fruit and lamb and Woldery wine.



MLAN Ah, when they spied on him to see if he would eat when they went away!

OOGNO When they questioned him concerning the gods and Man!

*Thahn* When they asked him why the gods permitted cancer!

*Slag* Ah! My wise Master.

MLAN How well his scheme has succeeded.

OOGNO How far away is hunger!

*Thahn* It is even like to one of last year's dreams, the trouble of a brief night long ago.

MLAN Ho, ho, ho, to see them pray to us!

*Agmar* (sternly) When we were beggars did we not speak as beggars? Did we not whine as they? Was not our mien beggarly?

MLAN We were the pride of our calling.

*Agmar* (sternly) Then now that we are gods let us *be* as gods, and not mock our worshippers.

*Ulf* I think the gods *do* mock their worshippers.

*Agmar* The gods have never mocked *us*. We are above all pinnacles that we have ever gazed at in dreams.

*Ulf* I think that when Man is high then most of all are the gods wont to mock him. (Enter Thief)

*Thief* Master, I have been with those that see all and know all, I have been with the thieves, Master. They know me for one of the craft, but they do not know me as being one of us.

*Agmar* Well, well ...

*Thief* There is danger, Master, there is great danger.



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*Agmar* You mean that they suspect that we are men?

*Thief* That they have long done, Master. I mean that they will know it. Then we are lost.

*Agmar* Then they do not know it?

*Thief* They do not know it yet, but they will know it, and we are lost.

*Agmar* When will they know it?

*Thief* Three days ago they suspected us.

*Agmar* More than you think suspected us, but have any dared to say so?

*Thief* No, Master.

*Agmar* Then forget your fears, my thief.

*Thief* Two men went on dromedaries three days ago to see if the gods were still at Marma.

*Agmar* They went to Marma!

*Thief* Yes, three days ago.

OOGNO We are lost.

*Agmar* They went three days ago?

*Thief* Yes, on dromedaries.

*Agmar* They should be back to-day.

OOGNO We are lost.

*Thahn* We are lost.

*Thief* They must have seen the green jade idols sitting against the mountains. They will say, 'The gods are still at Marma.' And we shall be burnt.

*Slag* My Master will yet devise a plan.

*Agmar* (to the Thief) Slip away to some high place and look towards the desert and see how long we have to devise a plan. (Exit Thief.)



*Slag* My Master will devise a plan.

OOGNO He has taken us into a trap.

*Thahn* His wisdom is our doom.

*Slag* He will find a wise plan yet. (Re-enter Thief.)

*Thief* It is too late.

*Agmar* It is too late?

*Thief* The dromedary men are here.

OOGNO We are lost.

*Agmar* Be silent! I must think. (They all sit still. Citizens enter and prostrate themselves. Agmar sits deep in thought.)

*Illanaun* (to Agmar) Two holy pilgrims have gone to your sacred shrines, wherein you were wont to sit before you left the mountains. (Agmar says nothing) They return even now.

*Agmar* They left us here and went to find the gods. A fish once took a journey into a far country to find the sea.

*Illanaun* Most reverend Deity, their piety is so great that they have gone to worship even your shrines.

*Agmar* I know these men that have great piety. Such men have often prayed to me before, but their prayers are not acceptable. They little love the gods, their only care is their piety. I know these pious ones. They will say that the seven gods were still at Marma. So shall they seem more pious to you all, pretending that they alone have seen the gods. Fools shall believe them and share in their damnation.

*Oorander* (to Illanaun) Hush. You anger the gods.

*Illanaun* I am not sure whom I anger.

*Oorander* It may be they are the gods.



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*Illanaun* Where are these men from Marma?

*Citizen* Here are the dromedary men, they are coming now.

*Illanaun* (to Agmar) The holy pilgrims from your shrine are come to worship you.

*Agmar* The men are doubters. How the gods hate the word! Doubt ever contaminated virtue. Let them be cast into prison and not besmirch your purity, (rising) Let them not enter here.

*Illanaun* But O most reverend Deity from the mountain, we also doubt, most reverend Deity.

*Agmar* You have chosen. You have chosen. And yet it is not too late. Repent and cast these men in prison and it may not be too late. *The gods have never wept.* And yet when they think upon damnation and the dooms that are withering a myriad bones, then almost, were they not divine, they *could* weep. Be quick. Repent of your doubt.

ILLANAUN Most reverend Deity, it is a mighty doubt.

CITIZENS *Nothing has killed him! They are not the gods!*

SLAG (to Agmar) You have a plan, my Master. You have a plan?

AGMAR Not yet, Slag. (Enter the dromedary men.)

ILLANAUN (to Oorander) These are the men that went to the shrines at Marma.

OORANDER (in a loud, clear voice) Were the gods of the mountain seated still at Marma, or were they not there? (The beggars get up hurriedly from their thrones.)

DROMEDARY MAN They were not there.

ILLANAUN They were not there?

DROMEDARY MAN Their shrines were empty.

OORANDER Behold the gods of the mountain!

AKMOS They have indeed come from Marma.

OORANDER Come. Let us go away to prepare a sacrifice, a mighty sacrifice to atone for our doubting. (Exeunt.)

SLAG My most wise Master!



AGMAR No, no, Slag. I do not know what has befallen. When I went by Marma only two weeks ago the idols of green jade were still seated there.

OOGNO We are saved now.

THAHN Aye, we are saved.

AGMAR We are saved, but I know not how.

OOGNO *Never* had beggars such a time.

THIEF I will go out and watch. (He creeps out.)

ULF Yet I have a fear.

OOGNO A fear? Why, we are saved.

ULF Last night I dreamed.

OOGNO What was your dream?

ULF It was nothing. I dreamed that I was thirsty and one gave me Woldery wine; yet there was a fear in my dream.

THAHN When I drink Woldery wine I am afraid of nothing. (Re-enter Thief.)

THIEF They are making a pleasant banquet ready for us; they are killing lambs, and girls are there with fruits, and there is to be much Woldery wine.

MLAN *Never* had beggars such a time.

AGMAR Do any doubt us now?

THIEF I do not know.

MLAN When will the banquet be?

THIEF When the stars come out.



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OOGNO Ah. It is sunset already. There will be good eating.

THAHN We shall see the girls come in with baskets upon their heads.

OOGNO There will be fruits in the baskets.

THAHN All the fruits of the valley.

MLAN Ah, how long we have wandered along the ways of the world.

SLAG Ah, how hard they were.

THAHN And how dusty.

OOGNO And how little wine.

MLAN How long we have asked and asked, and for how much!

AGMAR We to whom all things are coming now at last.

THIEF I fear lest my art forsake me now that good things come without stealing.

AGMAR You will need your art no longer.

SLAG The wisdom of my Master shall suffice us all our days. (Enter a frightened man. He kneels before Agmar and abases his forehead.)

MAN Master, we implore you, the people beseech you. (Agmar and the beggars in the attitude of the gods sit silent.)

MAN Master, it is terrible. (The beggars maintain silence) It is terrible when you wander in the evening. It is terrible on the edge of the desert in the evening. Children die when they see you.

AGMAR In the desert? When did you see us?

MAN Last night, Master. You were terrible last night. You were terrible in the gloaming. When your hands were stretched out and groping. You were feeling for the city.

AGMAR Last night do you say?

MAN You were terrible in the gloaming!

AGMAR You yourself saw us?

MAN Yes, Master, you were terrible. Children too saw you and they died.



AGMAR You say you saw us?

MAN Yes, Master. Not as you are now, but otherwise. We implore you, Master, not to wander at evening. You are terrible in the gloaming. You are....

AGMAR You say we appeared not as we are now. How did we appear to you?

MAN Otherwise, Master, otherwise.

AGMAR But how *did* we appear to you?

MAN You were all green, Master, all green in the gloaming, all of rock again as you used to be in the mountains. Master, we can bear to see you in flesh like men, but when we see rock walking it is terrible, it is terrible.

AGMAR That is how we appeared to you?

MAN Yes, Master. Rock should not walk. When children see it they do not understand. Rock should not walk in the evening.

AGMAR There have been doubters of late. Are they satisfied?

MAN Master, they are terrified. Spare us, Master.

AGMAR It is wrong to doubt. Go, and be faithful. (Exit Man.)

SLAG What have they seen, Master?

AGMAR They have seen their own fears dancing in the desert. They have seen something green after the light was gone, and some child has told them a tale that it was us. I do not know what they have seen. What should they have seen?

ULF Something was coming this way from the desert, he said.



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SLAG What should come from the desert?

AGMAR They are a foolish people.

ULF That man's white face has seen some frightful thing.

SLAG A frightful thing?

ULF That man's face has been near to some frightful thing.

AGMAR It is only we that have frightened them, and their fears have made them foolish. (Enter an attendant with a torch or lantern which he places in a receptacle. Exit.)

THAHN Now we shall see the faces of the girls when they come to the banquet.

MLAN Never had beggars such a time.

AGMAR Hark! They are coming. I hear footsteps.

THAHN The dancing girls. They are coming.

THIEF There is no sound of flutes; they said they would come with music.

OOGNO What heavy boots they have, they sound like feet of stone.

THAHN I do not like to hear their heavy tread; those that would dance to *us* must be light of foot.

AGMAR I shall not smile at them if they are not airy.

MLAN They are coming very slowly. They should come nimbly to us.

THAHN They should dance as they come. But the footfall is like the footfall of heavy crabs.

ULF (in a loud voice, almost chanting) I have a fear, an old fear and a boding. We have done ill in the sight of the seven gods; beggars we were and beggars we should have remained; we have given up our calling and come in sight of our doom: I will no longer let my fear be silent: it shall run about and cry: it shall go from me crying, like a dog from out of a doomed city; for my fear has seen calamity and has known an evil thing.

SLAG (hoarsely) Master!

AGMAR (rising) Come, come! (They listen. No one speaks. The stony boots come on. Enter in single file a procession of seven green men, even hands and faces are green;



they wear greenstone sandals, they walk with knees extremely wide apart, as having sat cross-legged for centuries, their right arms and right forefingers point upwards, right elbows resting on left hands: they stoop grotesquely: halfway to the footlights they wheel left. They pass in front of the seven beggars, now in terrified attitudes and six of them sit down in the attitude described, with their backs to the audience. The leader stands, still stooping. Just as they wheel left, OOGNO cries out.) The gods of the mountain!

AGMAR (hoarsely) Be still. They are dazzled by the light, they may not see us. (The leading green thing points his forefinger at the lantern, the flame turns green. When the six are seated the leader points one by one at each of the seven beggars, shooting out his forefinger at them. As he does this each beggar in his turn gathers himself back on to his throne and crosses his legs, his right arm goes stiffly upwards with forefinger erect, and a staring look of horror comes into his eyes. In this attitude the beggars sit motionless while a green light falls upon their faces. The gods go out.



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Presently enter the Citizens, some with victuals and fruit. One touches a beggar's arm and then another's.)

CITIZEN They are cold; they have turned to stone. (All abase themselves foreheads to the floor.)

ONE We have doubted them. We have doubted them. They have turned to stone because we have doubted them.

ANOTHER They were the true gods.

ALL They were the true gods.

## THE FIRST ACT OF KING ARGIMENES AND THE UNKNOWN WARRIOR

King Argimenes  
Zarb (a slave born of slaves)  
An Old Slave Slaves of King Darniak  
A Young Slave  
Slaves

King Darniak  
The King's Overseer  
A Prophet  
The Idol-Guard  
The Servant of the King's Dog

Queen Otharlia  
Queen Oxara  
Queen Cahafra Queens of King Darniak  
Queen Thragolind  
Guards and Attendants

### ACT I

Time: A long time ago. SCENE: The dinner-hour on the slave-fields of King Darniak.

(The Curtain rises upon King Argimenes, sitting upon the ground, bowed, ragged, and dirty, gnawing a bone. He has uncouth hair and a dishevelled beard. A battered spade lies near him. Two or three slaves sit at back of stage eating raw cabbage-leaves. The tear-song, the chaunt of the low-born, rises at intervals, monotonous and mournful, coming from distant slave-fields.)



KING ARGIMENES This is a good bone; there is juice in this bone.

ZARB I wish I were you, Argimenes.

KING ARGIMENES I am not to be envied any longer. I have eaten up my bone.

ZARB I wish I were you, because you have been a King. Because men have prostrated themselves before your feet. Because you have ridden a horse and worn a crown and have been called Majesty.

KING ARGIMENES When I remember that I have been a king it is very terrible.

ZARB But you are lucky to have such things in your memory as you have. I have nothing in my memory—Once I went for a year without being flogged, and I remember my cleverness in contriving it—I have nothing else to remember.

KING ARGIMENES It is very terrible to have been a king.

ZARB But we have nothing who have no good memories in the past. It is not easy for us to hope for the future here.

KING ARGIMENES Have you any god?

ZARB We may not have a god because he might make us brave and we might kill our guards. He might make a miracle and give us swords.

KING ARGIMENES Ah, you have no hope then.

ZARB I have a little hope. Hush, and I will tell you a secret—The King's great dog is ill and like to die. They will throw him to us. We shall have beautiful bones then.

KING ARGIMENES Ah! Bones.

ZARB Yes. That is what *I* hope for. And have *you* no other hope? Do you not hope that your nation will arise some day and rescue you and cast off the king and hang him up by his thumbs from the palace gateway?



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KING ARGIMENES No. I have no other hope, for my god was cast down in the temple and broken into three pieces on the day that they surprised us and took me sleeping. But will they throw him to us? Will so honourable a brute as the King's dog be thrown to us?

ZARB When he is dead his honours are taken away. Even the King when he is dead is given to the worms. Then why should not his dog be thrown to us?

KING ARGIMENES We are not worms!

ZARB You do not understand, Argimenes. The worms are little and free, while we are big and enslaved. I did not say we were worms, but we are *like* worms, and if they have the King when he is dead, why then—

KING ARGIMENES Tell me more of the King's dog. Are there big bones on him?

ZARB Ay, he is a big dog—a high, big, black one.

KING ARGIMENES You know him then?

ZARB O yes, I know him. I know him well. I was beaten once because of him, twenty-five strokes from the treble whips, two men beating me.

KING ARGIMENES How did they beat you because of the King's dog?

ZARB They beat me because I spoke to him without making obeisance. He was coming dancing alone over the slave-fields and I spoke to him. He was a friendly great dog, and I spoke to him and patted his head, and did not make obeisance.

KING ARGIMENES And they saw you do it?

ZARB Yes, the slave-guard saw me. They came and seized me at once and bound my arms. The great dog wanted me to speak to him again, but I was hurried away.

KING ARGIMENES You should have made obeisance.

ZARB The great dog seemed so friendly that I forgot he was the King's great dog.

KING ARGIMENES But tell me more. Was he hurt, or is it a sickness?

ZARB They say that it is a sickness.

KING ARGIMENES Ah. Then he will grow thin if he does not die soon. If it had been a hurt!—but we should not complain. I complain more often than you do because I had not learned to submit while I was yet young.



ZARB If your beautiful memories do not please you, you should hope more. I wish I had your memories. I should not trouble to hope then. It is very hard to hope.

KING ARGIMENES There will be nothing more to hope for when we have eaten the King's dog.

ZARB Why you might find gold in the earth while you were digging. Then you might bribe the commander of the guard to lend you his sword; we would all follow you if you had a sword. Then we might take the King and bind him and lay him on the ground and fasten his tongue outside his mouth with thorns and put honey on it and sprinkle honey near. Then the grey ants would come from one of their big mounds. My father found gold once when he was digging.

KING ARGIMENES (pointedly) Did your father free himself?

ZARB No. Because the King's Overseer found him looking at the gold and killed him. But he would have freed himself if he could have bribed the guard. (A prophet walks across the stage attended by two guards.)



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SLAVES He is going to the King. He is going to the King.

ZARB He is going to the King.

KING ARGIMENES Going to prophesy good things to the King. It is easy to prophesy good things to a king, and be rewarded when the good things come. What else should come to a king? A prophet! a prophet! (A deep bell tolls slowly. King Argimenes and Zarb pick up their spades at once, and the old slaves at the back of the stage go down on their knees immediately and grub in the soil with their hands. The white beard of the oldest trails in the dirt as he works. King Argimenes digs.)

KING ARGIMENES What is the name of that song that we always sing? I like the song.

ZARB It has no name. It is our song. There is no other song.

KING ARGIMENES Once there were other songs. Has this no name?

ZARB I think the soldiers have a name for it.

KING ARGIMENES What do the soldiers call it?

ZARB The soldiers call it the tear-song, the chaunt of the low-born.

KING ARGIMENES It is a good song. I could sing no other now. (Zarb moves away digging.)

KING ARGIMENES (to himself as his spade touches something in the earth.) Metal! (Feels with his spade again.) Gold perhaps!—It is of no use here. (uncovers earth leisurely. Suddenly he drops on his knees and works excitedly in the earth with his hands. Then very slowly, still kneeling, he lifts, lying flat on his hands, a long greenish sword, his eyes intent on it. About the level of his uplifted forehead he holds it, still flat on both hands, and addresses it thus:)

O holy and blessed thing. (Then he lowers it slowly till his hands rest on his knees, and looking all the while at the sword.)

KING ARGIMENES Three years ago tomorrow King Darniak spat at me, having taken my kingdom from me. Three times in that year I was flogged, with twelve stripes, with seventeen stripes, and with twenty stripes. A year and eleven months ago, come Moon-day, the King's Overseer struck me in the face, and nine times in that year he called me dog. For one month two weeks and a day I was yoked with a bullock and pulled a rounded stone all day over the paths, except while we were fed. I was flogged twice that year—with eighteen stripes and with ten stripes. This year the roof of the slave-sty has fallen in and King Darniak will not repair it. Five weeks ago one of his queens laughed at me as she came across the slave-fields. I was flogged again this year and



with thirteen stripes, and twelve times they have called me dog. And these things they have done to a king, and a king of the house of Ithara. (He listens attentively for a moment, then buries the sword again and pats the earth over it with his hands, then digs again. The old slaves do not see him: their faces are to the earth.) (Enter the King's Overseer carrying a whip. The slaves and King Argimenes kneel with their foreheads to the ground as he passes across the stage. Exit the King's Overseer.)



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KING ARGIMENES (kneeling, hands outspread downwards.) O warrior spirit, wherever thou wanderest, whoever be thy gods; whether they punish thee or whether they bless thee; O kingly spirit that once laid here this sword, behold I pray to thee having no gods to pray to, for the god of my nation was broken in three by night. Mine arm is stiff with three years' slavery and remembers not the sword. But guide thy sword till I have slain six men and armed the strongest slaves, and thou shalt have the sacrifice every year of a hundred goodly oxen. And I will build in Ithara a temple to thy memory wherein all that enter in shall remember thee, so shalt thou be honoured and envied among the dead, for the dead are very jealous of remembrance. Aye, though thou wert a robber that took men's lives unrighteously, yet shall rare spices smoulder in thy temple and little maidens sing and new-plucked flowers deck the solemn aisles; and priests shall go about it ringing bells that thy soul shall find repose. O but it has a good blade this old green sword; thou wouldst not like to see it miss its mark (if the dead see at all, as wise men teach,) thou wouldst not like to see it go thirsting into the air; so huge a sword should find its marrowy bone. (Extending his right hand upward.) Come into my right arm, O ancient spirit, O unknown warrior's soul. And if thou hast the ear of any gods, speak there against Illuriel, god of King Darniak. (He rises and goes on digging. Re-enter the King's Overseer.)

THE KING'S OVERSEER So you have been praying.

KING ARGIMENES (kneeling) No, Master.

THE KING'S OVERSEER The slave-guard saw you. (Strikes him) It is not lawful for a slave to pray.

KING ARGIMENES I did but pray to Illuriel to make me a good slave, to teach me to dig well and to pull the rounded stone, and to make me not to die when the food is scarce, but to be a good slave to my master, the great King.

THE KING'S OVERSEER Who art thou to pray to Illuriel? Dogs may not pray to an immortal god. (Exit. Zarb comes back, digging.)

KING ARGIMENES (digging) Zarb.

ZARB (also digging) Do not look at me when you speak. The guards are watching us. Look at your digging.

KING ARGIMENES How do the guards know we are speaking because we look at one another?

ZARB You are very witless. Of course they know.

KING ARGIMENES Zarb.



ZARB What is it?

KING ARGIMENES How many guards are there in sight?

ZARB There are six of them over there. They are watching us.

KING ARGIMENES Are there other guards in sight of these six guards?

ZARB No.

KING ARGIMENES How do you know?

ZARB Because whenever their officer leaves them they sit upon the ground and play with dice.

KING ARGIMENES How does that show that there are not another six in sight of them?

ZARB How witless you are, Argimenes. Of course it shows there are not. Because, if there were, another officer would see them, and their thumbs would be cut off.



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KING ARGIMENES Ah. (a pause.) Zarb. (a pause) Would the slaves follow me if I tried to kill the guards?

ZARB No, Argimenes.

KING ARGIMENES Why would they not follow me?

ZARB Because you look like a slave. They will never follow a slave, because they are slaves themselves, and know how mean a creature is a slave. If you looked like a king they would follow you.

KING ARGIMENES But I am a king. They know that I am a king.

ZARB It is better to look like a king. It is looks that they would go by.

KING ARGIMENES If I had a sword would they follow me? A beautiful huge sword of bronze.

ZARB I wish I could think of things like that. It is because you were once a king that you can think of a sword of bronze. I tried to hope once that I should some day fight the guards, but I couldn't picture a sword, I couldn't imagine it; I could only picture whips.

KING ARGIMENES Dig a little nearer, Zarb. (They both edge closer.) I have found a very old sword in the earth. It is not a sword such as common soldiers wear. A king must have worn it, and an angry king. It must have done fearful things; there are little dints in it. Perhaps there was a battle here long ago where all were slain, and perhaps that king died last and buried his sword, but the great birds swallowed him.

ZARB You have been thinking too much of the King's dog, Argimenes, and that has made you hungry, and hunger has driven you mad.

KING ARGIMENES I *have* found such a sword. (A pause.)

ZARB Why—then you will wear a purple cloak again, and sit on a great throne, and ride a prancing horse, and we shall call you Majesty.

KING ARGIMENES I shall break a long fast first and drink much water, and sleep. But will the slaves follow me?

ZARB You will *make* them follow you if you have a sword. Yet is Illuriel a very potent god. They say that none have prevailed against King Darniak's dynasty so long as Illuriel stood. Once an enemy cast Illuriel into the river and overthrew the dynasty, but a fisherman found him again and set him up, and the enemy was driven out and the dynasty returned.



KING ARGIMENES If Illuriel could be cast down as my god was cast down perhaps King Darniak could be overcome as I was overcome in my sleep?

ZARB If Illuriel were cast down all the people would utter a cry and flee away. It would be a fearful portent.

KING ARGIMENES How many men are there in the armoury at the palace?

ZARB There are ten men in the palace armoury when all the slave-guards are out. (They dig awhile in silence.)

ZARB The officer of the slave-guard has gone away—they are playing with dice now. (Zarb throws down his spade and stretches his arms)—The man with the big beard has won again, he is very nimble with his thumbs—They are playing again, but it is getting dark, I cannot clearly see.



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(King Argimenes furtively uncovers the sword, he picks it up and grips it in his hand.)

ZARB Majesty! (King Argimenes crouches and steals away towards the slave-guard.)

ZARB (to the other slaves) Argimenes has found a terrible sword and has gone to slay the slave-guard. It is not a common sword, it is some king's sword.

AN OLD SLAVE Argimenes will be dreadfully flogged. We shall hear him cry all night. His cries will frighten us, and we shall not sleep.

ZARB No! no! The guards flog poor slaves, but Argimenes had an angry look. The guards will be afraid when they see him look so angry and see his terrible sword. It was a huge sword, and he looked very angry. He will bring us the swords of the slave-guard. We must prostrate ourselves before him and kiss his feet or he will be angry with us too.

OLD SLAVE Will Argimenes give me a sword?

ZARB He will have swords for six of us if he slays the slave-guard. Yes, he will give you a sword.

SLAVE A sword! No, no, I must not; the King would kill me if he found that I had a sword.

SECOND SLAVE (slowly, as one who develops an idea) If the King found that I had a sword, why then it would be an evil day for the King. (They all look off left.)

ZARB I think that they are playing at dice again.

FIRST SLAVE I do not see Argimenes.

ZARB No, because he was crouching as he walked. The slave-guard is on the sky-line.

SECOND SLAVE What is that dark shadow behind the slave-guard?

ZARB It is too still to be Argimenes.

SECOND SLAVE Look! It moves.

ZARB The evening is too dark, I cannot see. (They continue to gaze into the gathering darkness. They raise themselves on their knees and crane their necks. Nobody speaks. Then from their lips and from others further off goes up a long deep Oh! It is like the sound that goes up from the grand stand when a horse falls at a fence, or in England like the first exclamation of the crowd at a great cricket match when a man is caught in the slips.)



## THE FALL OF BABBULKUND

I said: 'I will arise now and see Babbulkund, City of Marvel. She is of one age with the earth; the stars are her sisters. Pharaohs of the old time coming conquering from Araby first saw her, a solitary mountain in the desert, and cut the mountain into towers and terraces. They destroyed one of the hills of God, but they made Babbulkund. She is carven, not built; her palaces are one with her terraces, there is neither join nor cleft. Hers is the beauty of the youth of the world. She deemeth herself to be the middle of Earth, and hath four gates facing outward to the Nations. There sits outside her eastern gate a colossal god of stone. His face flushes with the lights of dawn. When the morning sunlight warms his lips they part a little, and he giveth utterance to the words 'Oon Oom,' and the language is long since dead in which he speaks, and all his worshippers are gathered to their tombs, so that none knoweth what the words portend that he uttereth at dawn. Some say that he greets the sun as one god greets another in the language thereof, and others say that he proclaims the day, and others that he uttereth warning. And at every gate is a marvel not credible until beholden.'



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And I gathered three friends and said to them: 'We are what we have seen and known. Let us journey now and behold Babbulkund, that our minds may be beautified with it and our spirits made holier.'

So we took ship and travelled over the lifting sea, and remembered not things done in the towns we knew, but laid away the thoughts of them like soiled linen and put them by, and dreamed of Babbulkund.

But when we came to the land of which Babbulkund is the abiding glory, we hired a caravan of camels and Arab guides, and passed southwards in the afternoon on the three days' journey through the desert that should bring us to the white walls of Babbulkund. And the heat of the sun shone upon us out of the bright grey sky, and the heat of the desert beat up at us from below.

About sunset we halted and tethered our horses, while the Arabs unloaded the provisions from the camels and prepared a fire out of the dry scrub, for at sunset the heat of the desert departs from it suddenly, like a bird. Then we saw a traveller approaching us on a camel coming from the south. When he was come near we said to him:

'Come and encamp among us, for in the desert all men are brothers, and we will give thee meat to eat and wine, or, if thou art bound by thy faith, we will give thee some other drink that is not accursed by the prophet.'

The traveller seated himself beside us on the sand, and crossed his legs and answered:

'Hearken, and I will tell you of Babbulkund, City of Marvel. Babbulkund stands just below the meeting of the rivers, where Oonrana, River of Myth, flows into the Waters of Fable, even the old stream Plegathanees. These, together, enter her northern gate rejoicing. Of old they flowed in the dark through the Hill that Nehemoth, the first of Pharaohs, carved into the City of Marvel. Sterile and desolate they float far through the desert, each in the appointed cleft, with life upon neither bank, but give birth in Babbulkund to the sacred purple garden whereof all nations sing. Thither all the bees come on a pilgrimage at evening by a secret way of the air. Once, from his twilit kingdom, which he rules equally with the sun, the moon saw and loved Babbulkund, clad with her purple garden; and the moon wooed Babbulkund, and she sent him weeping away, for she is more beautiful than all her sisters the stars. Her sisters come to her at night into her maiden chamber. Even the gods speak sometimes of Babbulkund, clad with her purple garden. Listen, for I perceive by your eyes that ye have not seen Babbulkund; there is a restlessness in them and an unappeased wonder. Listen. In the garden whereof I spoke there is a lake that hath no twin or fellow in the world; there is no companion for it among all the lakes. The shores of it are of glass, and the bottom of it. In it are great fish having golden and scarlet scales, and

they swim to and fro. Here it is the wont of the eighty-second Nehemoth (who rules in the city



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to-day) to come, after the dusk has fallen, and sit by the lake alone, and at this hour eight hundred slaves go down by steps through caverns into vaults beneath the lake. Four hundred of them carrying purple lights march one behind the other, from east to west, and four hundred carrying green lights march one behind the other, from west to east. The two lines cross and re-cross each other in and out as the slaves go round and round, and the fearful fish flash up and down and to and fro.'

But upon that traveller speaking night descended, solemn and cold, and we wrapped ourselves in our blankets and lay down upon the sand in the sight of the astral sisters of Babbulkund. And all that night the desert said many things, softly and in a whisper, but I knew not what he said. Only the sand knew and arose and was troubled and lay down again, and the wind knew. Then, as the hours of the night went by, these two discovered the foot-tracks wherewith we had disturbed the holy desert, and they troubled over them and covered them up; and then the wind lay down and the sand rested. Then the wind rose again and the sand danced. This they did many times. And all the while the desert whispered what I shall not know.

Then I slept awhile and awoke just before sunrise, very cold. Suddenly the sun leapt up and flamed upon our faces; we all threw off our blankets and stood up. Then we took food, and afterwards started southwards, and in the heat of the day rested, and afterwards pushed on again. And all the while the desert remained the same, like a dream that will not cease to trouble a tired sleeper.

And often travellers passed us in the desert, coming from the City of Marvel, and there was a light and a glory in their eyes from having seen Babbulkund. That evening, at sunset, another traveller neared us, and we hailed him, saying:

'Wilt thou eat and drink with us, seeing that all men are brothers in the desert?'

And he descended from his camel and sat by us and said:

'When morning shines on the colossus Neb and Neb speaks, at once the musicians of King Nehemoth in Babbulkund awake.

'At first their fingers wander over their golden harps, or they stroke idly their violins. Clearer and clearer the note of each instrument ascends like larks arising from the dew, till suddenly they all blend together and a new melody is born. Thus, every morning, the musicians of King Nehemoth make a new marvel in the City of Marvel; for these are no common musicians, but masters of melody, raided by conquest long since, and carried away in ships from the Isles of Song. And, at the sound of the music, Nehemoth awakes in the eastern chamber of his palace, which is carved in the form of a great crescent, four miles long, on the northern side of the city. Full in the windows of its

eastern chamber the sun rises, and full in the windows of its western chamber the sun sets.



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'When Nehemoth awakes he summons slaves who bring a palanquin with bells, which the King enters, having lightly robed. Then the slaves run and bear him to the onyx Chamber of the Bath, with the sound of small bells ringing as they run. And when Nehemoth emerges thence, bathed and annointed, the slaves run on with their ringing palanquin and bear him to the Orient Chamber of Banquets, where the King takes the first meal of the day. Thence, through the great white corridor whose windows all face sunwards, Nehemoth, in his palanquin, passes on to the Audience Chamber of Embassies from the North, which is all decked with Northern wares.

'All about it are ornaments of amber from the North and carven chalices of the dark brown Northern crystal, and on its floors lie furs from Baltic shores.

'In adjoining chambers are stored the wonted food of the hardy Northern men, and the strong wine of the North, pale but terrible. Therein the King receives barbarian princes from the frigid lands. Thence the slaves bear him swiftly to the Audience Chamber of Embassies from the East, where the walls are of turquoise, studded with the rubies of Ceylon, where the gods are the gods of the East, where all the hangings have been devised in the gorgeous heart of Ind, and where all the carvings have been wrought with the cunning of the isles. Here, if a caravan hath chanced to have come in from Ind or from Cathay, it is the King's wont to converse awhile with Moguls or Mandarins, for from the East come the arts and knowledge of the world, and the converse of their people is polite. Thus Nehemoth passes on through the other Audience Chambers & receives, perhaps, some Sheihks of the Arab folk who have crossed the great desert from the West, or receives an embassy sent to do him homage from the shy jungle people to the South. And all the while the slaves with the ringing palanquin run westwards, following the sun, and ever the sun shines straight into the chamber where Nehemoth sits, and all the while the music from one or other of his bands of musicians comes tinkling to his ears. But when the middle of the day draws near, the slaves run to the cool grooves that lie along the verandahs on the northern side of the palace, forsaking the sun, and as the heat overcomes the genius of the musicians, one by one their hands fall from their instruments, till at last all melody ceases. At this moment Nehemoth falls asleep, and the slaves put the palanquin down and lie down beside it. At this hour the city becomes quite still, and the palace of Nehemoth and the tombs of the Pharaohs of old face to the sunlight, all alike in silence. Even the jewellers in the market-place, selling gems to princes, cease from their bargaining and cease to sing; for in Babbulkund the vendor of rubies sings the song of the ruby, and the vendor of sapphires sings the song of the sapphire, and each stone hath its song, so that a man, by his song, proclaims and makes known his wares.



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'But all these sounds cease at the meridian hour, the jewellers in the market-place lie down in what shadow they can find, and the princes go back to the cool places in their palaces, and a great hush in the gleaming air hangs over Babbulkund. But in the cool of the late afternoon, one of the King's musicians will awake from dreaming of his home and will pass his fingers, perhaps, over the strings of his harp and, with the music, some memory may arise of the wind in the glens of the mountains that stand in the Isles of Song. Then the musician will wrench great cries out of the soul of his harp for the sake of the old memory, and his fellows will awake and all make a song of home, woven of sayings told in the harbour when the ships came in, and of tales in the cottages about the people of old time. One by one the other bands of musicians will take up the song, and Babbulkund, City of Marvel, will throb with this marvel anew. Just now Nehemoth awakes, the slaves leap to their feet and bear the palanquin to the outer side of the great crescent palace between the south and the west, to behold the sun again. The palanquin, with its ringing bells, goes round once more; the voices of the jewellers sing again in the market-place the song of the emerald, the song of the sapphire; men talk on the housetops, beggars wail in the streets, the musicians bend to their work, all the sounds blend together into one murmur, the voice of Babbulkund speaking at evening. Lower and lower sinks the sun, till Nehemoth, following it, comes with his panting slaves to the great purple garden of which surely thine own country has its songs, from wherever thou art come.

'There he alights from his palanquin and goes up to a throne of ivory set in the garden's midst, facing full westwards, and sits there alone, long regarding the sunlight until it is quite gone. At this hour trouble comes into the face of Nehemoth. Men have heard him muttering at the time of sunset: 'Even I too, even I too.' Thus do King Nehemoth and the sun make their glorious ambits about Babbulkund.

'A little later, when the stars come out to envy the beauty of the City of Marvel, the King walks to another part of the garden and sits in an alcove of opal all alone by the marge of the sacred lake. This is the lake whose shores and floors are of glass, which is lit from beneath by slaves with purple lights and with green lights intermingling, and is one of the seven wonders of Babbulkund. Three of the wonders are in the city's midst and four are at her gates. There is the lake, of which I tell thee, and the purple garden of which I have told thee and which is a wonder even to the stars, and there is Ong Zwarba, of which I shall tell thee also. And the wonders at the gates are these. At the eastern gate Neb. And at the northern gate the wonder of the river and the arches, for the River of Myth, which becomes one with the Waters of Fable in the desert outside the city, floats under a gate of



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pure gold, rejoicing, and under many arches fantastically carved that are one with either bank. The marvel at the western gate is the marvel of Annolith and the dog Voth. Annolith sits outside the western gate facing towards the city. He is higher than any of the towers or palaces, for his head was carved from the summit of the old hill; he hath two eyes of sapphire wherewith he regards Babbulkund, and the wonder of the eyes is that they are to-day in the same sockets wherein they glowed when first the world began, only the marble that covered them has been carved away and the light of day let in and the sight of the envious stars. Larger than a lion is the dog Voth beside him; every hair is carved upon the back of Voth, his war hackles are erected and his teeth are bared. All the Nehemoths have worshipped the god Annolith, but all their people pray to the dog Voth, for the law of the land is that none but a Nehemoth may worship the god Annolith. The marvel at the southern gate is the marvel of the jungle, for he comes with all his wild untravelled sea of darkness and trees and tigers and sunward-aspiring orchids right through a marble gate in the city wall and enters the city, and there widens and holds a space in its midst of many miles across. Moreover, he is older than the City of Marvel, for he dwelt long since in one of the valleys of the mountain which Nehemoth, first of Pharaohs, carved into Babbulkund.

'Now the opal alcove in which the King sits at evening by the lake stands at the edge of the jungle, and the climbing orchids of the jungle have long since crept from their homes through clefts of the opal alcove, lured by the lights of the lake, and now bloom there exultingly. Near to this alcove are the hareems of Nehemoth.

'The King hath four hareems—one for the stalwart women from the mountains to the north, one for the dark and furtive jungle women, one for the desert women that have wandering souls and pine in Babbulkund, and one for the princesses of his own kith, whose brown cheeks blush with the blood of ancient Pharaohs and who exult with Babbulkund in her surpassing beauty, and who know nought of the desert or the jungle or the bleak hills to the north. Quite unadorned and clad in simple garments go all the kith of Nehemoth, for they know well that he grows weary of pomp. Unadorned all save one, the Princess Linderith, who weareth Ong Zwarba and the three lesser gems of the sea. Such a stone is Ong Zwarba that there are none like it even in the turban of Nehemoth nor in all the sanctuaries of the sea. The same god that made Linderith made long ago Ong Zwarba; she and Ong Zwarba shine together with one light, and beside this marvellous stone gleam the three lesser ones of the sea.



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'Now when the King sitteth in his opal alcove by the sacred lake with the orchids blooming around him all sounds are become still. The sound of the tramping of the weary slaves as they go round and round never comes to the surface. Long since the musicians sleep, and their hands have fallen dumb upon their instruments, and the voices in the city have died away. Perhaps a sigh of one of the desert women has become half a song, or on a hot night in summer one of the women of the hills sings softly a song of snow; all night long in the midst of the purple garden sings one nightingale; all else is still; the stars that look on Babbulkund arise and set, the cold unhappy moon drifts lonely through them, the night wears on; at last the dark figure of Nehemoth, eighty-second of his line, rises and moves stealthily away.'

The traveller ceased to speak. For a long time the clear stars, sisters of Babbulkund, had shone upon him speaking, the desert wind had arisen and whispered to the sand, and the sand had long gone secretly to and fro; none of us had moved, none of us had fallen asleep, not so much from wonder at his tale as from the thought that we ourselves in two days' time should see that wondrous city. Then we wrapped our blankets around us and lay down with our feet towards the embers of our fire and instantly were asleep, and in our dreams we multiplied the fame of the City of Marvel.

The sun arose and flamed upon our faces, and all the desert glinted with its light. Then we stood up and prepared the morning meal, and, when we had eaten, the traveller departed. And we commended his soul to the god of the land whereto he went, of the land of his home to the northward, and he commended our souls to the god of the people of the land wherefrom we had come. Then a traveller overtook us going on foot; he wore a brown cloak that was all in rags and he seemed to have been walking all night, and he walked hurriedly but appeared weary, so we offered him food and drink, of which he partook thankfully. When we asked him where he was going, he answered 'Babbulkund.' Then we offered him a camel upon which to ride, for we said, 'We also go to Babbulkund.' But he answered strangely: 'Nay, pass on before me, for it is a sore thing never to have seen Babbulkund, having lived while yet she stood. Pass on before me and behold her, and then flee away at once, returning northward.'

Then, though we understood him not, we left him, for he was insistent, and passed on our journey southwards through the desert, and we came before the middle of the day to an oasis of palm trees standing by a well and there we gave water to the haughty camels and replenished our water-bottles and soothed our eyes with the sight of green things and tarried for many hours in the shade. Some of the men slept, but of those that remained awake each man sang softly the songs of his own country, telling of Babbulkund. When the afternoon was far spent we travelled a little way southwards, and went on through the cool evening until the sun fell low and we encamped, and as we sat in our encampment the man in rags overtook us, having travelled all the day, and we gave him food and drink again, and in the twilight he spoke, saying:

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'I am the servant of the Lord the God of my people and I go to do his work on Babbulkund. She is the most beautiful city in the world; there hath been none like her, even the stars of God go envious of her beauty. She is all white, yet with streaks of pink that pass through her streets and houses like flames in the white mind of a sculptor, like desire in Paradise. She hath been carved of old out of a holy hill, no slaves wrought the City of Marvel, but artists toiling at the work they loved. They took no pattern from the houses of men, but each man wrought what his inner eye had seen and carved in marble the visions of his dream. All over the roof of one of the palace chambers winged lions flit like bats, the size of every one is the size of the lions of God, and the wings are larger than any wing created; they are one above the other more than a man can number, they are all carven out of one block of marble, the chamber itself is hollowed from it, and it is borne aloft upon the carven branches of a grove of clustered tree-ferns wrought by the hand of some jungle mason that loved the tall fern well. Over the River of Myth, which is one with the Waters of Fable, go bridges, fashioned like the wisteria tree and like the drooping laburnum, and a hundred others of wonderful devices, the desire of the souls of masons a long while dead. Oh! very beautiful is white Babbulkund, very beautiful she is, but proud; and the Lord the God of my people hath seen her in her pride, and looking towards her hath seen the prayers of Nehemoth going up to the abomination Annolith, and all the people following after Voth. She is very beautiful, Babbulkund; alas that I may not bless her. I could live always on one of her inner terraces looking on the mysterious jungle in her midst and the heavenward faces of the orchids that, clambering from the darkness, behold the sun. I could love Babbulkund with a great love, yet am I the servant of the Lord the God of my people, and the King hath sinned unto the abomination Annolith, and the people lust exceedingly for Voth. Alas for thee, Babbulkund, alas that I may not even now turn back, for to-morrow I must prophesy against thee and cry out against thee, Babbulkund. But ye travellers that have entreated me hospitably, rise and pass on with your camels, for I can tarry no longer, and I go to do the work on Babbulkund of the Lord the God of my people. Go now and see the beauty of Babbulkund before I cry out against her, and then flee swiftly northwards.'

A smouldering fragment fell in upon our camp fire and sent a strange light into the eyes of the man in rags. He rose at once, and his tattered cloak swirled up with him like a great wing; he said no more, but turned round from us instantly southwards, and strode away into the darkness towards Babbulkund. Then a hush fell upon our encampment, and the smell of the tobacco of those lands arose. When the last flame died down in our camp fire I fell asleep, but my rest was troubled by shifting dreams of doom.



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Morning came, and our guides told us that we should come to the city ere nightfall. Again we passed southwards through the changeless desert; sometimes we met travellers coming from Babbulkund, with the beauty of its marvels still fresh in their eyes.

When we encamped near the middle of the day we saw a great number of people on foot coming towards us running, from the southwards. These we hailed when they were come near, saying, 'What of Babbulkund?'

They answered: 'We are not of the race of the people of Babbulkund, but were captured in youth and taken away from the hills that are to the northward. Now we have all seen in visions of the stillness the Lord the God of our people calling to us from His hills, and therefore we all flee northward. But in Babbulkund King Nehemoth hath been troubled in the nights by unkingly dreams of doom, and none may interpret what the dreams portend. Now this is the dream that King Nehemoth dreamed on the first night of his dreaming. He saw move through the stillness a bird all black, and beneath the beatings of his wings Babbulkund gloomed and darkened; and after him flew a bird all white, beneath the beatings of whose wings Babbulkund gleamed and shone; and there flew by four more birds alternately black and white. And, as the black ones passed Babbulkund darkened, and when the white ones appeared her streets and houses shone. But after the sixth bird there came no more, and Babbulkund vanished from her place, and there was only the empty desert where she had stood, and the rivers Oonrana and Plegathanees mourning alone. Next morning all the prophets of the King gathered before their abominations and questioned them of the dream, and the abominations spake not. But when the second night stepped down from the halls of God, dowered with many stars, King Nehemoth dreamed again; and in this dream King Nehemoth saw four birds only, black and white alternately as before. And Babbulkund darkened again as the black ones passed, and shone when the white came by; only after the four birds came no more, and Babbulkund vanished from her place, leaving only the forgetful desert and the mourning rivers.

'Still the abominations spake not, and none could interpret the dream. And when the third night came forth from the divine halls of her home dowered like her sisters, again King Nehemoth dreamed. And he saw a bird all black go by again, beneath whom Babbulkund darkened, and then a white bird and Babbulkund shone; and after them came no more, and Babbulkund passed away. And the golden day appeared, dispelling dreams, and still the abominations were silent, and the King's prophets answered not to portend the omen of the dream. One prophet only spake before the King, saying: 'The sable birds, O King, are the nights, and the white birds are the days,...' This thing the King had feared, and he arose and smote the prophet with his sword, whose soul went crying away and had to do no more with nights and days.



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'It was last night that the King dreamed his third dream, and this morning we fled away from Babbulkund. A great heat lies over it, and the orchids of the jungle droop their heads. All night long the women in the hareem of the North have wailed horribly for their hills. A fear hath fallen upon the city, and a boding. Twice hath Nehemoth gone to worship Annolith, and all the people have prostrated themselves before Voth. Thrice the horologers have looked into the great crystal globe wherein are foretold all happenings to be, and thrice the globe was blank. Yea, though they went a fourth time yet was no vision revealed; and the people's voice is hushed in Babbulkund.'

Soon the travellers arose and pushed on northwards again, leaving us wondering. Through the heat of the day we rested as well as we might, but the air was motionless and sultry and the camels ill at ease. The Arabs said that it boded a desert storm, and that a great wind would arise full of sand. So we arose in the afternoon, and travelled swiftly, hoping to come to shelter before the storm. And the air burned in the stillness between the baked desert and the glaring sky.

Suddenly a wind arose out of the South, blowing from Babbulkund, and the sand lifted and went by in great shapes, all whispering. And the wind blew violently, and wailed as it blew, and hundreds of sandy shapes went towering by, and there were little cries among them and the sounds of a passing away. Soon the wind sank quite suddenly, and its cries died, and the panic ceased among the driven sands. And when the storm departed the air was cool, and the terrible sultriness and the boding were passed away, and the camels had ease among them. And the Arabs said that the storm which was to be had been, as was willed of old by God.

The sun set and the gloaming came, and we neared the junction of Oonrana and Plegathanees, but in the darkness discerned not Babbulkund. We pushed on hurriedly to reach the city ere nightfall, and came to the junction of the River of Myth where he meets with the Waters of Fable, and still saw not Babbulkund. All round us lay the sand and rocks of the unchanging desert, save to the southwards where the jungle stood with its orchids facing skywards. Then we perceived that we had arrived too late, and that her doom had come to Babbulkund; and by the river in the empty desert on the sand the man in rags was seated, with his face hidden in his hands, weeping bitterly.

\* \* \* \* \*

Thus passed away in the hour of her iniquities before Annolith, in the two thousand and thirty-second year of her being, in the six thousand and fiftieth year of the building of the World, Babbulkund, City of Marvel, sometime called by those that hated her City of the Dog, but hourly mourned in Araby and Ind and wide through jungle and desert; leaving no memorial in stone to show that she had been, but remembered with an abiding love, in spite of the anger of God, by all that knew her beauty, whereof still they sing.



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### THE SPHINX AT GIZEH

I saw the other day the Sphinx's painted face.

She had painted her face in order to ogle Time.

And he has spared no other painted face in all the world but hers.

Delilah was younger than she, and Delilah is dust.

Time hath loved nothing but this worthless painted face.

I do not care that she is ugly, nor that she has painted her face, so that she only lure his secret from Time.

Time dallies like a fool at her feet when he should be smiting cities.

Time never wearies of her silly smile.

There are temples all about her that he has forgotten to spoil.

I saw an old man go by and Time never touched him.

Time that has carried away the seven gates of Thebes!

She has tried to bind him with ropes of eternal sand, she had hoped to oppress him with the Pyramids.

He lies there in the sun with his foolish hair all spread about her paws.

If she ever learns his secret we will put out his eyes, so that he shall find no more our beautiful things—there are lovely gates in Florence that I fear he will carry away.

We have tried to bind him with song and with old customs, but they only held him for a little while, and he has always smitten us and mocked us.

When he is blind he shall dance to us and make sport.

Great clumsy Time shall stumble and dance, who liked to kill little children and can hurt even the daisies no longer.

Then shall our children laugh at him who slew Babylon's winged bulls and smote great numbers of the elves and fairies, when he is shorn of his hours and his years.



We will shut him up in the Pyramid of Cheops, in the great chamber where the sarcophagus is. Thence we will lead him out when we give our feasts. He shall ripen our corn for us and do menial work.

We will kiss thy painted face, O Sphinx, if thou wilt betray to us Time.

And yet I fear that in his ultimate anguish he may take hold blindly of the world and the moon and slowly pull down upon him the House of Man.

## **IDLE DAYS ON THE YANN**

So I came down through the wood to the bank of Yann and found, as had been prophesied, the ship *Bird of the River* about to loose her cable.

The captain sate cross-legged upon the white deck with his scimitar lying beside him in its jewelled scabbard, and the sailors toiled to spread the nimble sails to bring the ship into the central stream of Yann, and all the while sang ancient soothing songs. And the wind of the evening descending cool from the snowfields of some mountainous abode of distant gods came suddenly, like glad tidings to an anxious city, into the wing-like sails.



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And so we came into the central stream, whereat the sailors lowered the greater sails. But I had gone to bow before the captain, and to inquire concerning the miracles, and appearances among men, of the most holy gods of whatever land he had come from. And the captain answered that he came from fair Belzoond, and worshipped gods that were the least and humblest, who seldom sent the famine or the thunder, and were easily appeased with little battles. And I told how I came from Ireland, which is of Europe, whereat the captain and all the sailors laughed, for they said, 'There are no such places in all the land of dreams.' When they had ceased to mock me, I explained that my fancy mostly dwelt in the desert of Cuppar-Nombo, about a beautiful blue city called Golthoth the Damned, which was sentinelled all round by wolves and their shadows, and had been utterly desolate for years and years because of a curse which the gods once spoke in anger and could never since recall. And sometimes my dreams took me as far as Pungar Vees, the red-walled city where the fountains are, which trades with the Isles and Thul. When I said this they complimented me upon the abode of my fancy, saying that, though they had never seen these cities, such places might well be imagined. For the rest of that evening I bargained with the captain over the sum that I should pay him for my fare if God and the tide of Yann should bring us safely as far as the cliffs by the sea, which are named Bar-Wul-Yann, the Gate of Yann.

And now the sun had set, and all the colours of the world and heaven had held a festival with him, and slipped one by one away before the imminent approach of night. The parrots had all flown home to the jungle on either bank, the monkeys in rows in safety on high branches of the trees were silent and asleep, the fireflies in the deeps of the forest were going up and down, and the great stars came gleaming out to look on the face of Yann. Then the sailors lighted lanterns and hung them round the ship, and the light flashed out on a sudden and dazzled Yann, and the ducks that fed along his marshy banks all suddenly arose, and made wide circles in the upper air, and saw the distant reaches of the Yann and the white mist that softly cloaked the jungle, before they returned again into their marshes.

And then the sailors knelt on the decks and prayed, not all together, but five or six at a time. Side by side there kneeled down together five or six, for there only prayed at the same time men of different faiths, so that no god should hear two men praying to him at once. As soon as any one had finished his prayer, another of the same faith took his place. Thus knelt the row of five or six with bended heads under the fluttering sail, while the central stream of the River Yann took them on towards the sea, and their prayers rose up from among the lanterns and went towards the stars. And behind them in the after end of the ship the helmsman prayed aloud the helmsman's prayer, which is prayed by all who follow his trade upon the River Yann, of whatever faith they be. And the captain prayed to his little lesser gods, to the gods that bless Belzoond.



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And I too felt that I would pray. Yet I liked not to pray to a jealous God there where the frail affectionate gods whom the heathen love were being humbly invoked; so I bethought me, instead, of Sheol Nugganoh, whom the men of the jungle have long since deserted, who is now unworshipped and alone; and to him I prayed.

And upon us praying the night came suddenly down, as it comes upon all men who pray at evening and upon all men who do not; yet our prayers comforted our own souls when we thought of the Great Night to come.

And so Yann bore us magnificently onwards, for he was elate with molten snow that the Poltiades had brought him from the Hills of Hap, and the Marn and Migris were swollen full with floods; and he bore us in his might past Kyph and Pir, and we saw the lights of Goolunza.

Soon we all slept except the helmsman, who kept the ship in the mid-stream of Yann.

When the sun rose the helmsman ceased to sing, for by song he cheered himself in the lonely night. When the song ceased we suddenly all awoke, and another took the helm, and the helmsman slept.

We knew that soon we should come to Mandaroon. We made a meal, and Mandaroon appeared. Then the captain commanded, and the sailors loosed again the greater sails, and the ship turned and left the stream of Yann and came into a harbour beneath the ruddy walls of Mandaroon. Then while the sailors went and gathered fruits I came alone to the gate of Mandaroon. A few huts were outside it, in which lived the guard. A sentinel with a long white beard was standing in the gate, armed with a rusty pike. He wore large spectacles, which were covered with dust. Through the gate I saw the city. A deathly stillness was over all of it. The ways seemed untrampled, and moss was thick on doorsteps; in the market-place huddled figures lay asleep. A scent of incense came wafted through the gateway, of incense and burned poppies, and there was a hum of the echoes of distant bells. I said to the sentinel in the tongue of the region of Yann, 'Why are they all asleep in this still city?'

He answered: 'None may ask questions in this gate for fear they wake the people of the city. For when the people of this city wake the gods will die. And when the gods die men may dream no more.' And I began to ask him what gods that city worshipped, but he lifted his pike because none might ask questions there. So I left him and went back to the *Bird of the River*.

Certainly Mandaroon was beautiful with her white pinnacles peering over her ruddy walls and the green of her copper roofs.



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When I came back again to the *Bird of the River*, I found the sailors were returned to the ship. Soon we weighed anchor, and sailed out again, and so came once more to the middle of the river. And now the sun was moving towards his heights, and there had reached us on the River Yann the song of those countless myriads of choirs that attend him in his progress round the world. For the little creatures that have many legs had spread their gauze wings easily on the air, as a man rests his elbows on a balcony, and gave jubilant, ceremonial praises to the sun, or else they moved together on the air in wavering dances intricate and swift, or turned aside to avoid the onrush of some drop of water that a breeze had shaken from a jungle orchid, chilling the air and driving it before it, as it fell whirring in its rush to the earth; but all the while they sang triumphantly. 'For the day is for us,' they said, 'whether our great and sacred father the Sun shall bring up more life like us from the marshes, or whether all the world shall end to-night.' And there sang all those whose notes are known to human ears, as well as those whose far more numerous notes have been never heard by man.

To these a rainy day had been as an era of war that should desolate continents during all the lifetime of a man.

And there came out also from the dark and steaming jungle to behold and rejoice in the Sun the huge and lazy butterflies. And they danced, but danced idly, on the ways of the air, as some haughty queen of distant conquered lands might in her poverty and exile dance, in some encampment of the gipsies, for the mere bread to live by, but beyond that would never abate her pride to dance for a fragment more.

And the butterflies sung of strange and painted things, of purple orchids and of lost pink cities and the monstrous colours of the jungle's decay. And they, too, were among those whose voices are not discernible by human ears. And as they floated above the river, going from forest to forest, their splendour was matched by the inimical beauty of the birds who darted out to pursue them. Or sometimes they settled on the white and wax-like blooms of the plant that creeps and clambers about the trees of the forest; and their purple wings flashed out on the great blossoms as, when the caravans go from Nurl to Thace, the gleaming silks flash out upon the snow, where the crafty merchants spread them one by one to astonish the mountaineers of the Hills of Noor.

But upon men and beasts the sun sent a drowsiness. The river monsters along the river's marge lay dormant in the slime. The sailors pitched a pavilion, with golden tassels, for the captain upon the deck, and then went, all but the helmsman, under a sail that they had hung as an awning between two masts. Then they told tales to one another, each of his own city or of the miracles of his god, until all were fallen asleep. The captain offered me the shade

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of his pavilion with the gold tassels, and there we talked for awhile, he telling me that he was taking merchandise to Perdonaris, and that he would take back to fair Belzoond things appertaining to the affairs of the sea. Then, as I watched through the pavilion's opening the brilliant birds and butterflies that crossed and recrossed over the river, I fell asleep, and dreamed that I was a monarch entering his capital underneath arches of flags, and all the musicians of the world were there, playing melodiously their instruments; but no one cheered.

In the afternoon, as the day grew cooler again, I awoke and found the captain buckling on his scimitar, which he had taken off him while he rested.

And now we were approaching the wide court of Astahahn, which opens upon the river. Strange boats of antique design were chained there to the steps. As we neared it we saw the open marble court, on three sides of which stood the city fronting on colonnades. And in the court and along the colonnades the people of that city walked with solemnity and care according to the rites of ancient ceremony. All in that city was of ancient device; the carving on the houses, which, when age had broken it, remained unrepaired, was of the remotest times, and everywhere were represented in stone beasts that have long since passed away from Earth—the dragon, the griffin, and the hippogriffin, and the different species of gargoyle. Nothing was to be found, whether material or custom, that was new in Astahahn. Now they took no notice at all of us as we went by, but continued their processions and ceremonies in the ancient city, and the sailors, knowing their custom, took no notice of them. But I called, as we came near, to one who stood beside the water's edge, asking him what men did in Astahahn and what their merchandise was, and with whom they traded. He said, 'Here we have fettered and manacled Time, who would otherwise slay the gods.'

I asked him what gods they worshipped in that city, and he said, 'All those gods whom Time has not yet slain.' Then he turned from me and would say no more, but busied himself in behaving in accordance with ancient custom. And so, according to the will of Yann, we drifted onwards and left Astahahn.

The river widened below Astahahn, and we found in greater quantities such birds as prey on fishes. And they were very wonderful in their plumage, and they came not out of the jungle, but flew, with their long necks stretched out before them, and their legs lying on the wind behind, straight up the river over the mid-stream.

And now the evening began to gather in. A thick white mist had appeared over the river, and was softly rising higher. It clutched at the trees with long impalpable arms, it rose higher and higher, chilling the air; and white shapes moved away into the jungle as though the ghosts of shipwrecked mariners were searching stealthily in the darkness for the spirits of evil that long ago had wrecked them on the Yann.



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As the sun sank behind the field of orchids that grew on the matted summit of the jungle, the river monsters came wallowing out of the slime in which they had reclined during the heat of the day, and the great beasts of the jungle came down to drink. The butterflies a while since were gone to rest. In little narrow tributaries that we passed night seemed already to have fallen, though the sun which had disappeared from us had not yet set.

And now the birds of the jungle came flying home far over us, with the sunlight glistening pink upon their breasts, and lowered their pinions as soon as they saw the Yann, and dropped into the trees. And the widgeon began to go up the river in great companies, all whistling, and then would suddenly wheel and all go down again. And there shot by us the small and arrow-like teal; and we heard the manifold cries of flocks of geese, which the sailors told me had recently come in from crossing over the Lispasian ranges; every year they come by the same way, close by the peak of Mluna, leaving it to the left, and the mountain eagles know the way they come and—men say—the very hour, and every year they expect them by the same way as soon as the snows have fallen upon the Northern Plains.

But soon it grew so dark that we saw these birds no more, and only heard the whirring of their wings, and of countless others besides, until they all settled down along the banks of the river, and it was the hour when the birds of the night went forth. Then the sailors lit the lanterns for the night, and huge moths appeared, flapping about the ship, and at moments their gorgeous colours would be revealed by the lanterns, then they would pass into the night again, where all was black. And again the sailors prayed, and thereafter we supped and slept, and the helmsman took our lives into his care.

When I awoke I found that we had indeed come to Perdondaris, that famous city. For there it stood upon the left of us, a city fair and notable, and all the more pleasant for our eyes to see after the jungle that was so long with us. And we were anchored by the market-place, and the captain's merchandise was all displayed, and a merchant of Perdondaris stood looking at it. And the captain had his scimitar in his hand, and was beating with it in anger upon the deck, and the splinters were flying up from the white planks; for the merchant had offered him a price for his merchandise that the captain declared to be an insult to himself and his country's gods, whom he now said to be great and terrible gods, whose curses were to be dreaded. But the merchant waved his hands, which were of great fatness, showing the pink palms, and swore that of himself he thought not at all, but only of the poor folk in the huts beyond the city to whom he wished to sell the merchandise for as low a price as possible, leaving no remuneration for himself. For the merchandise was mostly the thick toomarund carpets that in the winter keep the



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wind from the floor, and tollub which the people smoke in pipes. Therefore the merchant said if he offered a piffek more the poor folk must go without their toomarunds when the winter came, and without their tollub in the evenings, or else he and his aged father must starve together. Thereat the captain lifted his scimitar to his own throat, saying that he was now a ruined man, and that nothing remained to him but death. And while he was carefully lifting his beard with his left hand, the merchant eyed the merchandise again, and said that rather than see so worthy a captain die, a man for whom he had conceived an especial love when first he saw the manner in which he handled his ship, he and his aged father should starve together and therefore he offered fifteen piffeks more.

When he said this the captain prostrated himself and prayed to his gods that they might yet sweeten this merchant's bitter heart—to his little lesser gods, to the gods that bless Belzoond.

At last the merchant offered yet five piffeks more. Then the captain wept, for he said that he was deserted of his gods; and the merchant also wept, for he said that he was thinking of his aged father, and of how he soon would starve, and he hid his weeping face with both his hands, and eyed the tollub again between his fingers. And so the bargain was concluded, and the merchant took the toomarund and tollub, paying for them out of a great clinking purse. And these were packed up into bales again, and three of the merchant's slaves carried them upon their heads into the city. And all the while the sailors had sat silent, cross-legged in a crescent upon the deck, eagerly watching the bargain, and now a murmur of satisfaction arose among them, and they began to compare it among themselves with other bargains that they had known. And I found out from them that there are seven merchants in Perdondaris, and that they had all come to the captain one by one before the bargaining began, and each had warned him privately against the others. And to all the merchants the captain had offered the wine of his own country, that they make in fair Belzoond, but could in no wise persuade them to it. But now that the bargain was over, and the sailors were seated at the first meal of the day, the captain appeared among them with a cask of that wine, and we broached it with care and all made merry together. And the captain was glad in his heart because he knew that he had much honour in the eyes of his men because of the bargain that he had made. So the sailors drank the wine of their native land, and soon their thoughts were back in fair Belzoond and the little neighbouring cities of Durl and Duz.



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But for me the captain poured into a little glass some heavy yellow wine from a small jar which he kept apart among his sacred things. Thick and sweet it was, even like honey, yet there was in its heart a mighty, ardent fire which had authority over souls of men. It was made, the captain told me, with great subtlety by the secret craft of a family of six who lived in a hut on the mountains of Hian Min. Once in these mountains, he said, he followed the spoor of a bear, and he came suddenly on a man of that family who had hunted the same bear, and he was at the end of a narrow way with precipice all about him, and his spear was sticking in the bear, and the wound not fatal, and he had no other weapon. And the bear was walking towards the man, very slowly because his wound irked him—yet he was now very close. And what the captain did he would not say; but every year as soon as the snows are hard, and travelling is easy on the Hian Min, that man comes down to the market in the plains, and always leaves for the captain in the gate of fair Belzoond a vessel of that priceless secret wine.

And as I sipped the wine and the captain talked, I remembered me of stalwart noble things that I had long since resolutely planned, and my soul seemed to grow mightier within me and to dominate the whole tide of the Yann. It may be that I then slept. Or, if I did not, I do not now minutely recollect every detail of that morning's occupations. Towards evening, I awoke and wishing to see Perdondaris before we left in the morning, and being unable to wake the captain, I went ashore alone. Certainly Perdondaris was a powerful city; it was encompassed by a wall of great strength and altitude, having in it hollow ways for troops to walk in, and battlements along it all the way, and fifteen strong towers on it in every mile, and copper plaques low down where men could read them, telling in all the languages of those parts of the Earth—one language on each plaque—the tale of how an army once attacked Perdondaris and what befel that army. Then I entered Perdondaris and found all the people dancing, clad in brilliant silks, and playing on the tambang as they danced. For a fearful thunderstorm had terrified them while I slept, and the fires of death, they said, had danced over Perdondaris, and now the thunder had gone leaping away large and black and hideous, they said, over the distant hills, and had turned round snarling at them, showing his gleaming teeth, and had stamped, as he went, upon the hill-tops until they rang as though they had been bronze. And often and again they stopped in their merry dances and prayed to the God they knew not, saying, 'O, God that we know not, we thank Thee for sending the thunder back to his hills.' And I went on and came to the market-place, and lying there upon the marble pavement I saw the merchant fast asleep and breathing heavily, with his face and the palms of his hands towards the sky, and slaves were fanning

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him to keep away the flies. And from the market-place I came to a silver temple and then to a palace of onyx, and there were many wonders in Perdonaris, and I would have stayed and seen them all, but as I came to the outer wall of the city I suddenly saw in it a huge ivory gate. For a while I paused and admired it, then I came nearer and perceived the dreadful truth. The gate was carved out of one solid piece!

I fled at once through the gateway and down to the ship, and even as I ran I thought that I heard far off on the hills behind me the tramp of the fearful beast by whom that mass of ivory was shed, who was perhaps even then looking for his other tusk. When I was on the ship again I felt safer, and I said nothing to the sailors of what I had seen.

And now the captain was gradually awakening.

Now night was rolling up from the East and North, and only the pinnacles of the towers of Perdonaris still took the fallen sunlight. Then I went to the captain and told him quietly of the thing I had seen. And he questioned me at once about the gate, in a low voice, that the sailors might not know; and I told him how the weight of the thing was such that it could not have been brought from afar, and the captain knew that it had not been there a year ago. We agreed that such a beast could never have been killed by any assault of man, and that the gate must have been a fallen tusk, and one fallen near and recently. Therefore he decided that it were better to flee at once; so he commanded, and the sailors went to the sails, and others raised the anchor to the deck, and just as the highest pinnacle of marble lost the last rays of the sun we left Perdonaris, that famous city. And night came down and cloaked Perdonaris and hid it from our eyes, which as things have happened will never see it again; for I have heard since that something swift and wonderful has suddenly wrecked Perdonaris in a day—towers, and walls, and people.

And the night deepened over the River Yann, a night all white with stars. And with the night there rose the helmsman's song. As soon as he had prayed he began to sing to cheer himself all through the lonely night. But first he prayed, praying the helmsman's prayer. And this is what I remember of it, rendered into English with a very feeble equivalent of the rhythm that seemed so resonant in those tropic nights.

To whatever god may hear.

Wherever there be sailors whether of river or sea: whether their way be dark or whether through storm: whether their peril be of beast or of rock: or from enemy lurking on land or pursuing on sea: wherever the tiller is cold or the helmsman stiff: wherever sailors sleep or helmsmen watch: guard, guide, and return us to the old land that has known us: to the far homes that we know.



To all the gods that are.

To whatever god may hear.

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So he prayed, and there was silence. And the sailors laid them down to rest for the night. The silence deepened, and was only broken by the ripples of Yann that lightly touched our prow. Sometimes some monster of the river coughed.



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Silence and ripples, ripples and silence again.

And then his loneliness came upon the helmsman, and he began to sing. And he sang the market songs of Durl and Duz, and the old dragon-legends of Belzoond.

Many a song he sang, telling to spacious and exotic Yann the little tales and trifles of his city of Durl. And the songs welled up over the black jungle and came into the clear cold air above, and the great bands of stars that look on Yann began to know the affairs of Durl and Duz, and of the shepherds that dwelt in the fields between, and the flocks that they had, and the loves that they had loved, and all the little things that they hoped to do. And as I lay wrapped up in skins and blankets, listening to those songs, and watching the fantastic shapes of the great trees like to black giants stalking through the night, I suddenly fell asleep.

When I awoke great mists were trailing away from the Yann. And the flow of the river was tumbling now tumultuously, and little waves appeared; for Yann had scented from afar the ancient crags of Glorm, and knew that their ravines lay cool before him wherein he should meet the merry wild Irillion rejoicing from fields of snow. So he shook off from him the torpid sleep that had come upon him in the hot and scented jungle, and forgot its orchids and its butterflies, and swept on turbulent, expectant, strong; and soon the snowy peaks of the Hills of Glorm came glittering into view. And now the sailors were waking up from sleep. Soon we all eat, and then the helmsman laid him down to sleep while a comrade took his place, and they all spread over him their choicest furs.

And in a while we heard the sound that the Irillion made as she came down dancing from the fields of snow.

And then we saw the ravine in the Hills of Glorm lying precipitous and smooth before us, into which we were carried by the leaps of Yann. And now we left the steamy jungle and breathed the mountain air; the sailors stood up and took deep breaths of it, and thought of their own far-off Acroctian hills on which were Durl and Duz—below them in the plains stands fair Belzoond.

A great shadow brooded between the cliffs of Glorm, but the crags were shining above us like gnarled moons, and almost lit the gloom. Louder and louder came the Irillion's song, and the sound of her dancing down from the fields of snow. And soon we saw her white and full of mists, and wreathed with rainbows delicate and small that she had plucked up near the mountain's summit from some celestial garden of the Sun. Then she went away seawards with the huge grey Yann and the ravine widened, and opened upon the world, and our rocking ship came through to the light of the day.

And all that morning and all the afternoon we passed through the marshes of Pondoover; and Yann widened there, and flowed solemnly and slowly, and the captain bade the sailors beat on bells to overcome the dreariness of the marches.



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At last the Irusian mountains came in sight, nursing the villages of Pen-Kai and Blut, and the wandering streets of Mlo, where priests propitiate the avalanche with wine and maize. Then night came down over the plains of Tlun, and we saw the lights of Cappadarnia. We heard the Pathnites beating upon drums as we passed Imaut and Golzunda, then all but the helmsman slept. And villages scattered along the banks of the Yann heard all that night in the helmsman's unknown tongue the little songs of cities that they knew not.

I awoke before dawn with a feeling that I was unhappy before I remembered why. Then I recalled that by the evening of the approaching day, according to all foreseen probabilities, we should come to Bar-Wul-Yann, and I should part from the captain and his sailors. And I had liked the man because he had given me of his yellow wine that was set apart among his sacred things, and many a story he had told me about his fair Belzoond between the Acroctian hills and the Hian Min. And I had liked the ways that his sailors had, and the prayers that they prayed at evening side by side, grudging not one another their alien gods. And I had a liking too for the tender way in which they often spoke of Durl and Duz, for it is good that men should love their native cities and the little hills that hold those cities up.

And I had come to know who would meet them when they returned to their homes, and where they thought the meetings would take place, some in a valley of the Acroctian hills where the road comes up from Yann, others in the gateway of one or another of the three cities, and others by the fireside in the home. And I thought of the danger that had menaced us all alike outside Perdondaris, a danger that, as things have happened, was very real.

And I thought too of the helmsman's cheery song in the cold and lonely night, and how he had held our lives in his careful hands. And as I thought of this the helmsman ceased to sing, and I looked up and saw a pale light had appeared in the sky, and the lonely night had passed; and the dawn widened, and the sailors awoke.

And soon we saw the tide of the Sea himself advancing resolute between Yann's borders, and Yann sprang lithely at him and they struggled awhile; then Yann and all that was his were pushed back northward, so that the sailors had to hoist the sails and, the wind being favourable, we still held onwards.

And we passed Gondara and Narl and Haz. And we saw memorable, holy Golnuz, and heard the pilgrims praying.

When we awoke after the midday rest we were coming near to Nen, the last of the cities on the River Yann. And the jungle was all about us once again, and about Nen; but the great Mloon ranges stood up over all things, and watched the city from beyond the jungle.

Here we anchored, and the captain and I went up into the city and found that the Wanderers had come into Nen.



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And the Wanderers were a weird, dark tribe, that once in every seven years came down from the peaks of Mloon, having crossed by a pass that is known to them from some fantastic land that lies beyond. And the people of Nen were all outside their houses, and all stood wondering at their own streets. For the men and women of the Wanderers had crowded all the ways, and every one was doing some strange thing. Some danced astounding dances that they had learned from the desert wind, rapidly curving and swirling till the eye could follow no longer. Others played upon instruments beautiful wailing tunes that were full of horror, which souls had taught them lost by night in the desert, that strange far desert from which the Wanderers came.

None of their instruments were such as were known in Nen nor in any part of the region of the Yann; even the horns out of which some were made were of beasts that none had seen along the river, for they were barbed at the tips. And they sang, in the language of none, songs that seemed to be akin to the mysteries of night and to the unreasoned fear that haunts dark places.

Bitterly all the dogs of Nen distrusted them. And the Wanderers told one another fearful tales; for though no one in Nen knew ought of their language yet they could see the fear on the listeners' faces, and as the tale wound on the whites of their eyes showed vividly in terror as the eyes of some little beast whom the hawk has seized. Then the teller of the tale would smile and stop, and another would tell his story, and the teller of the first tale's lips would chatter with fear. And if some deadly snake chanced to appear the Wanderers would greet him as a brother, and the snake would seem to give his greetings to them before he passed on again. Once that most fierce and lethal of tropic snakes, the giant lythra, came out of the jungle and all down the street, the central street of Nen, and none of the Wanderers moved away from him, but they all played sonorously on drums, as though he had been a person of much honour; and the snake moved through the midst of them and smote none.

Even the Wanderers' children could do strange things, for if any one of them met with a child of Nen the two would stare at each other in silence with large grave eyes; then the Wanderer's child would slowly draw from his turban a live fish or snake. And the children of Nen could do nothing of that kind at all.

Much I should have wished to stay and hear the hymn with which they greet the night, that is answered by the wolves on the heights of Mloon, but it was now time to raise the anchor again that the captain might return from Bar-Wul-Yann upon the landward tide. So we went on board and continued down the Yann. And the captain and I spoke little, for we were thinking of our parting, which should be for long, and we watched instead the splendour of the westering sun. For the sun was a ruddy gold, but a faint mist cloaked the jungle, lying low, and into it poured the smoke of the little jungle cities; and the smoke of them met together in the mist and joined into one haze, which became purple, and was lit by the sun, as the thoughts of men become hallowed by some great

and sacred thing. Sometimes one column from a lonely house would rise up higher than the cities' smoke, and gleam by itself in the sun.



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And now as the sun's last rays were nearly level, we saw the sight that I had come to see; for from two mountains that stood on either shore two cliffs of pink marble came out into the river, all glowing in the light of the low sun, and they were quite smooth and of mountainous altitude, and they nearly met, and Yann went tumbling between them and found the sea.

And this was Bar-Wul-Yann, the gate of Yann, and in the distance through that barrier's gap I saw the azure indescribable sea, where little fishing-boats went gleaming by.

And the sun set, and the brief twilight came, and the exultation of the glory of Bar-Wul-Yann was gone, yet still the pink cliffs glowed, the fairest marvel that the eye beheld—and this in a land of wonders. And soon the twilight gave place to the coming out of stars, and the colours of Bar-Wul-Yann went dwindling away. And the sight of those cliffs was to me as some chord of music that a master's hand had launched from the violin, and which carries to Heaven or Faery the tremulous spirits of men.

And now by the shore they anchored and went no further, for they were sailors of the river and not of the sea, and knew the Yann but not the tides beyond.

And the time was come when the captain and I must part, he to go back again to his fair Belzoond in sight of the distant peaks of the Hian Min, and I to find my way by strange means back to those hazy fields that all poets know, wherein stand small mysterious cottages through whose windows, looking westwards, you may see the fields of men, and looking eastwards see glittering elfin mountains, tipped with snow, going range on range into the region of Myth, and beyond it into the kingdom of Fantasy, which pertain to the Lands of Dream.

Long we regarded one another, knowing that we should meet no more, for my fancy is weakening as the years slip by, and I go ever more seldom into the Lands of Dream. Then we clasped hands, uncouthly on his part, for it is not the method of greeting in his country, and he commended my soul to the care of his own gods, to his little lesser gods, the humble ones, to the gods that bless Belzoond.

## A MIRACLE

There is a road in Rome that runs through an ancient temple that once the gods had loved; it runs along the top of a great wall, and the floor of the temple lies far down beneath it, of marble, pink and white.

Upon the temple floor I counted to the number of thirteen hungry cats.

'Sometimes,' they said among themselves, 'it was the gods that lived here, sometimes it was men, and now it's cats. So let us enjoy the sun on the hot marble before another people comes.'



For it was at that hour of a warm afternoon when my fancy is able to hear the silent voices.

And the fearful leanness of all those thirteen cats moved me to go into a neighbouring fish shop, and there to buy a quantity of fishes. Then I returned and threw them all over the railing at the top of the great wall, and they fell for thirty feet, and hit the sacred marble with a smack.



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Now, in any other town but Rome, or in the minds of any other cats, the sight of fishes falling out of heaven had surely excited wonder. They rose slowly, and all stretched themselves; then they came leisurely towards the fishes. 'It is only a miracle,' they said in their hearts.

### THE CASTLE OF TIME

Presently there was a stir in one of the houses, and a bat flew out of the door into the daylight, and three mice came running out of the doorway down the step, an old stone cracked in two and held together by moss; and there followed an old man bending on a stick with a white beard coming to the ground, wearing clothes that were glossed with use, and presently there came others out of the other houses, all of them as old, and all hobbling on sticks. These were the oldest people that the King had ever beheld, and he asked them the name of the village and who they were; and one of them answered: 'This is the City of the Aged in the Territory of Time.'

And the King said; 'Is Time then here?'

And one of the old men pointed to a great castle standing on a steep hill and said: 'Therein dwells Time, and we are his people;' and they all looked curiously at King Karnith Zo, and the eldest of the villagers spoke again and said: 'Whence do you come, you that are so young?' and Karnith Zo told him how he had come to conquer Time, to save the world and the gods, and asked them whence they came.

And the villagers said:

'We are older than always, and know not whence we came, but we are the people of Time, and here from the Edge of Everything he sends out his hours to assail the world, and you may never conquer Time.' But the King went back to his armies, and pointed toward the castle on the hill and told them that at last they had found the Enemy of the Earth; and they that were older than always went back slowly into their houses with the creaking of olden doors. And they went across the fields and passed the village. From one of his towers Time eyed them all the while, and in battle order they closed in on the steep hill as Time sat still in his great tower and watched.

But as the feet of the foremost touched the edge of the hill Time hurled five years against them, and the years passed over their heads and the army still came on, an army of older men. But the slope seemed steeper to the King and to every man in his army, and they breathed more heavily. And Time summoned up more years, and one by one he hurled them at Karnith Zo and at all his men. And the knees of the army stiffened, and their beards grew and turned grey, and the hours and days and the months went singing over their heads, and their hair turned whiter and whiter, and the conquering hours bore down, and the years rushed on and swept the youth of that army



clear away till they came face to face under the walls of the castle of Time with a mass of howling years, and found

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the top of the slope too steep for aged men. Slowly and painfully, harassed with agues and chills, the King rallied his aged army that tottered down the slope. Slowly the King led back his warriors over whose heads had shrieked the triumphant years. Year in, year out, they straggled southwards, always towards Zoon; they came, with rust upon their spears and long beards flowing, again into Astarma, and none knew them there.

HERE ENDS 'SELECTIONS FROM THE WRITINGS OF LORD DUNSANY.' FINISHED ON LADY DAY, IN THE YEAR NINETEEN HUNDRED AND TWELVE.