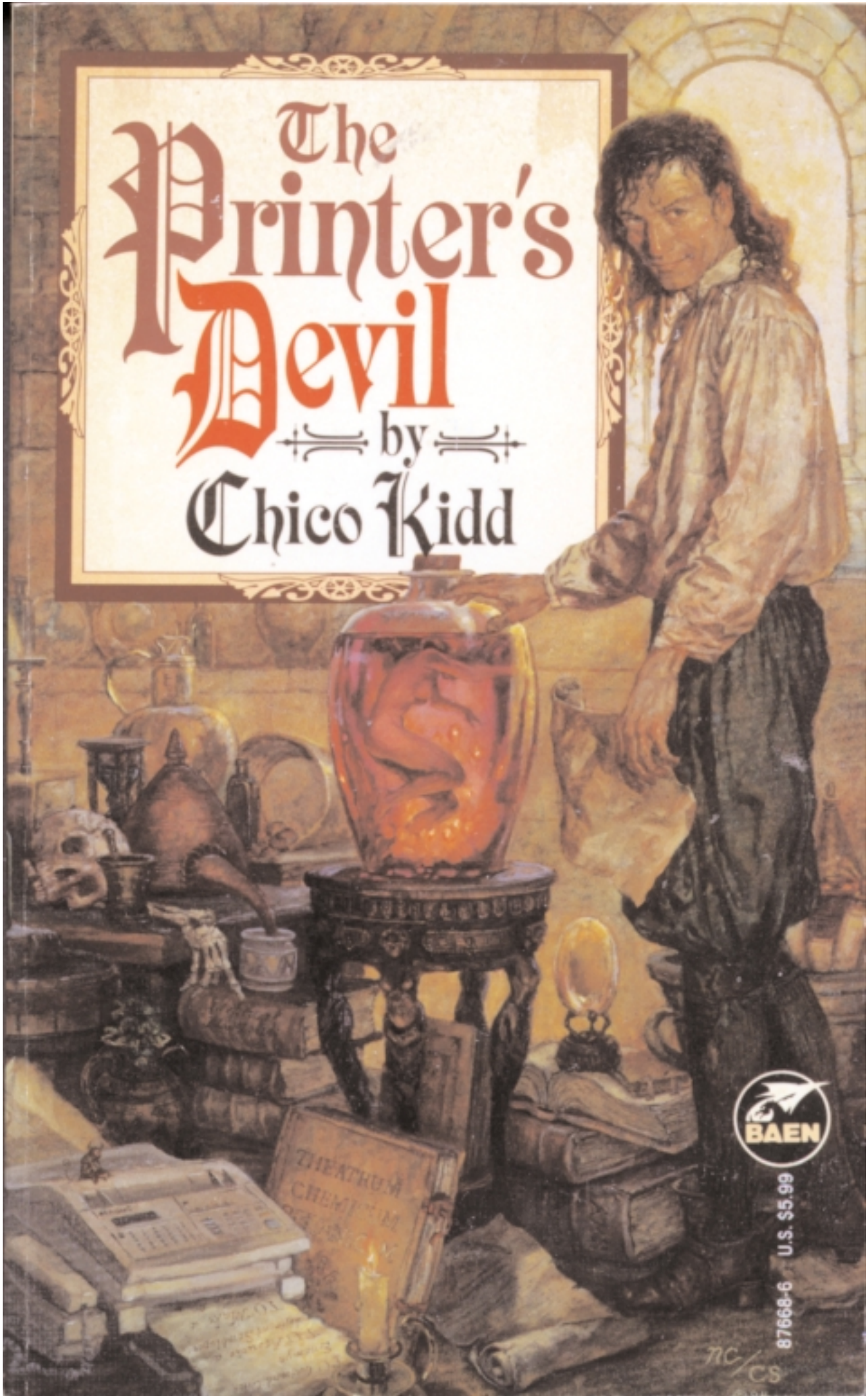
The Printer's Devil
by
Chico Kidd
BAEN
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by Chico Kidd

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Contents

"Throughout the whole province of Change Ringing, there is no more delightful method than *Stedman*. Ringers of methods of all degrees of intricacy find in it a continual freshness and charm. If we are to seek for the grounds of such a well-deserved popularity we shall probably be right in ascribing it chiefly to the varied nature of its work, while at the same time its music has a peculiar smooth and mellow cadence."

Rev. C D P Davies, *Stedman*

AUTHOR'S NOTE

The Fabian Stedman who appears in these pages may or may not be the deviser of the bellringing method called Stedman's Principle - since reports of his early life conflict. I have followed John Eisel, rather than Ernest Morris, in locating the young Stedman in London; but as Morris (quoting William Shipway) mentions *"his peculiar production on five bells"* being presented to the College Youths in the summer of 1657, we may suppose the Stedman Papers to commence a little before that time. The date of his apprenticeship is given as July 7, 1656, when Stedman was aged around twenty-five. If this seems too old for an apprentice to begin learning his trade, it is after all only tradition which puts the date of his birth as 1631; he was baptised in December of 1640.

Of course, the people who have life in these pages exist in a world which, although it has this sun and these stars, is very slightly other than ours, and follows different rules.

I also acknowledge my debt to the real Fabian Stedman, and to John Evelyn, to Victor Hugo and Verdi, to M R James, and to all the other people who have influenced the story.

C.K.

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1 : A Warning to the Curious

> ‘“As you are aware, E is the most common letter in the English alphabet and it predominates to so marked an extent that even in a short sentence one would expect to find it most often...
>
> ‘“‘But now came the real difficulty of the inquiry. The order of the English letters after E is by no means well-marked, and any preponderance which may be shown in an average of a printed sheet may be reversed in a single short sentence. Speaking roughly, T, A, O, I, N, S, H, R, D, and L are the numerical order in which letters occur; but T, A, O, and I are very nearly abreast of each other, and it would be an endless task to try each combination until a meaning was arrived at.”’
>
> Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, *The Dancing Men*

Grey as a flag, the church tower shouldered above trees: trees of so many shades of green that they caught the eye unawares. They rattled suddenly as a flock of black birds shot skywards, a cloud which broke as soon as seen.

Four people encased in the hot confines of an elderly Volkswagen Beetle stared at the tower with varying degrees of frustration.

‘Well, it’s *there,*’ observed the driver of the car for the tenth time.

‘So why can’t we *get* to it?’ asked one of his passengers. ‘We’ve been down Church Lane and All Saints Close, and neither of them were any use at all.’

‘We’re going to miss it if we don’t get there,’ complained the youngest, who was fourteen and inclined to be impatient.

‘Nobody else’s found it,’ the driver pointed out. “Nothing’s going ding.’

A car full of bellringers on an outing is not a lovesome thing, especially if all fails to go smoothly. Perfectly sensible people undergo a metamorphosis which puts Dr Jekyll’s to shame if there is the slightest chance of not being first at the next tower. Spouses snarl at each other. The day becomes a mad dash from church to church as tempers shorten. All this is done for pleasure.

‘Look, there’s a footpath sign. I’m going to get out and walk. Can you park here?’

Alan Bellman, a lanky, gangly man who bore a passing resemblance to Leslie Howard, and who had taken up ringing despite rather than because of his name, sighed, wondering how he had let himself be talked into coming on this outing. He pulled off the narrow road onto the yellowed grass at its verge, which was baked sere in that un-English summer.

As soon as the car came to a halt, the family he was chauffeuring - normally as pleasant as one could hope to meet - scrambled out of the car and headed for the footpath like a panting band of dogs. Young Debbie’s flip-flops slapped the soles of her feet, and the piebald flies with red eyes which doze upon the fronds of bracken in the sun buzzed upwards as the ringers passed them.

Following more slowly, Alan heard a bell sound suddenly, high and unexpectedly musical. Then another, and the rest of the six followed in close pursuit, swift and sweet as a scale on a glockenspiel. Ahead of him, Debbie quickened her pace so that her brown legs matched the speed of the bells.

His attention on the pleasing sight of Debbie’s back view in her T-shirt and brief shorts, Alan barely man-

aged to catch a bramble she had brushed aside before it raked his face; then he looked up in pleased surprise at the church facing him.

Unlike the walls of crumbly sandstone, red as rust, which flanked many of the roads they'd travelled that day, this tiny church was faced with knapped flint, cold in the sunlight. It was perfectly proportioned: its dimensions pleased the eye. Out from its tower tumbled the sound of the bells, bright and melodious. A group of ringers stood outside the open tower door, bright in summery shirts and dresses, almost too exotic for the quintessence of England in which they stood, surrounded by the silent trees.

Following his passengers, Alan joined the desultory queue, thinking as he watched the rush for bell-ropes that 'tower-grabbing' was a very descriptive term for this activity. He was content to wait: the urgency which seized most of his fellow ringers was alien to his nature. Maybe, he sometimes thought, this was one of the reasons why he himself was such an indifferent ringer. Such skill as he possessed, he had learned years ago to please his then girlfriend - a plan which had misfired when he had turned out ham-fisted. By that time, however, he himself had met Kim, and married her soon afterwards. Alan smiled a little at the memory of his first sight of her. For an instant he'd thought her a boy, with her cropped hair and jeans.

Eyes a little out of focus, he watched the ringers and the pattern the ropes made as they bounced up and down - the way the colours of the thin matted sallies blurred as they moved, red-white-and-blue turning to red in motion. Then he shook himself and, still listening with half an ear to the quick succession of the bells, wandered into the empty nave of the church.

It had that slightly sad and musty smell of all redundant churches. The worn stone floor was bare, and the pews had all been removed - no doubt to some pseudo-aged pub or yuppie kitchen. Dust drifted, in its stately way, in the coloured light falling through the stained glass: all that remained to the building of its past. That, and the bells, and the tarnished wall plaques. Little enough, when you remembered it was the centre of a community once, and people were christened there, and wedded, and buried in the churchyard outside.

'Have you rung yet?' said a voice in Alan's ear, making him jump.

He shook his head.

'Go and have a ding, then.'

'Okay,' Alan said, and went for his grab.

Only the tenor rope was free, but he was content to take the easy option of keeping the rhythm: it was one thing he could do competently.

"Do you want to play, Alan? Or shall we do some Stedman?"

"No, I'll bang the drum."

Having found the rhythm, Alan did not need to concentrate too hard - people who knew told him he should watch the other ropes, but he usually rang behind by counting the beat - and found his eyes drawn past his fellow ringers.

On the walls of the little ringing-chamber hung peal-boards black as ebony, the writing upon them illegible from where he stood. Newer boards commemorated the coronation of Elizabeth II and the Festival of Britain, but he could see nothing more recent. It was, however, the old ones which fascinated him.

Alan was a writer by trade and an antiquarian by inclination. Like a jackdaw, he collected old things: papers, books, paintings; letters, documents, photographs. When he could, he wrote about these things for

magazines: they were his centre and his core, a passion like music was to Kim. Most of the time, though, he wrote copy for advertisements, this being a more lucrative pursuit.

When the touch was over he stood his bell, tied the rope in that particular knot which novice ringers find so tricky to master, and crossed to examine the ancient boards. To his considerable disappointment, he found them largely indecipherable: what writing remained had faded to the state of blind-embossing: raised bumps of black on black. With some difficulty, he made out a few names - ones whose very shapes were old: Bartholomew, Tyler, Southwell.

Southwell.

The name snagged at his memory. Behind him, the next relay of ringers pulled off for their own grab, and the bells' sound rose once more. Carefully, so as not to knock any elbows, Alan sidled along the wall and out through the tower door into the churchyard.

It was not as overgrown as he had expected, although the trees crowded in like Tolkien's Old Forest. Grey gravestones, encroached by yellow powdery lichens, told the parish story to the early sixties. Alan's eye was caught by a fenced area outside the graveyard, and he leaned over the stone wall to see it.

Barred round by rusty rails, and almost obscured by tall grass and cow-parsley, there squatted a massive tomb. Reminded of E F Benson's creepy story *The Room in the Tower,* with its grave *outside* the churchyard *'in evil memory of Julia Stone'*, Alan, naturally, had to go and look.

Once inside the railings, Alan saw that the monolithic slab atop the tomb was blank save for patches of khaki lichen and olive-green liverwort and bird droppings. The sides, however, were a different matter.

His heart thumped and his breath came quickly as he saw the carvings. Excitedly he fumbled for his little fixed-focus camera, but found himself too close to see very much through the viewfinder. He wished Kim, a professional photographer, were there with her Leica and a wide-angle lens; in her absence, he had to do the best he could on his own.

At one end of the tomb was a simple inscription:

'ROGER SOUTHWELL. DY•D 1697 A.D.'

Southwell again. Where *had* he heard that name before? Clockwise from this, seven panels told a story: three on each side and one at the far end. All were surrounded by illustrations and motifs in smaller panels forming friezes and borders. There was too much to assimilate quickly.

Alan stood up too fast, his head suddenly spinning. The sound of the bells still crowded the air, not allowing any other sound in; looking at his watch he saw that some twenty minutes remained of their hour at All Saints. He squatted down again.

The carvings were both intricate and surprisingly well-preserved considering they had been braving wind, rain and snow since 1697. Alan ran his fingers over the first panel, finding the stone was strangely smooth to his touch. Then he examined the picture it presented.

The protagonist - Roger Southwell, presumably - appeared to be a scholar, or perhaps a magician, since the surrounding carvings were of cabalistic-looking symbols.

In this first picture Southwell, if it was he, was lifting a book inscribed *LIBER ARCANI* from a hiding-place. Alan copied the Latin words into his notebook, followed by *'Man finding book'*. He knew that *liber* meant *book,* but his Latin O-level lay too far in the past for much more than that.

The second picture showed the same man studying the book which he had found. That he was reading of treasure was implied by a frieze of crowns and coins, but strange creatures crawled among them - beasts of fearsome aspect. Alan wrote *'Man reading about treasure(?)'* after copying the inscription, and this impression was borne out by the third frame, which showed the man digging beneath a tree of no identifiable species. Instead of leaves, tiny birds and bats filled its branches; closer inspection showed the bark to be made up of serpents. Spiders and flies and crawling things abounded in the images surrounding this picture.

'Man digging for treasure,' Alan captioned it.

'Alan!' called someone, startling him.

Realising he must be invisible, crouched down as he was, Alan stood up and waved:

'Over here.'

'We're going to have lunch in the pub.'

'Which one?'

'There's only one. That-a-way. King's Head, or-Arms, or something. Some bit of a king, anyway.

'King's Buttocks?' suggested Alan.

'Probably.'

'I'll see you there in a minute. Don't drink all the beer,' Alan called, his attention returning to the drama in the story's fourth frame.

Here something had burst from the ground and was clutching the treasure-hunter in a horrid parody of an embrace. The creature seemed to have no proper shape, but it had claws, and teeth - with which it appeared to be gnawing its victim's face. Its fur was cleverly carved: conveying the impression of a nature both oily and unclean. Around this picture the images were unequivocal - demons fanged and clawed, and skeletal Death's naked bones and clenched smile.

'Monster attacks R.S.' wrote Alan laconically, and moved round the tomb to see what happened next.

As if some Pandora's box had opened, horrors poured up out of the earth. Here the artist appeared to have been strongly influenced by Hieronymous Bosch, and a shiver crawled suddenly across Alan's shoulders. He did not linger, noting merely *'Monsters on rampage.'*

So involved was he with the story that it was with some relief he saw Good vanquishing Evil in the next frame. The panel was filled with saints, all grim of countenance, with their clear eyes focused on the centre, where cowered the killing beast.

'*Saints Overcome Monster,'* wrote Alan, like a tabloid sub-editor. 'Gotcha,' he thought, recalling a favourite headline.

The seventh and final frame showed the saints again - 'All Saints,' Alan realised, belatedly recalling the church's dedication - but now they were binding the creature: not in chains but in garlands, garlands of elder and rowan, oak and ash, and other leaves he could not identify.

'Green Party ties up the monster,' he wrote flippantly.

And that was it; full circle. He was back at the inscription.

'DY•D 1697 A.D.'

Was this a real legend of Roger Southwell's death, or a serious allegory of some sort - a warning against meddling with the supernatural? Or simply a conventional caution against avarice?

Wishing for more information, he squinted again at the carved letters. Some strange impulse drew his attention to the base of the panel, and pushing the grass down with his hand, he found a further inscription - a line of deeply graven characters. But they were merely a meaningless jumble of letters. Alan frowned, but wrote them down anyway, then headed for the pub to join the others.

***

What with another pub visit at the end of the day, then a long drive back, followed by a chicken tikka with some of the other ringers, it was nearly midnight when Alan finally got home. He decided to go straight to bed, since Kim was away on location until mid-week.

Although they had met in a ringing-chamber, she had little time to pursue that hobby these days; which was a pity, as she had always been keener, and better, than Alan. Her being musical had a lot to do with it, he felt, as music is kin to mathematics and mathematicians often make accomplished ringers.

In the morning, after breakfast, he put Verdi's *Otello* on the stereo and headed for his bookshelves. The first thing he looked up was the village, and here he struck gold at once:

> 'Fenstanton: Fenstanton Abbey (ruined). A house built c.1660 for Roger Southwell, reputedly a magician. It stood empty for some years after his death in 1697 and has never been occupied for any length of time; around 1800 it was described as "derelict". Southwell himself lies buried in an interesting tomb *outside* the churchyard of the redundant church of All Saints, reputedly because he was excommunicated for wizardly activities.'

Confident that further research would yield more information about Southwell, Alan took his notepad from his pocket and looked at what he had written the previous day.

LIBER ARCANI. Secret book, presumably. Or - book of secrets? He wrote *'The book of hidden things'*.

HIC DIVITIÆ LEGET. 'Here reads (he reads?)' What was *'divitiæ'?*

Putting down his pen, Alan went to hunt for his old Latin dictionary. Eventually he found it in the glory-hole under the stairs, sandwiched between a hymnbook stamped in purple ink *'Priory Grammar School. Do not remove'* and a 1960 Ford Anglia manual.

'Here he reads of riches,' he wrote a moment later, and eventually, with the help of the dictionary, he translated the captions to all the frames.

The others read: *They have set a guardian* (he knew 'custodia'); *The reward of avarice; The power of God's holy saints;* and finished with something Alan vaguely thought was a quotation: *'Auri sacra fames', accursed hunger for gold.*

And now, he thought, what about that strange string of letters? Looking at them anew, Alan was certain they constituted a cipher, but how to break it?

GZNUZNZLPVTOVLFOGUHLSGZDVSMRMVWG

The first thing he noticed now was the frequency of *G*s and *Z*s, one of which must presumably stand for *E*, the commonest letter in the English language.

Alan sighed, stood up, fetched a beer from the fridge, and stared out of the window for a while. There was no easy solution to the code: that was plain. Also, it was Sunday, so libraries were shut. Either he'd have to try and solve it without help, or - wait.

Since waiting was out of the question:

‘Okay,’ said Alan to himself, ‘you’re a bright lad. You’ve been known to ring Stedman Triples. You can’t let a little thing like a code bamboozle you.’

He turned up the stereo, fetched a garden chair from the shed and put it outside in the sun, then settled down with paper and a pen.

Somewhere he’d seen codes grouped into equal numbers of letters - four or five. He added up the letters and found thirty-two, so wrote them down in fours.

GZNU ZNZL PVTO VLFO GUHL SGZD VSMR MVWG

They looked more manageable like that, anyway.

All right. There were four *G*s, four *Z*s, and four *V*s as well, so maybe these stood for *E, T,* and *A,* the commonest letters in English. He played around with this possibility for a frustrating half-hour, convinced that *Z* stood for *A,* simply because of the juxtaposition:

TANU **A**N**A**L P**E**TO **E**LFO **T**UHL S**TA**D **E**SMR M**E**W**T**

Something he’d read stirred in his memory then, and he rearranged the letters, taking the first of each group, and then the second, and so on.

TAP**E T**S**E**M **A**N**E**L U**TSE** NA**T**F H**A**MW ULOO LDR**T**

Now he had to guess. The two *TSE* combinations were almost certainly *THE,* but that didn’t help much. There were two *O*s together, and *L*s round them, and another *L,* which made three. Whatever came after *E, T,* and *A* as fourth commonest letter? Try *O,* Alan thought, and got:

TAP**E THE** M**A**N**E O**U **THE** N**A**TFH **A**MW **O**OO**O** DR**T**

Which was nearer to making sense, it seemed. And yet, far from solution.

‘Bugger this,’ thought Alan, and stared morosely down the garden. In the background, Luciano Pavarotti was lamenting the loss of Otello’s peace of mind. *‘Ora e per sempre addio, sante memorie, addio sublimi incanti del pensier,’* he sang. *‘Now and forever farewell, sacred memories, farewell, sublime enchantments of the mind...’* As always, it raised the small hairs at the back of Alan’s neck.

Then something occurred to him, like a lightbulb over Goofy’s head:

A B C D E then F G H

Z Y X W V ... U T S

It was a backward substitution! Quickly he scribbled out the rest of the alphabet, and came up with:

TAKE THE NAME OF THE MAGUS AND FOLLOW IT

And what the hell was that supposed to mean? he asked himself.

The name of the magus. Roger Southwell. Alan laughed suddenly. The answer had sprung off the page, a clue by a seventeenth century cruciverbalist:

South. Well.

He’d bet a hundred pounds that there was, or had been, a well in the grounds of Fenstanton Abbey - and he recalled, with a shudder, *The Treasure of Abbot Thomas.*

As to what was in the Fenstanton well - *‘Well,’* thought Alan, ‘only one way to find out.’

2: Caverns Measureless to Man

'...Facilis descensus Averno:
Noctes atque dies patet atri ianua Ditis;
Sed revocare gradum superasque evadere ad auras,
Hoc opus, hic labor est.'

(It's easy to go down into the Underworld; dark Dis's door stands open night and day; but retracing one's steps and finding a way back into the upper air, that's a job, that's a problem.)

Virgil, *The Æneid*

'Roger Southwell's Fenstanton Abbey, like William Beckford's Fonthill a century later, was a folly on a grand scale - an exercise so extravagant as to assume nightmare proportions.

'While Beckford's folly may be viewed as a gesture of revenge against society, Southwell's is less easy to categorise. Some commentators have seen it as a gesture of defiance against the established Church, that in building an "Abbey" complete with tower (and bells, if contemporary accounts are to be believed, although who the founder was, and what became of them, is unknown to this writer) Southwell was thumbing his nose at the authorities who had excommunicated him. How he escaped the scaffold is a mystery - the last recorded execution for witchcraft took place in 1685 and Southwell died in 1697 - because he apparently made no secret of his activities.

'The Abbey was begun probably in 1657 and building continued for at least ten years; but whether it was actually complete at the time of Southwell's death is debatable.

'Its tower, in any case, did not survive its creator very long: a 1701 report refers to it as "ruined" and the few references to the Abbey during the eighteenth century culminate in its description by George Wyatt as "the derelict remains of Robert (sic) Southwell's Abbey" in his *Counties* of 1802.'

Kim Sotheran read this item carefully, trying to align it with Alan's bizarre tale of tombs and codes and putative buried treasure.

Looking up from the book, she smiled at Alan's expression.

'So what do you think *is* down the well?'

Alan shrugged. 'Southwell's book, perhaps. His grimoire. Can you imagine? What a *find!'*

Kim raised one eyebrow, a favourite quirk of hers which Alan found irresistible. If she had doubts, she hid them well.

'I want to shoot this,' she said. 'I want the tomb and the folly, and the well. I'll do it on thirty-five mill' and we can back it up with your new toy.' She meant the video camera. 'Someone'll take it, even if you don't find anything - '

'Less of the "you", if you don't mind.'

'Well, all right, we then. Does it matter? But listen - why Roger Southwell? I've heard of John Dee and Roger Bacon and Michael Scot, but not him. The twentieth century hasn't heard of him, but you see his name on a peal-board and it's like a war-horse hearing a bugle.'

Alan shook his head. 'I'm not sure why,' he said. 'Something... it'll come back to me.'

Kim rolled her eyes. ‘Oh...kay,’ she responded, opening her diary. ‘This week looks horrendous; I’ve got a provisional booked on Saturday, but I can probably put them off till the week after.’

‘I can’t wait till Saturday!’

‘Well, you’ll have to.’

‘Can’t you manage Monday or Tuesday?’

‘We got to pay the mortgage, mate.’

‘I suppose so,’ Alan conceded reluctantly. ‘I’ll just have to slave over a hot word-processor all week, then.’

***

Despite the forecasters’ pessimistic predictions that the fine weather was about to end, the weekend began in blazing sunshine which almost made Alan regret that the two of them were going to spend a couple of hours inside a car on what might well turn out to be a wild-goose chase.

Kim seemed to have resigned herself to this prospect, for the moment at least.

‘Which car?’ she asked.

‘Oh, yours... at least we can open the lid. Why didn’t you get a convertible?’

‘In *England?* How was I supposed to know the country was going to turn sub-tropical this year?’

‘It’s the greenhouse effect.’

‘Well, I’m all for it. Do you want to take any tapes?’ She stuck her key in the lock of the Audi.

‘No, I expect you’ve got plenty in there,’ said Alan, opening the passenger door and checking. ‘Yup, looks good to me.’

‘Well, if I’m driving, you can do in-flight music.’ Kim slung her jacket in the back and got in while Alan shuffled cassettes. Eventually he chose *Rigoletto* and sat back as the car filled up with Verdi.

‘If you could sing like Pavarotti, I might just fall in love with you,’ said Kim a little later. ‘Why don’t you do some navigating instead?’

‘Navigator to pilot, take the next left,’ Alan obliged.

‘Ladies and gentlemen, the *No Smoking* sign has now been extinguished and you may unfasten your seat-belts,’ intoned Kim, then began to sing along with the tape, in a surprising tenor.

The bells were ringing, unexpectedly, in the redundant church of All Saints, Fenstanton. Sweet and light, their chattering hung in the air, a sound so quintessentially English that it evoked a strange nostalgia for rural idylls which never really existed.

Kim parked, directed by Alan, where he had a week previously. As she turned off the ignition, and with it the music, she sang the next line herself: *‘Quest’è un buffone, Ed un potente e questo.[1]’* Okay, I hear where the church is. Let’s go see this tomb of yours.’

Alan pulled the video camera in its case from the back seat of the car. Kim had been a photographer for too long to trust machines which did too much, preferring control over exposures and shutter speeds. Even she admitted that Alan’s new toy was fun, however, and enjoyed discomfiting their friends by producing it when they came to dinner. It was usually left to Alan, though. Now he pointed it in the direction of the church, and musical Stedman Doubles poured into it, while Kim took her own equipment from the car.

He pointed out the location of Roger Southwell’s tomb to Kim and went to read the note pinned on the tower door, which read, as he had half-expected, *‘Quarter-peal in progress, please do not disturb’*.

It was pleasant to think that these melodious bells were used from time to time, Alan reflected, and turned to follow Kim.

‘Might as well be Adam the bloody gardener,’ she was muttering as he came up to the tomb: she was pulling handfuls of sere grass through the railings. Alan bent to help, tugging at the vegetation, and cursing as his fingers encountered nettles.

‘What’s up?’

‘Been bit by a nettle. Rotten little sod.’

‘Dock-leaves this side.’

Alan tore off some of the sorrel-like leaves and rubbed his smarting hand with the sap, then resumed his task more carefully. When the tomb was cleared Kim spent some time photographing the panels, while Alan attempted to film them, with helpful translations interjected - he did not intend to waste all his hard work with the Latin dictionary.

‘Right,’ said Kim finally. ‘Now where’s Fenstanton Abbey?’

‘According to the map, it’s the other side of those trees.’

The Abbey was indeed a ruin. All that remained were a few ragged lengths of grey wall with empty windows, the base of a tower, little bits of tiled floor and paving scattered among the grass. All the remains of men’s works were being reclaimed by Nature, like the city called the Cold Lairs in *The Jungle Book.* Weeds found precarious rootholds in the remnants of the walls and crept through cracks. Moss furred the stones. No-one had adopted the ruins: they were adorned neither by green National Trust signs nor by brown Heritage ones reading *‘Fenstanton Abbey, Historic Ruins’* - the sort of thing which Alan hated, as if people needed to be told that a place was a *‘Mediæval Church’* or a *‘Historic Market Town’*.

‘Now all we need is to find the well.’

‘South.’

‘Where’s south? Where’s the sun, and what’s the time? Ten to eleven. Oh...kay. This-a-way.’ Kim led the way across a larger survival of flagstones.

‘That must be it,’ said Alan, pointing to a ring of rusty railings and a peeling notice reading ANG R KE P T. He hoisted the camcorder up and fingered the switch. Through the eyepiece he saw an image of Kim, in monochrome, walking up to the railings, which were about four feet high, and looking over them.

‘It’s got some kind of a lid on it,’ she called. ‘I can’t see how it’s anchored. Let me just get some shots of it, then we’ll see if we can get it open.’

‘I have to tell you that I’m a bit nervous about going down there,’ said Alan, moving closer. Kim stepped back, and adjusted her tripod.

‘We probably won’t have to. I expect whatever-it-is is within arm’s reach. Or do you think it’ll be like the hidey-hole in *Tosca?’*

‘More like the well in *The Treasure of Abbot Thomas.’*

‘You mean when the bag put its arms round his neck?’

‘Oh, thanks, Kim.’

‘Get out of shot, now.’

‘Yes, boss.’

After a good deal of scrabbling, straining and swearing, not to mention sweating, since the temperature was well into the eighties already, the two of them managed to remove the rotting wooden cover from the well. Though in an advanced stage of decomposition, its underside coated with black slime, the wood was nearly six inches thick and still able to drive splinters into unwary hands.

Eventually they wrestled it loose and, panting, surveyed the black hole thus revealed, lined with glistening brick.

Far below, a dim gleam spoke of water.

Kim felt gingerly around inside the rim, but found nothing which suggested a hidey-hole: no crevices, no tell-tale loose bricks. She eyed the rusty iron rungs set into the wall with displeasure.

'Looks like *Tosca* after all,' she said gloomily. 'Do those rungs look strong enough to you?'

''Fraid so,' replied Alan. 'I suppose I'd better go first, since I've got the light.' He peered down into the depths. 'Looks a bit Stygian.'

'Okay, Mephistopheles, down you go. I'll be right behind you.'

Alan knelt on the edge of the well and reached for the first rung with a tentative foot. After half a dozen cautious downward steps he began to trust them, and looked up at Kim's face in a circle of sky.

'I think it's okay,' he called, and an instant later the daylight was obscured by her descent. Alan gritted his teeth and continued, trying hard not to think of M R James. The camcorder in its case tended to unbalance him as it swung from his shoulder, and the well's damp chill made him shiver after the dry baking heat of the day.

He had not gone very far down - twenty feet or so - when he discovered an opening, and shone his torch into it. There was a confused rattling sound, startlingly loud in the confined space of the well, barking at the echoes.

'What the hell was that?' demanded Kim in a strangled whisper.

'Dunno.' Alan crab-walked into the tunnel, and discovered the answer almost immediately as it widened into a cavern. 'Bats! Must be hundreds of 'em. Oh, yuck.'

'Bats?'

'Look.' A little nervously, he directed his light into the cave. Like fleshy fruit the bats hung, softly clattering their leather wings, taking startled flight when sudden and unnatural day hit them. He felt, rather than saw, Kim arrive beside him.

'Jesus, did you ever see anything like it?'

'Only on David Attenborough programmes. Be careful - I don't think bat shit is very nice to get on you.'

'I don't much care to get any kind of shit on me, thanks.'

'It's got vast quantities of ammonia in it, apparently.'

'I can smell that.'

The cave, they found, was shaped like a bulbous mineral-water bottle, tapering at the far end. Its sides were rough enough for Alan to think that it was a natural cavern, discovered when the well was sunk.

'Well, Toto, I guess we're not in Kansas any more,' remarked Kim, who had always entertained a fondness for *The Wizard of Oz.* A moment later, she added, 'There must be another way out over there, otherwise how do the bats get in and out?'

'Well, that's a bit academic at the moment, because I don't intend to go any further into this cave than I

am at the moment, and I don't give a bugger how the bats get in and out.' Alan kicked crossly at the detritus underfoot, causing noisome dust to rise.

'What about the umbrella?' Kim asked suddenly.

'What?'

'The one in the car. Should stop the worst of it. Worth a try?'

'We've come this far. I suppose so.'

'You were the one who wanted to come in the first place.'

'Yes. I know.'

'Well, you keep the light. I can see all right. Don't go away.'

Minutes later Kim returned with the dilapidated black folding umbrella which lived in her car (and rather resembled a dead bat itself), and the two of them picked their way delicately and on the uncomfortable verge of hysteria across the filthy floor of the cave, beneath the legion of hanging bats.

Why, Alan wondered absently, were bats so vilified? He knew part of the answer: their nocturnal ways, their ugliness, their smell *(en masse,* anyway) - their association with unpleasant legends.

Yet he had always been quite fond of the little pipistrelles which swooped on noiseless naked wings in the country dusk; this myriad of cave-born rodents, however, unsettled him at a level which was very profound. He supposed he was subject to atavism, after all.

'It's illegal to disturb them, you know,' he whispered to Kim, who snorted.

'Tell me how to get to the other side *without* disturbing the little bastards,' she said.

Wings rattled as they passed, and Alan strained to hear the bats' silent sonar. At length they reached the far side of the cave, which narrowed to a tunnel which a skinny man might just squeeze through.

'Well, now we know how the bats get in and out,' said Kim.

'Yes, but we're no nearer to finding whatever's supposed to be here.'

'Maybe someone else got here first.'

'Ah hell, I hope not. All that brainwork and nothing to show for it.'

Alan swung his light morosely around, setting bats skittering as it passed them.

'No. Nobody else would be daft enough.' Suddenly he spotted something on the wall, and back-tracked with the torch. 'Kim!'

Together they peered at the roughly-carved inscription.

AN THOU CANST READ THE vii BELLS
WHEREAT THE MAGUS DWELLS
THOU MAYST KNOW A THING MOST RARE
WHEN THAT THE MESSAGE IS MADE CLERE.

'Oh, no,' groaned Kim. 'A treasure hunt. I hate this sort of thing, I really do. Trust you.'

'One reference,' said Alan gloomily. 'Just one reference to bells in the Abbey, and who knows what became of them?'

'Hold the light steady. We should be okay with this film.'

Later, in the pub, they held a council of war, having brushed cobwebs and other less identifiable though equally unpleasant things off each other as best they could.

‘What we need is a local history society,’ said Alan.

‘No, first let’s see if there’s a second-hand bookshop in town, or even a junk shop. You never know.’

‘I have the feeling none of this is going to be easy.’

Good fortune was not evident at first. In a narrow musty bookshop, the kind of establishment Alan was chronically unable to pass by, they searched the shelves in vain until the proprietor, a middle-aged man with a professorial air, took pity on them.

‘Can I help? Looking for anything in particular?’ he asked.

Kim, who had been momentarily seduced by a book of old photographs of the area, jumped slightly, but Alan replied eagerly.

‘Fenstanton Abbey. I believe it had a tower, and bells?’

‘Yes - though hardly one person in a million would know that. Well?’

‘We’re ringers, you see—’

‘Alan, he doesn’t want to know that.’

‘Ah, were you ringing over at All Saints, earlier?’

‘No, not today, but I came here a week ago for a ring, and you see, I’m a writer, and I sort of got interested in the Abbey. So we thought we’d poke around again today, and see if we could find any details.’

‘Like what happened to the bells,’ put in Kim.

The bookseller puffed out his cheeks and expelled air. ‘Well,’ he said slowly, ‘I’ve got a fair amount of stuff at home - which I suppose you *could* see, but I don’t want to let it out of my sight. No offence, but I don’t know you.’

Alan suppressed a surge of anger. ‘Just *seeing* it—’ he began.

‘That’s fine,’ Kim interrupted smoothly. ‘I can photograph anything we need, if that’s all right with you. I’ve brought plenty of film.’

‘Well, if you’d like to come back about five,’ said the bookseller, ‘you can toddle along with me. My name’s James Rendall, by the way.’

‘Alan Bellman.’

‘Good name for a bellringer. Sorry, I expect everyone says that.’

‘And this is Kim Sotheran.’

The bookseller shook hands. ‘You know about Roger Southwell, do you?’

‘Only that he was some kind of magician.’

‘Alchemist, really,’ James Rendall corrected him, ‘although his interests seem to have extended quite a bit further than that. Anyway, they say he hung bells in his tower to keep away an evil spirit which was haunting him. But you can read all about that later.’

3

The Journal of Fabian Stedman

I: The Maiden

It is a proverb with us in England, that every pavan has his galliard: by which expression is declared, That be a man never so wise or learned, yet every sage hath his moments of folly. Which expression is most apt in the matter of all men, for who can declare himself free from folly, whether it be in the cause of love, or avarice, or power over other men?

This day to ring St-Mary bells with the Scholars (the weather excessive hot and dusty), whither by and by comes Roger Southwell, journeyman to my master Daniel Pakeman (and wherefore they call themselves Scholars is a mystery to me for there is not amongst them any virtuoso or learned man that I can see); had nothing of him but nonsense, I never knew such a fellow for taking offence, or giving of it; he is forever drabbing an you believe his tales; for myself I do not, he being so truthful as a Dutchman.

I took but little note on Roger, for I was listening to an account of the charring of sea-coal that Hugh Bishop had lately witnessed, in order to burn out the sulphur and render it sweet; how twas done was but by burning the coals in such earthen-pots as the glass-men melt their metal in, so firing these coals without consuming them; they put a bar of iron in each crucible or pot, the bar having on one end an hook so that the melted coals may be drawn out sticking to the iron. Then they do beat off the half-exhausted cinders, now deprived of their sulphury and arsenic malignity, the which can then make up sweet and clear pleasant chamber fires.

I fell once again to thinking of this ringing of bells, the which is only practised in this isle of ours: How admirable it is that in such a short time it hath increased, and that the depth of its intricacy is found out; for within these thirty or forty years last past, changes were not known, nor thought possible to be rang. And now we ring changes, *ad infinitum*, nor can any number confine us.

And on a paper I did prick out a pattern that I think three bells might follow most melodiously, that one might then leave the pattern and be replaced by another, that even the treble might ring, for wherefore should he be ever constrained as he is? But I will think more on this.

To return to this black man Roger Southwell, who was in such an ill humour this day, speaking much nonsense about the daughter of Master Pakeman (at which Nate Mundy hath nonsense of his own, that Master Pakeman hath a young mistress, the which I can tell him is not true; —I have seen her, she is most fair, quoth he; however I do believe that all he hath beheld is the man's daughter Ann).

Roger saith he hath seen the girl in church, and means to seduce her Attentions through his art. For I must note that he fancies himself an alchemist or magus or some such; though for myself I think a man must study many years and be of altogether more sober temperament than the good Roger, an he would be a mage. Though I have seen Ann Pakeman myself and she is a comely Maiden, who would not be like to look with favour upon the journeyman of her Father.

However I expressed my scepticism to Master Southwell who then addressed me thus:

—Fabian do you come to my lodging when that we are done here and I shall show you how it is that I mean to woo Mistress Ann.

And I would fain see this thing, as what man would not, and went with him to his laboratory, and found it

most wondrous strange. Tis a mean little attic, if the truth be told, and nothing in it but a pallet and by the window (the which letteth in so much light as a penny-candle) a bench.

Twas this bench that drew my attention, for upon it sate all manner of arcane things, alembics, glass ware of many and divers kinds, sulfurous powders, bottles and jars, dried animals, and, horrid to relate, human bones and a very skull, a mortar and pestle (the which inside was most strangely discoloured), divers books (one lay open, I read its title, *Pretiosa Margarita Novella,* the which I understood to signify, *A New Pearl of Great Price),* and many other items too numerous to mention.

Roger then showed me a substance like unto pitch in a jar the which he told me was called *Mummy* and sold by pothecaries as a specific.

—It is hot in the second degree, he saith, and good against all bruisings, spitting of blood, and divers other diseases. There are two kinds on it, the one is digged out of the graves in Arabia and Syria of those bodies that were embalmed, and is called *Arabian Mummy,* and that is what this is. The second kind is only an equal mixture of the Jews lime and bitumen, and is of no use at all.

Strangest of all, in a large jar (that which they do call a Jordan, which is to say not a chamber-pot) a most hideous thing: I cannot describe it for it had no shape, and it stank like unto a midden, and gave off much heat.

—Tis an homunculus, Roger says to me, an it grows it will become a mannikin and be my servant. And more he told me too, about its making from shit and semen and other bodily excretions. I thought that it never looked like anything living, but I said naught to Roger. I had much misjudged the man; that he studied was plain to see; I remained sceptical about his powers; however he made for me a most persuasive demonstation that *cuicunque in arte sua credendum est*.[1]

Taking from his workbench some powders and a phial of viscous liquid he mixed all together and anointed his face with a portion of the resulting unguent, a dab on each chap and one on his front, and one more at his throat. Amazed I beheld his features change, not as one might suppose a melting and re-forming as of tallow heated, but a little disturbance of the air like unto that which one may see above a road in summertime.

In but an instant I beheld standing before me the semblance of a handsome lord, as unlike Roger as could be: no more the scowling visage but a face as comely as any man might wish, an he were vain about his appearance, which I am not.

—Just so will I woo Ann Pakeman, quoth a voice which was not Roger's neither; I could not speak a word being confounded and stricken utterly dumb.

—What thinkest thou, Fabian? asked he.

—Tis wondrous strange, I replied.

—No, he said, it is strange and wondrous too, and laughed. Wouldst thou go with me, he said.

—Whither, I asked.

—Why, to speak with Mistress Ann, when I go thither. I will have need of aid, an my plan progress as it should.

So doth our understanding of the world increase, as we apprise new things; so did I learn that Roger Southwell is a very mage, and that such magic as he hath shewn me is a thing any man can accomplish an he but have the knowledge and the cunning and the will withall.

[1] You can trust a man when it comes to his own art

So doth the art of ringing increase, and mayhap will ever continue, *parvus et parvus*.[2] Philosophers say, No number is infinite, because it can be numbered; for infinite is a quantity that cannot be taken or assigned, but there is *(infinitum quoad nos*[3]) as they term it, that is, infinite in respect of our apprehension.

Now I do not remember how may sennights passed after I apprised of Roger Southwell's intent that he put his plan into hand; there was a great moil in the city and the churches all filled of folk affrighted of the Puritan-laws.

By which time there were certain of us young men who pledged ourselves to his cause, as it were, acolytes as you might say; nor will I deny it although it sheweth me in a bad light. I can but say I was young (as were we all) and youth and lust do not combine to make sober gentlemen.

We had not been denied the details of Roger's wooing of Mistress Ann; how he had captivated her in his strange guise (and did he have other means at his disposal, conjectured I, thinking of love-philtres and such like); how she had been much enamoured of his semblance, not knowing that it was merely a seeming brought about by the art of magic; how she knew him under the name of Walter Kyd of Grayes Inn (being so bemused by his arts as not to wonder what such an one might be at, a-wooing the daughter of a printer); much of her sighs he hath told us, and of how she spake of even his name as beloved, though as we knew it was no name of his.

On such sand is faith built, by men who think it be a rock.

However he had not yet had from this dell her maidenhead; until one night he did consider that she was so far in affection for him that she would be sure to go away from her father his house with Roger. To this end Roger hath told off his acolytes (the which include myself) to accompany him, in a guise which he himself hath crafted.

We met five accomplices, Roger, myself, and three other ringers of our acquaintance, Thomas Audley (a clerk in the office of the Audit of Excise), Hugh Bishop, of Spittle-fields, and Matthew Boys, a writer of music and airs sore idle under the rule of the Puritan-folk (though they say the Usurper doth joy in church music there's little enow of employment in that trade); none of us were amazed by Roger's transformation, having all now been made acquainted of it.

More to concern us was our own: for Roger gave to each of us a talisman to wear and a small phial containing a portion of his efficacious unguent, and bade us each to touch his face with it in that certain way which he hath shewn us when he did give the word, that Ann or her father (if he should chance to wake) might not know us; although they were like to know only myself, apprentice to Master Pakeman these vii weeks.

So that night we found ourselves with Roger Southwell outside the house of my master, and Roger bade us anoint our faces with his potion. I put two fingers of my left hand into the pot and felt the substance for the first time: cold and thick it was, an it were a pease-pudding, and vile to the touch; nevertheless I applied it to my face, having no wish to be recognised by my master. Although it is truly said, *Audentes fortuna invat;*[4] and in truth I did feel bold, and fortunate too.

The touch of the unguent called to my mind that time when first I saw Roger use it: as then I saw, so now I felt a tingling and blurring of my sight; when it was done I felt no different, but the face I saw reflected in a nearby window was not my own. Mayhap we three were so forspoken by our bully-Roger that we no longer

[2] little by little [3] infinite as far as we understand [4] Fortune favours the daring (Virgil,*The Æneid)*

saw any strangeness in such a transformation.

That night was so strange and dream-like an one as I can remember: I must needs set it down ere it fade from my memory. Eager was the air; and Roger passed like unto a shadow into the courtyard of my master's house, under the light of the stars so pale and cold, and the planets that he doth conjure, and the pale sliver of the moon in her newness, and stood as a player in the theatre transfixed. (Although the canting faithful-brothers closed the playhouses when that I was but a child so I do not speak from mine own observation. However they would fain have also closed down the brothels and we do all behold how far they did succeed in this endeavour.).

—Mistress Ann, he called in a voice so soft as I thought she was not like to hear. Mistress Ann, it is Walter Kyd come with my friends to fetch you away.

Then above us there opened a casement and Ann Pakeman leaned out, a lanthorn beside her so that although it was a dark night I could see her very clear; her abron locks unbound, her pale Arms and neck; And I was quite stupefied with an heat of mine own.

—Come, whispered Roger. Come to me, mine own love, and we'll go hence.

And then I would swear my heart did stop, for the door below did open and the voice of Master Pakeman called out, Who's there?

But Roger smil'd in the darkness, and cast towards him a sprinkling of liquid that sparkled in the starlight as it were very stars itself.

—See and hear naught but what I desire, Roger rounded in the night's ear, so soft as a man bespeaking his lover.

—Who's there? cried Master Pakeman again.

—Hush, old man, Pantalone, calls Roger (and in sooth he might have been Old Iniquity), our errand is not with thee but with thy neighbour.

—Samuel Salter? enquires Master Pakeman, and I saw the cleverness of this Roger Southwell, for my master hath no love for Master Salter and would rejoice to see him discomfited. Whatever glamour Roger had cast was having its effect for it seemed Master Pakeman was confused and knew not that twas his own house which was assailed.

—Do you but rest silent, quoth Roger, and let us go about our business.

—Nay, sirra, quoth Master Pakeman, do you have designs gainst Master Salter I must know them, for they may lie with mine own.

And I saw Roger's silent smile of triumph. Seest the house of Samuel Salter, he said in a voice the softness of silk; pointing the while at the house of Daniel Pakeman.

—Aye, says that bemused worthy.

—Tis my intent, quoth Roger, to steal the man's wife and thus discomfort him.

—Twill do so, replied my master. But you will need accomplices.

In spite of my new semblance my bowels were in turmoil, for Roger then did gesture to the place where we three stood. Without a second glance, Master Pakeman addressed us thus.

—Welcome, gentles, mine aid is yours in this adventure.

All this time Ann had observed us from above; and I was more certain than before that Roger had mag-

icked her, for she seemed unsurprised.

—How to get her down? asks Master Pakeman. For know you that Samuel Salter bars his doors against the coming of the night.

—We have a ladder, replies Roger, do you steady it and I will climb to the lady's chamber.

Now my very skin was crawling as if ants and spiders were running over't. I looked full in the face of Master Pakeman, and saw nothing but what I ever did see, a man of middle years, hair grisard; excepting, *mirabile dictu*,[5] that he did not in one whit recognise me.

Up the ladder then goes Roger and returns with Ann Pakeman while that her own father steadies their descent, grinning the while like unto a fool. And presently Roger departs with Ann, and I and Thos Audley and Hugh Bishop and Matthew Boys to our own beds; glad I am not to live in Master Pakeman's house as do most prentices with their masters.

On the morrow, some sort of confused election of parliament called by 0. Cromwell (pretended Protector); up betimes and to my master's workshop, where all is in turmoil and making as much noise as a bear-garden.

—What goes on, I asked Bartholomew Knox, the first man I saw, that you are all stirred up like unto a nest of ants?

—Calamities and maledictions, Fabian, quoth he; someone hath stolen Master Pakeman's daughter away.

I clothed myself in surprise; but Knox knows no more, and how should he so?

—There looks to be no work done this day, he says, do you go home presently.

But I said nay: Why my indenture doth not permit that, and you know it well, Master Knox, having been prentice yourself in your time.

—Tis true, says he; keep yourself apart then, and do you not vex Master Pakeman further.

I was pleased enow to follow this good advice for much of the work of the prentice printer is unpleasant and tedious; inking the form with the ball (the which is a leathern pad stuffed with wool and nailed to a wooden handle) is none the less more pleasant than cleansing the same, when that they become clogged with ink; the which is done with urine, and the pelts then stripped off must be trod on until that the ink is worked out.

The boy Humphrey however was performing his morning task of collecting the drips and drops of tallow from the candles, not a whit distressed by all the perturbation around him.

It was as I was musing on all this that Master Pakeman himself came up to me, and on his face a very thunderstorm.

—Where is journeyman Roger, Fabian? he asks me in a tone deceptively mild. Dost thou know? For I know that you both do ring bells together.

—I know not, Master Pakeman, I told him truthfully (although I have a good idea where Roger is gone, yet I do not *know)*.

—Didst thou see him at all yesternight?

And then I must needs bear false witness to my master and say Nay; Not since he went away from here.

—Well then, quoth he, mayhap he will come hence.

—In good time, says I, making terrible bold.

At which my master makes a sour face and replies, Ay, in his *own* good time.

[5] wonderful to relate

Into this turmoil suddenly arrived Roger Southwell himself, and on his arm a woman cloaked so her face was covered. As when you do drop a stone into a pool and ripples spread outwards, so then a silence spread in the room. Master Pakeman turned to see Roger, and I could detect no trace of art nor magic about the man; nor was he in his customary black humour.

—Master, says he, here's your daughter Ann rescued safe from her captor; and we all stood amazed as she took down the cloak from her face.

—How camest thou here, and in such company? demands Master Pakeman. And art thou truly unharmed? I shall want your tale, Master Southwell, and twill go hard with you an you cannot explain how this came to pass.

—Tis simple enough, says Roger, quiet and modest like unto an humble man, for I have seen your daughter stolen, and have rescued her.

—How can this be? quoth my Master; Ann, does he speak truth?

And she replied, so soft that I must needs strain to hear, Ay, father.

—I will hear more of this, says her Father, but not here among all these flapping ears. Do you, Bartholomew, set the boys and prentices to their tasks; and you, Roger, with us to my room.

I had the tale of what befell there later from Roger, who was in a fine humour about it all. For he had spun a fine tale to Master Pakeman: coming out of an inn, the *Swan*, that he frequents, said he, he saw a maid struggling with a man who seemed like to do her ridiculous harm, and being a most chivalrous youth, determined to interrupt; To which end he seized the man by the shoulder and swung him round, only to cry out in surprise as he recognised Ann Pakeman, his master's daughter.

—Mistress Ann, how camest you in this pickle? he cries, but she hath no time to make reply for her captor draws his sword. Roger presently takes hold of the man's wrist and wrenches the blade from his grip (Roger being a long man, and timbersome, this tale is easy to credit), punching him in the face with the hilt; the man falls sense-less to the ground and Roger goes to the aid of Mistress Ann, who is fallen in a swoon.

Therefore hath he taken her to his own lodging and left her in the care of his land-lady, one *Doll Fawcett*, till the morrow when that she is well enow to return to her father.

The witty Roger hath recited this flummery with an air of great delight, and I begged him to tell me what truly had befallen yesternight.

—I do not believe that you do not know; *futuo*, what other thing? he replied. We were away to my lodging and I had her maidenhead of her (I felt mine own yard stirring at this tale) and when that we were done we slipped down-stairs and I wakened the good Doll with my tale of rescuing a distressed maiden.

—Cracked-piece, more like, says I.

—Ay, for I docked the dell in her plum-tree sweet, he replied with a smile.

—And what now will befall? I asked.

—Why, Fabian, quoth he, is it not as plain as a pike-staff? Our master believes me to be a stout man and a man of honour and much else besides, and hath given me leave to pay court to Ann.

—An you've filled her panniers, I asked, what happens an she be brought to bed of a child? Will you wed her? But to this he merely smiled and made no reply.

I watched him go with his swashbuckling way and did wonder what would befall, although such matters

I do not wish to learn; although there be fortune-tellers enough, and Gypsies willing to speak of such things (an a man do pay them); indeed that Thos. Audley of whom I spake had his fortune told by such an one and he said it was a mean petty thing that told him many things common, but had him beware of some body who should be with him to borrow money of him, but that he should lend them none.

Which advice Tho Audley never did need for he never had no coin that I ever did see, being so close-pursed as a Scotchman. Nor did I ever hear any fulfilment of this prophecy.

Now for a space of time all is of an even tenor with us: we rang our bells and drank our ale (when that we had coin to buy it) and I did meet a girl named Catherine Alsop, a very pretty girl, whom I would fain pay court to, but she would have none of me because of my lowly station; But Nate Mundy told me of a cut he knew who would swive for a farthing.

—Does she then live on Cheap-side, I asked, and they all laughed. But I did not forget her name, not being in the habit of losing sight of useful things.

Roger paid his court to Ann Pakeman, and I watched with care but she did not quicken; whether this was Roger's luck or his art I never did know.

In all his dealings he did seem a very gentleman *justum et tenacem proposti*[6] which was a great miracle to me who knew the man and of his thoughts could guess somewhat, and would never believe he had ceased from drabbing.

That this was his art I did not think neither, for he had his rut and I do believe the love of Ann Pakeman withall; moreover since that I had used his unguent I had come to learn the sensation of magic: There is a taste and savour in the air when that it is in use, a smell and a brightness. I only mentioned this but the once and that to Matthew Boys and Hugh Bishop, only to find that they them-selves never felt such a thing at all; and that was the strangest thing of all to me.

In the meantime I did not cease to think about many things: how to construe or compose or make a new method for ringing that should be different from any before designed. How that I should make Catherine Alsop look on me with favour. How (and to this end I have made notes in another place) to work towards producing a book of changes and all the peals rang set down therein (the which is a matter closely mewed up with *Imprimis)*; this mayhap I must have another write the book, for I have no great opinion of my prose. But to print it, when that I have mine own workshop (although that lieth some years in the future), to publish such a book and bring knowledge of the art to all those who would learn *(littera scripta manet)*[7].

So might *Hermes Trismegistus* in the ancient past have contemplated the dissemination of his alchemical art; so that now we see such as Roger Southwell using this same art, the art of Ægypt, whence come the *Gypsies*, for happiness, the which is surely the aim of every man.

Another Roger there was once, Roger Bacon, and he had in his study a brazen Head that would tell a man true things an he asked it; and a man named Michael Scot, that both could fly, men say; and they say this too of Saint Adhelm, once Abbot of Malmesburie, but he was a papist.

Also I observed my master, when that mine own tasks and duties allowed; choleric he ever was, of a fiery humour, and yet since that Roger first paid court to his daughter all that did seem quenched in him. Though I myself heard her say to him that she did indeed love Roger, still did he bear the semblance of a man unbe-

[6] upright and tenacious *(Odyssey)*

[7] the written word is permanent

lieving; but why he should seem so shrunken and old I never did know. However he retained his serpent's tongue, but it was less of a venomous thing than lately.

Further persecution by the usurper; an old Knight, instiled Sir Henry Vane, is imprisoned on Isle of Wight for a book he published, only one of many sent to prison.

Rec'd a letter from my brother *Francis* at Oxford, who states that his friend *Richard Duckworth* (A ringer of distinction, says Francis; but Francis thinks any man that can ring a plain course of *Granser Bob* is a very great Ringer) has made many notes for a book on the art, the which I found greatly strange because of mine own inclination in this matter. I determined to write back appraising Francis of this and mayhap one day to meet this Richard Duckworth; though while that I am a prentice printer in London and he a nascent Sir-John in Oxford such a meeting will be nigh impossible; unless like unto a magus I could fly thither.

I do think that a book is a small miracle: in it is distilled wisdom of a man who is dead, or whom he that reads shall never know; but also it is of its self a wondrous thing; for as with changes, there exists an infinitum of faces of type, each shewing forth his own pattern and making his own music, if this be not too extravagant a fancy: what mysteries lie within the capabilities of bold type, or italic type; Roman, Gothic, Dutch and German; It was this, I do believe, which took my fancy as a mere Infant, for I do remember my Mother telling me that even before that I went to school and could read, I wished for naught better than to look upon my Father's books; and when she most carefully shewed a page to me I would stare transfixed at nothing more than a line of type: I was a very *helluo liberorum*.[8]

My Father being a man of the cloth I am sure had hoped this to be an early manifestation of a similar calling in myself (believing with the poet that

> The World's a Printing-house: our words, our thoughts,
> Our Deeds, are Characters of sev'rall sizes;
> Each Soule is a Compos'tor; of whose faults
> The Levits are Correctors; Heavn revises;
> Death in the common Press; from whence, being driven,
> W'aregather'd Sheet by Sheet,& bound for Heav'n.)

But he was disappointed in me, being very much *asinus ad lyram*[9] as tis said; damn him any way, an I'd not spent years at the Universitie I had been out on my indentures ere now; for myself I do believe two clergy more than sufficient for any family; and trust my Father was satisfied when that my brother followed him on the church's path.

For myself I think that I am too easily tempted by the sins of the flesh to have sat comfortably with the cloth, nor do I find it in my heart to give credence to many of those things they would have us believe or feel proper awe for the Jack-in-the-box. (That one in the pulpit, I mean, and not him beneath the bed.) And, indeed, had I not gone off for a printer I would not have witnessed such wonders as Roger Southwell hath shewn to me.

Around this time Master Pakeman's sister (a widow-woman) came to live with my master; and it is true that she misliked Roger Southwell exceedingly, and it is my belief that she set her son (a roynish mean-featured villain) to spy upon him. And the name of this scab was Hawkin Kemp (which is to say Harry) and the

[8] glutton for books

[9] one unsuited to an occupation (lit. an ass with a lyre)

name of Daniel Pakeman's sister was Elizabeth Kemp.

And howsoever it was that it happened, this Kemp did spy Roger in an Inn with some doxy who was not Ann (tis my belief, knowing Roger, that twas but a whore, for the place was little better than a stew); thereafter every time I turned around when that I was with Roger I did spy the villain.

—He can do naught, Roger said when I spoke of it. Mine is the power, and Ann Pakeman is mine too.

—Have a care, Roger, quoth I, that one is as full of malice as an egg is full of meat, and his dam not less; And they mean you ill. For all your powers you are not proof against a stiletto in the heart.

—Come now, Fabian, he replied, I can keep myself safe; But hold, I have a thing for thee; And he put in my hand a small stone jar, saying, Dost thou not open it now, but twill come to thine aid in the matter of that Catherine-kitling that thou art afire for.

—Is't a love-philtre? I asked.

—Not exactly, but twill give aid. Tis for to thank thee.

—For what? says I.

—Why, for being an honest rogue, says Roger, and clapped me on the shoulder.

And I was right glad to have it; for it is true that *amare et sapere vix deo conceditur*[10] and thoughts of Catherine were taking my thoughts away from my labours.

At the door of the inn I turned, but all that I did see was the back of Roger Southwell as he went into the nether rooms, the which was not a thing that honest men were wont to do; but then I never did take Roger for an honest man. Truth to tell I was now more concerned with the stone jar in my hand and immodest thoughts of Catherine Alsop which the farthing drab (who did not live on Cheap-side after all) had failed to make me forget.

To look backwards on an event and consider how better to have acted that it should better have concluded is likelier the work of a philosopher and of no use to them that suffered thereby; But an Roger had taken more heed on Hawkin Kemp (or I had thought him of more account); mayhap certain things would not have happened. For certes it is that this Kemp worked for the downfall of Roger Southwell and that was all that filled his Mind.

Under the watchful Eye of Bartholomew Knox I was putting type in the bed and trying with little success to banish lewd thoughts of Catherine Alsop, when that this Kemp comes crying for Master Pakeman.

—Do you, Fabian, take the gentleman up, says Knox, the which vexed me mightily as that part of the trade I was learning ran more in accord with my taste than others on which I must needs spend much more of my time. Kemp was all in a fine fluster and more like a frighted horse than a man, half of a shiver and half like a man *maris appetens.*

—Master Pakeman here's Hawkin come to see you, says I, and Kemp scowls at me like as if to say, Tis your turn next; but I am damned ere I will be civil to the cur. My master seems as much pleased as I to see him but he bade me show the fellow in, the which I did do; but without the door I lingered, breathing so quiet as a bird.

—Well and then, I heard Master Pakeman say, what do you here, Hawkin, when that I am at my work.

—O nuncle, quoth the puppy, I have found that thing which you want, do you just come and see with your

[10] Even gods rarely have love and wisdom at the same time

own eyes.

—I need no convincing, boykin, says Master Pakeman, tis my daughter that's bemused by the wretch.

—O I have a plan, cries Kemp, a most quaint plan, for to show her the effeminacy of this sauce-Jack.

—And how may I do that, villain? Would you have me take my daughter into a vile inn amongst the common whores and drabs? My master's voice was chill as ice. And there followed a silence in which my breath seemed to come loud as a raging wind, although I felt I was nigh unto not breathing at all.

And then Bartholomew Knox did come up the stairs and beheld me; he opened his eyes very wide and seemed like to speak, but I gestured him to stay silent; he did so but beckoned me to come away, the which command I must needs obey. And when that we were come down and away he took me by the arm and spake sternly.

—Give me none of your long-tongued tales, Master Fabian, but tell me straight what you are at.

I was in a confusion at this for I knew not what to say; *Certes*, I could not tell the whole story. Why, I said, I do doubt that this Kemp means my master ill; therefore I listened, to hear what mischief I might.

—Do you get about your business, quoth Bartholomew Knox, and he but cuffed me lightly.

I bent my head once more to my tasks but now hearkened but imperfectly to the words of Master Knox; but I see no sign of Roger in the workshop, whom I must inform of what I had lately heard. And in a pissing-while Kemp passed me by and I spit at him, but missed.

Now I am at pains to discover where Roger might be; yet I must needs wait until the end of the day, when I might encounter him in the *Swan,* or the *George,* or the *Saracen's Head,* or any of an hundred taverns; and am like to be too late to foil the designs of Kemp, soever end he worketh towards.

And must I needs also forgo the company of Catherine, the thought of whose fair form in naked-bed is now a continuing fever in my loins; but tis thanks to Roger that I breached her defences and have lain with her (in truth, and none of that bundling as they do in the country), and do believe that she is not opposed to this coupling: I hear my name on her lips and it is very sweet. Thus if I am to act as Roger's ally I durst not forsake him when those who mean him ill are working their machinations.

Never did a day seem so long or go by so slow as did that day, nor did it come to its end having bestowed upon me any solution to the dilemma, *videlicet,* wherefore I should find Roger and what indeed I should do when that I did find him. I did believe that Kemp would as lief have Roger's blood on his sword as not; but did not impute such an Intention to Master Pakeman.

When that we prentices were finally given leave to depart it was rising dark in the streets; I hied me first to the *Swan,* asking of the potboy and the serving-wench and the innkeeper whether that they had seen Roger Southwell, but they answered me nay; like-wise in the *George* and the *Saracen's Head,* but it was at that inn that I remembered Roger had been likelier to be in the back rooms than drinking alone, for it is well known as a trugging-place. Though I had not the coin to pay those queans, nor did I desire to, being filled up with thoughts of Catherine; But then I had no choice but to go in for who should I see entering the inn but my master with Kemp and another man in a cloak.

I slipped through the door and found myself in a dark passage, stopping very still for I was blind, nor did any window relieve the blackness. I would fain have stilled the pounding of my heart, twas the second time that day I found myself creeping like unto a thief in places I should not have been. The noise from the Inn was

still to loud for me to hear other sounds to guide me, and I did not knowe at all what I should do.

I had come but a short way from the door by which I had entered, going sidewise in the darkness like I were a crab. Then did open that same door and through it came some man with a candle, closely followed by two more. I would not say I was surprised to recognise Master Pakeman; horror-struck would be the better word; but he was most surprised to see me, nor was there any place to hide.

The candle lit up his visage from beneath, giving him a most ghastly countenance, made more horrid by the fierce scowl on his features; and I'd liefer have heard him shout and rant than to hear him say in soft and threatening tones, What do you here, Fabian?

I heard then the thin whisper of a sword being drawn, and wondered for a mad instant an he intended to slay me, but twas only the puppy Kemp; I could not see the face of the third.

—Why Master, said I, no longer caring what he thought of me, what every man does here.

—Do you think on what your Father would say, he replied, for it will be my duty to inform him.

—I am but a man, I said, but he had turned his attention to another matter.

—Stay him here, Hawkin, he said, and to his other companion: Dost thou come with me. And it was plain that he knew whither to go for he led the other up the stairs.

Kemp stuck his own candle in a wall-sconce and waved his sword at me. I could spit you like a fowl and he none the wiser, quoth he.

—I think not, says I, reaching behind for mine own dagger, which is hid in the back of my clothes, staying out of range of the whelp's blade.

—Pah, he says, what art thou, a petty prentice, and thrust at me; the which I dodged with ease, and spit in his eye; this time I hit in the gold. Whilst he was thus blinded I kicked him in his stones; he dropped his sword with a cry and I put my foot upon it and hit him hard in the face. I could have run him through myself and no man think badly of me for doing it since twas he who struck first and at a man unarmed; instead I picked up his own sword and put it to his throat, enjoying the shocked look in his eyes and feeling a strong stirring in my loins.

—Petty prentice, is it, says I, and laughed; and then I smelled the pungency of urine. Twas revenge enough; I took his candle and left him weeping like a woman in the dark, to see an I could tell where my master had gone to; nor did I expect him to remain my master for a great space of time thereafter. But I found him not, only an empty passage, and so knew there must be a back stair.

Out of a room then comes Roger Southwell fastening his clothes, and stopped amazed to see me with a sword in my hand.

—Fabian, he began.

But I stopped him, saying Soft. No time to waste, quoth I, and related my tale.

—But who could that be, the cloaked man, he asked when that I had done.

—I know not, I said, but they mean you ill, all three of them.

—Is't murder in their hearts? asked Roger, but I think he asked the air and not myself; although Hawkin Kemp would have murdered me now had he the opportunity, the which I meant to insure that he did not.

—Thou didst well, Fabian, Roger said, seeming mildly surprised, as well he might, I fancy, I being neither hector nor bravo. Let us now hie down these stairs and drink some Ale, and he clapped me on the shoul-

der as he had done before. I reversed my grip on the sword so no man might think I was threatening any sort of brangle.

—How is't with thee and thy Kitling? he asked me a while later.

And I replied, Tis well.

—Get thee to her, then, quoth he, I can look out for mine own self now: forewarned is forearmed. But I thank thee, Fabian; very much do I thank thee.

So although I still did doubt that he was in peril, I stood up to leave the inn.

In the street outside, the which was very dark, there being but a fingernail of a moon in the sky, a cloaked figure came up to me. For the space of one breath I did believe it to be Roger, for the cloak was like unto his own; but I knew that he could not have been there ere I was. And indeed the man was too little in height.

A hand plucked my arm, and a voice whispered my name, Master Stedman, and it was not the voice of a man. I looked at the hidden face, and a light from the window fell on it then, and I was stonished to recognize Ann Pakeman: dressed in boy's clothes and very strange to behold.

—Help me, she rounded in my ear, I must see Roger, for I believe my Father means to have him murdered.

—Rest easy, Mistress Ann, says I, he is safe, he is warned.

—Is he within? she asked.

And I replied, Ay.

—I beseech you, do you bid him attend me here, she said.

—But you could go within doors yourself, said I, in that disguise.

At the which she smiled and said, Clothes maketh the man, but blushes make a woman; the which I thought was a clever conceit and very witty for a woman.

—Do you bide here, then, I said, and I will fetch him to you; and went back inside the inn.

I saw that Roger had finished his ale and was staring at the table; he did not observe me at first. Then he looked up; before he could speak I told him that Mistress Ann was without, dressed as a man.

—She must needs be in great anxiety for you, I said; he got to his feet and followed me to the door.

—Where then is she, he enquired, for we could not see her. I looked around and could perceive naught but a bottle of rags in the gutter.

—Mistress Ann, I called; then out of the shadows comes Master Pakeman, alone this time.

His eyes met mine own and he said, By now your comrade, the lecher, is dead; I turned my head to Roger behind me and was on the point of speaking, but Master Pakeman then looked down and beheld the bundle. He lifted his lanthorn and I saw that it was not old rags but a cadaver with a sack over the head and torso; it had been stabbed three or four times, and the blood on the sack was black in the dim light.

Roger pushed by me and spake: Master Pakeman.

I never saw such a look as that on my Master's Features then, rage and doubt and wonder chasing each other across his visage.

—Then who is this, he demanded, in a whisper more horrid than a shout. I believe that I knew the dreadful answer before it did dawn upon either Roger or my Master; but it was Master Pakeman who knelt by the corpse and stripped aside the bloody sack to reveal, *horresco referens*,[11] the face of his daughter Ann.

[11] horrid to tell

—Ann, Ann, quoth he in broken tones, then to Roger in a voice of thunder, This is your doing.

—Mine? cried Roger, and in his voice grief as deep as the ocean-seas, a loss that echoed in the skies and made me shiver at its emptiness, for this was a man with a void within; I saw the tears running down his face. Why, you foolish old man, I loved her better than ever you did, to keep her mewed up and deny her even a little space of joy.

Master Pakeman buried his face in his hands, I that thought he too was weeping. And then the rain began, and washed away the blood and the tears both; And I slipped away, being not comfortable with such grief, to seek solace in my Catherine's Arms, and in her bed, and in her body, and in *amabilis insania*.[12]

[12] a pleasing madness of rapture *(Odyssey)*

4 : A Weariness of the Flesh

‘Fruits fall and love dies and time ranges;
  Thou art fed with perpetual breath,
And alive after infinite changes,
  And fresh from the kisses of death;
Of languors rekindled and rallied,
  Of barren delights and unclean,
Things monstrous and fruitless, a pallid
  And poisonous queen.

‘Could you hurt me, sweet lips, though I hurt you?
  Men touch them, and change in a trice
The lilies and languors of virtue
  For the raptures and roses of vice;
Those lie where her foot on the floor is,
  These crown and caress thee and chain,
O splendid and sterile Dolores,
  Our Lady of Pain.’

Swinburne, *Dolores (Notre-Dame des Sept Douleurs)*

James Rendall inhabited a curious circular house on the outskirts of Fenstanton. Alan thought it might be a converted windmill, but avoided asking the bookseller on such brief acquaintance, especially as he had not quite liked the man. He could not help being beguiled by the house, however: a dwelling of barely ordered chaos, full of books and bears; the paintings on the walls indicated an eclecticism leaning more towards the Renaissance than any other period.

Rendall led them into a room more full of books than any other, but it was not these which first engaged Alan’s attention: it was a small, dark, old painting of a woman in a gown with a plain lace collar. Out of the picture and across the centuries she confronted them boldly, her red lips curled in a knowing and not entirely pleasant smile.

‘That’s Roger Southwell’s “Dark Lady”,’ their host remarked. ‘You know about her?’

Alan shook his head.

‘No-one knows who she was, or even who painted her portrait, though some people think Southwell painted it himself.’

‘She’s - sinister,’ said Kim, with distaste.

‘What’s this verse?’ enquired Alan. He thought the painting’s current frame was probably nineteenth-century; attached to its base was a small, tarnished plaque on which were inscribed verses he had to squint to read:

‘*While she, in her garden of poison,*
  Weaves subtly the music of death
To call to the halls of her master
  The lovers who bring her their breath.

‘Though nothing as salt or as sanguine
As blood doth she drain from her court,
Yet that which she takes is as vital
And must just as dearly be bought.’

‘Swinburne?’ Kim enquired, looking at Rendall, who shrugged, and, turning to one of the bookshelves, began to pull out volumes for them.

‘I’ll leave you to it, shall I? Would you like coffee?’

Two hours and several cups later, they were very little further advanced. Although they had found an account of the bells which once had jangled from the tower of Fenstanton Abbey, neither their inscriptions nor their ultimate fate - or fates - were forthcoming.

For some odd reason which neither Alan nor Kim could figure out - unless, as Kim suggested, it was simply the fact that seven was a number of some mystical significance - the tower had housed seven bells, not, as would be usual, an even number: one a fifteenth-century bell cast by one Jeoffrey Belyetere and the remainder in 1658 by a Thomas Chandler *‘whose Kin were thought to be bell Founders in Buckingham shire’*. The tower *‘fell down’* in 1699 according to one source, which also implied that the fall had not been spontaneous and opined that the bells had been removed some time prior to this.

Kim ran her hands through her cropped hair in exasperation.

‘This is driving me barmy,’ she said. ‘Why can’t we find out what *happened* to the bells? Oh, hold on, what’s this?’ referring to a tattered pamphlet which had just fallen out of the book she was holding. She unfolded it gingerly.

Meanly printed and not easily legible, it was entitled *‘An Account of the Worke of Removing the Bells from Rog. Southwell’s Tower’, Printed by B.K. at his Shop mdcciii A.D.* The initials F.S. were written under the title in ink. Inside the single fold the spread was numbered *ii* on the left and *vii* on the right, but Kim’s nascent groan of frustration was never given voice, because page *vii* read:

‘...neuer Hath been Safe sith it was Built.

The Belyetyre Bell was took to the Foundrie at Whyte-chapple for Bell-Mettal being crackt; Being a most Antient Bell nam’d Gabreele.

The other Bells Bought and Pay’d For by Mr. Robt. Clark with the Exeptioun of the Trebble for the Church of Saint Cross in Wilt-shire; the Trebble no Farther than All-Saints-Church nearby.’

‘Alan!’ exclaimed Kim in a voice which cracked like a broken bell itself, so unlike her usual tone that the startled face she made brought a hoot of laughter from Alan. ‘All the time - look - one of the bells is in All Saints.’

Alan squinted at the crabby print and the line of illegible script at the foot of the page. ‘But what about the others?’

‘Easy to look up. St Cross isn’t a common dedication. Good thing it’s not St Mary’s, there are millions of them.’

‘Oh, don’t. Always assuming they are still there, I suppose. But let’s go and look at the treble first.’

‘How? It’s a redundant church. You can’t just go and ask the vicar, ’cause there ain’t one.’

‘Well, how do you get permission to ring there?’

‘Redundant Churches Commission, I should imagine.’

‘More delays,’ sighed Alan.

‘Not necessarily. What do you bet our reluctant host has got something on the church?’

‘Good thought.’

Kim hunted among the books for a few minutes, but the library was arranged on somewhat eccentric lines and they eventually had to admit defeat and ask Rendall. He found for them a privately printed booklet, the artwork for which had been produced on an elderly typewriter with a wayward lower-case *‘a’*.

‘Eureka,’ said Alan. ‘Listen: *“the treble dates from 1658 and formerly hung in nearby Fenstanton ‘Abbey’ (despite its name, a secular building) prior to its collapse. It was the work of one Thomas Chandler and weighs two hundredweight exactly. The inscription reads:* Sum Rosa Pulsata Mondi Maria Vocata, *which is to say,* My name is Mary; for my tone I am known as the Rose of the World”.’

‘Well, that doesn’t help very much,’ grumbled Kim. ‘I suppose we’ll have to find the rest of the damned things now.’

‘Let’s just hope that the one that was melted down isn’t part of the riddle.’

‘Don’t you just bet it is, though?’

Alan nodded, grimacing, his attention turning once more to the dark portrait. Her eyes looked somehow not fixed in time - as if she knew things. Secrets. ‘That painting,’ he said.

‘She looks like a vampire,’ muttered Kim, who seemed unreasonably disquieted by the portrait. They both stared at it for a long moment. Kim was the first to look away: her gaze dropped to the table, and snagged on the yellowed pamphlet.

‘This may be a silly thought,’ she said, ‘but what if this *F.S.* stood for Fabian Stedman?’

‘That’s it!’ Alan exclaimed. ‘Dammit, that’s the link. *That’s* why the name Roger Southwell rang bells. Of course! What a *twit!’*

‘You going to let me in on this?’ demanded Kim.

‘Stedman knew Roger Southwell. It’s in my notes somewhere - you remember those pieces I wrote for Simon? About ringing in the seventeenth century? And old Matthew Boys and his opera?’

‘Well?’

‘That was when I found it. Southwell and Stedman.’

Kim opened the brittle pages again and peered closely at the line of script at the bottom of the page; she was unfamiliar with the idiosyncrasies of seventeenth-century handwriting, but managed to puzzle it out after a while. Unexpectedly, a shiver walked across her shoulders.

But what became of Roger Southwell, it read.

It was late when Alan and Kim finally got home, having stopped to eat vile things at a horrible pub restaurant en route, but Alan could not shake the habit of study. Whatever compelling enthusiasm was sending him in search of Roger Southwell took him to his own bookshelves, from which he pulled out the little white book known to all campanologists by the name of its compiler, *Dove* (Alan liked the bilingual pun with the Italian for ‘where’). Within its pages are details of every ring of bells in the world, and like a map it exudes a strange magnetism.

The dedications of churches, from St Edmund King and Martyr and Saint Swithun to Saints Mary and Ethelflæda, to those curious indigenous Cornish saints like St Gluvias, St Melina and St Hyderock (who on earth were they?); the more curious, to Alan's mind, fact that some churches appear to have no dedications at all; the *'ceramic bells'* (or, to be more precise, flower-pots) of Liss; and the odd snippets of interpolated information, from the expected *'Anti-clockwise'* and sadly all too frequent *'Unringable'* and *'Derelict'*, to the intriguing *'Ropes 1,2,3, and 4 fall in straight line on North side and 5 on opposite side'*, *'Round Tower'*, and *'Rung from middle aisle'*.

In his enthusiasm, Alan had momentarily forgotten that the guide is set out, in the main, alphabetically by town or city; and so found himself forced to cross-reference from the index to nearly two hundred entries listed for Wiltshire. There was, to his relief, only one *'St Cross'* dedication: the parish church of a town called Market Peverell.

Dressing-gowned, Kim yawned her way into Alan's study. 'Are you coming to bed, or what?'

'I guess so,' replied Alan. 'I've found St Cross, anyway. Not that it helps much.'

'We must have a Salisbury Guild report somewhere, from that outing. You never throw anything away.' said Kim. 'It'll be in there.'

'Hell, yes, I never thought of that.'

Diocesan Guild Annual Reports are useful booklets to ringers: where *Dove* gives bare bones, each of these little chap-books fleshes out the detail, giving the name and address of a contact, usually that individual known as a tower-captain, for each tower.

Alan spent the next half-hour looking for that years-old Salisbury Guild report, finding it eventually - in true *Purloined Letter* style - on the bookshelf next to Wilson's *Change Ringing*, barely six inches away from *Dove*'s usual home. By this time he was too tired to keep his eyes open, so he fell into bed at last and slept, untroubled by dreams.

'Kim,' said Alan in the morning, when she came upstairs carrying two mugs of tea.

'I know what you're going to say,' she interrupted, dumping the *Sunday Times* on his feet. It felt more like the *Encyclopædia Britannica.* '"Kim, how'd you like a little trip to Wiltshire?"'

'Kim, I know you don't like treasure-hunts, but what if there's real treasure at the end of this one?'

'I just hope that strip-cartoon on the tomb is allegorical, then. By the way, Alan--'

'Mm?'

'Ring up the tower-captain first. You can't just turn up on a complete stranger's doorstep, however hospitable ringers are.'

'I suppose so.'

Suddenly oddly reluctant, Alan picked up the Salisbury Report and leafed through it. He took a gulp of his tea, and nearly scalded himself; flicked through the colour supplement and read the book club inserts. At last he picked up the phone, glancing at Kim as he did so: she was engrossed in the book reviews.

After several rings, a woman's voice answered with elderly precision: 'Warminster 8699210.'

'Hello, could I speak to Mr Joseph Baker, please?'

'I'm sorry,' said the voice in an oddly strained way, 'he's been dead five years.'

'Oh Lord, I'm sorry. Is that Mrs Baker?'

‘Yes. Can I help?’

‘I was wanting to get in touch with the tower captain at Market Peverell.’

‘That’s Will Osborn now. I’ll give you his number.’

‘Pen,’ Alan mouthed at Kim, who passed him one.

Will Osborn, when Alan managed to get hold of him, proved to be one of those relentlessly chatty people whose conversation resembles the famed Chinese water torture in that it never ceases. Alan explained about wanting to see, and possibly photograph, the bells; he did not say why.

‘I’m really fond of those bells, you know, Mr Bellman. That’s a good name for a ringer, isn’t it? I expect you’re fed up being told that, aren’t you? They go like a dream, it’s partly due to yours truly (I tell you without false modesty), I have to tell you, I spend hours in the belfry cosseting them, and they’re truly sweet now. Well, as to inscriptions, the top five all have some Latin or something written on ’em, but I never was a classical scholar so I never took no note of it. You’ll find it a bit cramped in the belfry, I dunno whether you could take pictures, maybe if you had a special camera or something. Anyway we’re ringing a quarter this evening, like to get one of our youngsters through his first, so we left the bells up this morning; but you’re welcome to come and see them after the quarter. You won’t disturb the congregation if you come in through the vestry, I’ll get someone to let you in, ’cause we’ll be going to Evensong as usual. Service is at six, but of course you could come along before and have a gander at the church, or even a grab if you’d like; I don’t know whether you’re interested in church architecture at all but it’s a pretty little church, and some of the stained glass is a treat. Escaped old Cromwell and his vandals, you know. We’ve got a mediaeval rose window, even - every bit as good as York Minster, though it’s smaller of course. As you’re interested in history you might want to look at the peal-boards as well, there’s a couple of eighteenth-century ones in the ringing-chamber. Well now I mustn’t keep you, Mr Bellman. I’ll say goodbye, and hope to see you this evening.’

‘’Bye,’ responded Alan meekly to the dead phone line, not a little overwhelmed. ‘Vaccinated by a gramophone needle, as Groucho would say,’ he said to Kim. He relayed a portion of Will Osborn’s speech to her.

‘Wide-angle lens,’ she said succinctly. ‘I’ll take the sixteen mil’.’

It was just beginning to rain as the two of them scrambled into Kim’s car. The drapery of moisture dulled the spirits as surely as it drenched the landscape. Even *Trovatore* on the stereo failed to lift their spirits. Alan had a vague sense of disquiet, like a gentle squeezing in the hollow of his stomach, as if something irrevocable were about to happen.

He hoped it was just indigestion.

Some five miles from their destination, the rain stopped and the sky began to clear, fugitive rags of cloud fleeing on the upper air. Wan at first and watery, then gaining in strength, the sun reappeared as the travellers rounded a sharp and sudden bend and passed, on their left, a sign reading *‘Market Peverell - Twinned with St Bertrand de Comminges’*.

With a clatter which drowned out even Manrico’s call to arms from the speakers, *‘All’armi!’* a crowd of birds rose into the air from the trees on their right. For an instant the sky was blacker with their wings than it had been with clouds, and then Alan and Kim were in the village.

Slowing almost to a stop, Kim turned in her seat and stared out of the back window in astonishment.

‘Look! Ravens,’ she said. ‘Never seen so many.’

‘Probably crows,’ objected Alan. ‘Or rooks.’

‘Too big. I’m sure they were too big.’

‘Birds of ill omen,’ Alan intoned. ‘Huginn and Muninn.’

‘Pardon?’

‘Odin’s ravens. Mind and Memory.’

‘I thought they were called *Thought* and Memory.’

‘Same thing.’

‘Is it?’

‘There’s the church.’

Two men and a woman stood outside the church tower in the unmistakable limbo of people waiting for the rest of a band to turn up to ring a peal or quarter-peal. As such gatherings usually exclude outsiders, Alan and Kim hovered uncertainly near the church door.

One of the ringers, however, a wiry young man with a mop of unruly straw-coloured hair and a bushy beard, detached himself from the group and approached them.

‘Would you be Mr Bellman?’

Alan nodded.

The other man stuck out a large hairy paw-like hand. ‘Will Osborn.’

‘Hi,’ replied Alan, shaking it. ‘This is Kim Sotheran.’

‘Photographer,’ said Kim, somewhat unnecessarily as she was festooned with camera gear, and extended her own hand. ‘Nice to meet you.’

‘You brought your own photographer, did you? That’s efficient. I’m impressed.’

‘No need to be,’ said Kim. ‘We’re married.’

‘Ah! Well! Look, I found this—’ he thrust a book into Alan’s hands ‘– might be useful to you; now we’ll be up the tower in a tick for this quarter, that is if the others turn up (oh, that looks like two of ’em now). Would you like a quick grab before we start? Won’t take a sec. Come on up.’ He unlocked the door. ‘It’s a shame, but we have to keep it locked now. Hooligans, you know. Anyway, when we’ve rung down I’ll take you up myself. Don’t mind missing the service for once - I should do some work on the bells today anyway. Have you got some kind of special camera for confined spaces?’

‘I’ve brought an ultra-wide-angle lens,’ replied Kim. ‘Should cope with most things.’

Still chattering, Will Osborn led them up the narrow stone spiral stairs. St Cross, like many towers, had recycled its old bell-ropes in lieu of banisters. In the ringing-chamber, he supervised the ringing of rounds to let his guests have their grab, and then chivvied them out with a cheerful ‘See you later.’

In the church, Alan and Kim looked at each other. Kim grinned, and Alan let loose a chuckle. ‘Might as well look at this book, then,’ he said, turning his attention to it.

‘We’re spending all our time delving into musty books,’ complained Kim, looking at its dusty cobwebby binding with distaste. ‘I wonder how long this one’s been in someone’s attic?’

‘Sitting in a cupboard in the ringing chamber, more likely,’ said Alan, ‘along with forty years’ worth of *The Ringing World.*’ He put the book down on the font and opened it carefully. The spine made a cracking noise. ‘‘“*The Church of Saint Cross, Market Peverell, in the County of Wiltshire. By the Reverend Wilfred Hall,*

B.A., Rector. 1856. With numerous illustrations." What a pity it's in such a state.'

'Is there a contents page?'

'Here we are. *The Bells and Bell-tower, page 32*.'

He turned the yellow pages, thick like blotting-paper, with care, pausing en route to inspect the odd engraving; then, as the bells above them began their rounds, Alan and Kim began the next stage of their quest.

> 'In the fourteenth-century tower hang six bells of pleasing tone, the Tenor, or heaviest, being a new acquisition, cast by the Whitechapel Bellfoundry in 1850 to augment the five which have hung in St Cross since the early 18th Century. These bear interesting inscriptions, which will be set out later.
>
> Details of the six bells are as follows:-
>
> Treble. 2 - 8 - 9
>
> 2nd. 3 - 2 - 2
>
> 3rd. 5 - 1 - 8) Thomas Chandler 1658
>
> 4th. 6 - 2 - O
>
> 5th. 8 - O - 1)
>
> Tenor. 10 cwt in F Whitechapel 1850
>
> The inscriptions on the bells read as follows:-
>
> Treble. EMMANUEL OMNIPOTENS ORA ET BENEDICE EIS
>
> All-powerful Emmanuel pray and bless them
>
> 2nd. ECCE GABRIEL WHEREIN IS FOUND REST
>
> 3rd. KYRIE ELEISON + RAPHAEL NOCTU IGNIS OFFERE
>
> Lord, have pity + Raphael bring fire by night
>
> 4th SUM ROSA CIRCULI TENEBRIS NEBULAE NUNTIA
>
> I am the messenger, the Rose of the circle of dark clouds [it is thought that 'Rose' is here used in its secret sense]
>
> 5th. THOMAS SUM + OS ORPHEI + DIRUS IURATOR
>
> I am Thomas, Mouth of Orpheus, Dread Judge
>
> Tenor. VICTORIA REGINA 1850
>
> The curious inscriptions on the front five have never been satisfactorily explained; they appear inexplicable, unless they form part of some larger text. As the reader will observe they were not composed by a classical scholar.'

Kim stuck her hands in her pockets and flopped down in a pew. 'Can I swear in church?'

'Course not, the angels will strike you down.'

'Botheration, then. What the blazes does all that mean?'

At that moment the sun shattered in coloured fragments the stained glass on the western side of the church with one of those sudden effulgences which bring their figures to glowing life.

'The glass *is* nice,' Alan said; and above them, the bells stepped their measure, six in their stately pavane, the treble's silver thread treading an orderly path, the tenor's note mellow as the beat of a tuned tympanum keeping the rhythm. In and out, dodging to and fro, dancing their arcane pattern, the other bells rang the

method, a pastime ancient and melodious, a calling-on song for the congregation which echoed down the ages. Alan had never before thought that ringing could be subtle, but these bells sang so sweetly they beguiled him. Their sound sank into his heart, and made its home there.

5 : Renowned be thy Grave

‘My heart is suddenly in Italy.
Suddenly in that piercingly catching light
Caught, as by a thorn: images snag my mind,
The Italy of my mind, the sun
Clear as it is not here (or not
with the same clarity) pouring
Vernaccia into the gold...’

M M Thomas, *Towers*

The irrepressible Will Osborn led Alan and Kim up the stairs to the belfry, and opened the door to show them the bells in their oaken frame. The back five had been rung down, and pointed mutely to the dusty floor, silent and motionless and merely a potential for sweet music. The treble remained upright, like a chalice waiting to be filled. Through the louvres bright sunlight struck in stripes, pierced with dust, picking out details: a rope laid round a wheel, the treble’s blue clapper.

Kim noted, as she became progressively hotter and sweatier tucked in to that confined space taking photographs, that the inscriptions on the five Fenstanton bells were stacked:

EMMANVEL	ECCE	KYRIE	SUM	THOMAS
OMNIPOTENS	GABRIEL	ELEISON	ROSA	SUM
ORA	WHEREIN	+	CIRCULI	+
ET	IS	RAPHAEL	TENEBRIS	OS
BENEDICE	FOUND	NOCTV	NEBULAE	ORPHEI
EIS	REST	IGNIS	NUNTIA	+
		OFFERE		DIRUS
				IVRATOR

Intent on her work, she did not attach any significance to the layout of the words; but it was working like sugar and yeast in Alan’s mind - perhaps because his brain had got into the habit of puzzles - and when they eventually got home he did the same thing with the treble, solving the acrostic (to Kim’s relief) quickly.

‘You take the initial letter of each inscription and read across. That’s why three’s in English, to get the W, and four’s got *“kyrie eleison”* - the rest is just filling-in with Latin. That’s why it didn’t make sense to the Rev Hill.’

‘So what does it say?’ said Kim, peering at what Alan had written.

SUM	EMANUEL	ECCE	KYRIE	SUM	THOMAS
ROSA	OMNIPOTENS	GABRIEL	ELEISON	ROSA	SUM
PULSATA	ORA	WHEREIN	RAPHAEL	CIRCULI	OS
MONDI	ET	IS	NOCTU	TENEBRIS	ORPHEI
MARIA	BENEDICE	FOUND	IGNIS	NEBULÆ	DIRUS

VOCATA EIS REST OFFERE NUNTIA IURATOR

‘“SEEKST ROGERS POWR COME IN TOMB FIND VERONI”. What?’

‘Verony,’ said Alan smugly, placing a book, which she recognised as his dictionary of archaic words, in front of Kim. She followed his finger and read:

> ‘VERONY. The cloth or napkin on which the face of Christ was depicted, that which was given by Veronica before his crucifixion to wipe his face, and received a striking impression of his countenance upon it.
>
> *“Like his modir was that childe,*
> *With faire visage and mode ful mylde;*
> *Sene hit is bi the verony,*
> *And bi the ymage of that lady.”*
> *Cursor Mundi, MS.* Coll Trin. Cantab. f.ll5.’

‘Like the Turin shroud?’ she asked.

‘I suppose so.’

‘This means there’s some cloth somewhere with the imprint of a face?

Roger Southwell’s face?’

“‘COME IN TOMB”.’

‘It’s directing us back to where we started?’

‘Looks like it.’

‘Shit.’

‘As you say.’

‘I don’t suppose there was anything saying *PRESS HERE* on the tomb, was there?’

‘Not that I noticed. I’ll have to go back to Fenstanton.’

‘And do what? Dig him up?’

‘Hardly,’ said Alan, grimacing. ‘I reckon if I could shift the lid, I might find something.’

‘Shift the *lid?* Are you barmy? Who do you think you are, Burke and Hare? Even supposing you could move it.’

‘I don’t expect to find a body in there. That’s just the marker, the monument.’

‘You *are* barmy.’

‘Coming with me?’

‘I’ve got the Summers & Benson catalogue to shoot this week.’

‘Can’t you–’

“No, I can’t,’ said Kim, a little irritably. ‘You know it’s important, and it’s going to take till at least Thursday. Fenstanton will have to wait till the weekend.’

Alan had his own commitments, not least of them being deadlines. On Monday he had to travel into town to see a client - who insisted on calling his new range of cooking pots for the EEC market, on which Alan was currently working, the *‘pan-European’* catalogue: an expression which sent Alan into barely controlled hysterics whenever Stephen uttered it.

It was rarely that Alan used the Tube, living, as Kim and he did, at the far end of John Betjeman’s beloved

Metropolitan line. Most of his clients were based out of London and he would chug gently to their offices in his ancient Beetle, being overtaken by Metros, Golfs, and even the occasional milk-float. He didn't mind. When he had left - or, to be honest, been sacked from - from his last job four years before, he had shed the habit and the trappings of speed; had relinquished a shiny new BMW with hardly a qualm, and still counted himself extraordinarily lucky to be doing what he did, which - apart from the routine side of it - was basically getting paid for having fun.

For the first half of his journey the train swayed past fields and trees, a tamed and domesticated landscape and exciting no poetry in a present-day author, but a landscape nevertheless. The *Times* crossword had, unusually, defeated him, so he stared out of the window at the litter-strewn track.

Gradually the train filled up, enabling him to play *'what do they do for a living'* until the game palled - which was only about ten minutes, because he had no way of finding out whether he was right or not, and was coming up with the answer *'tart'* rather too often to be likely.

'What newspaper do they read' was better: he could still spot a *Guardian* at ten paces, even though many had defected to the *Independent,* but he quickly became depressed at the preponderance of tabloids.

He was staring past the right ear (which had no fewer than seven earrings in it) of the girl opposite him - blonde, pasty make-up, short skirt, and reading an unidentifiable tabloid - when he was struck by a very odd thought, one which was quite unlike the occasional whimsy which made its home in Alan Bellman's head.

It's no wonder women get attacked, he thought. *Don't they all look like victims? Who was it called them frails? Was it Mickey Spillane? Look at them, with their silly vacant little faces and their wide vulnerable eyes and their pouty little mouths. Look at their fat little hands that couldn't even lift their own typewriters. Look at the clothes they wear and their tottery spindly spiky shoes. Above all, look! Look at the absolutely dumb vacuous expressions on their faces. It's all saying: I'm weak and vulnerable, I need to be protected. But they go out into the world giving off signals like a wounded antelope to a lion, and then they bleat when they get attacked. And it's all due to an attitude. They walk like victims, even sit like victims with their knees clamped together, cringing into their seats.*

This was such an alien thought to Alan that he was past wonder at its invasion of his mind, although even in its grip he was aware of exceptions, Kim for one. Nobody could have called Kim frail, though she was slight and not tall: She stood and walked as though she were the hero in her story. If anyone had attacked Kim, Alan would have laid odds on *him* ending up with broken bones. She exuded a competence which was greater than Alan's own.

Feeling at once vaguely guilty and vaguely offended, Alan put his papers away and extracted a book from his briefcase just as the train marked its arrival at the perimeter of the metropolis by plunging abruptly into a tunnel. Its lights flickered on and off briefly as it changed tracks, then steadied, like Alan's thoughts.

There was a lot of work to do, and a return trip to Fenstanton began to look increasingly unlikely; to cap it all, Kim came home that evening with an odd expression (half-scowl, half-grin) on her face and the news that she had to fly to Rome at the end of the week. Ruins flipped into Alan's mind, and October sun mellow on them, the Castell Sant'Angelo, *Tosca*, the heights of St Peter's; and the crowds, the traffic and the fumes.

'I'm sorry it's happened now, but it could lead to more work for this client. I wish it was anywhere but Rome, I hate Rome.'

Alan looked at the nastily produced Italian literature which Kim's client had given her. 'It's like pseudo-Roman stuff, isn't it? You might be able to get to Tivoli, or Hadrian's villa, or somewhere nicer than the middle of Rome.'

'D'you want to come?'

Alan's heart yearned for Italy: like many Englishmen he felt it was his spiritual home; but he had to say, 'I don't think I can. I want to, but just look at all this stuff Stephen's given me.'

If Kim had any qualms about leaving Alan in the claws of a dawning obsession, she said nothing about it before flying out of Heathrow on Thursday evening. Alan had kitchenware copy coming out of his ears and by the time he said goodbye to Kim the two of them had been reduced to a state of weak giggling helplessness by a series of puns which had begun at awful and deteriorated from there.

At something of a loose end, Alan decided to go and call on the Westerbridge ringers, in the course of whose outing he had visited Fenstanton: Thursday was their practice night, and it was one which Alan usually enjoyed, and made more effort to attend than some others he could have mentioned, because he liked the people.

St Michael's, Westerbridge, had ten bells and more than its share of jokes about underwear, though it was rare now that all ten got going as they had only a few years before. The jokes continued, however.

The whole day had been incipient with thunder, airless and lion-coloured. Lightning split the heavens as Alan parked his car; he eyed the sky suspiciously, his vision fragmented by the brightness of the fork, and decided to play safe.

There was an umbrella on the back seat, half-submerged beneath old road atlases, photostatted details of ringing outings from the past five years or so, and other debris. He retrieved the brolly, muttering 'You can't fool me' to whoever controlled the weather. Thunder grumbled in reply. Then he headed for the church's tall white tower. It was a short walk and the skies retained their burden, bulging yellowly above.

Various voices greeted him as he opened the ringing-chamber door, and asked him how he was and whether it had started raining yet. He shook his head to the latter enquiry and waved to the Griffiths family, his passengers on the outing: Alec, Josie, and Debbie. Looking at Debbie, whom he'd probably known for eight years or so since she was a gangly Brownie in a peculiar knitted hat with badges all down her arms, it struck him very forcibly then that she'd suddenly grown up quite a lot. It had struck him before, of course, but not in quite such a way. He felt an ambivalent attraction which he hastily shoved away, recalling his strange thoughts in the train.

All in an instant the air released its held breath and a sudden chill blew in through the ringing-chamber window. The rains came with a sound which was almost a crash, and the smell of long-dry dust absorbing it rose strongly. Debbie leaned up and closed the window, Alan noticing how tall she was, and slim.

Very swiftly the storm came overhead, announcing its arrival with electrical effects which Alan thought overdone, drowning out the bells momentarily; and was as quickly gone, muttering off into the distance, leaving behind only the rain.

Even that was past by the time Alan came to go home once more, the only sign of its presence being shining streets and standing water which would drain away before morning came. He looked at his desk when he got in, and as swiftly dismissed it until the following day.

He awoke at seven, forestalling the alarm, determined to finish with his pots and pans quickly so he could go to Fenstanton at the weekend.

Despite a minor mishap when a bird's-nest fern, apparently harbouring a death-wish, jumped off the window-sill and into the kitchen sink, which was filled with water at the time, all was done by ten to five. Alan then spent a good twenty minutes hunched over the fax machine, swearing because it refused to transmit more than two pages in succession. Machinery and Alan did not get on: it had taken him a year to master his word-processor, and he still did not quite trust it not to eat pieces of copy and refuse to disgorge them. Programming the video recorder still remained beyond him, and he left that to Kim.

Saturday dawned overcast and dull, so Alan took the precaution of slinging his wellies into the car, together with an unspeakable old parka, a spade, and some of the black sacks the council insisted they used for household refuse. He realised, without attaching any particular significance to the fact, that he felt very peculiar. There was a kind of anticipation roiling in his stomach, the sort he hadn't felt since he was ten years old and looking forward to something exciting.

He felt at once hot and shivery, more like an incipient flu feeling than anything else: he pulled on a thick sweater and filled his pockets with aspirins, just in case. Then he spent some time staring at the rack of tapes, trying to decide what to take. Eventually he settled on *Andrea Chénier* and *Butterfly,* and shelled the cassettes from their boxes.

Thus fully equipped, he hopped into the car and turned the key with a brief prayer that it would start, which thankfully it did; his departure came as close to laying rubber on the road as a Beetle could. It did not occur to him until later in the day that he could have taken Kim's car, except that he usually didn't make a habit of using it if she was away.

As he travelled eastwards the sky darkened until he was forced to put his headlights on. Briefly, he substituted the radio in the hope of getting a weather-forecast and was rewarded with the information that he was following in the wake of yesterday's thunderstorms as they fled towards the North Sea, and consequently could expect some rather unpleasant weather conditions and temperatures no higher than eleven degrees Celsius.

'What's that in fahrenheit, you cretin?' Alan growled at the radio, trying to convert the figure. He jabbed irritably at the controls, resuming his music.

By the time he reached Fenstanton the rain was teeming down out of a sky the colour of steel. Alan parked as near to All Saints as he could and stared morosely through the windscreen, all enthusiasm gone.

Eventually he hauled his grubby parka and wellies from the back seat, squirmed his way into the former and inserted his feet into the cold interiors of the boots. He was pleased to find a pair of fingerless mittens in the pocket of the parka, and, leaving his spade behind for the moment, tramped grumpily through the belt of woodland. Wet branches aimed at his face to slap it, brambles reached for him, and chunks of unseen rock sneaked under his feet so that he turned his ankles. He tightened the string of his hood and tucked his chin down into the warmth of his scarf. It hardly seemed possible that he'd been here in a heatwave just a fortnight ago, he reflected crossly as he tripped over another tangly bit of undergrowth.

Alan emerged, as he'd planned, close to Roger Southwell's tomb. Somehow it looked different: he stood looking at it, wiggling his cold toes inside his wellies and wishing for the warmth of the car heater.

‘Well, get on with it,’ he told himself firmly, and approached the railings for the third time. As soon as he got through, he saw why it looked not as it had before.

It was no longer whole. The massive slab on top of the monument was cracked through into three separate pieces, scorched black in the centre. For a long instant Alan did not understand what it was that he was seeing, and then he realised what it must be: the tomb had been struck by lightning.

As he understood this, his heart gave a wild thump. This was almost as if it happened *for* him, as if he were meant to find something. For a moment some deep-buried part of him quailed, telling him frantically that it was far too much like the actions of some *deus ex machina* to be anything good; but he scrambled over the railings, disregarding the warning, and the next instant was tugging at the smallest piece of stone, which despite being the least of the three fragments was nonetheless murderously heavy.

Stone creaked and squealed on stone, and rain ran down Alan’s neck, as he succeeded in shifting it a quarter of an inch. He stood back, fuming, and was suddenly visited by the fervent wish that he was in Italy with Kim. But, as if it were already too late, he turned his attention back to the tomb.

‘Bloody thing,’ he observed, crossly. He stuck his fingertips into the crack and heaved with all his strength. The rough triangle of stone came loose abruptly and Alan jumped back in alarm, swearing, fearing for his toes; but with a hollow echoing boom the piece thus dislodged fell inside the box of the monument. Alan looked round wildly, expecting to find someone alerted by the noise, but calmed his galloping heartbeat a moment later by realising that there could be no-one in range *(Only Roger Southwell, ha, ha, he thought)*, since the only building in view was the church, and that was redundant.

Fumbling his torch from his pocket, he stepped up on the little ledge surrounding the tomb and shone the light inside. It appeared to be full of grotty-looking debris, he saw with disappointment. Perhaps he wasn’t the first to follow the clues after all.

No, he thought a moment later; it was all too bloody complicated for anyone who’s not some kind of a lunatic to go through all that. More than a little reluctantly he stuck his arm inside, up to the shoulder, and felt around somewhat gingerly. His fingers encountered cobwebs, and shrank from encountering their weavers. Nothing. He withdrew his arm, and shone the torch in again.

Without much hope, he pushed at another section of the broken lid. Much to his surprise, it moved, though noisily, sufficiently to allow him to climb in and poke around in the crumbly dirt. He scrabbled in the slippery debris, dust and other matter transformed by the relentlessly falling rain into something between mud and slime.

Ten minutes later his wet, sore fingers encountered a smoother texture, and he found what he presumed he had been looking for: a small metal-bound box. He could see no catch or opening on it, so he put it on a flat stone and hit it as hard as he could with another, but nothing happened, so he stuffed the box inside the front of his parka - it was too big to fit in the pocket - and sprinted back to his car through the dripping woods.

Walloping the box with his spade had as little effect, so he put his find on the passenger seat and drove back home with his foot on the floor, wishing, for the first time in years, for his old BMW. Every so often he looked down at the box covetously, and smiled.

Despite these frequent glances, he did not see the moment when it opened. Later he tried to convince himself he had heard a click, but was not at all sure. He parked the car inelegantly outside their house, wheels

slewed, seized the box in one greedy movement, and ran indoors.

He found himself shivering uncontrollably as with a fever, and forced himself to put on dry socks and a dressing-gown and turn on the gas fire before spreading the contents of the box on the rug before him.

6

The Journal of Fabian Stedman

II: The Homunculus

The preachers do tell us Jesus Christ was the Son of God, incarnate for the sake of mankind, living the life of a man that we should be saved; but I never heard tell that he did lay with a woman (not even the Magdalene) so how could he know what it is to be as man, and whole? That is a question I could never ask my father, nor do I think my brother Francis would be amused; he was ever a serious youth and he is grown to a serious man; our mother once said she thought I must be a changeling, so different were we in humour, though Francis be the elder.

When that Ann Pakeman died I did think that my father would incontinently remove me from my indenture to Master Pakeman; I know not what my master wrote to him; or even whether he did write to him at all; Roger Southwell, I am sure, he would have dismissed his Service save that Roger was in no wise to be found. Certes I kept my own head very low over my work in the months following and worked like a diligent apprentice; taking great care, *quieta non movere*.[1]

Although much of my waking moments my thoughts dwelt else-where, upon Catherine Alsop's form to be exact. She had got off a gammer a potion of some kind which the beldam had said would stop her conceiving; for my Catherine had said to me the first time that we lay together:

Hast got a child on me, Fabian?

And I said I knew not but that whether or no I would wed her; but how can a prentice wed; how feed a wife and child? Hence the potion. Although I never quite believed in its efficacy, she did not quicken, so it must have worked.

Many a time and oft I did wonder what had become of Roger Southwell, that had fled not from the wrath of Master Pakeman, for he cared not a whit for such, but I do think from his own grief. For I never had heard nor seen hide nor hair of him, as men say. Nor had I seen Hawkin Kemp the craven since that night, although the widow Kempe still did abide with her brother. my master.

I had kept the puppy's sword for mine own, for it was a good blade, and I had not owned such until then, which is a lack in a gentleman, the which I do aspire to, after all, as do all we prentices and journeymen.

And I did have a man make for me a scabbard for it, and both these I kept under my paliasse. I minded quite well that had he been more fortunate or less of a yellow-belly he might have hurt me, and I grew accustomed to wearing the sword, though not in sight of my master; though at the first I had no particular skill with it, this I did make shift to remedy, presuming upon the goodwill of Hugh Bishop whom was late a soldier, to coach me in its use until that I was of a good proficiency.

Nor had I neglected the art of ringing, having made many notes bearing upon this treatise towards which I work, and attending with others of like mind to ring on divers occasions.

I have made from simple beginnings a pleasing production for five bells to ring: Pleasing at this time only upon the paper on which it is pricked, with a symmetry that I think will sound very well, for I have given much thought to a pattern or Principle, in which all the bells would follow the same path; excepting only the Tenor,

[1] i.e. let sleeping dogs lie

for he must needs keep the rhythm, when the Treble is no longer a marker. I find this production has a fascination all dis-proportionate to the mere act of writing it out and altering the work on paper. For I have not yet introduced my fellow ringers to it, judging that the time be not ripe, and indeed there are many of them to whom Grandsire Bob is a mystery whose depths they may not discover.

There are many types of men who ring changes; and I have observed that ability comes not, as one might assume, from native wit or cunning. In the main a type of man who is cunning with mathematics or music like unto that Matthew Boys will do well, for he can follow paths in his mind and knowe where the bells will go; but a man who is involved with matters less structured than these, as 'twere a painter, perhaps, or a poet - I mean, a man who will use his fancy and not restrict himself to what doth occur in the world, not that such an one is permitted overly much exercise of his talents by the Puritan-preachers - he will in no wise make an excellent ringer; the other will progress farther than he will.

Having said which I must confess that I cannot name myself as belonging either to one type or the other, being neither a mundane man nor a fanciful, though perhaps a philosopher of sorts. For although - to cast it in its most basic image - I be involved in mundane matters on the one hand, *videlicet*, the craft of printing and learning of my trade, the which consists of very much rote and is a most exacting craft withal, yet I am not lacking in fancies of mine own. That these at this time do centre in the main upon Catherine Allsop cannot be denied, but I do consider other matters also. This art has little to do with humours melancholic or choleric, though I do not consider that a man of fiery humour would have the forbearance to learn to ring, being too impatient to aaster the art of bell-handling.

This thought hath brought me round again to consideration of Roger Southwell, a choleric man I would one time have said but have been proved in error; for such an one would not have acted as he did when that Ann Pakeman died; nor been a Magus neither. I do not like to think upon that night; 'twas a very horrid thing to see that poor dell a corpse in the street. Tis no whit distressing to see a beggar dead, or a rogue, but a pretty wench of seventeen years deserves no such end.

Kemp should have died that night, 'twould have been a better thing for him to die than she; oft-times I have wondered an if I should have killed him when that I had a sword at his throat; and I also wonder why it was that I did not do so. And although I have no great liking for my master Daniel Pakeman it is fearful to see him now so shrunken, for it appears that he hath aged a score of years since that night.

Considering Roger Southwell brought back to my mind the potion he had given to me.

–Tis not a love-philtre, said he, rather will it make people see you as you would wish to be seen; Or not, as the case may be.

This I took to mean that Catherine would see how I did love her, but an I would visit her without any one knowing, then I should not be seen. And since I have never pretended to be any thing that I am not, the which I do hope is passing honest, possessed of a good wit, and hard-working, I may believe that Catherine doth lie with me not under any bewitchment save that of love. But this potion, which I must needs employ to be with her in the house of her father, is not endless, and how shall I contrive to visit her when that it is all gone? Tis only rarely that she is able to come to mine own lodging, and that not likely for the night.

So run my thoughts while I work, and while I am alone; and while I write this journal. And now it is very strange thing to have to set down, that the thought of Roger Southwell hath in some wise materialized the man,

an if my thoughts were made incarnate. For we were yestereve lately finished ringing a merry peal when that he entered the ringing-chamber and greeted us so he had not been absent these many months; for myself I was so confounded by his appearance as if he had been an apparition or a phantom.

So when that we had stood up our bells there was much converse about what Roger had missed these months past; though I did note that he said not overmuch of how he himself had passed the time, nor of whither he had been.

Not until we had adjourned our gathering to the *Swan* did he give me any inkling, and that not until the others had departed. He was dressed for travelling, looking very gallant, and his boots, although new, bore marks as of hard use; he looked at me in a strange manner.

–I see many questions, he said. Sooth to say I have been on a pilgrimage, and I've been given leave to speak of it to thee. The which seemed a puzzling turn of phrase.

–What pilgrimage is this? I asked.

–I will tell thee all by and by; but how goes it with thee?

–I answered his questions with but little interest, for I was eager to know more concerning his own doings. At length he fell silent; I observed his features closely; Like his late master he bore the appearance of being older than his years, but with Roger 'twas rather an if he had acquired the wisdom of age than its signs of mortality.

–So, says I, what of this pilgrimage, whither did you journey, to what city was't?

And he replied, –Twas not to any city, nor town, nor country, nor principality, nor to any place that thou mightst call a place, Fabian; not to any place in this world.

And at those words I felt a great shudder through my body. –What mystery is this? I asked.

–A mystery indeed, he said, and spake quieter, Tis a journey all must make do they look for power.

–A magical journey, says I, a journey of the mind; and Roger did nod like he is pleased at my perspicacity.

–In part, though I travelled in body also. Know thou, Fabian, a man can be no true Magus without he make this voyage, but it harroweth the soul, I was barely strong enough to return. I have visited the stars and bathed in their pure argent-vive, I have journeyed to the moon and heard the music of the spheres. It was like unto the *Quintasensia*, but twas I that was being transformed from a base metal into gold; long I journeyed; long was the way, and longer the returning.

As he spoke of this my shoulders prickled and my hair felt like to raise in the air. I would have thought him horn-mad but that his tones were as ever sober and reasoned.

Seeing my face he smiled and said, –Dost disbelieve what I say, that thou sitst there mute as a fish?

–I cannot but believe you, I said, for I have beheld too many demonstrations of your art to think you a liar. But wherefore do you tell such things to me?

–I have my reasons, quoth he; one is that thou sensest the magic, it speaketh to thee. Thou dost know it dos not do so to other men?

–Ay, said I, for I once mentioned it to Matthew and Hugh, nor had they never felt it.

–It speaketh to thee, he said again. And there must be some signification in that. Dost remember my homunculus, that thou didst see at my lodging?

I was surprised at the seeming change of topic, but I answered –Ay.

–I failed that time, said Roger, it did not quicken; but now I do have the art to succeed. Dost thou know, did I but have these skills when Ann died, I could have breathed life back into her corpse as easily as twas taken from her? But I did not know, Fabian, I knew not; and so she was taken from me.

I said naught, but I'd thought on the matter, that an Catherine were lost to me I should go mad from grief.

–But now, quoth Roger, I mean to make such an homunculus as the world has not seen. Dost remember what I told thee of his making?

–Spittle and semen, I replied.

–In part, said he. And so being made of such bodily fluids, how should it then turn out, thinkst thou?

And I suggested, –Like unto that one from whom the fluids did emanate; *ex ungue leonem*[2]

Roger smiled, –Ay, Fabian, you do not disappoint me. And what is the primary characteristic of one to whom such substances are appurtenant? Dost thou look confused? Why, that he be a man, Fabian, a man like unto thee and me.

I did doubt I knew what his drift did portend, most strange though it did seem: –You mean to make a *woman*-homunculus? I asked.

–Ah, Fabian, quoth he, thou art a clever fellow indeed, with wit enough for three men. Precisely hast thou guessed it, that I mean to do, with fluids from the body of a woman, her spittle, mensone, and the moisture that comes to her when she doth lye with a man.

–What woman? I asked, though I was sore afeard of his reply.

The which was, as I had expected, –Why, thy pretty Catherine, Fabian. Do not rise; he put his hand on my arm; Tis but a little thing I ask. Thou hast not got her with child, dos she take birth-bane?

She has some potion off an hedge-witch, I replied with some reluctance.

–Then this shall be her child out of her body.

–That is not a persuasive argument, I said.

Roger looked at me and said, –Yet I know what shall be: how much of that unguent which I gave to you doth remain? And I think my face betrayed me. Then he said again, though with a gentleness which surprised me, Tis only a little thing, Fabian. And thou dost enjoy a woman, as I have not since Ann died. Wouldst thou begrudge me the possibility of happiness?

And I saw again the cleverness of this Roger Southwell, which I had known these many months, and never considered he would use it against me.

–This is not a small thing which you ask of me, I said, nor do I consider a phial of potion, however efficacious, is just reward. Why do you desire Catherine's sweats? *Fiat experimentum in corpore vili;*[3] do you lie with a common piece, you may have all of those emanations of the body as you desire, and more besides.

Roger replied, –I would not have my creation a whore, but an honest woman; dost thou not think that what I should receive from a drab would engender a drab?

–Then you owe me a thing, said I. And whence the thought came I know not, but whole-formed like unto an homunculus it slipped into my mind: An you may aid me to shed the blood of Hawkin Kemp, on whose hands was the blood of Ann Pakeman, you will do so. I did not know truly whether or no he was the assassin,

[2] know the lion by his claws

[3] Make your experiments on a worthless body

but I determined that his death was mine to deal him and he should know it.

–Thou art become a most bloody man, remarked Roger.

–Blood calls to blood, I replied.

–Then I will give thee that aid, and here's my hand on't, said Roger;

I took his hand some whit reluctantly. –One thing more, he said; you must make sure that Catherine has taken no potions when that you take those things I need.

–How may I convince her to do that, I asked. I must not get a child on her, for how can I take a woman to wife until that I have my own trade?

–I'll give you a specific that will render your seed impotent for a night, he said.

–For one night only? I asked, being concerned that such a specific might do harm.

–Certes, quoth he, do you not trust my word?

And when later I came to consider all this, and to ponder its implications, I could not but conclude that Roger had planned for a long time before. I reflected without amusement that *beneficium accipere libertatem est vendere*.[4] And it came on to rain, and's not ceased all this day.

Within a sennight I had collected all that which Roger did require, and he did show me the makings of this creature, how that the fluids were prepared and mixed, and the whole put in its bottle.

–And, he said, Though Paracelsus did say the bottle should be buried in a dung-heap for forty days, yet I have discovered a better place. And had he said the womb of a woman I'd not have been surprised; but he drew out from beneath his narrow pallet a box made from green wood, and quite filled with straw or hay.

–So, he saith, deep within this grass is heat generated, nor do I know by what agency, but I have measured it by secret means and tis warmer and kinder nor a pile of shit. And he placed the bottle tenderly into the midst of the straw.

–How will we know an it has quickened? I asked, and he said, Not until the forty days are gone by.

–And when they are past? I said.

–Then I must work for to make it grow, replied Roger, but he would not tell me how. And that forty days did seem a very long time to me, for I was half afeard and half eager to see what would come to pass.

I do not know how I expected this homunculus (or mayhap we should term it *Feminuncula)* should grow; like unto the horse-hairs which grow into eels, maybe; where out of the inanimate on a sudden one begins to move amongst a crowd in a space of water; an you have good fortune you may see this transformation from the unmoving to the animate when that it begins to lash about; this I have not seen, nor have I seen a salamander in the fire, although Nate Mundy said he did see one once: It was as long as his thumb and lay quite content in the flames, he said.

Though I have now seen wonders and miracles and will surely witness more before my life is done. For I do believe the world be full of prodigies, nor yet that they do not exist because that I have not yet witnessed them

So mayhap when I bore witness to Roger's bottle after forty days I expected to see more than that which there was to see; but it was merely like something incorporeal moved within the bottle; I could not see it and yet twas plain that it was there. I must needs mention that this bottle was of very great bigness, and laid on its

[4] To accept a favour is to sell one's liberty (Syrus)

side in the straw (the which as Roger had said had made within it a heat like unto a stove), in spite of the cold weather and December snows.

–Dost thou see her, Fabian? asks Roger. This that was made from the person of thy pretty Catherine, thy Kitling, verily, yet will turn into another person entirely.

–I see but a shimmering within the bottle, I replied.

–That is all that there is to see, quoth Roger. Now I must needs feed her through her growth and nurture her until that she be ready to show her form.

–And what shall you feed her on? I asked. Dos she eat the air, promise-crammed, as they say in the play?

But he would not divulge the recipe, this being too great a secret of his art or so I do imagine.

And it came to pass that it was not at all due to Roger and his art that I encountered again mine enemy Hawkin Kemp but through purest blind chance. I had happened to go an errand for my master to Richmond upon Thames, the which is a goodly distance to travel and I must needs take a boat thither; the which was a new experience for me and being a bright day for the season was most pleasant although I was nigh starved with cold and did wonder how the watermen stopped them selves from freezing.

After which I did seek the house of the man I must visit, when by the side of the river I beheld walking a man very familiar to me, one whom I last beheld his countenance white as cheese and pissing his breeches, in the face of one whom he had sought himself to slay. In one word, Kemp. And how brave and gallant he seemed in a suit of clothes all new *a capite ad calcem*,[5] a new sword by his side (at which my hand fell to mine, which one time had been his); my errand forgot I essayed to follow him, but without success. I do not believe that he saw me at all, but in some fashion he did contrive to elude me.

When that I had concluded mine errand I did not at once hie me back to London, but did stray around the streets of Richmond-town in hopes that I might encounter Kemp once more; but to no avail. Then must I needs get me to the boat once more ere the waterman made his last trip of the day, for it would go hard with me to remain in Richmond.

I did tell Roger of this when I next encountered him, but he seemed in no wise to care, being so involved with his creation that he rarely rang neither did he visit the inns as he was wont to do; much like any attentive father, I durst say, save only that twas no woman that was the mother of his offspring.

I reminded him of his promise but he merely answered that he'd see to it an he had the time; I was not well pleased with this reply, and spake so, but twas like I spoke unto a Wall.

This alchemy to which Roger is adherent, some times it me seems not to be that same chemical ccience as studied by other men; not that I have great knowledge on it; but Roger's experimentations led not to the transmutation of metals, neither to the stone of the philosophers.

What I had seen of his powers was more akin to that of the hedge-witches (although more powerful by far) with his potions and unguents. That he did study alchemy as well I do know, for he hath shown me his books: They go by such names as *Atalanta fugiens*, and *Ars Chemica, Theatrum chemicum brittanicum*, & *Lexicon alchemiae*,[6] and are filled with obscure symbols and arcane prose; Nor do I read the Latin tongue so well that I can decipher very much in those books, an Roger were to permit me to do so.

[5] from head to foot

[6] The titles of Roger's books are: *Atalanta Flying*, *The Chemical Art*, *The British Theatre of Chemistry*, and *The Lexicon of Alchemy.*

But one thing I do notice about these books, and that is that not an one of them is printed here in England; and this I do regret; for do you look at them it is easy to see that the printing is finer than any I have seen of London, or Cambridge, or Oxford.

With us in England there are restrictions enough, yet even books printed these forty years past seem better in their type and engravings than the work my own master produces. An I were to go (supposing such a thing were possible) to Basel or Frankfurt, should I learn those things which we in England seem to have forgot, or that have been suppressed by the stifling regime under which we all labour, that doth not permit of lightness?

My head is full of whirling thoughts; this day in the press I beheld the ink upon my hands and was visited by a strange conceit; *Viz*. that the ink that made an U around each of my fingernails also was worked into the tips of my fingers where it did look in its whorls and loops like unto an engraver's pattern, and each finger-end was different to his neighbour; and I did conceive the pleasant conceit that mayhap every man's ten fingers hold ten entirely different patterns to those of other men.

Except, I consider, in the case of an homunculus, for such is made entire from the body of one Magus, surely he should resemble his creator in every single way, having no other influences save that of sun and moon and wandering planets and fixed stars. Or, in the instance of Roger Southwell's creation, did she but come to term, should it be then that she would bear the Fingertip-patterns of Catherine Allsop.

Now as I have said I was not made privy to the secrets of nurturing Roger his creature; and I did see very little of him through the time which followed; nor did I encounter Kemp again, although I would have given coin to find the whelp. But then, thus it goeth with us, that what wedesire is all the better for the waiting; and 'tis said truly that revenge is a dish better eaten cold. *Dum spiro, spero*.[7]

There comes in my mind a strange thought, that I do but fill this page with conjectures because that I am reluctant to write of that which passed in connection with the creature of Roger Southwell; an this be the case I will presently exorcise this reluctance. For that day when Roger sent me word that I should attend to view the *homunculus muliebre*. He bid me attend not his lodging but another house hard by that place wherein he dwelt; and I presented myself thence at the appointed hour.

Roger attended me very pale in the face and excited as with lust; but if 'twere such then 'twere like unto a cold lust, one which giveth no heat, neither to loins nor to thoughts; on his front pearls of sweat, though the air was bitter cold. He seized me by the arm and bore me within doors, and hurried to an upper chamber, saying not a word the while.

And I must confess that his humour affected me also, that I was most apprehensive anent that which I should see, whether it be succubus or chaste maid; and it came to me madly that the unicorn cannot come but to the chaste maid, but *she* cannot be ignored; what chimeræ then would this creature bring to her?

And it was then that Roger opened the door of a chamber and I beheld, beside the casement and shadowed, the form of a woman, but scarce the bigness of a child; robed like unto a nun, save that a veil covered her countenance also. All in black was she clad, and did not speak or move; not when we entered the room, nor when Roger bespoke her, calling her maiden; nor when that we approached her.

–Thus has she been, whispered Roger in my ear, his voice but a mere thread of sound; thus hath she stood,

[7] While I breathe, I hope

and hath not moved, since I clothed her in black and brought her hence.

For me my mouth was dry as twere with fear, and yet there was nothing to fear; what could a woman do for to make me to fear? And then, so slow I did not observe it at first, she turned her veiled head toward me. So slow she moved, that I felt the hairs prickle on my scalp an they were like like to rise. Roger spake not, neither could I move; slow, so slow, she lifted up her hands to her veil (and her hands had a pallor like unto a cadaver, yet they were delicate as a child's) and slipped it from her face.

Now here my pen fails my fingers as my mind then failed my senses; I beheld her countenance, the which first I saw with shock as like unto Catherine's, was the face of *Eve* and of *Lillith* too; of *Aphrodite, Astarté, Proserpine;* nay; the face of a living woman, but one who embodied in her being all the attributes of woman, saint and seductress, virgin and sinner; such perfection lay in her features that I was stricken. I had believed no man can witness a thing so fair and live, nor recover from the hurt. The former yet I do; the latter, I know not.

And then there came the most terrible thing; for slyly she turned her face as doth a coquette, and rolled up her eyes; and, *horribile dictu,*[8] her eyes were as stones, gray and pitted and horrid like unto toads; into mine own eyes she looked with that blank dead stare, the which should have engendered naught but disgust; but so cruel and perverse was this creature that I was overcome with desire, and even stepped towards her, with every intention of taking her in my arms and drinking of her pallid Lips; I felt so tight in the loins and more breathless with desire than ever I had been with Catherine. I reached for her, but Roger took my arm; I did turn to him, and tears stood in my eyes and made the room unclear.

I groaned aloud, –Ah, Roger, what is this that thou'st done, what hast thou done?

She was his creation and newborn to power and life both, and we two grown men stood helpless before her. Roger sank to his knees, pulling me half down, but I would not kneel before her, neither to worship nor as a supplicant, nor never, never as a lover. My fingers fumbled at my sword's hilt, but none had strength enough to draw it; then it sprang from its scabbard and embedded its point in the roof above, the hilt a-swinging in front of my face like unto a pendulum.

And then I knew that I must needs act, or lose my very soul, or worse; and with all my strength I took hold of the dangling sword-hilt, forcing my fingers to do my will, and pulled it from the ceiling. It dragged my hand down, as a magnetised needle doth point to the north; and my senseless fingers were like to drop it, but I wrested my right arm free from Roger's grip and took hold of the sword with both hands.

Then 'twas as if a voice spake inside my head, one which was for me alone, and it said, –Which one of thy weapons wouldst thou sink in my body, then, little man? and laughed, and that bitter laughter harrowed me to the soul.

But I stood fast, and inch by inch I raised the tip of the sword until that it pointed at her breast.

–Enough of such folly, quoth the voice within my head, and I knew only blackness, an I'd fallen in a swoon.

I awoke thinking: *What is God that he permits such things to be?* And I had no answer, as I have had no answer these many years. Faith indeed hath my father, and my brother also, but in no wise hath that rubbed off on me. I do question all that which they do believe; the foundation of their faith is but the nativity of mine

[8] horrid to tell

own unbelief.

In the play *Mephistopheles* saith of this world, *Why this is Hell nor am I out of it;* tis true; but tis equally true that if the playwright showed an *Angel Gabriel,* saying, *Why this is Heaven, nor am I out of it,* then folk would shy away and be afeard, fearing their God more than the devil. *Corruptio optimi pessima*.[9]

In my head was such a pain as I have never felt, a pounding like unto a blacksmith's hammer, and lights swam before my eyes; I perceived that I did lie where I had fallen, in that empty chamber where Roger hath shown me his creature, nor had the night come, by which I knew that I had not lain senseless for too long a time; but Roger was gone, and so also was the creature. I put a hand on my head an if it would ease the pain, but it did not do so; and so I must needs get myself hence from that place all weak like unto a man with the palsy. I took up my Sword from the floor where it lay and my hand shook so, it was with much difficulty that I sheathed it.

Now I am a man in good health and but five and twenty years of age, but I felt like unto a very ancient, nor was it an easy matter to hie me home to my lodging. My eye-sight was blurred like unto bad printing, and my head hurt so, I could think of nothing but the pain of it. I staggered from side to side like a drunk man, and I dare say that was what those folk whom I passed thought I was; nor did I care one whit, being concerned only with the getting to my bed. And when that I had done so, at length the spinning lights did take their leave, and I sank into sleep.

And that night in my sleep I was visited by a very curious dream, the which puzzled me greatly; for it seemed to me that I heard the sound of a great peal of bells, but it was as if many more did ring than we should ever find in a tower, and their sound was like unto iron, nor did they ring any pattern which I do know. And I beheld the figure of a woman or girl with a handbell, nor did any sound come from this bell, although she swung it most lustily. Nor could I make out her features; she was not veiled, twas simply that I could not make her face come clear; And words came into my mind then, which I set down when I awoke, lest I should forget them:

In memoriam Ledæ Helenæ matris, Lamiæ atque, Filiæ Doloris, Reginæ Orientis at occidentis, Ave atque vale.[10]

And then she was overwhelmed by the sea which rushed through narrow streets in vast saves with the speed of thought, that I feared would drown me also; But the shock of the waves was not tremendous, and they bore me along with gentleness, though swiftly. And over all the sound of the iron bells continued, but they slowed until that I could hear but six ringing, then five, four, three, two and at last one, and its music spoke to me and said, *Sum Rosa Pulsata Mondi Maria Vocata.*[11] And I was borne away on the surface of the waters, to waken amazed in my narrow bed, and the morning was fresh without.

I had as lief searched for a gypsy or a fortune-teller, for though have no wish (nor should any man for all that all the world seems to wish it) to know what lies in my future; let come what will; of such an one I could have asked, *Riddle me this dream;* but it being just such a day as any other, I must get me to Master Pakeman's shop to work.

[9] Corruption of the best is the worst thing of all

[10] In memory of Leda, Helen's mother; and of Lamia, Daughter of Sorrow, Queen of the East and of the West, Hail and farewell.

[11] See page 32

Many days hence I did make bold to apprise Roger on't; he seemed to take no heed thereof. But my thoughts were in tempest, like unto the roiling skies when that a wild storm blows; what had befallen Roger, what of the woman (by what other name shall I call it?) which I greatly feared as I have feared naught in my life before.

However I am thankful that though of Catherine created she resembled my Town Miss in no wise for that would greatly distress me; but she had stupefied me, and put words in my mind, and taken from me near the whole of my will, and in the face of that power who would not be affrighted; Speak with Roger I must, lest he be possessed by her, he him-self who created her, the which remains a Wondrous and Miraculous Deed, whatsoever Prodigy hath resulted.

I am in unease when that I do consider that Roger is becoming a very *Faustus* for power, not that I do think he hath sold his soul, rather that there is hubris in the possessing of overmuch power. For Roger is an ill-tempered Man & not given over-much to humility. Alas for the slaying of Ann Pakeman, that hath inspired him to this deed.

And indeed many days passed ere that I saw Roger again, and each day that passed I could not forbear from conjecture as to his fate. But I confess I never thought to see him attend to Ring with us again; but hence he came, merry as you please, and clapped me on the back saying –How dost thou, Fabian?

The which I most Admired; and I made to Speak, but Roger spake first, saying –Hist, hist, hold thy peace, I will tell all by and by.

And so I must needs contain my soul in patience against the time when he is ready to speak. Look so hard as I might I could see no change in him as one who hath been harrowed or possessed or even who had seen a great wonder; Yet these last days have I observed that I have some white hairs upon mine own head, where all hitherto were brown. And I did conceive the thought, for I have heard it said that great dread can turn a man's hair white, that this might be the cause; or it may be they were present all the time and I but did not see them.

For it is true indeed and I have observed before, and not only in myself, that it is not only possible for a man to be wilfully blind, but that he doth this constantly; blind, and deaf also; we convince ourselves of half-truths and pretty fables (that we are all saved by Jesus Christ, that a maid be chaste, that good fortune shall come in a week or a year) Such Concerns that we wish to Believe, and ignore the Truth an we mislike it.

And thus Roger Southwell: being wilfully blind to his own acts; believing that they signify naught, or naught evil; happy as an hog in his filth and seeing not (nor did I then) how consequences do flow out from an action like unto the ripples from a pebble cast into a pool of water. And thus also mine own self, for I do admit contradictions in my thoughts: for the one side, some doings of Roger which I have witnessed do run perilously close to witchcraft, and witches do hang yet in England, we being a most enlightened country (by the flames of fanatical Puritanism, I mean); For the other, that I should not believe witches exist, for *non habeo anima naturaliter Christiana* [12] nor to be truthful *anima* of any other persuasion. I may call myself a rational and pragmatic man, yet even so I have seen very magic, and therefore I do believe in it, for I cannot dis-believe that which mine own eyes do witness. But I know not where in any scheme of things the creature of Roger's art doth have her place.

[12] My soul is not naturally Christian

Therefore having at length no patience left to me at all I did demand of Roger what hath befallen that time when last I did see him, and what became of the creature.

–Lilu is grown free of any Constraints I have, he said.

–Why dost thou name the creature *Lilu?* I asked.

–Tis but another way of saying, *Lilith*, he replied, and ’tis as good a name as any other for a person that was not born.

–A person, quoth I, she is no person, but what manner of thing is she?

–She is of flesh and blood, Roger said, but whether or no she hath a soul I know not; and I have not the power to compel her; she will do an she will, say I yea or nay; and I know not whither she went, nor when she will return.

–Do you not care neither? I asked, and an expression passing strange visited Roger’s eyes; I was not sure I had seen anything there; it passed in the blink of an eye.

But all he said was this, –*Hoc mihi non est negotium*,[13] I have other fish to fry.

[13] That is nothing to me

7 : Not Exactly Ghosts

‘...thither he / Will come to know his destiny.
Your vessels, and your spells, provide,
Your charms, and every thing beside...
He shall spurn fate, scorn death, and bear
His hopes ’bove wisdom, grace, and fear:
And you all know, security
Is mortal’s chiefest enemy.’

William Shakespeare, *Macbeth*

Alan stared at the things he had uncovered with such effort. Disappointingly, there was no grimoire, no treasure map; there was a crystal ball, though, or not quite a ball, which was intriguing. It was an ovoid of smoky glass, wrapped in a linen cloth turned beige with the years. As if it dwelt there, the glass fit comfortably in the palm of his hand; he nearly failed to realise that the cloth itself was important, was what he had gone to seek, until he remembered the key to the cipher.

The Verony.

Alan picked it up from where he’d discarded it, and held it up: the light of the fire shone through it, and he saw the outline of a face made translucent by the flames, like the watermark on a sheet of paper. The cloth was about eighteen inches square, coarsely woven, and threadbare in places, especially at the hem. He laid it flat on the carpet, and the image disappeared.

For no apparent reason, then, the skin on Alan’s back crawled, and he shuddered. He picked up the cloth again, and held it up to the gaslight. The face which he saw was not, as he had subconsciously expected, an image like the Turin Shroud. The old word ‘verony’, then, *was* being used metaphorically; but if this was the imprint of Roger Southwell’s face - his death-mask in two dimensions - who had placed it there? Who had subsequently removed it and placed it with the glass? Who had invented the maddening series of clues leading to it?

Alan stared at the face. It looked an ordinary sort of face by any standards, and there was nothing to make it come to life as a portrait might have done. Only the impressions of features lay there. Then, struck by a thought, Alan took the cloth into Kim’s office, where there was a lightbox for viewing transparencies.

The neon flickered into its daylight glow, and the face stared eyelessly at Alan. He put his own face close to it, almost touching the fragile cloth, but was visited by no revelation. It then occurred to him to wonder the purpose of the crystal egg, so he padded back to the living-room to fetch it, and placed it on top of the backlit linen.

Later he would wonder how long he stared at the smoky glass before he became aware of images, very far-off and remote, moving in its depths. Something about them made him very uneasy, though he could not say why. A sense of wrongness, of the world tilting, invaded his mind; but it was at too great a distance from him.

In a kind of trance, he bent his face to the glass, and saw disconnected figures appear, drifting as if under-

water or on slow-motion film. He flinched as a clawed hand reached towards him, a cloven foot swelled into being. Faces swam at him, horrible faces, some crowned with horns like obscene growths, some with mouths which were muzzles, fanged and snarling at him. He saw, and heard the rustle of, bat-like wings, and for an instant smelt an odour so foetid that he gagged on it.

Behind Alan's shoulder, someone laughed.

It was not a pleasant sound. Alan jerked round, breaking his eye-contact with a snap as sharp as breaking glass. The room was so charged, so vibrant with the ghastly presence that he half-expected to see blue sparks; but the room was empty. Yet he was still convinced that there was someone, or some*thing,* close to him - even if he could not see his visitor.

His mouth was dry and he found he was panting. He could hear his heart thumping. Sweat ran down his chest inside his clothes, like rain down a window.

'Who's there?' he whispered.

Instantly the room went cold as ice, and the rank and bitter stink wrinkled his nostrils again. Alan's muscles spasmed, although a faraway corner of his mind was screaming at him to run. Again he heard the echo of mocking laughter. Then, abruptly, the chill smell and sense of alien presence all disappeared as if switched off like a television - but leaving behind the sense that nothing so simple as that would banish it.

Something was loose in the world which had not been present before, and Alan was miserably certain that it was his fault.

He sank into a chair, shaking, his legs too weak to support him. The room, apart from the cold neon glow from the lightbox, was in darkness. Alan looked at his watch and found to his astonishment that midnight had passed. Getting up, he turned the main light on and the lightbox off; then, without knowing why, gathered up both cloth and glass ovoid, and left them on the bedside table when he got into bed.

If Alan dreamed that night, nothing remained when he woke in a panic of anxiety and found that he could no longer see. Frightened, he rubbed at his eyes, and found a cloth over his face: he had been sleeping with the gravecloth draped over his head.

Puzzled, he bunched the fabric loosely in his hand. *I suppose I must have done that in my sleep,* he thought. *Perhaps my subconscious figured it'd protect me from the things in the scrying-glass*. He frowned. Where had that word come from? How did he suddenly know it was a scrying-glass, when yesterday he'd been content to call it a crystal ball?

Suddenly aware that he felt very peculiar, he got out of bed and went into the bathroom for a glass of water. Leaning over the washbasin, sweat cold on his face as if from a hangover, where he stared at the tap for a long time before turning it on, as if it were an unfamiliar artefact. He drank the water, and splashed some more on his face, but still the strangeness persisted.

It was Sunday. Alan and Kim were not habitual morning-service ringers, but today Alan felt a strong inclination to go to Westerbridge and ring. He walked back into the bedroom and eyed the cloth and scrying-glass suspiciously. His finds had lost their glamour in the morning light; he felt annoyed at lost effort and vaguely embarrassed.

So he dressed and drove the six miles to Westerbridge, where five ringers welcomed him with some enthusiasm.

Several times he found himself looking at Debbie Griffiths. Again he noticed how she seemed suddenly to have grown up. Her image in his brain now triggered the impression *'woman'* rather than *'child'*: she had developed breasts, and her nipples made points in her T-shirt.

'Alan, *make the bob!'* shouted Debbie's mother, and he hauled on his rope, realising how far away he'd been. The bells crunched discordantly above him.

'Lead after Ted,' Alec advised him, and Alan, red with embarrassment, got himself back where he ought to have been and began counting his places furiously: he'd never been a good enough ringer to do it on autopilot.

'Four behind next,' he told himself fiercely, and presently the touch came round.

'Sorry about that,' Alan said, tying his rope. 'I was miles away.'

'We noticed,' said Josie Griffiths dryly. 'How about some Grandsire?'

'I'll bang the drum,' Alan volunteered hastily.

'No, you'll have to ring inside - I'll make you half-hunt if you like.'

It was the best offer he was going to get, and simplified his role somewhat. 'Okay,' he sighed, grimacing; and, by dint of grim concentration, managed to keep right through the service touch. After this Alec Griffiths invited the other ringers back for coffee, a common ritual on a Sunday morning. Alan accepted, but Ted and Zoë had other engagements.

The Griffiths' home was only five minutes from the church, but Alan gave them a lift anyway. Drinking coffee - mercifully good coffee, as Alan knew from previous visits - he watched Debbie covertly, noting things he'd never seen before. How expressive her face was, very unlike the sullen youngsters he saw on the streets. Debbie was lively and animated, as though she liked her life. She was a lucky adolescent in more obvious ways too. No spots. No puppy-fat. Her face was - elfin, Alan thought, and brought himself up abruptly.

Steady on, he upbraided himself silently, *that's a bit over the top.* Elfin, indeed! He drained his coffee mug, and accepted a refill, wondering precisely why he was suddenly so interested in the girl. *She has forspoken me,* he thought, the words popping into his mind like a quotation - but from where? And what did it mean?

'When does school start again?' he asked aloud, to cover his confusion, bending to scratch the family dog behind the ears. The dog, a large beige-coloured mongrel incongruously named Blondie, leaned into his legs ecstatically.

Alan's query was rewarded with a disgusted face from Debbie.

'Oh, don't!' she groaned. 'The holidays are short enough, as it is.'

'Short!' exclaimed her father. 'Wait till you start working for a living.'

Debbie leaned her head forward so her hair obscured her face, then parted this curtain with her fingers and grinned. 'I'm not going to *work,* I'm going to be a singer.'

'What sort of singer?' asked Alan.

'A soprano, of course,' replied Debbie, which seemed an unusual reply for a fourteen-year-old - although thinking back, Alan recalled that the sounds he had heard leaking from the earphones of her Walkman were not mindless chitterings of pop music. 'I want to sing Cio-Cio-San.'

'Don't we know it!' said Josie, mock-seriously. 'Every time she has a bath we get *Un bel dì* at full blast. I think it's the only bit she knows.'

‘I know it all,’ said Debbie, ‘just not all the words. I wish we could do Italian at school instead of boring old Frog.’

‘If you know French it’d help you learn Italian,’ said Alan. ‘They’re related languages, you know.’ He was suddenly horrified at how pompous he sounded, and shut up abruptly.

‘You’re an opera buff, aren’t you?’ Josie asked.

‘Kim more than me, really. I’m just as fond of orchestral stuff.’

‘What’s your *favourite* opera?” Debbie enquired, leaning her chin lightly on the fingers of one hand, which put dimples in her face.

‘I like lots of them,’ Alan answered, unable to be precise. ‘I suppose *Rigoletto* or *Trovatore*. Sometimes I get hankerings for Puccini.’

‘What’s your favourite *Puccini* opera, then?’

‘Sometimes *Butterfly* - sometimes *Tosca.’*

‘Oh, Tosca. She’s too *old,’* said Debbie.

‘Too old?’ repeated Alan, momentarily startled.

‘’Course. Well, think about it, she’s already a diva, isn’t she? And Cavaradossi is a famous painter, or they wouldn’t let him paint in the church, and the Sacristan wouldn’t bring him sandwiches. So they must both be at least thirty.’

Alan winced - he was thirty-five - and said, ‘Is that why you like Butterfly, because she’s just fifteen?’

‘I suppose so,’ said Debbie. ‘Though Pinkerton’s such a rat, and she must be a real wimp to pine over him. It’s just that I love the music.’

Josie stood up. ‘Well, I’d better go and make cooking noises. Alan, would you like to stay for lunch?’

‘Oh, no, it’s all right, thanks,’ said Alan, in a sort of panic. ‘I’d only be in the way.’

‘Don’t be silly,’ Debbie argued. ‘Mum wouldn’t ask you if we didn’t have loads of food, and I bet you haven’t got any at home while Kim’s away.’

‘Debbie!’ said her mother.

‘She’s right,’ Alan said hastily. ‘If you really have got enough, I’d love to stay. I’m at a bit of a loose end today.’

‘Can I put some music on, then?’

‘Yes, but let’s have a rest from *Butterfly.* You’ll wear the record out.’

‘Oh, Dad. What, then? Alan, you choose.’

Alan looked at the shelves of boxed LPs and selected *Un ballo in maschera*. ‘You’d better do the honours, I don’t want to scratch it,’ he said to Debbie, who was sitting on the floor by the stereo.

‘I like Oscar in this,’ she said.

‘That’d suit you,’ Alan smiled, then was astonished to hear himself add, ‘I’ll teach you Italian, if you like.’

Debbie looked up. *‘Really?’*

‘Provided it’s okay with your parents.’

‘Only if you’re sure it won’t be too much trouble for you, Alan,’ replied Alec. ‘And Debs, don’t you forget you’ve got extra singing lessons.’

‘No, no,’ said Alan. ‘We wouldn't make it any more than, say, once or twice a week?’

‘Brilliant!’ exclaimed Debbie, and scrambled to her feet to go and inform her mother.

Horrified, Alan heard Carlo Bergonzi on the record: *‘La rivedra nell’estasi raggiante di pallore...’* *‘What ecstasy to see her again, in her glowing pallor...’*

I can’t possibly fancy that child, he thought in a panic, *she’s fourteen years old, for God’s sake - what am I thinking of?*

The four of them spent the afternoon playing Trivial Pursuit, a game which Alan usually won. But today his thoughts were in chaos, and there was no clear winner by the time Debbie and her mother had to leave to ring a quarter.

Alan stood up too and said, ‘I’d better go too. Thanks for the lunch, Josie.’

Outside, he found his hands were inclined to shake, and it took him three tries before he got the key in the ignition. He looked at his hands on the steering-wheel, and tensed them so the tendons stood out.

Then he jabbed at the tape-player and turned up the volume.

‘Amiche, son venuta al richiamo d’amor...’ sang Cio-Cio-San. *‘My friends, I’ve come at the call of love...’*

‘Damn,’ said Alan.

Back home, he found himself unable to relax. He wandered round the house; went into the garden and pulled out a few weeds; then ambled indoors again.

This won’t do, he thought, sitting at his desk. Here his eyes were drawn to the scrying-glass and cloth, both of which he could have sworn he had left in the bedroom: he looked at the glass with distaste, remembering that stench and the overwhelming presence.

Casting around almost desperately for something mundane to anchor his brain, Alan picked up his diary. A client meeting in the morning. Good. Something thunderingly banal like a Grand Prize Draw ought to cure his agitation. He opened the filing drawer in his desk and drew out the client’s brown folder. Although he knew the account backwards, he forced himself now to look through all the old mailing packs he had done for them - even to read some of the copy. This was a thing he usually resisted strongly; while he enjoyed re-reading features and articles which had given him pleasure to write, copywriting came from another part of his brain entirely and was no pleasure at all.

Presently he reached up and switched on the lamp, which pooled light over what he was reading while shadows gathered around him, and the furniture began to lose its definition. Mesmerised by the print, Alan drifted into a near-trance - no longer reading, yet somehow transfixed by the shapes the words made on the page.

Gradually his vision cleared. He found himself staring at the paper in front of him with curious incomprehension. It was no longer an invitation to send in the form and win a Caribbean cruise or any of fifty other superb prizes, but a yellow, parchmenty page covered with blurred print and notations in a precise, minute, old-fashioned handwriting.

Still in a dream, Alan looked up, past the lamp which now seemed to flicker like a candle, and surveyed the room. It was as if, like a palimpsest, what *had once been* had laid itself over what was *now.* There was a man standing by the window, at a table on which Alan could dimly make out the outlines of curiously shaped glassware. One piece he recognised as an alembic. Now the man at the table was mixing things in a stone mortar, crushing and blending them with a wooden-handled pestle. Then he put down his tools and approached

Alan's desk.

Alan saw that the man was tall and dark-haired, but there was nothing saturnine, or sinister, or even particularly strange in his appearance: there was just a thin face framed by long, rather untidy black hair which could have done with a wash. The man was wearing a baggy white shirt with a large square collar and loose breeches cut somewhat on the lines of Bermuda shorts, but in a dark colour. He appeared to be Alan's age, or possibly a little younger. Reaching past the lantern on the desk, he put his broad hand on the book in front of Alan. Turning it round as if to consult it, he then read a little, frowning slightly, his lips moving soundlessly. Finally he nodded, reversed the book, and returned to his mixing by the window.

The words on the page came clear to Alan.then, and he read, without at first comprehending: *A Receipt to make a Maiden Enamour'd of a Man.* Alan blinked, and read on. The ingredients were almost entirely unfamiliar to him. He did not know what Jew's-lime was, nor retherne-tongue. Some remote part of his mind told him that he could look up the words, but it seemed unimportant.

He raised his eyes to see the magician (*magus*, his mind corrected him) scrape the contents of his mortar into a stone jar and seal it, first with a cork, then with wax which he softened in the flame within the lantern and imprinted with a signet ring he took from his index finger. Two minutes later, he appeared to decide that the wax had hardened sufficiently, and slipped the jar into some concealed pocket in his clothing.

Until now, Alan had sat a mute witness at his desk. Never once had it occurred to him that there was any overlapping between the dream, if dream it were, and reality, if this were truly reality; but the magus turned round just then, and met Alan's gaze with a penetrating stare which was at once slightly amused and thoroughly in control. He smiled at Alan, and nodded.

'Thy first lesson, my prentice. Mark it well,' he said, and disappeared.

Obediently Alan took a thick spiral-bound notepad from his desk drawer, uncapped his fountain-pen, and covered several pages with his straggly handwriting.

8 : The Ghost in the Machine

‘Thrice toss these oaken ashes in the ayre,
Thrice sit thou mute in this inchanted chayre;
Then thrice three times tye up this true love’s knot,
And murmur soft, shee will, or shee will not.

‘Goe burne these poys’nous weedes in yon blew fire,
These Screech-owles fethers, and this prickling bryer,
This Cypresse gathered at a dead mans grave:
That all thy feares and cares an end may have.

‘Then come, you Fayries, dance with me a round,
Melt her hard hart with your melodious sound.
In vaine are all the charms I can devise:
She hath an Arte to breake them with her eyes.’

Thomas Campion, *Third Booke of Ayres, XVIII*

Alan woke to a day suddenly autumnal. Not that the trees’ leaves had turned sere overnight or that flowers in the gardens had ceased to grow; it was merely that a certain quality had entered the air and given it clarity beyond its brightness, and dew still lay pearled on the lawn. He dressed quickly, collected his client’s file, and set off for his morning meeting.

It was not until he returned that afternoon and opened his desk drawer to replace the file that he suddenly remembered his dream of the previous night. He stopped in mid-motion, left the folder lying across the tops of his hanging files, and opened the shallow drawer beneath the desktop.

His red spiral-bound notebook lay there. This was a repository for ideas, useful quotations, obscure words and their meanings, the odd poem which visited him, random thoughts and all other kinds of jottings. Now he eyed it as if it were a cobra coiled in the drawer - one which had not quite opened its hood.

After a moment he pulled the fat notebook out and kneed the drawer shut, then flicked through the scribbles until he came to a page he recognised, and at which something inside him stirred. Quickly he scanned the rest of it, then turned it over and found three dense pages of automatic writing.

TO Confound Ones Enemys.

TO Assume a diffrent Semblance.

TO Make a Maiden Enamour’d of a Man.

There came a loosening inside Alan as he read, partly as if his heart had shifted in its home, partly akin to sexual desire, but mostly as if his entire axis had shifted to a different orbit. He was still Alan Bellman, but an Alan Bellman who was skewed.

This time he understood the recipes he read, not even translating the old words. He knew that herteclowe meant germander, and galingale was sweet cypress. He knew where to find the ingredients and how to mix them, and in what season - when the sun was in Virgo: how fortuitous that revelation! - he also knew, with the certainty of a magus’s knowledge, that the spells would work.

He spent the remainder of the day collecting what he would need. Certain items, including a stone pestle and mortar, and some thick greeny-grey glass vessels with corks, he obtained from a wholefood shop nearby, but most of them he gathered himself.

Alan had never been able to suffer fools gladly, nor was he terribly good at dissembling. In the days when he'd worked for other people he had begun with the naive belief that it was the work itself which counted. Since then he'd learned how to compromise, but on the odd occasion when he'd had a fool for a boss, he had made no secret of his opinions.

The last one who had sacked him still dwelt in his mind like an excised cancer, although it had been several years ago, and he was not a man who bore grudges as a rule: when he had moved out of the fool's orbit, he forgot him.

> *'To Confound ones Enemyes: It is not requir'd for a True Magus to obtayne Finger-Nailes or Haire of the Foe, as some Hedge-Witchs wolde haue us Doe; For to teach him a hard Chapter, Suffitient it is to invision his Countenance in the Mind; The Scrying-Glass may be imploy'd. The Potion must needs be Mixt as follows.'*

Evening was gathering as Alan measured his ingredients into the bowl and began, methodically, to crush and blend them together. The pungent scent which arose was unlike anything he had ever smelt before; his nose wrinkled as with an incipient sneeze. The smell was acrid and quite unpleasant. And yet, perversely, he wanted to keep on sniffing it.

As he worked, the room gradually faded; or, rather, it became distanced, as if Alan stood within a cylinder of air that was other than the normal air in the room, which he breathed. His perceptions at once narrowed and seemed to broaden: narrowed, in that sight and smell and all the rest of the seven senses focused only upon what he was doing; broadened, in the sense that he was somehow aware of the width of the world, the infinity of the sky, the stars and the expanding universe. A strange hectic music sang there, but he had not the time to heed it: Words had to be whispered.

When the herbs and oils and other substances were sufficiently mixed into a stiff paste, green-blue as the leaves of olive-trees, Alan shaped it into a tiny cone with his fingers. It felt somehow slick, a viscous and slippery surface which his fingers had not expected from the texture in the mortar.

Having done this, Alan took up the scrying-glass. In the back of his mind, a momentary fear visited him, some remote part of him recalling with horror the roiling visions he had seen, and the presence which set his spine to crawling when he thought about it, but with an effort of concentration he put those thoughts aside, and bent to the glass.

'Robert Simpson,' he whispered, the sibilants hissing and crackling in his ears. He could see the face very clearly in his mind's mirror, as if it had been etched there: the jowly features of a man whose mask was that of the bluff and straightforward Yorkshireman, but whose true character was far different. It was a face Alan had grown to loathe. Staring into the glass focused it more exactly, as if he were looking through the viewfinder of a camera.

He knew the right time to set light to the cone, too. Automatically he flicked a match afire, and strange incense filled the air.

Alan Bellman dreamed.

Across the valley from him, a valley like a crucible full of clouds - as though he was very high up, although the air was not cold - he could see the wrinkles of terraced fields where tightly curled green crops clung to the steep slope. Higher, the mountains became naked, and on more distant peaks he could see the glint of snow lying in pockets shaded from the noon sun. The sky was an intense cobalt, hard as an intaglio, and cloudless - fading, at the circling horizon, to a blue which was almost yellow. He breathed air like wine, air which had surely never held man's pollution. Recognising that purity, he filled his lungs, and then breathed out very slowly, relishing it. There was something intoxi- cating in that high atmosphere which came from nothing so simple as an imbalance of oxygen. He felt dizzy with its clarity.

Leaning on the long staff he held, Alan scratched his chin, and encountered a three-day beard. This puz- zled him vaguely, and when he looked down he found himself clad in a rough brown robe like a monk's habit, and scuffed boots.

'What else should a pilgrim wear?' asked a voice in his head, and he swung round, startled. The hillside turned ragged as he looked at it, and blew away like clouds in a storm, leaving Alan seated at his desk once more in the darkness of his office. There was a rank and sour smell in his nostrils and a black charred patch the size of an old penny on the desk in front of him. He rubbed it automatically, and the veneer crumbled like dead skin flaking off. Achingly weary, he paused only to open the window, before staggering to his bed.

In the morning, he felt curiously light and empty, as if he'd just recovered from a bad bout of flu. Kim's back this afternoon, he thought, and the day brightened.

Then he remembered the previous evening, and something clenched in his stomach. Had he really put a curse on a man he'd practically forgotten? It seemed ridiculous, now, but frightening too. Still not quite believ- ing how he had spent the evening, he put on a dressing-gown and went into his study.

The air still smelled vaguely of burnt vegetation, despite the open window, which had made the room rather chilly. Alan closed it thoughtfully, eyeing the desktop and his notebook lying innocently on the polished surface, and the open drawer, on which lay his client's brief from yesterday. There was no sign on the desk of any scorch-marks, which, Alan thought, was just as well. He rather doubted whether he could come up with a plausible explanation if Kim discovered a hole burnt in his desk.

He pushed his notebook aside and began to re-read the job he had to do, spreading the art director's roughs on his desk.

Some time later the telephone rang, startling Alan into realising he hadn't washed or dressed and that his feet were freezing. He picked up the receiver, tucking his left foot behind his right knee to warm it.

'Alan Bellman,' he said.

'Oh, hello, Alan. It's Alec Griffiths here.'

'Oh, hi. What can I do you for?'

'I've got some work for you, if it's the sort of thing you do. If you want it, that is.'

'I'm like the girl in *Oklahoma,*' said Alan. 'I never say no. It's the curse of the freelance. What's the job?'

'My company's Annual Report. I mean, putting it into proper English.'

'Piece of cake,' said Alan, shifting in his chair, changing feet to warm the right one this time. 'Can you fax me details? Then I can give you a price.'

'Right, what's your number?'

Alan told him, and put the phone down. Somehow he didn't want to take on any more work at the moment. It was as if something were nudging commercial concerns out of the forefront of his mind. Absently, he gazed at the page of scribbled copy in front of him, and then jumped as the fax machine whirred.

Eleven pages to come, said the cover sheet, so he went into the bathroom to wash and shave.

When he'd dressed in his usual uniform of scruffy tracksuit pants and sweatshirt, he returned to he office to find yards of paper trailing out of the fax. He tore off the curly roll and had just cut it into pages when the phone rang again: it was Kim.

'Hi gorgeous,' she said. 'I've just checked-in, and the plane's on time. So I should be at Heathrow by two-thirty.'

'I'll be there,' said Alan. 'Have a good flight.'

'Hope so. See you, love.'

The fax pages had curled under themselves again while Alan had been on the phone, so he gave them another reverse roll-up and started to read. It seemed straightforward stuff, although the so-called 'draft copy' made him wince. Lastly there were two sample pages of last year's report, and finally - a sheet with just a few lines of close-written

> *'To myn Prentice: him who wolde learn of myne Art; Greeting. Thou hast had the Receipts thou wisht; Payment is deferr'd untill that Time when I shal call in the Debt. Use well the Art and thou wilst discouer much that is Hid.* Fortuna favet fortibus.'

For a long time Alan stared at this message, the knot of fear inside him clutching his vitals. Then he crushed the flimsy paper and threw it at the litter-bin, which it missed. Then he set to work again, determinedly banishing all extraneous thoughts, until it was time to meet Kim at the airport.

When Kim's flight eventually arrived and Alan spotted her amongst the throng, he hurried over and gave her a hug, then relieved her of her camera cases.

'Missed me?' she asked, raising one eyebrow.

'Mm. Good flight?'

'Lousy, actually.'

'Why?'

'Turbulence. Worst ever. Everyone was either throwing up or praying, or both. That's why we're so late. The weather, I mean, not being awash with vomit.'

'Ecch. Are *you* okay?'

'Yes - you know I've got a cast-iron stomach. Anyway, how are you? Anything happened?'

'Not a lot,' said Alan.

'Not a lot?' echoed Kim disbelievingly. 'Haven't you been back to Fenstanton?'

'Well... yes.'

'Jeez, this is like extracting teeth. What happened? Did you find anything?'

'No,' said Alan.

'No?'

'The tomb had been cracked open by lightning. There was nothing inside but rubble.'

'After all that!' exclaimed Kim. 'I don't believe it! All that haring round the countryside, and sod-all to

show for it?'

Alan nodded. ''Fraid so.'

'Are you going to leave it at that?'

'What?'

'So long, Roger Southwell, and thanks for the wonderful wild-goose chase?'

'I don't know,' said Alan. 'I did think of researching the man a bit. You know, with all the interest there is in the occult, I could probably sell his story somewhere.'

'And his "Dark Lady".'

'Who?'

'You know - the portrait at James Rendall's. Another Roger Southwell mystery. Alan, you can't just leave it like that.'

By this time they had reached Kim's Audi, which Alan had left in the car park. He held out the keys to her.

'Do you want—'

'No, I'm knackered. You drive.'

Alan stowed Kim's gear in the boot and got into the driver's seat. Kim slid in beside him, cursing as the seat-beat locked when she tried to fasten it.

'Well, I've picked up another Prize Draw from Suttons,' Alan related, once they were on the road, 'and Alec Griffiths rang me about doing his firm's Annual Report. Oh - and I've promised to teach Debbie Griffiths Italian.'

'You've what? Why?'

'I don't quite know, really,' said Alan. 'Except that she seems to want to be an opera singer.'

'Debbie?'

'Surprised me too, but she seems really keen. On Puccini, at any rate.'

Kim opened the Evening Standard, which Alan had bought in the airport shop, and turned first to the cartoons. Five minutes later she was leafing idly through the news pages.

'Alan.'

'Mm?'

'Did you see this about Robert Simpson?'

Alan's heart lurched. 'What about him?'

'He's in intensive care following a car crash. They reckon there's permanent brain damage. Apparently he drove his Merc into a bridge on the M4.'

'Serves the bastard right,' said Alan savagely. Inside him a mélange of emotions and sensations - exultation, fear, hope, dread, desire - thrashed and coiled like snakes in a pit. 'Well, come on, Kim, he wasn't much better than a vegetable when he *had* all his faculties.'

As he had expected, Kim found this unanswerable: she couldn't pretend to have liked Simpson. The kindest words she'd ever applied to him were 'that fat shit'. She turned on the tape player, having forgotten what was inside; it was *Lucia:*

'Il fantasmo... il fantasmo...' sang Dame Joan Sutherland. Kim shivered, inexplicably. *'The phantom...'*

Later that afternoon, when Kim had gone to sleep on the sofa, Alan returned to his office and furtively re-

read that spell.

A Receipt to make a Maiden Enamour'd of a Man.

Almost without thinking, he picked up the scrying-glass and caressed its smoothness. Slowly a strange smile spread over his face, an expression which Kim would never have recognised as Alan's.

9

The Journal of Fabian Stedman

III: The Murders

This day I received a letter from that Richard Duckworth the friend of my brother Francis, most elegantly written and in a most fair hand; I had forgotten I had written to Francis concerning this Master Duckworth: *Absens haeres non erit*,[1] in truth. He soundeth a man much as Francis, which is to say, a clergyman, paying at the least lip-service to these knaves of Puritans; an a man do subscribe to their beliefs, so is he saved; an he do not (and I do not), why he will be damned.

And how must I then respond to a man of the cloth? 'Tis not my custom to dissemble, nonetheless I must needs do so, for what I have to say to this Reverend. is of more import than mine own self-esteem. It is that now there are books in this land dealing with all manner of things, mean and ill-printed though many be (and few indeed though printers are permitted to be, is there not space and to spare for a book on the *Campanalogia*, the art of *Change-ringing*, or *Tintinnalogia* as we might term it, being concerned with the *Tintinnabulation* which is most pleasant to the ear when that it is struck well and is also a most admirable exercise for the mind.

To this effect can I write to the man and not enter into matters controversial. An I avoid entirely matters religious shall I find no trouble. 'Tis not an obligation to sign oneself, as he doth, *Your Brother in Christ* (even if the Faithful-brethren would have it so, making folk eat, as they do, religion with our bread). For I have no brothers save mine earthly one and he be a man just as this one and no God or spirit.

Nor do I hold against them their beliefs, for I am sure they are most honestly felt, 'Tis merely that I have no desire to have them fed to me, being unable to believe them myself; and having had more than a sufficiency of my father thundering from the pulpit in my youth, nor did he spare us his sermons at home. I'll say one thing in favour of this Duckworth and that is he writeth not like a clergyman composing sermons but with grace and an easy flowing style clear to read, the which will be an advantage should we work together on a book.

Today in Fleet-street was a man murdered most horribly, his body seeming drained of substance but not of blood, which latter would be more easy to comprehend for 'tis said that there be spirits which drink men's blood for nourishment; I have spoken to a man that lifted the cadaver and he said that it was scarce the heaviness of a child, but it was a man grown and tall as I. 'Tis true that men be slain every day, but in ways common and commonplace: in brawls; by robbers; for revenge; by sword-thrust and dagger, club and drowning. This man said that the corpse had no mark of any weapon on't, only a bitten lip, and the hue of it was blue like unto a bruise and the body dry like unto an husk. And this was a most strange thing.

I have to confess that I bethought me of Roger Southwell and his uses of bodily fluids, though in truth he used very little of them for any purpose I knew; but perchance a witch would use very great quantities for his black arts; they do tell us that there be indeed witches, and indeed from time to time a beldam is seized and hanged, though none I have seen ever did look to be any thing more than an aged crone pissing in her skirts with fear. Though an they possess such power why then do they not save them selves from the noose?

[1] i.e. out of sight, out of mind

This fervour of the church is a wicked thing, to dangle witches and heretics and stretch their necks (in truth they say they do not murder heretics any more, although I hear 'tis but a generation since that they were making pyrotechnics with *Unitarians* so-called) and adulterers too, and I daresay they would burn fornicators an they could catch them (an 'twould not make London-town an empty place); indeed it may be that they do simply murder anyone who doth not meekly comply with their own beliefs. Oft I say to myself, *Cave quid dicis, quando, et cui*,[2] lest they come for thee.

I have not seen Roger since that day when he appraised me of the departure of the creature that he called Lilu, nor in truth do I wish to see him, for he is become not at all a comfortable companion. Yet so much doth remain with me of friendship, that I do think of him with concern lest the canting church lay murderous hands upon him.

There was much talk at ringing-time about a new drab that hath come to dwell in Clerken-well and ply her trade. Bet Paget was the name she called herself, and many were the tales they told of her great beauty and skill in the art of Venus (as they do call it), the which I may say seemeth very strange to me for when I have passed the time with such an one it has been no more than skirts raised in an alley or a back room and all done in two minutes of the clock; although it is true that I never had the coin to pay a whore for a longer time nor had the inclination to do so neither. This being the case it is also a mystery to me how the likes of Nate Mundy find coin for occupation with this Queen of the Queans. And in spite of my great love for Catherine I could not be wholly indifferent to the tales-of this Bet and the divers ways in which she doth pleasure a man. I shall not write down what Nate and the others did say for the mere thought of it is causing my yard to stir and this is an unprofitable activity at this time. Nonetheless, an had we all coin we should all be rich, and most like dead of the pox as well, men being what they are.

I fell to thinking then that those desires of nature which our canting *Sir-Johns* term the *Seven Deadly Sins* are in truth quite the contrary, for lacking them we should not strive for anything. An a man have not lust he will not strive to please his doxy; an he lacks avarice he will learn no trade nor wish for coin to live; without gluttony he would eat nothing but porridge; *et cætera.*

These holy Faithful-brothers would have us live within a gray world where there is no black nor white, no passion, no anger nor joy; no heights nor depths neither: a place wherein folk move calm and slow from place to place, blessing God at every turn, asking his permission for all things they do; for all that those who would ordain such a place see it as the purest ideal it is nothing of the kind. An there be a God in whose eyes such behaviour is pleasing, in them all right minded men should spit.

I would have us enjoy our lives to the fullest measure, for whatever else is uncertain, there is one great truth: And that is that *Old Bone-Face,* the Reaper, awaiteth every man that ever lived. An there be any sequel, why that is a question for the metaphysicists, for I have never seen a revenant nor heard a message from the further side of the grave. As far as I know, when that we die, then we are dead, and there's an end on't. Therefore it doth behove us to make of this life whatsoever we are able, and hence the reason for my book: One small thing perchance, but 'tis the only way to life after death.

Well and good, there's no profit in these speculations, the which I but write to pass the time when I am kept apart from Catherine. For her father doth make his own demands on her time for to write in his account-

[2] Beware what you say, when, and to whom

books (he being also a printer though having but a small shop); his goodwife did die at the birthing of Catherine and he never took another nor fathered another child.

It is an uncommon thing in a woman to read and write, at least not so well as Catherine does, and to do figure-work and all in a fair hand withal. I do wonder if a woman may have the temperament to ring bells, for did any one 'twould be Catherine. She could ring the Treble and the lighter bells, as do youths ere they come into their strength. By youths I do not mean those ringers that do call themselves *College-youths*, but boys whose stones have not yet fallen. Or mayhap that description doth apply to some who style themselves College-youths, now I come to think on't.

Now 'tis true that when first I beheld Catherine all that I desired was to lie with her, but now I do see that she is of uncommon sort. It may be that I am too fond and foolish now that lust is transformed into something more, to see clear but I do think that Catherine is a woman of that same mettle of our late queen Elizabeth whom some called *Gloriana*, who hath said that within the body of a weak and feeble woman she did have the heart and stomach of a man.

I must speak to Catherine; for tho even now I do not like to think on the horrid death of Ann Pakeman, but she did look comely in man's dress and I had not have known her for a woman. Put my Catherine in such attire and no man but would take her for a pretty boy, in which case all we need to fear are men of th'other persuasion. 'Twould then be I that had the pleasure of disrobing her. For when all's said and done, if boys played women in the play-houses, why should the reverse not be possible?

–Indeed, said Catherine herself when I did speak to her of these fancies, didst thou never hear tell of Hannah Taylor who was a soldier for the Royalists and a swordsman of note, nor did they discover that she was a woman until she died? Or the one that they called Marius Jordanus, who was a follower of Galileo and truly a woman, nor did she recant his teachings even when that her master himself did?

–*Eppur si muove*, said I, which were the words that Galileo spoke after he was forced to recant of his discovery that the earth doth move around the sun: Indeed it doth move (but I was not speaking of the earth). I would fain see thee in breeches though.

–That is not for any other cause but lust, quoth she, the which I was unable to deny. But, Fabian, she said, her eyes bright, Let us but do this thing, let me be a boy, let me see your world, the world in which you men move. I can think of nothing more exciting.

–What of thy father? I asked.

–O use your magic potion once more, quoth she impatiently; At which I felt all the blood drain out of my face. Fabian, didst thou imagine I was unaware? she asked; I could but shrug my shoulders.

And on a sudden most grave, she said, –I did love thee from the first moment I saw thee. And when that I perceived the bright music of your enchantment, why then I knew that a man who would adventure so much was not to be disdained, prentice though he be.

And this arrested me; –Thou dost feel it, when the art of magic is in use, I asked.

–Ay, dost thou not? she responded.

–That I do, I told her, but not all do; Indeed I believe that most folk do not.

–Indeed that must be so, she said with a mischievous smile, for then my father wold have found us out. And I did embrace her then, for 'twas more than I had wished for.

I think on Catherine now, I cannot hold her countenance in my mind; ’tis like unto trying to hold a hand-full of water. I can see with ease the faces of many folk I know, but Catherine’s I cannot; perchance this is always so when that we love. There are gestures she makes and words she favours; she dwells within me like an house-hold spirit; she is too shining and diverse to see clearly. In her person she is as tall as I, her hair is the colour of an horse-chestnut and her eyes are gray, O but she is comely. *Habeo et teneo*,[3] and that is a great joy and delight, and piss on them that say other-wise.

So it came to pass that Catherine Alsop is become the first woman-bell-ringer. We disguised her in clothes of mine own, the which were a whit large but did serve to conceal her form, and called her a boy of fifteen years hight *Kit Francis* (the Kit from Catherine and the Francis from my brother, who would have swound had he known); And I did introduce her as a new prentice of my master, for there was none to gainsay this with Roger gone.

And from the first it was plain that Catherine would prove exceptional as a ringer of changes; In a short time she mastered bell-handling, and more soon than it pleases even me to admit she had set herself to learn changes, could hunt the treble passing well and then did acquaint herself of the Intricacies of divers peals.

I observed that soon she’d be making compositions to ring at great length; indeed on occasion it did seem that the ringing was a greater pleasure to her than mine own companionship; scarce a day passed that she did not go a-ringing at some tower; although she did also do sufficient to dissuade me from this notion when that we two kept company, *ab ovo usque ad mala*.[4]

I hear from Hugh Bishop that the *Protector Cromwell* doth now affect king-ship and is petitioned to take that title on him by all his new-made sycophant lords; but dares not for fear of the fanatics not all purged out of his rebel army. ’tis not the kind of king we’d wish back upon the throne.

On a night a sennight following on mine birthday when I did return late to my lodging I saw that within my room there showed a light, and so I did draw my sword and release the latch with great care before that I kicked open the door with my foot; But within was only Roger Southwell and woundy harrowed in the countenance.

I stepped into the chamber and did close the door behind me, asking, –What do you here?

–Why I am but come hither to pay mine end of our bargain, saith he; To give to thee that which will send thine enemy to thee.

–Kemp? I asked, for truth to tell I had nigh forgot him; though the thought of him did anger me anew.

–I’ll warrant thou art too much involved in tumbling and touzing with thy Kitling to think on him, said Roger, and I had a month’s mind to hit him.

–Why do you remember this now, I asked, when such a space of time is passed?

–Fabian I always pay my debts, quoth he. Hast thou a thing to eat or drink in this place? I looked at him closer then, his features looked pinched and starved with cold; and made haste to see an if I had me any Victuals; I found half a stale loaf and some dregs of sauced ale, both the which he swallowed hungrily.

–Art thou fallen on hard times then? I asked.

–Nay, he replied, but that I do forget to eat and drink some days. Fabian give me thy sword that I may for-speak it.

[3] I have and hold

[4] i.e. from the beginning to the end

–For what purpose? I said.

–That it will cleave to Kemp, and seek him out, and give thee intelligence that he be near.

So I reversed the sword (which I had not sheathed) and offered him the hilt; he took it in his two hands and spoke words over it that I could not hear, nor do I think they were English or Latin words; and the air shone and sparkled about him and the sword; It so crackled that the separate hairs on my arms did stand on end, then flashed so bright I must needs close my eyes for the shining of it. Then he returned to me the sword and I bedded it in its scabbard.

He ruffled my hair with his hand and quoth –Thou art become grisard, Fabian, before thy time.

I frowned at him for I misliked this, and asked, –Hast thou seen aught of the creature that thou named Lilu?

He narrowed his eyes and said, –Why do you ask?

–Roger, I said, angered, hast forgot from what thou madst her? And he grimaced as if he tasted a sour savour in his mouth.

–I have not seen her, he said, nor heard aught of her, and this doth perplex me greatly.

Self do, self have, I thought, but did not speak the words out loud.

–Never doubt, Fabian, I have a cunning scheme in my mind to counter her an she do come by with ill intent.

–Beshrew thee, Roger, I said, that is not my concern.

–I do give you my word, saith he, that no ill shall come to Catherine Allsop in connection with this. And he looked so fatigued then that I did feel sympathy for him.

–I had best go hence, he said, for I have much to do on the morrow.

–I'll aid thee an I can, I said.

And Roger raised up his eye-brows and replied –I thank thee, Fabian; and went out at the door.

The day following I did wonder whether it was that Roger could see into the future like unto a gypsy for Master Pakeman did call to me and say, –Fabian, you shall go this day to Richmond for me to Master Fletcher's where you are gone before.

–Gladly, says I, and truly I spoke, for like unto a red flower opening in my breast there blossomed the thought of making an end on Kemp; *Aut inveniam viam aut faciam,*[5] said I to myself.

I hied me back to my lodging and fetched my sword before I did go for a boat; and although I did once more find the voyage up-river a pleasant interlude, I did yearn all the time for it to be over so I could be about my business.

–Twill rain before night, the waterman said to me when I lighted, you should make haste with your errand; but I did consider I needed the dark for mine own task. although as matters turned out I did not.

But first of all, I went strait to Master Fletcher's House for to collect a packet of writings. As on the previous time I must needs attend a while until that the papers were ready, but at length I had the writings in a satchel and came out a doors once more into a day very dull and gray, with clouds all in the sky so that the sun was not to be seen; and it did cast as 'twere a pall over the day.

I minded well where it was that I had seen Kemp, down by the river, so that was the way I turned my steps; I remembered much of the town from the wanderings I had made on that day. And then I came around the cor-

[5] I'll either find a way or make one

ner of a building and walked strait into Kemp him-self before ever any of Roger's magic could take effect.

–*Fabian Stedman*, he whispered, nigh too soft to hear; I stepped back and drew my sword.

–We have unfinished affairs to settle, he said, and I had no need to look far to discover the source of his sudden courage, for he had with him two roynish fellows; three on one is bad odds, for the one, anyway. He had his sword out presently, and I made haste to parry him.

–Wat, says he to one of his bullies, do you spy out for the watch, and we will finish this cock-brained whoreson.

–Thou smock-faced crack, said I, I had fain see you adventure it. There was as 'twere a knot in my belly but strange to tell 'twas not so much fear as arousal; I grinned a wolf's smile at them; and then both set on me.

All was so confused I cannot set down any clear narrative of the first minutes, but 'twas clear Hugh Bishop's teaching was good; for he was a soldier and taught me a soldiers tricks while these two had learned off a fencing-master; they did jig about like girls with the green-sickness.

Kemp seemed content for a while to permit his accomplice to cross swords with me while he essayed to harry and distract me from one side or the other; then the one slipped past my defence and did gash my arm, at which I took my own dagger-hilt and punched him in the face with it; after which he lost Interest in the fight. I believe I did break his nose, for it was gouting blood; I kicked him as he fell and also kicked his sword out of reach. Kemp nigh spitted me with a fortunate sword-thrust, but I dodged aside and went for his gut with my dagger; he deflected the mortal blow but I cut him, and pressed the advantage, backing him to the wall. I saw his frighted face as white as paper, and sheathed my sword in his body; It slipped in with but little resistance, and he did fold over.

–Wat, he cried, and the other came a-running. As I gave to Kemp his death-stroke this man put his own dagger into my side and pain followed sharp and sudden, worse nor any whipping I ever took. I let go the sword which was stuck in Kemp's body, and put my dagger in the man Wat's throat. His blood spewed out like unto a fountain and he fell without a cry, looking mightily surprised.

This Wat's dagger had stuck in me just below my ribs on my right side; I pulled it out and there followed a rush of blood that soaked my clothing. The dagger fell to the ground and I pressed my hand to the wound, seeing mine own blood leaking betwixt my fingers.

It came to me a whit late that I must needs get me hence before that some one came; I looked round but the third man, that I broke the nose of, was gone; I retrieved my sword and wiped it and the dagger clean on Kemp's clothing, then made my way down the alley towards the river. My head felt empty and strange; I had killed two men that sought to slay me, and my Yard was stiff yet; though walking was becoming difficult, I could not go a strait line but staggered from side to side. I felt cold sweat on my countenance, and leaned against a wall on one side; I do not know whether I swound but far-away I did hear a Voice, although I could not tell any words.

Then someone had an arm about me and I one upon a shoulder and I was being dragged halting in at a door.

I could make out nothing plain, the room swam; –Can you stand up, asked the voice, and the question seemed difficult to answer.

–I think it unlikely, I replied after some consideration, and the words came out slurred like unto the speech of a drunk man.

–Lie you down here, then, and attend until I return.

I replied that I did not think I had be going any other place; then I know I fainted, because I woke propped against a wall and someone giving me water to drink; much of it spilled down my chin, and I realised that it had a faint bitter savour as of herbs.

–Drink it all, said the man, ’tis the loss of blood that makes you faint. Then I’ll see about your hurts.

–Who are you? I said.

–Your saviour, I think, he said; hight Nicholas Griffin; I did spy you beset by three rogues, I went to fetch a pistol; but you had done the work and mumpt them indeed when I came out a doors. I looked and saw he had a withered leg, the which explained his slowness.

–And you, he said, what’s your name, and your business?

–Fabian Stedman, printer’s prentice, I replied, awaiting an Inquiry that never came.

Instead he said, –Is’t only the arm and side, or are you more hurt?

–I think the arm is but scratched, I said, but my side’s sore hurt; but there’s no more wounds.

–I’ll put you on a poultice, he said.

–Are you a Pothecary? I asked.

–Of a sort, he said.

–A Magician then?

–No, not that, indeed; an Herbalist I am, *primes inter partes.*[6] Soft now, can you take off your shirt, an I help you?

I saw that on my arm was in truth but a shallow cut, which was nigh stopped bleeding, but around the stab-wound in my side, which looked so small, my flesh was bruised and swollen, and the blood still welling out, and I felt a cold trickle of fear. ’tis not so deep as a well, I thought, nor so wide as a church-door, but ’tis enough, twill serve.

Nicholas Griffin took a wet clout and wiped away blood.

–An you had an ale-belly, he muttered, this would be but a flesh-wound. However we will do our best, and hope twill suffice.

–Is’t grave? I asked.

–’Tis not so bad, he said; you will not die, young man, for forty or fifty Years, an you stay out of brawls. Next time you might not be so fortunate as to meet with those less skilled than you. He applied some jollop that smelt pungent, and bound a pad over’t; my arm he anointed also, but more lightly, and bandaged it. Now you need clean clothes, he said; at that moment there came a banging on a door somewhere.

–I’ll not be long, he said, and went out, closing the door behind him.

I looked round the chamber: it was more like unto a cook’s-kitchen nor a pothecary’s work-shop, with a pot over the fire and a wooden table and a joint-stool and bunches of herbs hanged up to dry. I wondered briefly whether an I could get myself to sit at the table, rather than on the floor, but decided it was not a good Idea. By and by Griffin returned, his countenance thoughtful.

[6] first among equals

–’Twas the watch, he said, at the which I started in alarm. Soft now, they are gone; they asked me an I had seen murder done and I told them ’twas those dead ruffians that attacked a lone man, who was long gone. Now see, put on these clothes for your own are ruined.

–I cannot pay you for any of this, I said, and he but shook his head.

–’Tis no matter; I do not want paying. Now you must get you hence, for ’tis three a clock already. And mind, do you limit your occupation for awhile, lest you hinder the healing. Tell your little Town-miss to have a care an she want you whole again.

I imagine I did look surprised for he laughed and said, –My young friend, what age have you, five, six and twenty years?

–But lately turned six and twenty, I said.

–Well I never met a man of six and twenty that did not swive whenever he could, said Nicholas Griffin, and laughed again. I smiled, but bethought me that ætwould pain me overmuch to laugh also.

–Now get you hence, he said, drink no strong ale for a sennight, but drink you water with these herbs in it; and he gave me a small paper folded and sealed with wax, saying, A thing more, do not place so much faith in magic, ’tis not the rock that you believe it to be.

I discovered that an I walked slow and did not move over-much the pain was not great, though it ached sorely and made the boat-trip a lesser pleasure than hitherto; although the rain prophesied by the boat-man never did come; what do they know?

I delivered Master Fletcher’s writings to my master and worked quietly the rest of the day, lest he notice that I moved not easily and found that I had been in a brawl. Afterward I hied me to Catherine and told her what had befallen; I had entertained a doubt that she might mislike me when that she found I had killed two men, but she had heard the tale of Ann Pakeman’s murder, and thought it fine revenge, and was more concerned with my hurts. However we discovered that much was possible even though I could not move very well; although I was a plaguey long time returning to my lodging afterwards.

A day later a very horrid thing to relate, Nate Mundy is murdered, they found his corpse in Clerken-well; like unto the other man, drained of substance like some Vessel emptied and blue in the face. And though Nate was but a smell-smock kind of man, yet it is a waste that he be dead so youthful, at the age of but twenty years.

There was a pamphlet circulating ere long that said that Nate and Humphrey Hope (which was the other man that was killed the same way) were not murdered at all but stricken down by God for excessive whoring, the which is just the kind of thing I expect the snot-nosed Faithful-brethren to say and an they believe such nice falsehoods will put an end to fornication then ’tis high time England had a King again to put an end to such foolishness and sit down upon these damned Parliamentarians.

I had but xvii years of age when they did cut off the head of king Charles and my father so distressed that he did fast for three days nor took aught but water to drink all that time. But now they are fond bedfellows, the which doth show that not the least among men but hath given up his principles for the sake of an easy life. Beshrew me an ever I do the same.

That night I did dream another strange dream, nor did I know that I dreamt, for ’twas so real that I believed I was in my chamber having lately returned for the night. And the ache of my wound keeping me waking there came a knocking at the casement so Insistent that at last I arose from my bed and went to look out at it; and

outside, sitting on the air, was a woman all white and her countenance masked; and I fell to panting as if 'twere (this thought came to me in the dream, and I did remember it in the morning) the breath in my body was calling to this creature.

I laid my hand on the window-catch ere I knew what I did; when that I saw't I moved my hand away and without the figure tapped on the glass again, opening her mouth below the mask to bare her wolf's teeth, all sharp and fangy. But then the pain of my wound came on so sharp I bent over double with the hurt of it; and when the ache had died down, she was gone and I resumed my bed.

However day by day my flesh healed, aided by the herbal specifics of Nicholas Griffin that had warned me to abjure magic. And indeed in spite of Roger's incantation I had received no warning of Hawkin Kemp's presence; Of whose demise his mother my master's sister had been apprehended so that she took to wearing a black veil atop her widow's weeds, the which did call to my mind the creature of Roger southwell when soever I did see her.

I half expected questions of Master Pakeman, but an he knew Kemp died that day I went to Richmond-town he did not connect the two occurrences. And indeed why should he so; knowing neither that I do possess a sword nor that I have skill enough to use it. Nor do I think him like to see a prentice of his acting such a part.

In my mind there are matters spinning that I feel certain are connected, and could I but make those connections I might discover some momentous thing. Is there a link betwixt Roger's creature and the dead men? Or betwixt my dream and they? I could wish I knew what Roger is doing at this time, as he works towards his cunning scheme to counter her, what soever that may be.

It was Catherine that did point my mind in the right direction, after we had been to ring the first time since I was stabbed. The stretching did pain me a whit, but it was not the sharp pain that ate me the days after that it was done, more like unto an ache, and then an itch in the flesh. So we made haste back to my lodging, for I could not go arm-in-arm with her when she was dressed as a boy; she was not so merry as her wont and she sat on the bed and clasped her arms around herself.

–What is't? I said, does aught ail thee?

She shook her head; and I came to put my arms about her and found her as rigid as a piece of wood. I set to rubbing her back, and she put her head upon my shoulder. So my thoughts had taken another direction, which is to say the usual one, when she did say very quiet, –I have such horrid dreams these last nights I am almost afeard to sleep.

–What manner of dreams, I said; tell me one.

–I durst not, she replied, which was not the words of my Catherine.

–Listen to me now, I said to her, I have bad dreams also; I will tell thee mine, that I did have not such a long time since, and the which was most horrid, do you but tell me thine.

–Do we dream real things, Fabian? she asked.

–I know not, said I honestly; But perchance we can riddle them.

–I dreamt, said Catherine then, three times now have I dreamt it, and they do say that three times is the charm, that I had me a desire to drink of the breath of living men. And I did turn cold myself.

–What is't? she asked of me.

–I'll tell thee by and by; tell thy tale.

She said, –I seemed to be drifting through the air, having no body of mine own; I floated hither and yon, seeking for nourishment. And two times I did feed but not the third, though the third I desired most urgently. I know not what manner of creature I was; not human, nothing possessed of a soul; but each time I woke, I felt not human even then.

I held her close then, my thoughts a-roiling. It was Roger's creature Lilu, in a new disguise, that was walking the night and sucking out the breath and the life from men, and Catherine dreaming her because Lilu was made from her; and I could not tell her that.

–What did you dream then, Fabian, she asked me, and I told her of the white woman that drifted outside my casement; she looked fearfully at it.

–We dreamt the same thing then, she said, but from opposite sides.

–They are dreams, only dreams, I said, and I held her until we both forgot them.

In the morning I awoke betimes and lay without moving, knowing that something was very wrong; I opened my eyes and knew; for Catherine was yet there in my arms; we two had fallen asleep and slept the whole night through, and just now her servant or her father would be finding her own bed not slept in. Catherine must have felt me move as I wakened, for she opened her eyes also.

–O Fabian, she said, what have we done?

–Hush, I said, 'twill be well, I'll wed you today and Master Pakeman can go whistle for a prentice.

–What will my father say? she cried.

And I said, –He will say what he will, and we will discover't soon enough, but just now we are here two together, and what shall we do about that? And therefore we did the only thing we could do.

–Not until that we were dressed, she in her own proper clothes and I eschewing working-dress, did she say, I dreamed again.

–The same? I asked her.

–Ay, the same.

–Well, said I, there's no help on't for now, we must needs go speak with thy father. (I durst not even contemplate mine own father; I have seen him in a rage, I was sore affrighted of him as a child and did oft-times feel his belt and more than his belt for small petty things that were offences in his eyes; I did not wish to occasion his wrath as a man grown.)

'Twas not so great a distance from my lodging to the house of Catherine's father, the which was also his shop and smaller by as much as half than that of Master Pakeman.

–Something is wrong, Catherine said to me as we approached; there was a mess of folk in the street and all milling about like unto pismires in an ant-nest stirred up with a stick; I am afeard, she said.

And in truth I was concerned also for that the crowd did seem to centre upon Master Alsop's.

–What's the moil, I asked a man that was standing by; he knew not; but another turned and said, –'Tis Master Alsop the printer; they say he's murdered.

And Catherine cried out, –No, no, no.

I caught her hand to hold her from running, saying, –Wait, we'll go together; and she was white like unto chalk; I could not stay her.

I would have staid her from beholding the body an I could, but she was not to be held back, nor spared the sight, the sight I had more than half expected. Her father's corpse was blue in colour, dry like unto an husk, tumbled like a bottle of cloth in a corner of his small chamber; the knuckle of his right hand was bloody, an he had been in a brawl, and there were blood-stains and smears by the door-jamb, the which made me think on some thing I could not quite recall. And after a time they bore the body away for burying in Pulcher's bone-yard.

Then passed many days mightily confused and I cannot order their events in my mind, but I do recall that at one time I stood in Master Alsop's bed-chamber where his cadaver was found and looked on the bloody marks by the door; And then there returned to me that fancy that I had entertained a long time since, and which I did write down then, anent the patterns on our finger-ends; and I looked close at the marks and indeed that was what they were, smeared and not clear but quite plain did a man but know what to look for.

An I could discover whose fingermarks these were, they might point their fingers towards the assassin. But I said nothing of these thoughts for I was greatly frighted that they would be the same as Catherine's, an my suppositions were correct.

And Catherine being at work that Whitsuntide on her fathers affairs and accounts, he having no heir but she and no kin, I did find ink-prints of her own fingers on a torn paper, the which I took in secret to the others to compare; 'twas as I had feared. 'twas in truth Roger's creature, that was Catherine's dark twin, was murdering men yet at large in the city: there had she left her mark.

10 : Cry Havoc

> ‘And then, abruptly, once more I thought I heard the sound of the huge, soft tread on the aisle, and this time closer to me. There was an awful little silence, during which I had the feeling that something enormous was bending towards me, from the aisle..And then, through the booming of blood in my ears, there came a slight sound from the place where my camera stood - a disagreeable sort of slithering sound, and then a sharp tap. I had the lantern ready in my left hand, and now I snapped it on, desperately, and shone it straight above me, for I had a conviction that there was something there.’
>
> William Hope Hodgson, *The Thing Invisible*

Kim awoke with a crick in her neck and stared into darkness, which disoriented her. She slid off the sofa with a groan and when her eyes adjusted to the cat light she squinted at the clock-counter on the video: 22:03, it said.

‘Damn,’ she muttered irritably, turning on the nearest lamp. She rubbed her eyes, rolling gritty particles between thumb and forefinger, then stamped grumpily into the kitchen to brew some coffee. Prowling uneasily around the downstairs while it filtered, she nearly tripped over her camera case, which had been dumped in the hall with the rest of her gear.

‘Bloody hell,’ she growled. What was Alan up to? He’d never failed to stow her gear away before, sometimes even when she didn’t want it put away. She padded up the stairs, treading carefully on the ones which creaked so as not to make any noise.

Light crept under the ill-fitting door of Alan’s office, so she eased it open carefully and peered round it. Alan was pillowed on his arms, snoring gently. Pieces of paper covered in his untidy writing spilled out from beneath him; the screen of the word-processor glowed blue by his side. Kim reached over to turn it off, then blinked in surprise: the text displayed was in Latin. She stared at it uncomprehendingly.

‘Magia naturalis licita est, & non prohibita.

‘Miraculum magnum a Trismegisto appellabitur homo, qui in deum transeat quasi ipse sit deus, qui conatur omnia fierei, sicut deus est omnia; ad objectum sine fine contendit, sicut infinitus est deus, immensus, ubique totus.’

The cursor was pulsing after *totus*. Kim stared at the keyboard for a moment as if that would unravel the mystery of how to use the machine, but it didn’t. Unwilling to turn it off, perhaps losing hours of work, she drew back.

Possibly woken by the sense of a presence in the room, Alan stirred and opened a bleary eye. ‘Wha’s time?’

‘Quarter past eleven.’

‘Christ, I must have nodded off.’

‘Yeah,’ agreed Kim without irony, ‘you must have. What’s with all that Latin?’

Alan looked at the screen and turned red, like a child caught out. ‘Just something I was writing.’

‘Prize Draws in Latin, now?’

‘It’s... to do with Roger Southwell,” said Alan, pressing keys. The screen flashed up the words STORING TEXT.

‘Oh,’ said Kim.

***

Kim frequently remembered her dreams - sometimes three or four or even more on a restless night, if her intermittent insomnia struck. Sometimes they were mere snatches, sometimes full-blown dramas. She was apt to amuse herself by analysing them, but that night she dreamed a really baffling one.

She found herself in a dim street, the buildings to either side obscured and difficult to see: a sense of menace hung over everything.

Adocentyn, said a voice from nowhere, which meant nothing at all to Kim.

Cautiously, she walked down the street, avoiding deep ruts filled with a substance like the grey mud which boils in thermal springs. As she walked, the buildings on either side drew closer together, their upper stories practically touching over Kim’s head. She halted at a corner; peered round it.

Something lying in the gutter made her heart jump illogically, the way an unexpected wino in a doorway does. Looking closer, she found that it was a bundle of sacking, coarse and stained. Curiously, she poked it with her foot. It felt - loose. Surrendering to curiosity, she squatted beside it, untying the wet cords which bound the sack, and peeled the damp fabric back. The next second she jumped back with an exclamation of disgust, her heart hammering, for the sack contained a corpse which had been dead a long time: it was a little like old bones and leather, with a straggly mass of hair just visible. Kim stood up, grimacing - and then the body began to move, feebly, and a great rush of blood burst out from it.

‘Shit!’ said Kim, trying to avoid the flow - and woke up. The moon was looking in through the window with its pale expressionless face (although she could have sworn she’d closed the curtains).

Well, I wonder what all that was about, she thought. *Body in a sack: that’s* Rigoletto, *and Gilda (‘Mia figlia! Dio! Mia figlia!’*[1]*);* but why? Failing to find a logical connection, she turned over and went back to sleep.

When, some hours later, she staggered out of bed bleary-eyed to make the morning coffee, she stubbed a toe on the metal case containing her photographic gear in the hall. This did not improve her temper, and she hopped around cursing for a while; but at least it had woken her up.

In the kitchen she stood on one leg to massage the bruised toe while waiting for the kettle to boil, staring absently out of the window and reviewing the previous day’s strangeness. It was not like Alan to fall asleep at his desk, or forget to move her gear, or to be so oddly furtive about what was on his word-processor.

Kim would have liked to ask him a number of questions, but she had a client at half past nine, which meant she had to be at the studio by nine.

When she got there, the studio was freezing cold, and rolls of paper surrounded the fax. Kim listened to messages on the answering machine, none of which were of great import, turned on the fan-heater to reduce the chill in the barn-like room - a somewhat optimistic gesture - and examined the faxes, muttering ‘Why - is - it - so - bloody - cold?’ The temperature seemed lower inside than it was out, which was ridiculous.

‘Client’ll freeze to death,’ she worried, searching for coffee. Presently the door-buzzer sounded and she found herself greeting not only her own client, the art director from the advertising agency, but the agency’s

client as well.

Kim's heart sank. Clients on shoots were always bad news. Knowing not a thing about lighting, film or camera angles, they would nonetheless flap around poking their noses into everything, changing their minds every five minutes, and panicking when they saw the Polaroids, which they always imagined showed accurate colour however many times they were assured to the contrary.

Mickey made an 'I'm-sorry' face from behind the client, and Kim gritted her teeth and prepared herself to be agreeable.

'The model's booked for ten,' she told them. 'Now a lot of this is going to be down to the lighting' - Mickey grimaced - 'and you won't be able to see very much till I've done some Polaroids. "Weird but not sinister", is the brief?' This to the client, who nodded.

'The software package is called MicroMagic,' he said. 'I've brought new samples of everything, and a little PC - that's new, too.' Kim raised an eyebrow at Mickey: she wasn't used to efficient clients. She was not sanguine that he would continue to impress.

'You got a visual for me to look at?'

'Oh, yah,' replied Mickey, unzipping her folio case. Her roughs showed a wizard in a tall hat and spangled gown with his hands spread in typical pose, except that beneath them a PC had been substituted for a crystal ball. *'MicroMagic,'* said the ad. *'Better than a pact with the devil.'* Kim felt the invasion of a shudder down her back.

'Jesus, it's cold in here,' observed Mickey. 'You a closet Eskimo or something?'

'No, I think the heating's up the Swanee,' Kim said. 'Cluster round the fan-heater, guys. Soon warm up when we've got some lighting on set. You want this on one-twenty, Mickey?'

'Yah, 's only going in press, don't need five-fours. Don't go any smaller, though.'

It took most of the day to set up the shot: the lighting was complicated, Kim was something of a perfectionist, and the client blotted his copybook pretty soon and nit-picked constantly thereafter. Both Kim and Mickey breathed deep sighs of relief when he departed at four o'clock; so did the model. After that, without the interruptions, they finished within the hour and Kim sent the films to the lab for overnight processing.

'Want a beer?' she asked Mickey after the model, too, had taken his leave.

'Sure, why not. Thank God that old fart-arse Clive buggered off early. Why is this place so cold? I've been freezing all day. It's like *Tales from the* friggin' *Crypt.'* Mickey blew out, and her breath stood in the air like mist. 'Look at that. That ain't natural, in September.'

Kim rubbed at her own arms, feeling the lizard-skin of goosebumps through her sweatshirt. 'It is strange. Here - at least the beer ought to be cold.'

'Frozen solid, more like. Thanks. When d'you expect the trannies back from the lab?'

'Oh, by ten, I expect. I'll get them on a bike as soon as.'

Despite the cold, Kim felt a strange reluctance to go home when Mickey had left the studio, but it was too chilly to potter for very long. She broke down the set and packed up as slowly as she could, and was on the point of locking the strongroom door when something made her stop.

One instant, there was nothing. In the next, she was aware of threat - a threat as tangible as a mugger with a knife, but more. It was an *over-reaching* threat which filled the air, a palpable presence, and Kim felt icy

sweat on her face, cold as if she were about to be sick.

She backed to the wall, putting it behind her for safety, and looked round. The familiar shape of the studio - lights, stands, backgrounds, milk crates and debris - all was as she had left it. The high ceiling was in shadow. But what she felt was present, not behind anything, but somehow in everything.

This is damn stupid, thought Kim. And yet it wasn't. Something was there, wherever *'there'* was. Then, as suddenly as it had appeared, the presence was gone. Kim sagged against the wall. Breathing heavily in reaction, she wiped her clammy face.

He found something, she thought. *Alan. He found something in Southwell's tomb. Or is it that something's found* him? *Or me? Something from the tomb?*

At home the only sign of Alan was a yellow Post-it note in her office: *'New client - Brewer Neal (brokers). Gone for brief.'* and a telephone number.

Uncharacteristically indecisive, Kim returned downstairs and spent some time in the kitchen manufacturing a sandwich of very thin bread with a very thick filling. Chewing this thoughtfully, she walked slowly upstairs again and stared at the closed door of Alan's office, wrestling with a sense of control slipping away, of the world gone awry; as if its rules had suddenly been rewritten.

It seemed to her that the way everything worked had been subtly altered, so that now it was quite natural for Kim to go furtively searching Alan's office - as natural as it was for him to keep secrets from her; which would never have happened in the world as it had been. Kim sensed, with a profound but unfocused dread, that something irrevocable had happened. Or was happening. Or was about to happen.

She envisaged a whole series of worlds, each diverging from a path, spreading down like a family tree, branching from paired single ancestors into the ultimately uncountable: the branches occurring where one unforeseeable possibility would prevail, or be chosen, over another.

So there was now an infinity of possible worlds, and a further infinity within each of those; and something now was different in the particular world which Kim and Alan inhabited. It had diverged from time. Deep inside, she felt an intuition of some strange evolution, a yearning, but for what she could not tell.

Pushing open Alan's door, she would not have been in the least surprised to enter a magician's den complete with hanging crocodile, athanor, and curled alembics. Or to meet there with someone who had not existed a moment before - or who had always existed.

Consequently the mundane scene which met her eyes, the word-processor and the fax machine, the mailing packs spread on the desk - was for a disorienting instant far stranger still. So disoriented was she, hanging as she was between possibilities, that she almost jumped ten feet when the telephone rang, and her hand hovered over the receiver for what seemed like minutes before she picked it up.

It was the photo lab.

'Kim?'

'Yes?'

'It's Dave, at Pix. You know those films you sent in today?'

'Yah?'

'There's something dead funny about them. I've just got the test shots through, and either you've got a double exposure on 'em or else you've invented some new technique we lesser mortals haven't discovered

yet.'

'Dave, what the hell are you talking about?'

'Can I bike these tests to you now? Then you can see for yourself.'

'Oh God, if you must,' said Kim. *I do hate this kind of thing,* she thought. *Riddles, puzzles, treasure-hunts. Damn it, how did this ever start?* She thought of telephoning the number Alan had left, but irritably dispelled the idea, knowing herself how annoying it was to be interrupted when with a client. Forgetting, for some reason, what it was she had been about to do, she made her way downstairs, scarcely aware that she was singing to herself:

'Deserto sulla terra, col rio destino in guerra,
e sola speme un cor... un cor al Trovator.'
'Alone in the world, unlucky in war,
the troubador has only one hope: his heart.'

It seemed, when she realised what it was, an ill omen. Kim grimaced, and crossed to the stereo to put on something more cheerful. But somehow there seemed to be sinister overtones in all the titles she read, and she eventually opted for silence, whistling softly through her teeth instead.

At last a leather-encased youth on a motorcycle appeared with a cardboard envelope marked PHOTOGRAPHS: DO NOT BEND.

Hurrying upstairs, she ripped off the wide brown tape which sealed the package and drew out a strip of three transparenies, which she placed on the lightbox, then pressed the switch. The fluorescent lights beneath flickered on, and Kim stared in horrified disbelief at the shots she'd taken that afternoon. Her first thought was: I'll have to get them retouched. But on closer examination, she wasn't sure it was possible.

Balefully lit from beneath, the 'wizard' crooked his bony fingers over the PC: in whose screen squatted an image which, although it was as three-dimensional as a hologram, Kim could not see clearly. She was glad of that: it gave her the impression that her own sanity was a thing to be doubted. She could be sure of a mouth, which quirked as she watched - or so she thought - into the same smile as the model's. It revealed altogether too many teeth that were more like fangs for comfort. And eyes. Eyes expressionless as a bird's, or a lizard's, or a toad's, staring into hers. Was that a hand, clawed? A horn, there? a hint of scales?

'Bastard,' she muttered, for no real reason, and snapped off the light. Somehow, the eyes remained, green like a cat's in car headlights, flat and luminous. Leaning over the lightbox, Kim cursed aggressively, but found this did not relieve the strange sensations whirling and curdling inside her stomach.

She went back into Alan's study, then, and stared dumbly at the small smoky glass lying innocently on a frayed handkerchief on the desk - innocently as a black widow in its web. Battle appeared to have been joined, though how she knew that was, in itself, another mystery. Almost as if, in this adjacent world, she had grown another sense. And the tableau before her, her own hands flanking the cloth but not touching it, and in the centre, the glass (neither of which had been there earlier) spelt out a message clear as calligraphy.

Kim looked at her veiny big hands and at the way the light and shadow lay on them and thought: *These are the hands of the person who has to fight this battle.*

Her wrists looked too improbably thin and bony to support the thought.

11 : Look Not In My Eyes

‘Know that your words have won me at the last
To practise magic and concealèd arts.
Yet not your words only but mine own fantasy
That will receive no order from my head,
But ruminates on necromantic skill.
Philosophy is odious and obscure.
Both law and physic are for petty wits.
Divinity is basest of the three,
Unpleasant, harsh, contemptible and vile.
’Tis magic, magic that hath ravished me.’

Christopher Marlowe, *Doctor Faustus*

The voice was of singular beauty, and that part of him which was now, somehow, *other* than Alan Bellman marvelled at it. It was a sound outside that other’s experience: the control of it, the subtlety of the melodies. There was so much music to be had in this strange world. So much of of everything, and all at the turn of a .switch. Light, music, water; fire, breezes, speech; like having control over all the four elements, and more.

Alan was listening to Joan Sutherland on his Walkman. *(‘Sempre libera degg’io/folleggiare di gioia in gioia... Forever free to flit from pleasure to plasure*’) He whistled the tune, almost soundlessly, experience having taught him that singing along to tapes brought odd looks from fellow-travellers. His voice was not as pure as Kim’s: it tended towards flatness on occasion. In his hands the paper, open at the cartoons, lay unregarded, even the exploits of his favourite character Modesty Blaise. But his mind seemed to seethe with power: it was a slightly uncomfortable feeling, as if his brain were too big for his skull.

Tomorrow night he would begin Debbie’s Italian lessons. Recalling this, a strangely anticipatory pleasure hovered deep within him, but his blank expression did not alter.

Still only partly anchored in reality, he folded his paper away and got off at the right station, following that sixth-sense which no commuter ever loses. At a break in the music he squeezed the ‘off’ button, and pulled the headphones down round his neck where they sat like the bronze torc worn by a Celtic chieftain. He brandished his ticket in the direction of the collector and returned it to his pocket. Finding his car, still eighty per cent on autopilot, he stared at the dashboard for several minutes before starting the ignition, as if it were an unfamiliar artefact.

Parking the Beetle, he noticed that his office light was on. When they bought the house, he and Kim had tossed for offices in the two spare bedrooms: she had the smaller, at the front of the house; his was larger, but, being at the side, gave only on to the next-door wall.

Living as they did in a cul-de-sac, traffic noise was negligible. Alan frowned, not quite knowing why, and trudged to the front door, his briefcase heavy as a headstone.

He found Kim sitting in his office, hunched like a spider in his swivel chair, with her legs drawn up. She never sat neatly - or did anything tidily. Her feet and hands were too big, her small frame too angular, more like a gangly adolescent boy than a woman in her thirties. Her androgynous appearance suddenly disturbed

him, like something strangely new.

‘Hi, magician,’ said Kim.

Alan’s heart vaulted in his breast with something like horror, something like panic. He saw, without surprise, the scrying-glass and cloth on his desk before her, and felt his face turn transparent with guilt.

In the instant when he was about to confess all to her, something locked like a clamp on his tongue, paralysed his speech centres, and he found himself, of all things, laughing.

Kim’s face sent a pang through him: stony and remote. He sensed the coiled anger behind her pose, and deep inside, he quailed. Some part of him still strained towards her, towards the light, but it was pitilessly suppressed by something Alan could take no credit for. For a long second he saw her as in a blaze of lightning: everything was clear as revelation. Then, too quickly for him to react, the moment was past, and he sensed her receding from him. It was like a dream in which something he had known all his life suddenly became entirely unfamiliar.

Horrified, he saw her hand close round the glass, and, with an inarticulate sound, moved to stop her. He gripped her wrist. It was a mistake. When her first wrench failed to free her, she said, ‘Let go,’ in reasonable tones; but when that had no effect, she biffed him in the eye.

It was not a hard blow, but Alan’s perception cleared slightly.

‘Don’t look in the glass!’ he exclaimed, and was shocked by the despair in his voice.

‘Why not?’ asked Kim, looking down at his hand, which still held her wrist.

Alan, following her gaze, released it quickly. ‘I don’t think it’s - controllable,’ he replied, remotely surprised that he was being permitted to answer, to warn.

‘And the Verony? Is that uncontrollable too?’

‘The glass,’ Alan went on, ignoring the question. ‘It shows you things that aren’t - aren’t pleasant. They seem too... huge, too —’

‘Over-reaching?’ she suggested, remembering her sensation in the studio.

He nodded eagerly. ‘Yes, that’s just it. You don’t see them clearly. That’s the worst thing. No, maybe it’s the best thing. Fangs, claws.’

‘Talons,’ said Kim. ‘Scales. Reptilian eyes.’

‘You’ve looked in it, then,’ Alan said flatly.

‘No. No, that was something else.’ Something that came after me, she didn’t add.

Alan stared at her, saying no more. The silence stretched, hanging between them, teased out until its substance became impossibly fine.

Then Kim looked away and, surprisingly, began to sing softly.

‘Sconto col sangue mio l’amor che posi in te!
Non ti scordar, non ti scordar di me ...’
‘I pay with my blood for loving you! Never forget me...’

Alan heard her voice as never before, the strange tenor quality of it: nothing of the feminine, as even a counter-tenor’s holds. The atmosphere cleared, lightened, as if the mu sic were freshening the air. He felt the hairs rise on his arms.

Kim felt it too. Slowly, she replaced the scrying-glass on the desk, and got to her feet. Alan followed her

out of the room.

‘The Verony?’ she asked.

Alan shook his head.

‘Nothing,’ he said. ‘Danger in the glass; nothing in the cloth.’ He could see she didn’t quite believe him.

Hands shaking, Alan picked up two tumblers from the draining-board; located the bottle of scotch and poured two large measures; handed one to Kim.

‘Can you tell me what’s happening?’ she asked.

‘It’s the glass,’ said Alan. ‘There’s something in it that wants out.’ He did not say what else had happened since he looked in it.

‘All that treasure-hunt business, then?’ Kim said. ‘It was bait, was it? Bait to find the glass?’

‘I don’t believe there’s treasure as such, no.’

‘Treasure, “as such”?’ echoed Kim.

‘No gold. No hidden coins or jewels. Maybe...’

‘Maybe what?’

‘I don’t know. Can’t guess.’ Alan drained the whisky in one gulp, grimacing. He disliked the taste of neat scotch.

‘Why didn’t you tell me you’d found something in the tomb? I presume that is where they came from?’

Alan nodded. ‘I - something stopped me. Like I felt, oh, that it wasn’t worth mentioning.’

‘Why not?’

‘It wasn’t anything as logical as thought. There was just this... strong disinclination to say anything at all.’

Kim swallowed a mouthful of scotch. ‘There’s nothing logical about any of this. First you find the tomb, which leads you to the well, which then leads you to the bells - which then lead you *back* to the tomb. Why?’

‘If I knew—’ began Alan, and stopped in frustration. He thought he did know, but couldn’t tell Kim. Physically, was unable to tell her. His head drooped with weariness; he knuckled his eyes fiercely.

‘Go to bed,’ said Kim.

‘I guess so.’ He forced himself to his feet, staggering with exhaustion, and made his way upstairs.

Kim, following later, found him fast asleep and fully clothed on the bed. She stared at him for a while as if he were something alien, then threw a blanket over him and crawled into bed herself.

In the morning Alan woke feeling curiously weightless. Everything seemed very bright, as if snow had fallen outside and the room was flooded with its strange unheavenly light. A purpose throbbing like a pulse within him, he extricated himself from the blanket which had wound itself round him during the night, and ran down the stairs to the kitchen.

Blearily, Kim accepted the coffee he handed her. She was too sleepy to want to pursue the looming mystery, and shortly departed for the studio to re-shoot MicroMagic, without much thought of the day ahead.

Alan, meanwhile, rode high on his cloud of euphoria until he had pulled on random clothes and re-established himself at his desk. Then he opened the drawer and extracted his precious spiral-bound notebook, turning it to the page too long delayed.

A Receipt to make a Maiden Enamour’d of a Man.

Rubbing his bristly chin with an obscure pleasure, Alan re-read the spell and began to collect together the

ingredients he had carefully accumulated, crushing them in his mortar to a fine and fragrant powder.

Unlike his first mixture, the smell of this melange was beguiling, heady and delightful. He was tempted to rub a pinch of it beneath his nose, but did not do so, in case it somehow spoiled the spell. When it was completed, he folded the powder carefully in a piece of clean paper and stowed in his pocket. Then he telephoned Josie Griffiths.

'Debbie still on for tonight?' he said.

'Looking forward to it eagerly! Really, it's awfully nice of you, Alan. Are you sure it's not too much trouble?'

'Not at all,' replied Alan. 'My pleasure.'

Kim peered at him strangely when she returned home, but Alan had steeled himself to appear normal and felt he was succeeding fairly well. Debbie turned up after he had devoured, with evident relish, a large plate of greasy sausages and chips.

He made, in the cafétière, strong bitter coffee, and stirred his powder into Debbie's cup along with two spoonfuls of sugar. Debbie, who knew his preference for mouth-shrivelling brews, drank it with apparent enjoyment and a large amount of cream. Watching her, Alan wondered when and how the magic would take effect.

'I've never done this before, so I bought a textbook,' he told Debbie. She took the paperback from him and flicked through it, smiling at some of the pictures.

'You don't really speak any Italian, do you?'

'Not properly,' she replied, seriously. 'I've learnt some arias, and I know what they mean, but that's sort of parroty, isn't it?'

Alan nodded.

'I can't break it down into "so-and-so" means "so-and-so" —' She sang then, extraordinarily well:

'Un bel dì vedremo
Levarsi un fil di fumo
Sull'estremo confin del mare.'

Alan felt his skin crawl.

"'One fine day",' the girl said, *'"we'll see a wisp of smoke rising over the farthest horizon of the sea."* But what's what? *"Un bel dì* - everyone knows that. Some of it's like French (you were right), so you can guess - but I want to know how to put it all together! It's so *frustrating!'*

Quite unexpectedly, Alan was suddenly overwhelmed by déjà vu: his own eager, younger self, believing nothing to be impossible; that everything could be learned; that he alone was master of his fate. The abrupt realisation that long ago all those illusions and dreams had faded away without his noticing - that Mephistopheles could invade anyone, had he but lost enough - brought tears to his eyes, as sharp as a sudden east wind. He shuddered.

Debbie was staring at him curiously. 'Are you all right?'

'It's nothing,' said Alan. 'Just what people used to call *"a goose walking over my grave".'*

'I never heard that saying,' said Debbie. Her eyes - blue as the spring-flowering ceanothus in the front garden - looked huge to Alan, and her lips were slightly parted. A terrible longing swelled in him as he looked at

her, a pain which gripped his vitals. The felt his breath grow short and cold sweat spring out on his forehead.

For a moment he was terrifyingly convinced that he was having a heart attack, and stared at Debbie in anguish, frightened that the powder was acting upon him instead of upon her. She, for her part, stared back with a curiously blank expression as these thoughts chased each other through Alan's mind; then she shook her head slightly as if to clear it. With a feeling akin to panic, Alan controlled a strong urge to kiss her.

By the time they had finished the lesson, Alan was half-convinced nothing had happened - and, on the other hand, half-convinced that something *had*.

Debbie's father came to collect her, and she kissed Alan on his scratchy cheek.

'Same time next week!' she confirmed. ''Bye, Alan, 'bye, Kim.'

'Well, Mr Chips?' Kim enquired. 'How was it?'

Alan blinked. 'Easy enough. She's very bright, Debbie.'

'Growing up, too,' remarked Kim.

'I suppose so,' murmured Alan. Kim raised one eyebrow and seemed on the point of saying something. Alan, his head suddenly reeling, squeezed his eyes shut and stared at the bright darkness inside them. 'I'm for an early night,' he added, and shot an anguished glance at her, but she had turned away. 'G'night,' he muttered.

'Night,' responded Kim absently.

When she was sure Alan was asleep - he proved impervious to a poke in the ribs - Kim padded to his office and picked up the scrying-glass.

Unsure quite why, unless some deep-rooted instinct wanted her to be on home ground, she took it into her own office and put *Turandot* on quietly in the background. Then she sat down at the desk, cupped the glass in her hands, where it lay heavily, and stared into it.

Clouds. The first things she saw were clouds, boiling and swelling, clenching, simmering. Something was tossed amongst them, like a leaf on titanic air-currents; she stared at it for some time before realising it was an aircraft, and recalled her hectic flight from Rome.

Be still, storms. She did not articulate the words in her mind, nor was she part- icularly aware of their presence in her brain. They just were.

Not controllable, eh? thought Kim, as the tossing clouds became quiescent. A wolfish grin lit up her face. She was not aware of it. *Now, glass, what will you show me next?* she asked.

Faint and far-off, she saw a man in an alchemist's workshop, the image familiar from films and Dulac illustrations. There was no doubt in her mind that this was Roger Southwell. A tall, dark-haired man, he did not look as though he washed very often. His hair hung lank and stringy. The picture she saw of him was like a television broadcast on a snow-stormy night.

Oh, go away, thought Kim crossly. *You're the cause of all this trouble, aren't you? Come on, glass, show me something useful.*

The image broke up, resolved itself briefly to a robed man climbing a steep mountain trail, then whirled into static again. Kim resisted the urge to thump the glass as she would an ancient radio, and glared fiercely into it.

Now a face swam into focus, as close as in a mirror, and Kim gasped involuntarily, flinching back. It was

not her face reflected, but the face of a young man, perhaps twenty-five years of age. He stared out at Kim, with eyes as grey as hers, as fixedly as she stared at him, but not, it seemed, seeing her. She saw details: sweat shiny on his forehead and upper lip - which was less than perfectly shaved - the tenseness of muscles in his jaw, as if his teeth were clenched; a small cut on his chin. So involved was she that her fingers rose to its equivalent location on her own face.

With an effort, Kim distanced herself from the reflection which was not her own; heard, distantly, from the stereo, the words *'Nessun dorma... nessun dorma...' None shall sleep...*

In the glass, the young man blinked several times, very rapidly. He moistened his lips with his tongue, then bit his upper lip. Kim saw it whiten around the pressure of his teeth. He was frowning. His eyes never moved.

She stared at him, trying to project intense concentration. Suddenly he closed his eyes as if in pain. Kim drew back, and the face retreated too, revealing a glimpse of sparrow-coloured hair, long and rat-tailed. In the instant before the man's face faded, she saw his left eyelid jump twice as with a tic.

Kim was aware of silence: the opera had finished. She relinquished the glass, hardly able to believe that she had been staring into it for the better part of two hours. Yet somehow she felt encouraged. This magical thing which Alan had not been able to control (she believed him that much) had yielded to her will; had shown her, too - the idea came newly-minted to her mind - a potential ally.

Had Roger Southwell been able to control what he saw in the glass? Or had he, like Alan, seen only demons and horrors?

They were hardly answerable questions, but the thought came to Kim that something had happened to time itself when the world skewed, and left it less rigid. She wondered whose face she had seen, and the idea had lodged in her mind that he was an ally, however many centuries he looked over at her.

Exhaling noisily, Kim leaned back. These were forces of which she knew nothing, could guess nothing. And there was no-one she could ask who was likely to know any more than she did.

Then she recalled the bookseller in Fenstanton.

James Rendall knew about Roger Southwell. What was it he'd said to them? *'He was an alchemist, really; although his interests seem to have extended quite a bit further than that. They say he hung bells in his tower to keep away an evil spirit which was haunting him.'*

The glass was blank now, smoky and vacant as a paperweight, but Kim could still see the face clearly in her mind's eye, the intense and desperate expression. It was, strangely enough, an encouraging image.

12

The Journal of Fabian Stedman

4: The Magus

My thoughts persist in whirling back to Nicholas Griffin's words in Richmond-town, *Put not thy trust in magic*. It is magic that hath placed me in this pickle, and I know not what to do. *Primus*: I dare not tell Catherine of the creature that was got from her body (because of the way that it was got of her body), nor that it is this creature that hath killed her father and the other men; *Secundus:* Those men that were killed had been whoring and that is not a thing I can tell a daughter anent her father; *Tertius:* I would fain speak incontinently with Roger Southwell but do not know whither he is to be found. And what will befall when my Catherine doth dream her dream again?

I have quit Master Pakeman's indentures and he will write to my father by and by, as must I needs also do; although I am not unduly apprehensive as to what he will say; when I wed Catherine I'll have me a printer's-shop to work in; there is but a journey-man and some iv boys and prentices of ages xii to xviii that have their lodging close by (there being no room for them in the house), which is less than half of the household of Master Pakeman. Also I left a letter at my old lodging-house gainst Roger's coming by.

So now, I write my thoughts on paper simply to aid my dilemma, for I have no confidant with whom to resolve my problems. Just as our comprehension of the world is imperfect; as there are matters we do not understand as yet (although I believe we shall come in time to do so), *videlicet,* how the blood doth go around the corpus; why some men dye of the plague yet others worse afflicted do not; what wonders shall be yet uncovered in the New World across the ocean; how a child (or, indeed, a lamb, or pup, or kid) doth grow within its mother's womb; though 'tis said, *Omne vivum ex ovo,*[1] doth he begin, as did the homunculus, with a thing incorporeal, or is his beginning like unto that which will be birthed, but so small as a pin-head (on which 'tis said that one may behold an infinite number of angels, did you but know how to look), that grows apace until the travel; even so I cannot know what I shall do anent the creature of Roger's art.

Nevertheless I do believe that some manner of conclusion will fall to my lot, so Kemp's death was mine to deal him. *Homo sum; humani nil a me alienum puto*.[2]

Basta, as the Italians say: Enough. I resolve to discover Roger where it is that he has gone, for I must needs ask a thing of him; I do give thanks that I am free of my indenture (by whatever agency), and may spend time in doing so.

For the first time in my life I do regret the proliferation of ale-houses in London, for I must visit all those that I know Roger hath frequented, which is to say, all those within a half league of St-Paul's church-yard; but at the least I can visit in the habiliment of a gentleman and not a prentice to be disregarded by the landlord and spat at by the potboy. *Quantum mutatus ab illo*,[3] in very truth, as Virgilius did write of Hector when he did return clad in the spoils of Achilles.

I spent many hours in this fruitless adventure and was obliged to tip away a deal of nappy ale that I'd liefer have drunk but that I must needs keep my head clear. But, as they say, *gutta cavet lapidem;*[4] mine endeavours

[1] Everything that lives comes from an egg

[2] I am a man; nothing human is alien to me

[3] How changed from the way he used to be

[4] The drop wears away the stone

at last bore fruit. In a mean tavern close by Saffron-hill the potboy did say he knew Roger; not as an acquaintance, but by his visage. It was a pretty child, plump as a pony, that I thought no better than a whore; but his intelligence proved true, that Roger did frequent the Pye-house in Turn-mill-street close by.

As a man that was fair acquainted with Roger I was sore distressed by the mean little stew, the which was so filled with filth as an hog's-sty; even as a prentice I was never so low as to frequent such a trugging-place. I have not seen an house so frenchified in my life; I would not have touched any of its whores with an oar.

I talked to the cully-man (that had a breath like the jakes) but he knew naught save that one of the drazels there had swived with a gentleman, as he did put it, and he had remembered the man for his brave clothing as much as his tallness.

Ay and well you might, thought I, *for you will not see his like in such a place too many times.*

–Dost know whereat he dwells? I asked, and the fellow laughed.

–I'faith I do not, think you he gave me his name and lodging?

–Oh ay, says I, and paid your little cut two shillings to catch the scabbado from her too; I'll wager you know well enough what way he headed when he did leave.

At this the sauce-jack looked at me sideways and replied, –And what then, an I did?

–I'll pay you a tester, I said; an you ask for more, I'll break your head.

In a glout he replied, –He went down to Cow-cross-street and turned to the left.

This Information was but scant help, but I gave the rogue his coin none the less, and did walk my self in that same direction. I had but turned the corner when I heard running steps behind me, and a woman's voice did entreat me to stop; which I did, but kept my hand upon my sword-hilt. 'Twas a mean little drab that was not so much clad in her gown as spilling out on't, and in spite of every thing the sight of her bouncy dugs did stir me.

–Well what is it you want, I said.

–Sir an you'll not raise my skirts I could tell you a thing for coin.

–I'll not swive with you, I said, make haste and tell me.

–No money, no coney, she replied.

And so I said, –How shall I know an your Intelligence is what I do need.

–I heard you speak with Close-stool-Bob, you nominated a certain gentleman.

–Do you know aught of him? I asked; an you do, tell me how he looks.

–He is timbersome man, quoth she, Black, with a dark eye; wears a silver ring with a red stone; nigh a span taller than you are.

–Marry, says I, then you have seen him standing on his feet?

–Ay and more than that, she says, would you know the bigness of his wand as well?

–And what of him then, I said, what is it you'd tell me.

–Why, the place of his dwelling, she said, and smiled. Is't worth coin?

And I nodded but was not so pleased to pay her.

–I'll give you two times what I paid your Bob, I said, that's a shilling.

She appeared to consider the offer, then held out her hand for the coin; I took the precaution of holding fast to her wrist lest she run off with the money, but she showed no inclination to do so; I think she yet did

hope to earn more from me on her back, but I bade her get hence when that she had given me the address.

–My name hight Peg, an you come by another time, she called after me.

It was not so far to Roger's dwelling, a walk of a half-hour or so, but it came on to rain and I must needs take shelter for a time; following which the streets were wet as well as filthy and the kennels running with all manner of detritus; I was as shitten-heeled as a farm-boy by the time I did arrive at my destination. The aged trot that did appear when that I did bounce at the door looked not like to notice or care, however,being moderate foul herself.

–Does Roger Southwell lodge here? I asked.

And she mumbled her mouth so long a time I thought her dumb; but then she spake and said –Ay, but he's not in a doors; although her speech was well nigh impossible to make out; I think in truth she had not a tooth in her head.

–I'll wait, quoth I, do you show me his room, and I frowned upon her with the most fiercest countenance I could until she stood aside to let me by, pointing the while up the stairs.

–In the top of the house, she said.

I had climbed near the whole way when I bethought me that Roger might well have locked his door, for that all his books *de omni re scribili, et quibusdam aliis,*[5] were inside the room; but then I did hear a clatter of foot-steps upon the stairs; I hastened to the top and turned round hand on sword hilt lest this be a threat; but 'twas Roger.

I let a smile come to my face. –Well met, Roger, quoth I ere he could speak, for he did appear as a man might when stricken by lightening, and stopped on the stairs a few steps below me; I have had a merry long chase to find you out, for I knew that I never was going to encounter you occasionally.

Then he managed to summon a smile to his countenance, and hastened up to meet me and clapped me on the shoulder; the whore Peg had the wrong of it; Roger was not more than half a foot taller than I; 'twas enough. I am of a height with most men: I saw then how he did employ his advantage, looking down upon me; an half-year since ''twould have worked but I too had learned some things and I was not afeard of Roger Southwell.

–Come in my room, an you are come to speak with me, he said, and opened the door; I felt myself carried backwards in time, for it was just such such a room as that where he had lived when first he did show me his art: The narrow pallet with clothing piled upon it, and by the casement a table with his alchemical wares.

This room was better furnished than the other one, and for all it also was an attic, was more bigger too; he had a pair of joint-stools and a shelf for his books, and an oaken chest in the corner; on it an ale-jug and half a pie.

Roger noted the direction of my glance and said, –old Joan down-stairs will dress me a cole-dish, or a seething of pudding and souse, but I'd needs pay her another three shillings for better fare, and so I make do from the tavern an I hunger for more victuals. I think there's hum in the jar, twill be a whit stale, but you never did fret about such; or have you come up in the world?

–Roger, quoth I, for a close-mouthed man you are terrible loose-tongued on a sudden; but I'll drink with you.

[5] about everything knowable, and other things as well.

And he poured some into a pot for me, and the remainder for him-self.

I drank the ale; it was strong, and stale, and most like sauced to boot, but I had been walking a long while; Roger watched me for a space, then cut off half the pie and offered it me; I shook my head, and he ate it him-self. All the while I said nothing, but merely stared at him. At last he spake, and the words spewed out on a sudden.

–I know not where she is, or what it is that she is doing; I have no tidings.

–I know what it is that she is doing, I said, and that is the reason I have sought you out, keep you never so full close.

–Fabian I swear to you, I did not know it would be thus, he said.

–No you did not know, for all your vaunted knowledge, I said, nor did you think neither. Is this what a magus does, I inquired, Is this a quest for learning or for power?

–It was always power, Fabian, replied Roger somewhat sadly, I thought you knew that at the least.

–Oh ay, I said, my wits are not so dull. You saw a way you did think would give you a thing you desired, and that was all that you did see.

Roger stood up on his feet and went to his work-bench, waving me to do likewise.

–Tell me then of her doings, quoth he.

His fingers lighted on a small egg-shape of glass and he caressed it an it were an whore's tit; I do not think he knew what his fingers did.

–She doth drink men dry, I said; Not of blood, but of breath and life. And when that she maketh these vile feasts, then Catherine Alsop dreams that it is she herself that sups them; and one of the men was Catherine's own father. How it is that she doth entice them I do not know but I do believe she plays the part of a common drab; but certes it is, that she may be Catherine's bane: She is a strong woman but such dreams would vex a strong man and I can do naught to give her aid.

Roger held out his hand to me: In it lay the glass that he had been fondling: It was the colour of smoke.

–Do you know what this is? he asked.

–A scrying-glass, I should imagine, I replied.

–'Tis well, said Roger, I had forgot how clever you are; but 'tis no common glass, such as a gypsy or hedge-witch would use; 'tis a summoning-glass.

–And I felt a shiver like unto cold water tipped down my back.

–Whom doth it summon? I asked.

–Those whom I call, replied Roger.

–Demons? I asked; he shook his head.

–Not demons, Fabian; I have no truck with such; *Magia naturalis licita est, atque non prohibita.*[6]

–Natural magic, you name it? quoth I; there was never a thing natural about this affair, and well you know it.

–I but quote the words of the philosopher *Mirandola,* replied Roger. Now mark you this, for each several demon there is an opposing angel; do you but know what angel is appurtenant to that demon, he can be banished. Or she, indeed.

[6] It is natural magic, and not prohibited

–Do you say there is an angel that will banish your creature? I asked.

–Maybe not, replied Roger; I would not name her demon, being a thing created.

–Would you not, I said; you have not seen her of late, how then can you know?

Roger pounced on these words like a cat with a mouse.

–You have seen her? how? when?

–*Ohé, iam satis,*[7] I said, I dreamed her without my casement and did feel her hunger; yet she did not come within nor feed that night; yet Catherine did dream her also.

A slow smile did come to Roger's countenance then, although I saw naught to smile on.

–I begin to see a solution, he said. Will you look in the glass, Fabian?

I looked at the thing in his hand, then at his face again.

–Tell me wherefore I should do such a thing, I said.

–To discover the antithesis of this creature, he replied; doubt you not, I'll set wards that naught evil can pass.

–I am not afeard, I said.

–You should be, answered Roger; I shrugged my shoulders.

–Very well, I said, make your charms and I'll do it.

–Then wear this talisman about your neck, he said, and gave to me a waxen seal upon a riband that he took up from his work-bench; I did look at the thing without love, for I could believe: *Timeo* Rog. Southwell *et dona ferentes;*[8] but I put it over my head so the charm hanged at my breast.

–Now do you sit there and move not; and he gave me the glass to hold.

What Roger's protective rituals were I do not remember well; he inscribed circles, figures, Greek and other lettering (mayhap these were Hebrew); speaking the while in a soft voice words which I could almost, but not quite, make out; slowly I began to feel and sense the magic, the sparkle of it in the air, the tingle on my skin, the sharp and spiced scent of it; perchance all my other senses sang with it too.

When he was done he gave me a paper with a prayer on it to read, the which I did without protest.

–Now think on the creature, he said; Look i'th'glass, and consider her.

I looked into the deeps of the glass that I held in my two hands, that were in my lap; and slowly the air seemed to condense and to curdle; to change its own nature into something other, that was not air; and yet it was. I could see naught but the glass; in my thoughts I imagined the creature in her different guises: the child-like figure she had first worn, and the pallid floating sprite that did come to my window; unbidden I saw too Catherine's face, as she sate at her desk with the account-books: She raised her head and stared out the casement, an she had truly been present in the room. I heard Roger draw in his breath, but it did seem a very long way away and I took no heed on't. Then, strange to relate, I beheld a countenance I knew not; a boy's face I thought it at first, yet gray lay in his hair; a bemused look in the eye. I do think that I lost my senses for a brief space of time; certes I have no recollection of any thing more until I saw Roger's face nigh unto mine.

–Soft now, said he, this is a very great thing; I do believe I know how we may banish this creature, but both you and your Catherine must needs play a part.

–But she knows naught of this matter, I said.

[7] Hold, enough

[8] I fear Roger even when he comes bearing gifts (cf *Æneid , Greeks* bearing gifts)

–Do you then not trust her, Fabian? quoth Roger.

And then I grew shamed that I had not spoken to her.

–I believe, said he further, that just as the creature was given life by Catherine, so too can she destroy it. Nay, hear me out (as I did make to speak); she is its anti-thesis; who better to act as its adversary? But it must be you that guides and ensnares it. Just as Catherine is your lode-star, so it seeks to cleave to you; you must be the bait, to entice it to its destruction.

And these words sank into my thoughts like fish in a lake seeking their proper home; so the truth of them spake to me. And within my breast my heart did quail.

–O Roger, I said, Roger, what have you done?

But indeed a certainty was with me, that Catherine was not to be kept in Ignorance of events as I in my vanity had thought to keep her; and that very night (for I did return at a late hour) I had long speech with her about all these matters.

And she did shake her head and sigh, –Ah men, ah men. You are so sure and so forward, yet you think not, ever, upon the consequences of your actions.

Which were, indeed, the words that I had spoken to Roger; but I did know better wisdom than to say so. Instead I did but hold her two hands in mine and beg forgiveness.

–I know thy Roger too well, for all I have never met him, she said; thy words give him more life than any homunculus; there is no blame to thee, whom I do love; and I will dare it, this adventure; and I was terrible proud of my Catherine then, truly she hath a lions heart.

–Now Fabian, she said then, on the morrow you must come with me for to see a very strange thing.

–What thing can that be? I asked, but she would say no more.

So on the morrow I did walk with her unto the shop of Rafe Eaton, that did sell pamphlets and wood-cut-pictures and chap-books and such by Paul's-churchyard; and Catherine did speak to this Rafe Eaton, which was an ill-made man of some xl years but so hairless as he might be an egg, a pilgarlic for sooth, desiring him to fetch out some thing from the back of the shop; the which he did.

The packet he laid on the table was tied up in a cloth, and he unwrapped it with care to reveal a small painted panel of wood, may be xii inches tall and a span in breadth. And when that I did see what was pictured on this panel I did swear an oath that I'd liefer Catherine had not heard, for all that she's gone dressed as a boy and come to ringing (ringers not being known for moderate language); but I believe I may be excused my wonder, for the picture was as like unto her as a twin; yet it was not Catherine, for there was that in those painted eyes that I liked not.

–I am not so full of awe as I was yester-day, she said to me, because now I think I do know who this may be.

–Master Eaton, I said, who did paint this picture? for there was no signing that I could see.

–'Twas a man that is now dead, instiled Humphrey Hope.

–Humphrey Hope that was murdered in Fleet-street? I asked, and Rafe Eaton scowled a right grim countenance.

–I'll make no sale do you noise that abroad, said he, hold your peace.

–You'll make your sale, said Catherine, for I'll buy it from you my-self. Mark you I'll not pay more nor

ten shillings.

–Would you make me a bankrupt? he exclaimed, I'll not part with it for under a guinea.

–Why then keep it; I am not so enamoured of it, said Catherine carelessly .

–xv shillings, for your fathers sake, then, he said.

–Ten, replied Catherine.

–Ah very well, I suppose I am well rid on't, 'tis yours.

Ten shillings, thought I, but lately that was more than the cost of my lodgings, mean enough though they were.

Catherine gave the man the money and we bore the picture away in his cloth.

–And now, said I, what meanst thou to do with it?

–Marry, said Catherine, the thought comes to me that dost thou and Roger Southwell wish to do battle with the succubus, her image may prove a potent weapon. Now, there is work to be done, and today 'tis ringing-day at Bow, so we must shift to be done in good time.

And seeing her thus, with the wind in her hair and laughing in the face of peril, I did love her the more.

–When shall we be wed then? said I.

And she replied, –By God, as soon as may be; I've buried my father and mourned him full well; now I can do as I please.

So I swung her up in my arms and kissed her in the street. And we were wed in Bow-church in May-time, and made as merry as we could, the times being what they are: Yet there was an abundance of oil of barley and clary and burnt claret, and pies and tanzeys to eat.

But it also befell that on that tide (being in that season when that the sun was in the sign of Gemini, that they also call the Twins) I had intelligence from Roger that the time was come that we must act.

And truly the Impact of this Zodiacal sign was not lost upon me for I had long thought of the creature as being Catherine's dark twin.

At this time Catherine and I were embarked upon the printing of a number of bell-ringing peals, each one to his own pamphlet, with divers methods to lengthen or shorten the number of changes (such as extremes), she having a skill in the figure-work of this art; this did consume a terrible amount of time for proof-reading of the changes pricked out and I have gone cross-eyed doing so, because none but we two could, the men in the shop knowing naught of Ringing. *Vox audita perit, littera scripta manet*.[9]

A boy did deliver Roger's message sealed in a paper and I gave him a penny. Roger wrote briefly, *I'll come to you this night.*

Had the paper contained a poisonous serpent I had not been more apprehensive; I did show it to Catherine, who said merely, –So be it.

–*Aut vinceremus aut moriemus*,[10] I said.

But she shook her head: –None shall die, she said.

–Is this a prophecy? I asked.

–God will aid us in this good adventure, she replied, so we cannot fail.

But I could not be so sanguine, being not so confident in the motives of God nor in the powers of Roger

[9] The spoken word is lost, the letter written down will survive

[10] We'll either win or die trying

Southwell neither.

O lente, lente, currite noctis equi,[11] thought I to my-self.

On occasion I do envy those folk who do trust unquestioningly in God, but such beliefs are not a part of mine own nature: I do not see God's hand in every thing; I do not see it in the visits of the plague, nor in the rule of the Puritans, nor in the death of Ann Pakeman, nor in the beggars in the gutter; lord of misrule, may-hap; not God. An he is not able to prevent such things, why then he is not omnipotent; an he chooseth not to prevent them, then I have no more words to say.

Roger came by at a late hour; dusk stood in the sky and the stars were begun to shine: Fire-folk sitting in the air, a pretty fancy. But on occasion I do conjecture, like that Jordanus Brunus Nolanus of whom I have read, that an all these stars be suns like unto our own, would they not also have planets which go around them; and what manner of creatures would Inhabit such planets; men like us, or beasts, or creatures wondrous strange and like unto neither men nor beasts; nor demons nor angels neither. And how it doth confound the imagination to think how faraway must those suns and planets be.

Still men be clever and in an hundred centuries or more, perchance will have found a way to journey thither; when that they have discovered and understood all things on the earth. What will a man be like in the xxvii century, or even the xx? Very like unto us, I do expect; I do not think that man's nature shall change; nor do I anticipate that he will be the wiser than we, for all his learning, for 'tis a part of that nature which is ours that we do not heed the lessons of history: neither our own, nor the world's.

We did choose to make our experimentation in that room which had been the bedchamber of Catherine's father (and in which he had died); Catherine and I did not use it but for a store-room; –And besides, Roger said, she hath been here before.

Now it was empty save for two chairs which Roger had bidden us place in't. he would stand, he said, for his conjuring, and did caution us that 'twould be perilous to move lest we erase some of his magical marks. And he took the painting that Humphrey Hope had made and leaned it gainst the wall.

–Now you must both do precisely as I say, he said; sit you down each in a chair (he had moved the chairs to certain places in the room the which he said were significant); You may speak to one another but do you not distract my attention. Fabian do you hold the scrying-glass, but regard it not until I give the word.

I had told Catherine of this glass but I do not think she was impressed; and indeed when I recall looking in it that other time, there was not much happened.

Roger then did draw a circle with chalk around each of us, saying, This is the circle of *Solomon:* Nothing evil may pass over't; but you must rest without moving, and not break the circle.

Inside the circles were some figures and letters inscribed, and around their circumferences he wrote many strange words; maybe they all were names, I did see among them *Raphael, Seraphim;* then outside the circles he placed litten candles and inscribed more figures around them. After this he made a triangle and wrote a word on each of the three sides; *Tetragrammaton* and *Anephezaton* were two of these; I do not recall the third, although I think it began with the letter *P*.

–This is where she will appear, he said.

Finally he made another Solomon's-circle about himself; so we were disposed thus, myself in the centre

[11] Slowly, slowly, let Night's horses run slowly (The words of Marlowe's Faustus as he waits for the devil to claim his soul.)

of the room facing to the east where the portrait stood, with the triangle between it and myself, some two-foot from the outside of my circle; Catherine to my left and Roger upon my right. And the magic hung so thick in th'aire I was like to be ill with the sweetness on't.

–Well now, all's prepared, he said when all these preparations were completed. Now what we must do is this: Fabian do you look in the glass and think on her, as you did th'other time; and Catherine twill be best an you pray in silence. When the creature doth appear within the triangle I shall summon an angel to banish her.

–You said that she was no demon, said I; wherefore then this talk of an opposing angel? *Aquila non capit muscas.*[8]

–But angels do concern themselves with lesser powers in the canon of evil, replied Roger; therefore I must summon the most strongest power of good that I can, lest her power be greater than we know. And some whit of this argument did seem passing strange to me, but I had not the leisure to pursue it.

–Are you ready, Fabian?

–Ay, so much as I shall ever be, I replied, and took up the glass for a second time, my neck a-prickle with magic.

In the depths of the glass clouds roiled and raced, as a wild storm did impel them to break in rags and flee away; I called into my mind the images of Roger's creature, from the unseen move-ments in vitro, in the glass-womb wherein she did grow, to the night-robed child-woman (child *she* never was), to the masked and preda-tory shape that last she took, and the face on the painting, which was Catherine's but not Catherine's.

I could hear no sound in the room, neither my pounding heart nor my breathing; I felt like unto a man under-water, in an element not his own, sucking in what was not air but something I could reach out and take an handful of, then mould it as a potter shapes his clay into whatever I did choose.

The room narrowed around me until I thought that I was inside a jar, like unto an homunculus myself; far-away, farther than a man can Imagine, farther than the planets of the most distant sun, a spark appeared in the dark that coiled within the glass; and faster than an arrow, or an horse a-galloping, or the very wind, this spark did travel towards me: I say, towards me, for I did know I was its target, but my gaze was captured by it; and it did grow and wax until that it filled the glass with shining light, a glowing so fair, so pure, that I did yearn for it with all my heart and soul, to the exclusion of all else.

This shining lasted but an instant and then did explode like unto soundless gun-powder, a flare that did shock and blind me so that I did fling up my hands to cover my face, dropping the glass; I heard it fall to the floor with a dull sound which did seem a very long way away; I think I cried out.

A-tremble I looked up, my vision clearing, and beheld standing within the triangle a figure so like unto Catherine that I had to glance to my wife (strange words to think yet, my wife) for to be sure that she yet sat there; then I did look again, and then to Roger, for neither one of them did stir, but were mute and unmoving as statues.

And then this second Catherine spoke, and she said, –You have called me so I knew you would.

I knew fear then, clenching in my belly and bowels, for but a brief instant: she stepped out of the confin-ing triangle taking no heed on it. I stood up, not barely knowing I moved; she came another step and was near enough to touch and to embrace. I took her by her arms which were not merely like unto Catherine's, they

[8] Eagles don't bother going after mice

were Catherine's own; my tarse went stiff in an instant and I pressed her close.

–Kiss me now, Fabian, she said, make me unready; and I was in a fever of desire, and her hands were busy.

As from faint and far-off I then did hear Roger's voice raised in a shout, –Catherine, he cried.

And then I did kiss her; I felt her teeth sink into my lower lip, but there was no pain. And the next instant someone pulled her from out my arms and flung her aside, and I heard Catherine's voice crying, –Get away, get away.

A hand seized hold on my arm, and I returned to my senses to see Catherine standing between me and the succubus which knelt on the floor with such hatred on her features I thought the venom of her glance would strike Catherine down like the stare of a basilisk. Roger let go my arm and I stepped out of the useless circle; my mouth began to sting. I put my fingers to the lip; they came away bloody. And seeing the blood then did fear flood in to me.

–Say this prayer after me, Catherine, cried Roger, you must banish her, you are her antithesis; and swift as a viper the creature dove to one side and seized the scrying-glass, which had rolled away from me.

–Very God of very God, I heard Catherine repeat after Roger, lend to me thy power that I may banish this succubus; and I saw that the air in the chamber was curdling again, but 'twas not from the prayer; she was using the summon-glass all the while they prayed, and the name that she did invoke was *Beelzebul.*

Roger raised up his arms, but the creature did not cease her frightful summoning; some thing very great and very perilous hung just outside the air. she could not see me; I was hidden from her by Roger and Catherine; I pushed Roger to one side, took two paces to her and kicked the glass out of her hands.

At the same time Catherine cried –*Sic fiat, amen,*[13] and the creature vanished from sight with a great noise as of a rushing wind. Catherine and I fell into each others arms, but I did not need Roger's white countenance to know that what had been summoned, remained, hovering as 'twere on the threshold of our mortal world. that it had not wholly been brought through from wheresoever it dwelt did not mean that it could not be; it was present in potential.

–I do not think I dare to look again in that glass, Roger said, his voice shaking.

–You placed us all in peril, I said, I'll wager you knew your wards would not preserve us against corporeal evil.

–'Twas all I could think to attempt, he said, not a whit repentant; It worked, Fabian, did it not?

–Perchance it did, said Catherine, but not in the way you intended.

–Not entirely, Roger admitted, I did not foresee she would use the glass; I did not know she would know to, or be able to, having not imagination as do men.

–How can you know that? asked Catherine; for she was made of me, of mine own secret self; who knows but that she shared my desires and fancies also, and but took her pleasures because she could, and in the was that best suited her nature?

And Roger found this unanswerable; but I thought it made perfect sense.

[13] let it be so

13: Which Can Eternal Lie

> '"I wonder if this is a contrivance of the Enemy," said Boromir. "They say in my land that he can govern the storms in the Mountains of Shadow that stand upon the borders of Mordor. He has strange powers and many allies."
>
> '"His arm has grown long indeed," said Gimli, "if he can draw snow down from the North to trouble us here three hundred leagues away."
>
> '"His arm has grown long," said Gandalf.'
>
> J R R Tolkien, *The Fellowship of the Ring*

Kim swore at the hearse-shaped Volvo estate which was cruising sedately along the fast lane at just under sixty, and swerved to pass it on the inside; the surge of power from the accelerator was like adrenalin.

Clear of the obstruction, she booted the pedal to the floor and the speedometer needle crept towards a hundred. She had *Tosca* on the stereo, and was, as usual, accompanying it, but her mind was not on the music. A feral urgency impelled her on to Fenstanton, but her thoughts were elsewhere. She felt like a kaleidoscope, her shapes and colours fragmenting minute by minute to form different patterns.

Fenstanton presented a sleepy façade on a weekday. It seemed profoundly unlikely, preposterous even, that commerce was being carried on behind its closed doors, that such mercenary concerns made their home there. The people in its offices surely could not turn their minds to filing, or accountancy, or typing: the town seemed too relentlessly bucolic. Kim had never worked away from cities, and this gentler pace was another country to her.

She parked in a half-empty Pay And Display, watched a small bus disgorge a handful of passengers on the other side of the road, then headed for James Rendall's little bookshop. The sudden awful thought struck her that it might be closed, but she shrugged it off and went on walking, passing a greengrocer's displaying a selection of limp and rather dirty vegetables - hopefully captioned 'Organically Grown' - in wooden crates, a chemist's with oddly shaped bottles gathering dust in the window as if it were still an apothecary's, and the inevitable shoe-shop, before recognising the establishment she sought.

James Rendall was sitting by his elderly cash-register reading a Dick Francis paperback, which he put face-down on the counter as Kim approached. Recognising her, he smiled.

'Still on the trail of the bells?' he enquired.

'No, we found those,' Kim replied. 'They were a red herring, I think. What we should really have been asking about was Roger Southwell himself.'

'Ah. May one ask why?'

'It's rather complicated,' said Kim. 'I'm not sure I understand it all myself. How... receptive are you to the idea of magic?'

'Depends what you mean by magic,' said Rendall.

'Roger Southwell's magic. Mainly. And things from the past, encroaching on the present.'

The bookseller looked at her with narrowed eyes, his expression unreadable as a bird's. 'Let's say I have an open but sceptical mind.'

Kim nodded. ‘Fair enough. Southwell, or someone, left a set of clues which led us to find - a certain artefact. This artefact displays qualities which are... inexplicable by any science I know. And I can’t help wondering if Southwell may have found some way to... influence people in the future. That is, now.’

‘Admirable,’ said Rendall, with a touch of acerbity.

‘What?’

‘An admirable display of not telling me anything at all, while seeming to say rather a lot. Have you ever thought of taking up politics?’

A number of retorts flashed through Kim’s mind, but she settled on reasonableness. ‘Mr Rendall, until I know exactly how you’re likely to react, I’m not going to reel off a story that sounds as if I’m barking mad.’

Rendall considered this, then relented. ‘I know enough about Roger Southwell to believe he could “influence people” in the future.’

With a sigh of relief, Kim said, ‘Then you might be able to help.’

She related the events of the past few weeks. Rendall listened without comment. When she had finished, however, he said reluctantly, ‘I don’t think I *can* help you.’

‘Why not?’

‘This is all quite new to me. I was under the impression that Southwell was primarily an alchemist - to which he added a hotch-potch of bits and pieces from other *“concealèd arts”*. I haven’t got much stuff specifically about him, though - you’re welcome to read what I have. But I don’t think any of it is going to help you, unless it shows you somewhere else to look. If what you’re implying is that your Alan is somehow being influenced by Southwell.’

‘It’s not so much Southwell who worries me,’ said Kim frankly. ‘All right, he was a magician, he had these powers, but he was human. It’s that glass. That presence I felt in the studio - which Alan saw in the glass. And didn’t you say that Southwell hung bells in his tower to ward off a demon?’

Rendall’s head came up. ‘You’re saying this glass is a means of calling up something beyond the control of its summoner?’

‘No, I think it’s been called already. By Southwell. By Alan. I don’t know who by. I don’t know why Southwell wanted the glass found. I need to find out more about the man, to learn something about the demon.’

The bookseller stared at the closed glass door of his shop, and the relentlessly empty street beyond. ‘Well, I shan’t lose much trade by shutting up for a while now. Just wait a few minutes, then you can have the run of my library again.’ He started doing mysterious things which presumably were necessary to safeguard the closure of the shop.

As he pottered, Kim asked, ‘Do you know how the bells were supposed to keep this demon away?’

‘That’s a fairly common superstition. People often used to ring bells to scare off the evil spirits of storms, for instance. Something to do with the essence of bell-metal, which I presume is iron.’

‘No,’ said Kim. ‘Bell-metal’s a mixture of copper and tin.’

‘Really? I was sure it’d be the “cold iron” syndrome.’

‘You get steel bells - very occasionally. They sound awful. They have a sort of wailing noise underlying the actual sounds of the bells themselves. I’ve rung on some. It’s not an experience I’d care to repeat.”

‘Can’t say I’ve ever noticed that different churches’ bells sound different.’

‘I guess you need to be a ringer to notice. Or fairly musical.’

‘I’m afraid I’ve got the original cloth-ears,’ said Rendall. ‘Right, I’m ready. Where’s your car?’

‘In the Pay And Display. Want a lift?’

‘Why not. Won’t hurt me to miss one walk.’

Apart from the strangely disquieting portrait, Kim had noticed very little in the bookseller’s house on her previous visit. This time, however, Rendall left her in the living-room and disappeared, presumably to fetch something from his library. It was an arctophile’s den: Kim counted eighteen bears, some most venerable, and vaguely recalled seeing more in the rest of the house. She concluded that no-one with such taste in companions could be all bad.

James Rendall reappeared carrying just one book, which he handed to Kim. ‘Start with this,’ he suggested. ‘I’ll go and see whether I can find anything else.’

Like all the other books she had encountered since the tomb, it was old: a brown-bound tome which creaked slightly despite her care in opening it. It was called *The Magus and his Magic* by one Edward Dunning, MA, FRS, and sub-titled *The Alchemical and Hermetic Tradition in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries.* In its table of contents Kim noted chapters devoted to John Dee, Giordano Bruno, some obscurer names, and halfway down, Roger Southwell. It appeared to be a short chapter, so she turned straight to it and began to read.

> ‘Those who spend any amount of time in research are, of course, apt to be diverted from time to time by red herrings. For some months the name of Roger Southwell, builder of “Fenstanton Abbey”, was wont to crop up in connection with magical matters, but I formed the impression, subsequently proved to be erroneous, that he was only a very minor figure in the canon of the Magi.
>
> ‘On the contrary, it appeared from later research, Southwell was indeed an important figure - not, however, because of any new ground he explored, but rather through what he achieved. If all the sources - contemporary and otherwise - are to be believed, Southwell was one of the very few practitioners of High Magic who actually succeeded in *making it work.*
>
> ‘Little is known of his early life. The tradition persists that a contemporary account of some of Southwell’s exploits exists, in the form of a diary penned by one of his acquaintances, but I have been unable to locate it. Indeed, since it may be said that we suffer from a surfeit of seventeenth-century diaries written in impenetrable prose, I may venture to suggest this lacuna to be no great loss.
>
> ‘Returning, then, to the man himself. A strong local tradition maintains that he was born in a Wiltshire town, Market Peverell, some three miles from Warminster, in 1626. The family appears to have been well-to-do, but no further details are forthcoming.
>
> ‘The story proper, if such it can be designated, begins around 1657, when the construction of Southwell’s famous (or infamous) “Fenstanton Abbey” commenced. Southwell built this imitation “Abbey”, with its tower and ring of bells, on the pattern (it would appear) of Romsey Abbey, which, on the evidence of a 1692 oil painting by Edward Cluny, it closely resembled.
>
> ‘Southwell’s reputation locally was, in a word, mud. Of the many rumours circulating about him, some are unusually specific: not, for instance, that he had truck with devils, but that a particular *female* demon

known as his “Dark Lady” was attendant upon him. Another version of this story asserts that the demon, far from being a familiar, was haunting him and that the sole purpose of the bells hung in the “Abbey” was to confound this malevolent spirit (a common belief with regard to bells).

‘Demons were also held to be source of Southwell’s fortune. By 1657 he was certainly a very wealthy man, and it was this *auri sacra fames*, according to one legend, which led to his death. Indeed it is a curious depiction of this story which ornaments his supposed tomb at Fenstanton.

‘I say “supposed” because reports conflict, and it is here that the most astonishing rumour about Roger Southwell comes to light. On the one hand, there is the simple local story: Southwell was excommunicated for his wizardly activities, and so was buried outside the churchyard. On the other there is absolutely no evidence to support these assertions;strict as the Puritans were, “excommunication” properly pertains only to the Roman Church. Quite the contrary, in fact, since Southwell’s name appears in the church of All Saints, Fenstanton, in the bell-ringers’ records; and there is also evidence that the present churchyard wall was erected subsequently to the tomb, which is dated 1697. Certainly Southwell seems to have disappeared from the vicinity of Fenstanton in that year, but there is no evidence at all that he either died, or was buried there.

‘Now we must move back to Wiltshire. Not far from the hill-fort at Battlesbury Hill near Warminster there is a mound known locally as “Roger’s Mount” in which it is said that a wizard is sleeping. The legend is as follows.

‘An aged magician (the implication being a “white” magician), having done battle with a demon all his life, but feeling himself becoming too frail to fight, entered the hill to sleep in order, presumably, that the demon, too, should become “dormant”. The wizard let it be known that he intended to sleep until such time as he was summoned, at which he would “clothe himself again in flesh” and return to life. Certain clues, which are not specified, were left in order for his avatar to accomplish this.

‘If the “Roger” of “Roger’s Mount” and Roger Southwell were one and the same, and the evidence suggests this, the conclusion appears to be that here was a man whose magic actually worked. Whether his plans ever come to fruition, and whether or not his reincarnation (if this is indeed what is implied) would be a good thing - especially for the man who accomplishes it (because presumably when Southwell wakes, so too will the demon) - are questions not within the scope of this work.’

‘Now the other thing,’ said James Rendall, making Kim jump by coming back in just as she finished reading, ‘is this.’ He handed her the incomplete pamphlet she’d seen before.

‘Yes, I’ve read that one,’ she replied, distracted.

‘I know. But it’s fairly contemporary - and you said it fell out of another book. Do you remember which one?’

‘I’d know if I saw it.’

Having identified the book, Kim re-read the strange chapter on Southwell while Rendall searched his records. It looked as though she ha been right about the treasure hunt: Alan had swallowed the bait, hook, line and sinker.

‘Have you got anything on the practising of magic?’ she asked the bookseller.

‘What, like a grimoire? No,’ he replied without looking up.

Kim shook her head. ‘I was thinking more of *defensive* magic. Have you read this about Southwell?’

‘Not recently.’

‘You should.’

This time Rendall did look up. ‘Why?’

‘Because it does explain something - but not what to do about it.’

‘When I’ve found out - ah!’

‘Success?’

‘Yes. Here we are. The book came from a library in Wiltshire belonging to a Mr Joseph Baker; he died about five years ago and his widow sold the books - what is it?’

‘Probably a coincidence,’ replied Kim, who didn’t believe it for one minute. She told Rendall about their trip to Market Peverell. ‘You’d better read the chapter.’

Rendall took back his book and began to read, while Kim picked up the dilapidated pamphlet once again and squinted at the spiky handwritten message.

But what became of Roger Southwell?

She sighed, more inclined to think the question should read *What’s to be done about Roger Southwell?*

‘I suppose you’ll be going to Wiltshire, then?’ asked Rendall when he had finished the chapter.

Kim looked at her watch. It was ten to two. ‘Looks like it,’ she said glumly. ‘I wasn’t cut out to be a detective.’

‘Take the pamphlet,’ he suggested. ‘If you happen to find the rest of it, I’d be willing to pay a reasonable amount for it.’

‘I’d rather make a copy - it’s a bit old to be carted around in my pocket.’

‘I’m afraid I don’t have a photocopier. But I’ll pop it in a plastic folder. Look, it’ll be quite safe like that.’

‘I suppose so,’ said Kim dubiously, accepting it.

‘Good luck,’ said James Rendall. He did not ask for a receipt, as she had half-expected he might.

Kim thought she’d need more than luck. She remembered the ravens and her hectic flight from Rome. Powers were ranged against her. ‘Well, you knew that,’ she told herself, starting the car.

She had always been a fast driver, even before she could afford a fast car. It was impatience as much as anything: chafing at the fact that she couldn’t actually do anything while driving - except drive.

Whereas Alan - thinking of Alan, Kim gritted her teeth. No three-centuries-sleeping wizard was going to take him over. Not if she had anything to do with it.

It started to rain, and she flicked the wipers on: their metronome movement dislodged a few leaves and threw them past her vision. With a burst of rifle fire at the execution of Cavaradossi, *Tosca* drew to its close, and Kim groped for another tape.

Water poured in a cataract over the windscreen, as if someone had suddenly thrown a small reservoir at it. Kim swore violently and clicked the wipers to fast. It appeared to make little difference. She slowed, carefully. The rain gushed down, blown at her by a buffeting wind which rocked the car in a cocoon of whirling spray. Kim turned on the headlights.

The wind grew worse, yowling across the exposed road. Kim saw a lorry toiling towards her down a long hill, its canvas sides flapping like the sails of a clipper ship in the teeth of a tropical typhoon. She changed

down to tackle the hill, right hand tense on the steering wheel.

Twenty yards from her the lorry began to slide sideways over the white double line in the centre of the road. She saw its driver’s blanched, panic-stricken face as he wrestled to bring his juggernaut under control - even as she hauled on the wheel to bring her own car round in a desperate U-turn, feeling its wheels lock and skid for a few dreadful seconds before gripping the road again and allowing her to accelerate away from the careering lorry.

Escaping up the next side-road, Kim slewed her car to a stop just in time to see the lorry tip completely over, crashing and sliding in the hurricane-like winds. Sparks flew up from the road, instantly quenched by the teeming rain. As the lorry shuddered to a halt against trees splintered by its impact, she scooped up her phone and shakily punched out 999.

14: Music Hath Charms

‘We shall drink dishonour, we shall eat abuse
For the Land we look to - for the Tongue we use.

We shall take our station, dirt beneath his feet,
While his hired captains jeer us in the street.

Cruel in the shadow, crafty in the sun,
Far beyond his borders shall his teachings run.

Sloven, sullen, savage, secret, uncontrolled,
Laying on a new land evil of the old -

Long-forgotten bondage, dwarfing heart and brain -
All our fathers died to loose he shall bind again.

Here is naught at venture, random nor untrue -
Swings the wheel full-circle, brims the cup anew.’

Rudyard Kipling, *The Old Issue*

By the time Kim had told several different people what had happened, and the shocked and bruised (but otherwise unhurt) lorry driver had been conveyed to hospital, it was too late for her to continue on to Market Peverell. The rain, unabated, had brought on early night; Kim was damp and chilly and tired, and still shaken by her narrow escape.

She drove slowly home, too weary to make the effort of selecting an accompanying opera: Radio Three piped Brahms and less pleasant things at her. The wipers snipped across the windscreen, to and fro, to and fro, producing their own monotonous music, counterpointed by the rain.

Alan was still at work when she finally got back. Genuinely at work, it seemed: pencilled roughs were strewn over his desk, bearing the headline *‘Enter our great Treasure Trail Prize Draw and you could win £50,000’*.

He had Joan Sutherland singing quietly in the background: *‘The soldier tir’d of war’s alarms/Forswears the clang of hostile arms/And scorns the spear and shield./But if the brazen trumpet sound/He burns with conquest to be crown’d/And dares again the field.’*

So engrossed was he that he did not notice Kim until she spoke.

‘You all right?’ she asked.

He raised his head, looking reassuringly like the old Alan, and nodded.

‘How was your day?’ he said, putting down his pen - he still liked to do first drafts in longhand, and the first two fingers of his hand were habitually grey with old ink - ‘Find any decent locations?’ This was the convenient fiction Kim had invented to explain her absence.

‘Ugh. Don’t ask,’ she groaned. ‘I was very nearly mashed by a lorry.’

Alan got to his feet, looking concerned.

‘Oh, don’t worry - no harm done. Only I had to waste the rest of the day hanging round in the bloody rain while the police took dozens of statements.’ She yawned cavernously.

‘Poor you,’ said Alan, and she could almost believe he was back to normal. ‘Let me get you a drink.’

‘G and T. Easy on the T.’

‘Coming right up.’

‘First I’m going to change.’

‘Have a bath,’ Alan suggested. ‘I’ll bring it to you.’

Kim found the temptation of immersing herself in quantities of very hot water irresistible. She soaked herself and consumed her drink, feeling the cold and the annoyance drain away, and nearly fell asleep in the tub. She returned downstairs to find Alan making supper. It was all so normal that, perversely, she felt herself growing suspicious, yet was too tired to do anything about it; contenting herself with devouring a large plate of spaghetti bolognese. Outside, rain still lashed against the windows.

‘...deepening anticyclone,’ Kim heard a television weatherman say. She brought up her head, startled: she’d almost been asleep again. On the screen the forecaster flickered in front of his blue-and-green map, which was strewn with the tarot symbols of his art, like an image in the scrying-glass. ‘Heavy rain and strong winds, gale force in places, gusting up to...’ A snore made her look towards Alan. He was sound asleep, his head tucked into his shoulder, almost like a bird’s. Somehow he looked very alien.

Collecting up the debris of plates and glasses, Kim passed into the kitchen and stared at the windswept garden for a while before turning the light on. There was something unnatural about this storm: something that reeked of malice.

That thought identified, Kim shivered. Storms and demons - how could she combat them? She thought of looking in the glass again, but something held her back. Still, somehow, she was going to have to regain control of her life, if she were to thwart this invisible puppet-master who commanded wind and weather to confound her.

Moved by an impulse to impose a sort of order at least upon the sounds of chaos - she resorted again to music, slipping the tapes of *La Bohème* into the deck and donning a pair of earphones so as not to wake Alan.

Exuberant music, passionate music. This opera which, many years ago, had first opened up that world to her, still managed to bring inchoate tears to her eyes at its close. Silly, but there it was. Having music within herself, she had always rejoiced in the miracle which once had enabled composers to go on and on continuing to produce such melody, aria upon aria, upon duet, trio, quartet, ensemble. Chorus upon chorus. Divine music, the art of its finding now lost in cacophony. How had Rossini borne *not* composing, all those barren years? Kim wondered. Surely it was like relinquishing magical power: a loss too bitter to bear.

Power. The word snagged like a bramble, caught in her brain. Music has power - that could not be denied. But just how much?

Kim drew a deep breath, her heart suddenly pounding with possibilities. The possibility that music had real power - it was a kind of magic, after all. And the possibility, at last, that here might be a weapon in this curious and arcane fight into which she had unwittingly been drawn. If she could learn how to use it, of course. How to gather it up and fling it, like a missile. Like a Mills bomb. And, of course, where to direct it.

Quietly, experimentally, Kim joined in with the voice she heard in her ears, *‘Che gelida manina, Se la lasci riscaldar... How cold your little hand is; let me warm it up for you...’* and as she came to *‘Ma per fortuna e una notte di luna... But luckily tonight the moon is shining,’* she drew back the curtain and stared fiercely out

at the driving rain. Did it abate, momentarily? Did the moon try to shine through the blanketing clouds? In all honesty, she could not be sure. But the thought remained, like a jewel inside her.

Sighing, she let the curtain fall back and allowed the music to overwhelm her, welling in her head with its full commanding power.

In the morning a washed-out world awaited. Water lay gleaming sullenly in puddles, in gutters, across streets where drains were blocked. Each separate and self-contained little flood was pocked with the changing splashes of more rain. Above, an ill-tempered pregnant sky glowered over the flat drenched landscape.

Kim swore softly when she saw. Evidently it wasn't done yet. 'Time's a-wasting,' she muttered, tucking her hands into the sleeves of her dressing-gown.

'Wha?' mumbled Alan, wrestling with the duvet in which he was cocooned.

'Still pissing down,' said Kim, 'But I need to go out again. I didn't find a location yesterday, so it'll have to be done today.'

'Well, drive carefully.'

'Don't worry. I don't want a repeat of yesterday's little diversion, thanks. Coffee?'

'Mm.'

'You okay today?'

'I think so,' murmured Alan sleepily.

If she had cherished a vague hope that the weather might have improved, Kim was disappointed. She splashed down the path, cursing as her trainers let in the wet, and dived into her car with alacrity. It started first time, despite the rain, which caused her to wonder fleetingly why Roger Southwell had not acted to sabotage her means of travel. Perhaps he just doesn't know how, she reasoned. Not a lot of motor cars around in the seventeenth century.

She waved to Alan, who was standing at the front window, and stuck a cassette in the slot. No sacred music, though she had briefly considered it, but a selection of tenor arias. Music which was challenging; valedictory; defiant; triumphant. Nothing elegiac, nothing of loss, but something which she could, perhaps, pick up and hurl at her enemy. *'All' armi,'* she breathed, *'To arms,'* although that cry would not be raised for a while, and bared her teeth at the wild rain as the inside of the car filled up the joyful aria from *Fille du Régiment.* She bellowed out its succession of exuberant top Cs at the top of her voice.

All the tales Kim had ever read about magic emphasised its perils as well as its seductive power; stressed the need for balance; taught that knowledge was the key: the knowledge of a thing's true essence, sometimes symbolised by a secret true name. Sometimes, indeed, music was allied to power, but still with those caveats. She felt no temptation, no lust for power; just a certain desperation and a vague sense of clutching at straws. If this were magic, she had little idea how to use it, unless the music itself were the knowledge of the core.

But by the time the tape got to *'Com'è gentil/La notte a mezzo april! E azzurro il ciel... Lovely as an April night, and the skies are blue,'* she knew it was working. The rain still fell from a leaden sky, but without the fury. Wind still flurried it, but without the malice. It was a September storm; nothing more. Presently Kim replaced Donizetti with Verdi, humming nonsense where she didn't know the words.

It was rising midday when she parked in the broad High Street of Market Peverell, between an engagingly reedy and be-ducked pond and a delicatessen full of interesting-looking jars and cheeses. She used her

portable phone to call the number which Alan had dialled at the very start of their quest, and received the same reply from the former tower captain's widow.

'I'm sorry to bother you,' said Kim in answer, 'but I was trying to trace some books which belonged to your late husband.' She jumped as a bell began to sound from the church, and glanced down the road to see the cluster of beribboned cars which indicated that a wedding was about to take place. By this time, the rain had virtually ceased.

'Well,' said the firm, elderly voice, 'I suppose you could come round to the house. Do you know where it is?'

Elizabeth Baker proved to be a formidable old lady who had lost none of her marbles and did not draw Kim's attention to the George Cross with its blue ribbon in a yellowed box on the mantelpiece.

Kim asked about it all the same. The elderly lady shook her head slightly.

'I don't quite know why I leave it there now, except that Joe used to like to see it. Joe was a VC, you know - got it in Burma. But he was always prouder of my old gong.'

Kim, who came from an army family and knew a little about war, was tactful in her probing; Elizabeth Baker acknowledged this with a small smile and said merely, 'I was with the SOE in France.'

The photographer in Kim looked at angles and saw her hawky nose and bright blue eyes; the businessman in her recognised a will to match her own and a mind which was proof against illusion. She instantly cast aside her prepared story about searching for the remains of James Rendall's pamphlet.

'I have my own little war,' she said carefully, 'and it's very odd.'

'Odd - how?' enquired the widow, with more (it seemed to Kim) than normal curiosity.

Taking a deep breath, Kim tried to put it into coherent order. Meticulously, she tried to omit nothing, not even the most trivial-seeming events.

'There are some wicked folk around,' nodded the old lady, then added, unexpectedly, 'Both alive and dead.'

Kim, seeing steel in her eye, could easily picture her much younger self killing German soldiers.

As if she felt she had to explain, Elizabeth Baker continued, 'And they killed my Joe three years ago.' She flexed the remains of her left hand (two-and-a-half fingers and a thumb) as if it pained her yet.

'Oh no,' whispered Kim. 'Why?'

'For money. Riches he never had.'

'Riches,' repeated Kim in astonishment, a vision of the carvings popping unbidden into her mind. 'There were never any riches.'

'I know; It was just the - the *"auri sacra fames"*, I think.'

'The accursed hunger for gold. Yes. It keeps coming back to that.'

'So, anyway - you've found a way of fighting back.'

'Rather a guerilla sort of way,' replied Kim, choosing her words with care. Part of her, deeply buried, was still wailing *Why me?*

'I expect there's a little voice inside you saying "why me?"'

'Oh, hell,' said Kim, 'someone's got to do it.'

'It won't be a picnic.'

‘Tell me about it,’ muttered Kim.

The elder gestured with her mutilated hand - not, apparently, out of a desire to draw Kim’s attention to it, but her eyes followed it nonetheless.

‘It wasn’t a Nazi shot me,’ she said, pronouncing the word the way Churchill used to, with a long *a* and an English *z* sound, ‘it was a French collaborator.’

‘You’re telling me to suspect everyone - anyone at all.’

‘Indeed. But you may also find allies in unexpected places.’

‘And somehow I have to find the magic - or the music - which will not only fix Roger Southwell in his non-existent grave, and then find - if I can - a way of getting rid of this... this demon.’ Kim was thinking out loud, and was a little startled to be answered.

‘You believe it is a demon, then? A thing of Satan?’

‘I call it a demon. I’m not sure about Satan. It’s something - inherent in the scrying-glass, as if it’s tuned to it. Southwell called it, I suppose, and couldn’t control it, any more than Alan can. But I believe I can.’ There, she’d said it.

After a pause in which Kim could hear her own heart beating, Elizabeth Baker stood up stiffly.

‘I didn’t get rid of all Joe’s things,’ she said.’ Come with me.’

Great, thought Kim. *More musty old tomes* - though she didn’t say anything.

The old lady opened the green door of what Kim had taken to be a cupboard, revealing a flight of stairs, and started up them. Climbing in her wake, Kim saw the old-fashioned, slightly threadbare carpet, anchored with brown rails and flanked on either side with dark-stained wood; and was visited by a sensation which was not quite an ancient déjà vu, a sense of past and present not simply askew, but overlapping.

All the old houses she’d ever been in were this house, just as all she’d done in her life up until that moment was preparation for what she had to do. Whatever had moulded Kim throughout her life - had made her solely and-completely Kim Sotheran, a person as unique as her own fingerprints - seemed no longer wholly random, but a means to a particular end: giving her the strength and the will and the valour to fight this specific battle.

So might this courageous old lady she followed have thought, parachuting on a night without a moon into occupied France. Both of them knew what it was to face a foe of such magnitude that there was no room left for illusion.

The room they came to was sparsely furnished, as if Elizabeth Baker lived only on the fringes of her house, concentrating her home comforts into the few rooms she used. Through the dusty glass doors of a cupboard Kim could see the dull matt covers of old books and some aged red-tabbed box files whose labels were yellow, whose inked captions were sepia with the passage of the years and spotted with the detritus of flies.

‘Joe was something of a pragmatist, but he saw enough queer things during the war to learn to keep an open mind. There was a demon in Burma that he saw when he was with the Chindits, who wears her feet back to front... He once said to me he thought evil feeds on evil; he meant that the more there is around, the more it will wake and draw out. And evil as great as Nazi Germany meant many wicked things were stirring.’ She unlocked the cupboard and took out one of the box files.

‘Not just Hitler?’ murmured Kim.

‘Evil itself is a dictator, whether it’s dressed up like a pompous little man with a moustache, or a bunch of faceless terrorists, or a fundamentalist state. That’s what the devil is, you know. And it’s precious difficult to combat. Or rather, it’s not so much difficult, as demanding of great courage. Will, and wit. You’re in occupied territory now, my girl.’

Kim nodded slowly, although she hadn’t been called ‘girl’ in years, and took the proffered box. ‘What’s in here?’

‘The accumulated wisdom of Sergeant Joe Baker,’ replied his widow. ‘I only sold the dross, my dear. All the important things are in there, though you may have to do a lot of reading before you know exactly what to do.’

The box was heavy, bowed outwards with its paper burden.

‘Will you keep it for me - just for another hour?’ Kim asked. ‘First I want to take a look at ”Roger’s Mount”.’

‘As you like,’ said Elizabeth Baker, her mouth quirking in a grin which gave a glimpse of the girl she’d once been, before she went to France. ‘The house *is* protected.’

‘I thought it might be,’ said Kim, and did not ask how.

Roger’s Mount gave her no clues, however. Shaped rather like a steak-and-kidney pudding, which robbed it of any sense of menace, it sat complacently in the middle of a field of hummocky grass in which moles had been busy. A green National Trust sign on a post added to the mundanity of the site.

Kim walked all round the mound’s circumference, singing quietly to herself all the while. It was little larger than the average suburban semi, and she felt no sense of awe. No fear; no threat.

He’s not home, she thought curiously. *The only bones in there are much more ancient than Master Southwell’s, lying among their old potsherds and spearheads*. The thought brought a memory of barrow-wights, but even that had no power over her. *No, he’s not home. He’s in Alan, somehow. Occupied territory.*

She returned to collect Joe Baker’s box with an odd sense of having achieved something, made some sort of advance, yet with no idea how.

Stopping once on the way home, in a pub for a hasty beer, Kim leafed through the contents of the file, noting as she did so that the missing pages of James Rendall’s booklet were there, though that hardly seemed important now.

The box also contained a motley assortment of yellowed newspaper cuttings, brittle old pamphlets, tiny chap-books through which she leafed carefully, a heavy white envelope folded round a flat box, which she did not open yet because she knew what it contained.

And, at the bottom, wrapped in oiled cloth so old that even its folds were cracked, a bundle of sheets of ancient thick paper stitched crudely together to form a rough book.

The writing was spiky and strange, but not impossible to decipher. Save for the conventions of the period, it was very like her own. She squinted to read, and her gaze skimmed down the page to encounter the words:

‘This day to ring St-Mary bells with the Scholars, whither by and by comes Roger Southwell...’

Kim’s heart thudded. This was, it had to be, the diary mentioned in Dunning’s book. *Or my name’s Luciano Pavarotti,* she thought.

15

The Journal of Fabian Stedman

5: The Demon

I did fall to thinking of this year gone by, for ’tis scarce a twelve-month that I did come to London-town for a printer; Nor do I regret the experience thereof. *Omnia mutantur, nos et mutamur in illis*;[1] did I remain in another place I’d not be married nor have no trade neither; but groan and sweat under my father his yoke, nor doth he take kindly to the ringing of bells (I wot not of one thing he doth pleasure in, unless it be chastising the heretic, of which number he always did count me one).

But now I am in hope that Roger Southwell shall take himself hence and trouble and vex us no longer, and that he will have the good sense not to look again in that scrying-glass; nor that I ever did believe that Roger hath any sense at all, not good or other-wise, he never hath shown it to me an he did. Love-philtres, disguises, homunculi and demons, nor did any thing but grief come out on any of them.

I do yet, in spite of all, in some wise give the man credit for his achievements for he hath found power and hath used it, the which is a thing not given to many men. Though give any man power and he will misuse it, as we do see every day in those that presume to govern over us; not to mention the Sir-Johns.

Now I do find ’tis harder labour in the print-shop than ever I did as a prentice; we yet make for our-selves the leisure to go a-ringing. And becoming by and by aweary of Grandsire Bobs and such-like I bethought myself to introduce mine own small creation to my fellow ringers. *Aut non tentaris aut perfica*,[2] as Catherine did say with very truth; although I’d liefer quote the English proverb, Venture naught, gain naught.

For when the art of cross-pricking lay enveloped in such obscurity, that it was thought impossible that double changes on five bells could be made to extend farther than ten, and triple and double changes on six farther than sixty; then it was that a worthy and knowing gentle-man, to dissipate those myths of ignorance, and to usher in the bright morn of knowledge, pricked those much applauded peals of Grandsire and Grandsire Bob; which for their excellency have for many years together continued triumphant in practice amidst all others whatsoever; which indeed have been a great light in the production of a great variety of new peals.

So that thing I did presently do, and when that we had all learned it well there was such music coming out on the belfry as I never did hear.

For three run merrily before, and two do bob behind, and they change places each with another swift and melodious and with pleasant symmetry; the changes are all double, two singles excepted; the bells have all a like course and by this method the peal will go sixty changes, and to carry it farther extremes must be made, as elsewhere I have showed more fully.

’Tis most harmonious to hear and I am most pleased with it, being the most Ingenious peal upon five bells that I ever could imagine. And Matthew Boys the musician was well enamoured on it, he says he’ll use it in a song, though I know not how he shall do this.

As the original design of casting peals of bells was in order to make pleasant music thereon; so the notes in every peal are formed apt for that end and purpose, every peal of bells behind tuned according to the principles of music; for in a peal of six bells are the six plain song-notes, whereupon all music consists, namely,

[1] Times change, and we with them

[2] Either don’t try or else succeed

la sol fa mi re ut. But in regard that in ringing of them the notes cannot be had at command, as the notes of other instruments may.

And I bethought me of that Richard Duckworth for with those recent events just gone past I had well nigh forgot my thoughts of a ringing-book and my correspondence with the man. These clear days of knowledge, that have ransacked the dark corners of most arts and sciences, and freed their hidden mysteries from the bonds of obscurity, have also registered this of ringing, in the catalogue of their improvements; as well the speculative as the practic part, which of late years remained in embryo, are now become perfect, and worthy the knowledge of the most ingenious.

Although the practic part of ringing is a subject for another place, yet the art of changes has his invention in the mathematical, and produceth incredible effects. Catherine doth admit to a great fascination with my peal, and oft do I see her pricking out on paper an extension of it; I much admire her mathematical mind, and am amazed by it.

Like unto an unspoken pact betwixt us, we neither one do speak ever of Roger Southwell; I did act like unto a fool in the matter of the creature that is now destroyed, that I well do know; but an we are assigning fault, first to blame was Roger, and there is not cause for guilt in my-self, save only guilt by association, an there be such a thing.

He is gone off for the stone of the philosophers or some such thing and we are well rid on him indeed. None the less I do think on him, not the least through cause of that which was summoned by the succubus in the glass; I cannot keep my-self from the thought that ’tis this which doth lurk in the hazy air of this muggy summer, like unto a constant threat of thunder.

In the town ’tis so hot as to be sans comfort of any sort; the women fan themselves with little fans of paper or cloth and the streets do stink worse nor the jakes; the air is filled with flies of divers sorts, all the which do bite and sting; many folk have got the flux and I do doubt that the plague will come again, for ’tis a sickly year.

There cometh relief only in the ringing of bells, the which is a very wondrous thing; I’d a thought such an exercise to sweat us worse nor walking in the streets; ’tis not like playing at Angel-beast for heavy toil; but the air in the ringing-chamber seemeth more sweet nor that outside.

We oft are visited by one nor another of the College-youths, a band that heretofore hath held themselves aloof from the common run of ringers, thinking they are over grand for the likes of us; yet now they make themselves pleasant and extend invitations to some of our number, my self included, to join their society.

Whether or no I shall do this I know not, for I take more delight in the company of those with whom I am wont to ring, and Catherine also; the College-youths have not invited her into their ranks (the which would be a great and merry jest were it to occur) for they believe this boy Kit be over-youthful for their number, though she be in truth one of the best of our ringers.

None theless I did see no wrong in introducing my peal to them: Master Stedman’s peculiar production on five bells, they do call it, but this does not stop them from ringing it most Industriously. The poet I believe is wrong to say, *Bene qui latuit bene vixit*,[3] for an we live obscure, so shall we die; only those that never did achieve any thing die so. Pride it may be on my part to say that my peal may out-live me; I’d liefer say, *Exegi*

[3] He has lived well who has lived in obscurity (Ovid)

monumentum aere perennius; [4] but I never did believe pride to be a sin, nor even sin to be that which the Puritans do hold it, *videlicet,* every thing that brings pleasure to a man.

Did I think I'd seen the last of Roger Southwell I was mistaken, for up he comes again at ringing-time; making speech an you'd not believe a thing ever happened, and dressed in a suit of very fine stuff (as Catherine. did tell me after, for myself I'd not know lawn from fustian without some one did tell me) with rings upon his fingers.

For a man that had not touched a bell-rope these three months he did ring some Grandsire passing fine, but I was pleased to see his visage when that Francis Bullen did say, –Now we'll ring Master Stedman's composition, and did not try over hard to suppress a smile.

Now as the ringing of changes is performed partly by the ear and partly by the eye, a man must needs fix his attention upon his fellow ringers to mark their ropes (the ear informs when to make a change, guiding the striking of the note true in its place according to time; the eye directeth the pull in the making of it); but a man's eye-sight is such, that other things are also seen, in periphery, as 'twere; thus did I mark the expression on Roger's face while we rung and found it wondrous strange; 'twas like unto a man having a revelation, and I did wonder the import on it. Nor did I think I'd wait a long time to find out, for whatsoever else Roger may be you'd never call him a close-mouthed man.

He sate down beside me in the ale-house all so full of words he looked like to burst.

–God give me wit, Fabian, he saith to me, but is it true that you did invent that peal?

And I replied, –It is; and he stared at me awhile, and at Catherine (anent whom he'd spoke not a word); until he saw that I verily had not an idea why he should ask.

–Marriage hath dulled your senses then, quoth he; Do you truly not know what you have wrought?

–Roger, said I, you have not lost your talent for exasperation of a man; for pox sake tell me whereof you speak.

And he shook his head and said, –Your peal, Fabian, your merry and ingenious little peal, it is naught less than a charm against the demon. Do you not feel it, feel th'air when you do ring it?

And it did fit like unto a key in a lock, or a finger in a glove.

–Ay, certes, said I, but I did not make the connection.

–You make powerful magic, my friend, said Roger. You know that folk on a time did hold that the sound of bells did calm the winds and tempests?

–Ay, what of it, I asked.

–Do you also know aught of Ficinian magic?

–Nay, said I.

–Ah well, much of it hath but little power; there be better charms for most purposes; yet 'tis based upon music, the power of harmony. What you have done, Fabian, without even knowing it, is mix together two sorts of magic to make a third type more power-full than either, and mayhap we should name it, and call it Fabian magic. Thou art a very magus and never known it.

–And indeed, said Catherine when I had done gaping at Roger, 'tis a magic that never was possible before, for we are only ringing changes now these forty years past. Close thy mouth, Fabian, thou lookst like a cod-

[4] I have built a monument longer-lasting than bronze

fish.

–I drunk of my ale and said, So why is it yet in th'aire, an it be true, and my peal doth charm it?

–'Tis not so potent, replied Roger, and for all that I do not believe this daemon will truly be laid until that I am in my grave. But you've shown me how I may keep it from me. I'll build me a house, quoth he, a great house in the country; I'll make it like unto a church, with a tower, and I'll have vi bells in the tower, to ring your peal when soever the demon doth approach near, and another bell to chime me the hours of the day.

– And how shall the bells ring, with only you to pull their ropes? asked Catherine.

–Why, Kit, I am a magus, quoth Roger. I'll make me a mechanical frame for to hang the bells in, and they shall ring at my pleasure. And I'll charm them also, so there's virtue in the very bells. I thank you, Fabian, and you too, little Kit-cat; have a care of your-selves, lest he turn on you his wrath, being thwarted of me.

And he drained his mug, and clapped me on the shoulder, and departed the Inn; we followed his example but a short space thereafter, for my thoughts were in a moil anew. Truly Roger's appearance is ever a mixed blessing at the most.

–I am sore inclined to wish we'd never met with Roger Southwell, said Catherine as we walked homewards, and this sat with mine own thought. I would we could give him his lure, she added.

–And how to do that? I asked. I know naught of his art, nor wish to.

–Yet it seemeth that power hath come none the less; wouldst thou not use it?

–Nay, quoth I, I'll not meddle with such, it's done me naught but ill.

–Oh ay? said Catherine, you'd be yet a prentice, and unwed?

–'Twas not that of which I spake, said I, I but think on the demon and such-like.

–Ay, think on't, she replied; Roger nominated it not twenty minutes since; what then shall we do when that it comes a-hunting, Fabian? Make us a ring o' bells like Roger, or live in the church, an they'd give us sanctuary? Gods arse, man, he'd not ha' warned us an he thought us safe.

–Is this my lion-hearted Catherine, I asked. What is become of the maid that would spit in the demon's eye an it came?

And she sighed and said, –Well I'd ha' told you soon enough, I carried my water to the doctor a sennight since.

–Thou art with child? I said.

–Ay, she replied.

I forgot demon and all then and took her up in my arms.

–O have a care, she cried, remember how I am dressed.

–Then let's to our bed, said I, desiring her more than ever I did ere then. *Ille terrarum mihi praeter omnes angulus ridet*.[5]

What's a man to think, when he is first to become a father? Strange indeed, for swiving is the most natural thing in the world; a man doeth it whensoever he can and thinks on't more than that; indeed I'd lain with Catherine these many months and never known that she hath ceased to take of her potion; yet I feel proud, an I'd done some clever thing. How can this then be sin; 'tis against nature to term it such.

Wherefore have we religion; only to take away such fleeting pleasure we have in this short life, it me

[5] That corner of the earth to me smiles sweetest of all (Horace)

seemeth. I felt Catherine's belly with my hand but she shows no swelling, she says it is two months gone. Can a man then swive with his wife when that she be big with child, or will that do harm? I've no inclination to find occupation with common cuts again; I never was a great mutton-monger.

Now I do see how it is that a woman doth change in many ways her nature when that she be with child. Thus Catherine's doubt of the demon is not for herself; she puts the child first in her mind; she's not so ready to spend time a-working, nor ringing neither, nor as she had use to do, pricking out divers peals and the like; 'tis as well I suppose, we'll not be able to disguise her no more in a few months.

This day I determined to go to Richmond-town and visit that Nicholas Griffin that did aid me. For he being an herbalist will be able to give me some specific against Catherine's becoming sick, for I hear a woman with child is wont to vomit in the morning-time. Indeed it may be that he can advise me in the matter of the demon, for 'twas he that did give to me the counsel I now do follow; put not thy trust in magic; for I do believe that Master Griffin be rather more nor a common pothecary.

'Tis entirely another matter to find the time to hie me thence, so I wrote a letter to that John Fletcher whom was known to my late master Daniel Pakeman and paid a messenger-boy to carry it thither.

This Fletcher is a versifier of some sort that paid Master Pakeman to print up his poems; therefore I made bold to suggest him that he and Matthew Boys did meet; 'twas Matthew himself gave me this notion, he did tell me of a musical piece was writ by one Master Davenant and called the *Siege of Rhodes,* that was like unto a play save that much of the speech was not speech at all, but sung; 'Twas made into a moral piece to instruct folk so that the faithful-brothers should not call it sinful. This style of *Masque,* as 'twere, might make merry revelment when that we be rid on this Puritan rule and the play-houses opened up again; an any man can write such pretty airs then it be Matthew.

Master Fletcher has took the dangled bait and I am gone to Richmond; he told me that in Italy and France these music-dramas hight *Opera* and even that here in England masques yet be put on stage, but in private houses and *sans* spectacle. He did describe to me a grand masque that he did witness some XX years since, that had a great procession upon horseback between Holborn and White-chapel; and showed me some writings by a wittaly whoreson instiled Prynne that ranted against such entertainment. I'd not have used such pamphlets to wipe my arse with.

When that I was done with mine errand at John Fletcher's I hied me down towards the river and the dwelling of Nicholas. Griffin, and bounced at his door.

An he admired my advent he did not betray this by his countenance, merely bowed his head a whit and said, –Master Stedman, is't not? You are come up i'the world an I mistake not.

–Ay, I replied, I have a print-shop now and a wife withal, and am come for to repay you your kindnesses.

–Well, there's no call, said he, but I'll not refuse you; and stood to one side to admit me.

–There was one other thing I'd ask of you, I said.

And Nicholas. Griffin said –Ay, so I did guess.

–It's two things, I added; one's some specific for my wife to give her surcease of morning-sickness, and to ease the travel.

–And th'other? he inquired.

–'Tis a lengthy tale, said I, an you have the time to hear't.

–’Tis the reason you sought me out, quoth he; speak.

And I did relate all that befell with the magic of Roger Southwell, although I did not speak his name.

When that I was done he looked at me a rare long time, and then he sighed and said, –What a tale you tell; ’tis a hard chapter you have learned.

–Have you then any counsel you can give? I asked.

–I did tell you once, put not your trust in magic; that’s good counsel. Prayer too can aid a godly man; tho you have not the look of a man that’s over fond of the church, nor that calls much on God.

–Can you then tell an heretic from the cut on’s garments? I said, ’Tis well that the priests cannot do likewise.

And he made a smile that was no more than a little crooking of his mouth (as ’twere he did not wish to be overly amused) and said, –Not so; but most men drawn into such a moil of magic and meeting with demons would be a-down on their knees at the altar seven days in the week, in a muck-of-sweat betwixt God’s wrath and the devil’s magic.

–I go to church for my duty and no more, I said, I do not ask help of the Puritans’ God.

–Yet you ask it from me, said Nicholas Griffin. Do you believe I have more power nor the Lord?

–You argue like unto a lawyer, I said.

–Ah well, said he, I must needs be certain of you, do I endeavour to give you aid; I have mine own opinion of God and I’d give offence to a churchly man, most like. Mark you I do not deny God’s presence; ’tis simpler nor that; I merely misdoubt his concern for mankind.

–Well then we be of one mind, said I; Heretics both, and due both for stretched necks an the Puritans do find us out.

–Man is born to trouble as the sparks fly up-wards, quoth he (I did marvel that he quoted scripture); we’re all damned in their eyes for one nor another of the seven sins, all of which are but the nature of man.

–So have I thought too, I exclaimed. That do we deny lust, gluttony and greed, we’ll never strive towards any end; we’ll lie down and the Puritans shall order our lives for us, grayness without end; nor art, nor music, nor pleasure; and then be cast down by their puling God for all of eternity. Well I’ll none of it. This life be sufficient, as the day be sufficient unto itself.

–Well now, Master Stedman, quoth he, here’s my laboratory, for I am physician and apothecary both, as well as herbalist; here’s a rare collection of spagyrical remedies too.

He walked halt to a dresser filled with little drawers, and showed me all the boxes and pots with all the names and figures of the drogues and simples that they contained painted on them, and books by Gerard and Culpeper and others.

–You’ll know the place where Master Culpeper had his shop, said Nicholas Griffin, ’twas in Spittle-fields, in Red-Lyon-street; he dyed not iii years since, and did teach me much. See here, these herbs are all efficacious for women, being under the rule of Venus; mother-wort, arrach, plantago, May-weed, mug-wort, nep and pudding-grass; that’s good against sickness too; medlar and bistort both prevent abortion; juniper, bettony and the white lily help speed the delivery when she falls in labour. Balm and peony too, they’re good in childbed; celandine and dill can ease the pains; th’eringo’s a venereal plant; there’s rue and sanicle and even mulberries, and winter savory’s an excellent general specific; butterbur has his uses, and is even better mixed with

zeodary or angelica; and bay, that's also resistant to witchcraft. Vervain's under the rule of Venus also, and it was named *herba sacra* by the Romans.

Nicholas Griffin while he did speak, pounded divers of these dried herbs and powders together with a mortar and pestle, and poured the mixtures into papers.

–This is for the *hypermesis gravidorum*, the sickness, quoth he; this to ease and strengthen the womb; and this to give her speedy delivery when she comes to her time; do you seethe a pinch in wine or ale and give it to her to drink. *Probatum est.* Do you concern yourself anent occupation?

–Oh ay, said I, on a sudden blushing like unto a green girl.

–'Tis well enough, he said, you may swive when it please you; you'll not harm your wife, an you take care, nor the child neither; that's an old-wife's tale; they say also that excessive occupation maketh a woman barren, there'd be no folk in the world this day were that true. 'tis not a sin neither, but you'll take no heed on that.

–As for th'other matter, he said when that I'd taken the packets of powders from him, I'll say this: the demon's too close-tied to your magus to do over-much harm to any other, even you, even your wife and your child; when he's built him his house 'twill be bound there, I'll wager that. Till then, hyssop's a good charm, the holy herb, and bay.

–*Asperges me hyssopo, et mundabor,*[6] said I.

–You too can quote from scripture then, an it please you, quoth he.

–Ay, for my father's a sir-John and my brother also.

Nicholas. Griffin returned to his listing of efficacious herbs so: –Berries of rowan; St-Johns-wort, instiled *devil's-flight;* vervain, and rue, the herb of grace. They are all here in this paper; an you feel a threat do you throw a pinch of the powder in th'aire. Then a silver jewel for you and your wife, also, will give protection; you stand not in peril, nonetheless, I am sure on't. All these plants are not magic, not in themselves; their virtue lies in that which they bring out in your own self; for no demon can prevail against an armoured heart.

Straight from Nicholas. Griffin I found me a silversmith and did buy two rings of silver off him, and a little chain for our child to wear; and then I walked back to the river to find me a boat, well pleased with the day's labour.

The sun was in a haze but there blew a pleasant wind; the brown Thames-river seemed not so stinking as of late, in spite of the thick scum begriming it along the bank. There was an old Jack-raker a-scraping filth off the path into the water; he had not a tooth in his head and wore a greasy rat-skin cap over his ears. I passed a pair of mermaids outside a dirty hot-house; one opened her gown to show a neble, and spat at me as I went by.

After that I'd gone by the whores I heard footsteps coming behind me very swift and with great haste and did turn with my hand ready on my sword-hilts; I beheld a mean filthy stinkerd with a wild staring eye; he passed me by in a reek of stale beer and I berated myself for a startle-cat. Nonetheless I kept my hand where it lay, and 'twas well I did so.

I had found me a boat and was haggling with the waterman when I herd a voice speak my name; I turned around and an explosion split the air, a fiery breath passed by my face, the waterman cried out and staggered

[6] You will sprinkle me with hyssop, and I will be made clean

backwards, and the whores began to braul at the tops of their voices. I had out my sword in the same instant that another boatman, a long timbersome fellow, seized hold of the assailant.

–Let fall your pistol, or I'll slit your throat, I said to the man, ready to do so an he did or nay; 'twas only then that I recognised his countenance; I'd last seen him bleeding in an alley after that I'd broke his nose; 'twas crooked from that even now.

I looked to my boatman; he'd one hand griped round his other arm, his fingers all a-gored, and was rare white in the visage; I'd fain have left the would-be murderer to the mercy of that one's fellow watermen save that some one had brought down the watch and they removed the man hence.

Following this I took an other boat downriver and was home anon, and was backwards pleased to behold Roger Southwell a-sitting in the shop, that was shut up by that time and the prentices and journeyman long gone home.

–What do you here? I asked, endeavouring to keep my voice from wrath.

–Such words for an old friend, Fabian? he said; have I fallen so low in your favour?

–Roger, said I, I've naught to thank you for.

–Naught save all your good fortune, he replied, and I never did come closer to giving him his lure; being yet a whit prudent I but shrugged my shoulders and stared at him.

For a wonder 'twas he that looked away first; then I did observe his countenance; he had the look of a man sick of the plague that knew he was dying and had little space to settle his affairs. So I stood with my arms a-folded and awaited his explanation.

After a space of time he looked up again and made a kind of Ingratiating smile.

–Will you write out your peal for me, Fabian? he asked, that I may live free of the demon which besets me; such a little thing 'tis to ask.

–I'd a thought you'd be weaving magics to send it back whence it came, said I.

–I verily believe that one is and will ever be beyond my powers, Roger replied soberly. Yet it may be that though I am unable to banish it in this life I may yet do so in another.

–Have you then learned to look beyond death? I asked.

–Nay, not so, said he; however my spirit shall live again when that the right man doth read the riddles I will leave for him.

I cared not; I'd had enough; I picked up a printed peal from the table, the Ink was yet wet, and smudged a trifle.

–Here take it, said I, get you hence and trouble us no more.

And he looked at me most strange and said, –Yet I'll be within call, an you need me; took up the paper with my peal upon it, and departed.

Then did Catherine come from out another room and embraced me, though she did not mention Roger Southwell at all; and I found myself telling her all that Nicholas Griffin had said and all that had befallen me that day.

She looked at the folded papers I'd laid on the table and said, –This Nicholas Griffin, you think him an honest man?

–Ay, honest, said I, he has no truck with Roger's magic; his potions are from herbs that grow and not from

the black arts. See, I said, unfolding a paper and smelling of the wondrous perfume within, naught that hath such a fine savour can do thee harm.

–’Tis like unto a garden in summer, she said; Am I to eat it?

–Nay, said I, we must needs seethe it first in ale or wine so that you may drink a draught of it. ’Twill save you from sickness and bring good humours. And see, I said, here’s a ring of silver that also hath virtue.

–Well now you have turned your coat indeed, said she, on a time ’twas only magic that you heeded, and now do you sit at the feet of an herbalist.

–You sound like unto a very critic, I said; I but mean the best for you and for our child.

–O I know, said she, and ’tis carrying the child that doth put me into such an ill temper. Let us try out one of these scented potions.

Between one thing and another ’tis some while since that I did last write in this journal; the month of August turned most unseasonable, wet and sickly, a most prodigious rain at the end of the month.

Matthew Boys hath made a most pretty song from the notes of my peal, he played it on a stringed Instrument he called a *Chitarrone* that was from Italy, that was like unto a lute but more ornamented; he’ll put it in his opera that he is writing with John Fletcher, ’twas he that wrote the lyric to this song, a kind of little sonnet about lost love, for the play’s the tale of Peter Abelard.

That’s a sorry tale enough, showing what barbarities the priests will do; for all it did occur five centuries past, and in France, and they were papists to boot, yet the breed’s the same today, howsoever they do cant and protest.

Perchance this little air can work, in his small way, to counteract the demon whose presence yet makes our weather so intemperate; Catherine learned to play and sing it, although the words are most sad, ’tis the song that Heloïse doth sing when that she’s lost her lover and she’s to be made a nun. ’Tis most strange to hear the music-notes on the harpsichord that are wont to issue from the tower out of the great mouths of bells.

This doth call to my mind a man I did meet not so many days since, Thomas Chandler, come to beg employment at the bell-foundry in White-chapel; his father’s a bell-founder in Buckingham-shire and is imprisoned by the Puritans for taking of the mass. Thomas. and his brother Geoffrey hath fled; but they were not taking on men at the foundry. At that I bethought myself of Roger Southwell and his tower; I know not an he hath built it yet, yet I gave Thomas. Chandler a letter to take to him.

By and bye comes back from Roger a letter full of gratitude, he says his tower’s a-building and the Chandlers shall cast him bells this year or next. For me with weather so foul I’d liefer wait were it my task, no sooner had the pit been dug than ’twould be all filled up with rain and mud.

Catherine in some sickness so she drank of Master Griffin’s potion and it did ease her as he said; she’s around four months gone with the child, she should bear it late in February or March an it come to term.

I cannot but be concerned, the skies roil with tempest and all the seasons are turned about, ’tis not yet October but winter’s upon us. I do doubt yet the demon’s power, in spite of the words of Nicholas. Griffin.

My mind being full of these thoughts this is most like the cause of a strange dream I dreamt, strange and sad and so clear I did wake a-grieving until that I remembered my situation; I fancied that we had a little child, that he was dying of an ague, that we had sent for physicians but the river was all frozen up and the coach broke and so the poor mite perished.

When that I awoke and did reassure my self that it was in truth a dream I even did consider praying but that I thought it would be presumptious; an it be there's a God in truth he's not concerned with one man nor another, no more than with an hedge-sparrow or a pismire. Doth a bee-keeper number the names of his bees, though he care for them?

In December a fancy visited me, that I recalled muted merriment in years gone by at Christmas-tide when that I was a child; this is a thing the Puritans will not have us celebrate, they say 'tis superstitious mummery and the feast hath been but lean these many years.

How soever I said to Catherine, –Lets have us a Christmas-feast and pox take the Puritans; for I desired to give her a treat as she is big by now with child, it is passing strange to embrace her; she likes not occupation so well as she had used to, in truth she is for the most part uncommon dry i'the placket.

–Well we must go to church said she, I'll not have the time for dressing the meats.

–Twill not be so much for us two, I said, and after all, feastings not confined to meats. Let us simply make merry and forget these drear times, merry by the fireside.

–In truth there's but little opportunity to do that, she replied. For they do frown upon bear-baiting not because it doth hurt the bears and dogs, but because people enjoy the watching on it. And I did find that a fine metaphor for all the Puritans acts.

Accordingly we did go to do our duty on Christmas-day to hear a preacher ranting, I took no note on it save that he did take an uncommon long time about it and the day was woundy cold and the chapel likewise.

I took a-hold of Catherine's hands, they were like unto ice; the words of the song came into my mind, *Starves my heart and very soul with cold;* I played the air in my head in hopes of countering the demon, an that were the cause of the ice; and thought that her poor chilled hands did warm a little.

At last the sermon did end, and then there came a sudden commotion: a band of soldiers broke in and carried us all away, for why I knew not, doubting they in some wise had found out my intent and meant to chastise me for my thoughts of revelry. But no, in the afternoon came some officers from White-hall to examine us one by one, I believe some folk were took to prison; the reason was for taking of a sacrament that day contrary to some ordnance or another. I was close to laughing at the irony on it but decided 'twas wiser to keep mine own counsel.

These common prayers, they did say, were but the papist mass in English, the which was palpable nonsense; further they accused us of praying for Charles stuart the king they had slain.

–Who'd be so great a fool, quoth I, and they looked like to assault me. What's a man to do, I said, an he keep apart from the church you do prosecute him for heresy, an he attend you accuse him of being a papist; at this one of the soldiers did strike me in the back with his musket where a coward hits a man.

In spite of all this I was let return home with Catherine. Thus was my plan to revel at Christmas-tide sent all awry; but we made passing merry the following day, and again at the anniversary of the year. Catherine did discover a little verse that did make us to smile, *videlicet*,

To Banbury came I, O profane one,
Where I saw a Puritane-one
Hanging of his cat on Monday
For killing of a mouse on Sunday.

’Tis yet bitter cold, severe and frosty; the demon hath us in a grip of a winter none on us have seen the like of. Today’s the eve of saint Agnes, when green girls dream of those they’ll marry, so men say. I asked Catherine an if she’d ever looked in a mirror on this night, or divined with pins; she laughed and said nay.

The river’s frozen, fish and fowl in blocks of ice, and entire boats too, an you believe the tales; they also say the carrion-crows’ feet do freeze fast to their prey. Did any one doubt that ’tis the demon’s work there is that in the air to give the proof on it: a foul and evil fear so big with threat as is Catherine with child; you can nigh smell the rotten stink on it.

Catherine says the child is restless in her belly and doth kick her intemperately; she hath aches in her back and is constantly tired; the herbal remedies give little relief. In truth I sleep but poorly myself, being visited by formless horrors and imaginings. I went to a whore the first time since I was wed; had no pleasure of it, and later dreamed of the succubus so that I awoke in a muck of sweat.

They say this hath been the severest winter, that man alive hath known in England; I can well credit it; in the shop even the urine that is for cleaning the forms did freeze ere it could be used. I remembered well this stinkerd’s task and let the prentices go hence; most like they went a-skating on the Thames, being over young to go a-drabbing, though it may be I do them an injustice in saying thus.

What a long time a child doth take in growing; I’d liefer have an homunculus, that grows in a bottle. Catherine hath grown so great I did ask an she’d be birthing a calf; she said she did trust not. Her dugs are swelled so big also I’d scarcely know her for the maid she was; is it therefore perverse to be yet, as I am, *maris appetens* for her, I do wonder.

This day the fourth day of March is Catherine delivered of twin babes, a boy and a girl; she fell in pieces at four a clock in the morning and I did run to fetch the mid-wife, being in great terror that the blood would call to the demon, for there was a great deal on it; Catherine did drink down her draft of one of the herbal potions and for good measure I did cast into the air a handful of Nicholas Griffin’s powder, the first time I’d done such, for I was nigh breathless with the oppression of the night, cold and choking as ’twas.

The poor little boy-twin died soon after his first breath; so sad to see, a tiny mite blue like a bruise and all perfectly formed. The little girl is a lusty child; we shall name her *Elizabeth;* poor Catherine is grievous sick in a great fever and I grow afeard; this night I can write no more.

The river being frozen I took horse to Richmond to speak with Nicholas Griffin, and a plague of a time it did take me to get thither, the nag an old spavined beast that I do swear trotted slower nor I could walk. The man came to the door in his night-gown; hearing my tale he hied straight to his work-shop and rummaged in drawers a space for to discover the herbs he desired.

Back home by noon for I’d risen in the night, Catherine sore distressed and very weak. The physician hath let her blood, such a foolish fumbler, can he not see she’s nigh drained on it already? An there were a way I’d give her a quart or so of mine own blood; would such a thing could be done. Yet I believe she’s gained colour since she took the new draught. The midwife saith, give her rich food to eat, I bought her meats and pies and tanzeys full with eggs and cream; had to feed her by mine own hand else she’d not have taken it.

The air grows thicker than ever, worse nor thunder ever was; the demon hath taken one child, is it not content with that?

The physician says Catherine will live; I do doubt her fever, she burns like a fire. Mercifully Elizabeth

appears strong and suckles the wet-nurse mightily. There are tempests in the skies this night, but no relief in the air; they are like unto flying omens.

In the night Catherine awoke crying with pain, the horridest sound I ever did hear, and her life's-blood soaking the bed; she fell into a fit so extreme I gave her all the herbs I had off Nicholas. Griffin, though much spilled on the floor she was shaking so. I called for the physician but he came not until that it was all too late.

My sweet Catherine died at dawn, this day, the seventh day of March, and with her died also my soul and the joy of my life; for her I shall go mourning to my grave, never cease to curse the name of Roger Southwell whose demon did take her from me. *Quis desiderio sit pudor aut modus tam cari capitis?*[7]

[7] How can there be any shame or stint in mourning for one so dear? *(Odyssey)*

16: Next Himself In Power

> '...almost every spot of it was covered with great black flies, that never changed their place or moved...
>
> 'And very soon he came back, and the old man that was sexton with him, with a shovel and the earth in a hand-barrow: and they set it down at the first of the places and made ready to cast the earth upon it; and as soon as ever they did that, what do you think? the flies that were on it rose up in the air in a kind of a solid cloud and moved off up the lane towards the house, and the sexton (he was parish clerk as well) stopped and looked at them and said to my father, "Lord of flies, sir," and no more would he say.'
>
> M R James, *An Evening's Entertainment*

His thoughts tossed as by a tempest, Alan Bellman sprinkled the dust of dried herbs into the paste forming in his stone mortar; a sense of approval hung in the air. He held out his left hand and watched it quake like the hand of a drunk, unable to still it by effort of will. In their proper seasons he had mixed the powders, preparing the ground for his next move.

Third time is the charm, part of his mind thought. First was the destruction of John Simpson, which proved the power. *Then I snared the girl, all she awaits is her knight* (Some day my prints will come, as the woman said in the photo shop, his mind insisted)... *which now I become.*

Third time, third time.

Cold, he thought as he stuck two fingers into the mixture. Chill and slick and disgusting in ways he could hardly put into words. It numbed his finger-ends, as though they slid over ice. He lifted the small viscous lump out of the pot and stared at it. It was quite unlike anything which came out of a tube from the chemist's, being somewhere between cloudy and translucent, somewhere between the colour of blood and the colour of pus: more like the discharge from an infected boil than anything else, but thicker.

Grimacing a little, he smeared the unpleasant stuff on his face: forehead, cheeks, lips; then a dab on his throat, just where the Adam's apple made its sharp protrusion. An instant later he gasped, as a hot effervescence fizzed through him from these several points. Cool air hissed into his throat, and he staggered across the room to watch his reflection in the glass of his dark old cabinet.

Steeped in the culture of the movies, Alan had seen transformations galore flickering on cinema screens: Jekyll to Hyde in many variations, man into were-beast, Dracula into skeleton and thence to dust; and had, perhaps, subconsciously expected something similar. But he could not detect any alteration of his features, no sliding of flesh like malleable wax, no sudden palimpsest of one face onto another.

Then a stab of pain closed his eyes for a crucial second, and when he opened them again, he was changed.

'Christ,' he whispered, seeing a nineteen-year-old's reflection in the glass. 'God,' he said. 'Oh, my lord.' He ran his fingers over the strange and youthful features. His chin felt smooth as a boy's, and a flap of hair blacker than Alan's had ever been tumbled over his forehead. He shuddered with knowledge. Then he grinned at his new guise, and began, quietly, to laugh.

Kim was enclosed in her office with that strange old file she had brought back the previous day, and had responded, earlier, with an absent-minded 'Not this time,' when Alan had called out 'Want to go for a ding?'

Nevertheless, Alan took great care to be silent now, as he slipped cautiously down the stairs, avoiding the creaky treads.

He drove a little over a mile, hoping no-one would see him, and put the Beetle in a shady car-park before joining a pair of elderly ladies at the nearby bus-stop.

When the bus appeared the driver peered at him suspiciously and said, 'Full fare?'

'Yes,' replied Alan indignantly.

Someone was raising a lone bell in the tall white tower of St Michael when he got off the bus at Westerbridge. It clanged into silence and came to rest, then four more began to go up.

Usual vast Sunday attendance, thought Alan, recalling his last visit with a jolt almost of panic. He touched his strange new face, reassuring himself that it was still there, and combed the dark hair with his fingers. His heart thudding fiercely, he drew a deep breath and started up the stairs.

The Griffiths family and Ted and Zoë turned to stare at the stranger who came into the ringing-chamber, smiling the pleasant smiles of ringers welcoming a potential ally to their band.

'Hallo,' said Alec Griffiths. 'Are you a ringer?'

'Yes,' squeaked Alan, his voice - to his alarm - cracking. 'Not an expert, though,' he added in a startling bass.

'What do you ring?'

Alan caught Debbie's eye, and smiled; she smiled back.

'Oh, Plain Bob, Grandsire, Stedman if I'm feeling intelligent,' he said.

'Well, catch hold for some Bob Doubles, then,' said Josie. 'Would you like the fourth?'

Formulae rushed through Alan's mind as he tried to remember what the fourth did to start, and he turned to the dangling ropes with what he hoped was a nonchalant air.

'Sure,' he said carelessly, his mind working furiously. *Odd bells out, even bells in. In, then, and four blows behind next. Unaffected if there's a call: good. I can cope with that.*

'That's the four,' said Debbie, pointing. 'I'm Debbie Griffiths. What's your name?'

'Steve,' said Alan quickly, his mind a sudden blank. 'Steve Green,' he added, catching sight of the lone grass-coloured sally on the treble rope which Debbie was holding. 'I'm a student.' She smiled at him again.

'Look to, then,' she said.

***

Kim sat shaken by a storm of unexpected grief and anger, the memoir closed in on itself in her lap. *You fool,* she raged at the shade of Roger Southwell, *how many more lives must you wreck with your wretched magery?* She clenched her fist, wanting to slam it against the wall or the desk. Instead she found herself thumping her own thigh, wincing at the force of the blow. Surprising, the strength of her fury. These days, until recently, nothing had seemed worth expending passion on, in the way she had felt when she was younger. Not that she had ever been a great embracer of causes.

Presently she stood up and stretched stiff limbs. It seemed as though she had spent hours studying the contents of Joe Baker's box. All the other items lay on the desk before her, pieces of a jigsaw, which, fitted together, would set things to rights. Or not. The world hung disconcertingly in balance, somewhere close to Kim's mind, and whatever she did next must set something in motion. She felt a dizzying sense that everything in

her life had been intended to draw her to this moment, and it staggered her.It had not rained since the previous day, when she had made it stop.

That, at least, was something. On an odd impulse, she went into Alan's study and started rummaging through his filing cabinet, thankful that this was one thing he did keep in some sort of order.

The file she was looking for contained an article entitled *A Pattern of Changes*, copious photocopies from reference works, and, in a plastic folder on its own, another photocopy: this of the manuscript of the sole surviving song from Matthew Boys' opera, the first true English opera, *Peter Abelard.* She studied the idiosyncratic notation for a while, but it was too different from the numerical paths which bells follow and she could not tell, really, whether it *was* the music of Stedman Doubles. But the first six notes of the melody were 'rounds', in a way - six descending notes, DCBAGF. And every sixth note was the same, like the tenor covering. It was, she thought with a sigh, yet another damned code to decipher.

'Il mio nome non sai,' she sang to herself. *'Dimmi il mio nome, dimmi il mio nome prima dell'alba... You do not know my name; tell it to me before dawn comes...'* Caught for an instant, she read the lyrics of the sad little song, Héloise's aria:

'For me there are noe Seasons since the theft
Of Spring whereat I woke a time ago;
Brief Summer fled ere I had space to knowe
His sudden Sunne, and here I lye bereft.

The gawdy Leaves of Autumn are made lowe:
The Frost takes all the Vertue from their Gold
And starves my Hart and verie Soule with Cold;
And falls o'er Alle the muted, chilling Snow.

Thus doth my time, so Brief, draw to her close,
Nor shal the Sunne return to wake my Hart;
The dawns may pale, the yeare shal turne agayne,
The Seasons even Change; yet for my Part
I am to dust returnd. Thus Dyes the Rose,
Thus falle the Hills at last: thus Endes all Pain.'

It appeared to be scored for soprano, Kim observed, and frowned: had Matthew Boys intended women to sing and act on stage, against all convention? Or would Héloise have been played by a boy, or even a castrato? She shook her head, annoyed at having spent time in such unprofitable speculation, and returned to her own study with the song held loosely in her hand.

They stared at her, the things on the desk. The battered journal; the cuttings and the pamphlets (the missing pages now restored to James Rendall's); the dull bronze Victoria Cross, too heavy, when she picked it up, for its small size; the scrying-glass, squatting like a toad in the corner.

So, she thought. The answer is here. The way to destroy a demon, free Alan from possession, lay a wizard's soul to final rest, and set back the world as it once was. She grimaced at the immensity of the task.

Suddenly, like the stars coming out, she realised that it was Southwell himself who was, after all, the key.

The demon wanted - had always sought - him. His essence; his soul. The magus had apparently kept his foe at bay with the music of Stedman's principle, played endlessly on his own strange carillon, but could not destroy it. They were bound to each other, endlessly circling, like a pair of wary wrestlers.

I will give Southwell to the demon, Kim thought. *I'll stake him out like a goat for bait, and when it comes, the music will destroy it, and him too, because it will not be silenced.*

A small voice within her insisted that the music was not enough, that more would be required.

'It's all I know to do,' she said aloud.

Somehow reluctant to act, although a kind of decision had been made, she picked up the now-complete pamphlet. Yet still she was not sure how essential the bells themselves were: Southwell must have thought them important, since, according to the pamphlet, he had bequeathed them to the church of Market Peverell. That the treble had remained in Fenstanton was pure chance: All Saints' treble had developed a crack at the time when the bells were being moved, and the good folk of Market Peverell had kindly offered Southwell's treble to them.

Kim was certain, however, that if sound-recording had been available to the magus, he would have used it. Bell-metal, after all, being a mixture of copper and tin, had no magical properties that she knew of, not in the way which cold iron was reputed to. It was the sound, the combination of notes, the harmonies, which had the power. It had to be.

She knew she was prevaricating.

Even as the thought came, she stretched out her hand to the scrying-glass, as if its magnetism had just that instant been switched on. Her fingers closed round it, and a tingle went up her arm.

Picking it up, Kim looked at it dispassionately, observing how it magnified her palm, lifeline, heartline. The patterns of her skin were enlarged through it into a leather-grain. But it did not appear to reflect her face. Or maybe it was her face which cast no reflection, she thought: feeling strangely un-anchored to the world; unfixed in time.

That part of her which inhabited elsewhere could not marvel, as her twentieth-century self did, at the extra-ordinary smoothness of the glass, because she knew it to have been created by no human agency; and for no good purpose.

A sentence popped into her mind just then, and, like a quotation, she spoke it aloud.

'I put my will upon you,' she said, and looked into the glass.

Instantly the air changed and utter dread sluiced over Kim. A horror ate at her soul, attacking her suddenly and without warning from all directions at once. She knew, with certainty, that something intent on the most diabolical malice bent over her, something invisible but all-encompassing. If it had shown her teeth like a shark's, claws like a tiger's, she would have been relieved.

The room filled up to the ceiling with icy cold and a stink of rot. Feral laughter seared her ears: a bitter, hard, predatory sound of entirely the wrong shape to emanate from anything so human as a throat. Her skin prickled; she felt sweat course down her face, her sides; all down her body. And all Kim's optimism drained away, all her hopes, all her stubborn conviction that everything would, in the end, be all right. Worms crept into her mind, tears into her eyes, and dust fell over all.

There was nothing left to draw strength from.

Again the mocking laughter sounded, harsh and final, a sound with no one source: it came from everywhere at once. She knew, through some supernormal sense, that she was being toyed with, teased, before the terror would rip her physical body to pieces and leave her mind screaming and naked in the eternal darkness, violated unceasingly, helpless before the triumphant mirth of that most ancient of all enemies.

So Kim, with nowhere left to turn, reached within herself. And there she found, so buried she almost missed it, a core of strength which grew into a kind of armour, then more than armour - a weapon. In another age she might have called it faith. It was stubbornness which lay within, not the workaday pig-headedness she'd always had - but steel; adamant, fortress. A force which turned her fear to cold fury, and focused it like a laser beam.

'Begone,' she said impatiently.

The room emptied all at once, as suddenly as it filled, just as if a plug had been pulled out. Kim became aware that her left hand was numb, and looked down. It lay in her lap, wrapped round her right, which itself enclosed the scrying-glass. Thoughtfully she lifted this and put it to one side, seeing an impression on the back of her hand which matched the relief of the surface of the Victoria Cross she held in her left.

Kim stared at her country's highest honour for quite a long time, a number of thoughts chasing each other through her head. Foremost amongst them was a connection suddenly made, that the medal she held was made of bronze.

An alloy of copper and tin.

As was bell-metal.

***

Alan could barely remember being nineteen. He knew, as an intellectual fact, that he had once been a teenager; could even picture himself as he had been then, never really afflicted very much by the ills of adolescence. Never fitting in terribly well, either: he liked the Beatles better now than he ever had then; he had not been terribly interested in chasing girls, or very good at sport.

This felt different.

He knew it must be different. Whether it was an effect of the ointment, or of some other change in him, he neither knew nor cared. Everything seemed brighter, more alive, as if the world had suddenly been carbonated. Chatting with Debbie, the whole fizzing of it threatened to overwhelm him; if this were lust, it was of an entirely different species than any he had ever felt, more intense, more exciting, more wholly delightful. He was almost breathless with it. When she had brushed him accidentally descending the narrow tower staircase, a kind of effervescent shock buzzed through him.

He sat drinking coffee with the Griffithses, and Ted and Zoë, scratching Blondie's ears while trying to make polite conversation and look as if he were in a strange house. Which he was, in a way, being not the same Alan Bellman who had sat there many times before. Subtle threads tugged him, his own self one way, his new persona another. And a third (that odd sense of being visited) in yet a different direction. He was in three pieces, a curious and disparate trinity.

Debbie blew him a kiss when he left.

By the time he got back to the car-park, he felt exhausted, and a disquieting thought possessed him: he had never knowingly learned of an antidote. However, when he looked in the rear-view mirror he saw Alan

Bellman again sandy-haired and thirty-five. He breathed in deeply, trying to slow his thudding heart, and turned on the ignition. As he drove slowly home he found his lips whistling. Of their own accord, it seemed. It was a moment before he recognised the music: *Caro nome, Dear name,* from *Rigoletto.* Debbie had been singing it earlier.

As he turned the corner into their road, he saw something which was extraordinary even by the standards of what had happened lately. There appeared to be a heat-haze shimmering between himself and his home, but such a heat-haze as Alan had never seen or could have imagined. It was dark, like tinted glass.

A wall of immeasurable height, it towered into the sky until his eyes lost it. Beyond it, the world glimmered, all stained and tainted with its blackness. As he drew nearer, he grew very afraid, and abruptly pulled into the kerb and turned the engine off.

Gazing at the shuddering, disturbed air, he almost decided to do a three-point turn and drive away again. Instead he got out of the car and walked warily towards the barrier, halting about twelve feet away. From there he could hear a faint buzzing, as of insects, and a curious rustling sound.

His mouth was suddenly dry, and his knees felt shaky. He swallowed to try and get some saliva circulating, and moistened parched lips with his tongue. Alan found his lower lip was stinging as he licked it: it had cracked open in the centre, but was too dry to bleed. He did not know why he was afraid, but something about what he was seeing terrified him, and not only because it stood between him and his home.

It was almost physically impossible to move. Alan had never before appreciated how true it was that one could be paralysed with fright. He concentrated on putting one foot in front of the other. Another step. Then a third. Alan was shaking all over now, and his mind was shrieking and howling at him to run.

He looked up, and knew terror.

The wall was made up of flies. There must have been millions, thousands of millions, a myriad of them, hovering in the air, each one no bigger than a match-head, all keeping formation. Alan moaned in dread, and never knew he was doing it.

And then, as if a wind had suddenly risen, the insects dispersed. It was an almost instantaneous thing: too fast, almost, to believe. One moment they were there, then gone, in a hum of tiny wings; the shadowed world grew bright once more.

Alan started to run down the road.

17: Thy Form From Off My Door

‘And mixt with these, a lady, one that arm’d...
Had beat her foes with slaughter from her walls...
Nor bent, nor broke, nor shunn’d a soldier’s death,
But now when all was lost or seem’d as lost...
Brake with a blast of trumpets from the gate,
And, falling on them like a thunderbolt,
She trampled some beneath her horses’ heels,
And some were whelm’d with missiles of the wall,
And some were push’d with lances from the rock,
And part were drown’d within the whirling brook...’

Alfred, Lord Tennyson, *The Princess*

Kim looked out of the window, across centuries, it seemed, hearing Alan’s voice shout her name and seeing him run towards the house, not knowing that he saw her standing there like an icon - while another part of her, or another memory, or another Kim Sotheran entirely, saw another man running.

She felt lambent, incandescent, the world suddenly seeming to fill up with light. There was too much light, she thought, as if the scene before her were lit by another sun - an alien, younger, brighter star than Earth’s own, white as phosphorous flaring in the air. Briefly she wondered whence came that brilliance, why the world was lit thus, and then, for the first time in her life, she passed out.

Nothing lay in her memory between the brightness and hearing Alan’s panicked voice.

‘What’s the matter? What’s the matter?’

She might, she thought, have died in that moment, and never known it. As it was she had no idea why she was lying on the floor. Alan tugged at her arm ineffectually.

‘What happened?’ he persisted.

‘I don’t... know.’

‘You were lying here with your eyes open. I thought - ‘ He couldn’t finish the sentence, as if saying it might make it so: *I thought you were dead*.

Clutching his arm, she got shakily to her feet. The movement set her head spinning, nausea climbing her throat. She stumbled to the bathroom and threw up, retching painfully until nothing remained. Alan hovered uncertainly outside the door. Kim was hardly aware of his presence. Heat and cold washed over her alternately; sweat and shivers. Supporting herself blindly on the washbasin, she sluiced cold water over her face, slurped some of it into her mouth over her sore palate, down her bile-burned throat. She felt weight fall across her shoulders: a blanket. Alan supported her into the bedroom, switching on the light against the cloud-darkened sky outside.

‘There were flies,’ he said, obscurely.

Kim coughed, seized a glass half-full of stale water from the bedside table, and drained it. It tasted dusty. She coughed again.

‘Lie down,’ said Alan. ‘I’ll get you a brandy.’

She felt too weak and shaky to argue; she sank back into the pillows, wondering what had happened - what was happening. What had she done?

Alan came back into the bedroom and handed her a glass, sitting on the bed beside her. Kim took a cautious gulp of the spirit, feeling it run a warm descent to her stomach, as she watched Alan covertly. *Are you Alan now, or Roger?* she asked silently. *And who, or what, am I?* That thought worried her more than the other, so, to avoid it, she swallowed the remainder of the brandy and held the glass out to him. Behind him, the sky was as grey as an elephant's hide.

His hand extended. His fingers curled round the tumbler. He turned without speaking, his recent solicitousness gone. Kim got up, carefully, hearing the blood pounding in her head, and stood by the bed.

'Roger Southwell,' she said quietly.

Alan's head swivelled round, and her heart turned an appalled somersault, even though she had been prepared for something of the kind. He looked up with white eyes, the pupils horridly rolled up out of sight. Then, like pebbles, they slid back into place and focused on her.

Except that now they were brown, not blue.

Kim swallowed, her mouth dry and sore again. 'Speak,' she ordered, hoarsely.

The answer, when it came, was in an unexpectedly reedy voice. There was, however, nothing weak or uncertain about its tones.

'What would you have me say, bane of demons?' The inflection was mildly amused, almost ironic. 'I dance to your tune and come at your call, I who never thought to acknowledge a master. You would banish me from this robe of flesh, then?'

'It is not your home, Roger Southwell.' She found her speech falling involuntarily into an archaic pattern.

'Yet I am not an uninvited guest.'

'So say those who commit rape,' retorted Kim.

Alan's face looked momentarily puzzled, then cleared, and Southwell nodded.

'Ah, rapine. So the centuries rend us asunder,' he said, recognising a truth. 'I must needs leave the maiden be as well, then?'

'Yes,' said Kim. *The maiden?* she thought.

'What is your intent, magus?'

'I control the glass,' she said. *Barely,* her mind pointed out, but she hushed the errant thought. 'I will give you fair warning, as you never did, with all your tricks and riddles.'

Southwell interrupted, looking suddenly almost horrified. 'Do you not know whence comes the power?'

Kim frowned. He continued in a burst of passion.

'Ye be fools, all fools, and you as much as any, an you know it not. More so, in sooth. That power I did give unto Fabian, the which he did refuse, was not wholly mine own; for what was his he did comprehend and yet did gainsay it, fool that he was - '

'Yet his name is remembered more than yours.'

'Still, I am quick, and he is dead; dead these three hundred years.'

'No,' said Kim. 'You are a trespasser, where you are not welcome. And his is the truer immortality.'

'Hold your peace, I do beseech you,' said Southwell impatiently. 'Permit me to enquire of a master -

whence cometh your power, do you believe?' A hint of something like sarcasm slipped into his tone.

'From music,' replied Kim.

'Wrong! Wrong, wrong! The power is in you. It is a talent, like the ability to paint. Music is but your way of working it. Do you understand me?'

An invisible fist thumped Kim under the heart. More red herrings and riddles. She should have known. Her every move had been circumscribed by Southwell's deceit. Yet whyever should she have imagined he would cease his deviousness when she had merely solved one problem or penetrated one disguise?

'I can teach you... pilgrim,' said Southwell slyly. 'With power such as yours, well-taught, you could be invincible, all-conquering.'

She recognised the gambit, and managed to laugh. 'Do you think me such an easy mark?'

Southwell shrugged. 'It was worth a try.' He fell into idiom as easily as had Kim. 'You overthrew the demon. For a space of time, at least. I acknowledge your mastery in that - but in naught else. Next time we meet, magus, you will not o'erthrow me.'

Kim stared at him.

'But together...' he said. 'Have you no wrongs you wish to see righted? No enemies to confound?' He reached a hand towards her. 'I think you have a talent for hatred. Most magi do.'

Kim was silent, recognising, as Southwell had earlier, a truth. Up until that moment she had been viewing her battle, her war, in terms of black and white, with Southwell and his demon bracketed together and representing the former. Suddenly things were not so clear-cut, were shifting, re-forming. He had, she knew logically, spoken to some shameful part of her which wanted - yearned - to accept his offer.

Southwell was watching her closely, sensing her uncertainty. ''Tis easy,' he said, 'to be a master. When I did but comprehend that simple truth, all that passed hitherto seemed but as hollow foolishness.'

'The homunculus?' asked Kim, curious despite herself.

Southwell made a dismissive gesture with his fingers.

'Ay, foolishness,' he said. 'When there be power here' - he touched his head - 'needst no potions nor midnight incantations.'

'But you made Alan work spells, didn't you?'

'A man doth make use of that which he hath at hand. He had not the talent for power, but he had the desire for it, and that did prove sufficient.'

'Sufficient to bring you here?'

'How lightly you do phrase it, to be sure. Ay, to call me back after three centuries. Hearken to me now! I am here and not lightly to be banished again, howso you may believe. Yet you need not involve yourself in such a trial. I can retreat back into the sleeping part of this mind so that you will not know me to be here, and there remain but an observer of this strange and wondrous world... I would fain not miss sight of all the prodigies it doth hold. And in return - teach you all the uses on your power.'

'I—' began Kim. The word 'no' somehow would not pass her lips. The magus smiled.

'Just so,' he said, 'think on't. I withdraw - thus.'

Alan blinked, and his eyes were his own again. 'Kim,' he said uncertainly. 'Did I doze off?'

'Sort of,' she replied. Outside, remote thunder rumbled.

‘Are you all right now?’

‘Fine. I’m fine. Will you show me what you’ve been learning?’

‘What?’

‘The magic. The spells. I’m curious.’ Come on, she encouraged him silently. If it’s only a matter of willpower -

Alan’s shoulders sagged. ‘Come on, then,’ he said.

As easy as that, thought Kim, exhilarated. It was like learning the use of a new muscle. The more you exercised it, the easier it became. There was a curious hint of sexual pleasure, too - the way music felt sometimes. She was aware, now, of the power moving in her, somewhere even deeper than her deepest veins, nearer her core, and almost expected some visual sign of it - light fizzing from her fingertips, perhaps. Distantly, too, she felt the storm growing nearer

‘To Confound Ones Enemys,’ she read. Aloud, she asked, ‘John Simpson?’

Alan nodded.

‘So who is the maiden?’

‘The maiden... ‘twas Ann...’

‘No!’ Kim said sharply. ‘Not Ann Pakeman. Now, not then. Who?’

‘I beheld her in church - I...Debbie, that’s her name. Ay. She knows me as - my name is Steve...’ He looked bemused, and Kim’s memory unearthed a dream she recognised. Connections slipped into place. Blood. A corpse in a sack. And the diary.

‘Listen to me, Alan. Listen! Leave her alone. Otherwise she’ll die. Do you understand?’

‘No,’ said Alan, absently.

‘You remember Ann, don’t you? You just said “Ann”.’

‘Ann, yes. Poor Ann.’

‘Ann died. Like Gilda in *Rigoletto*. You’ll make history repeat itself. You have to stop.’

‘I’m not sure I can,’ he observed, quite clearly. Then, abruptly, he seemed to shake himself. ‘What - what were the flies? Where did they come from? Where did they go?’

‘What flies?’

‘Outside. It was like a wall of flies, all round the house.’

‘I don’t know.’

‘What were you doing?’

‘Looking in the scrying-glass,’ replied Kim, her back prickling as she recalled the soul-shrivelling presence of the demon. She stuck her hands in her pockets, fingers reassuring themselves of the hard outline of the Victoria Cross. And I have to do it again, she thought, and soon. She shivered anew.

‘Only demons in the glass,’ said Alan, shuddering.

‘No,’ Kim told him. ‘Not any more.’ Even as she said it, she knew it was presumptuous, while knowing it for putative truth. How had she, Kim Sotheran, thirty-something, photographer, gained power over spirits of earth and air? ‘*Spirits from the vasty deep,’* she muttered.

The doorbell rang then, making them both jump.

‘I’ll get it,’ said Alan.

Kim followed him down the stairs to see him open the door to a bewildered-looking Debbie Griffiths, trailing a footsore Blondie, who was wagging her stump of a tail hopefully. As she watched, fat drops of rain began to fall.

'Shit,' breathed Kim, suddenly short of breath.

'Debbie!' said Alan in surprise. 'What is it?'

'I... I'm not sure,' the girl faltered. 'I sort of - found myself here.' Her white face peered past Alan.

Kim pushed him to one side and grabbed Debbie by the elbow.

'Come in, for God's sake, you look dreadful,' she said, repelling the dog, who had seized hold of her leg. 'Alan, go and make some tea.'

'Oh - all right,' Alan agreed.

Debbie allowed herself to be led indoors and seated on a sofa.

'I feel weird,' she said.

'Put your head between your knees if you feel faint.'

'No, not faint. We went out for a walk and ended up here! How could I do that?'

'I don't know,' said Kim. 'What were you thinking about? Were you "miles away"?'

'I don't know. I was singing a bit, I think - singing to myself - I'm really not at all sure.' She looked up. Kim saw tears leaking from her eyes.

'Hey, come on, it's all right. Don't cry.'

'I feel so *stupid,'* snuffled Debbie.

Kim patted her knee awkwardly, and handed her a paper tissue. 'It happens to us all,' she told the girl. 'I do it all the time. Never know where the day goes. Come on now, mop up.'

'Tea,' said Alan, coming in. Debbie wiped her eyes and wrapped her hands round the hot mug, bending her head into the steam for a second.

'Do you want to call your mum?' asked Kim.

'Yes - no. I mean, I feel such an idiot.'

'I'll drive you home,' offered Alan.

'No, *I* will,' said Kim. 'I'll drop you at the end of your road, if you're embarrassed. Are you all right, though?'

'I think so,' replied Debbie, with a weak grin.

Ahead, loud as the guns in the battle of the Somme which people had said could be heard in England, thunder burst, and lightning carved the sky. The air sparked with electricity. Blondie whimpered nervously.

Without conscious thought Kim stood up and sang,

'Comè un bel di di maggio, che con bacio di vento
è carezza di raggio, si spegne in firmamento...'
'...a beautiful May day, kissed by the breeze
and caressed by the sun, fades from the evening sky...'

And the roiling clouds calmed their seething, the charge seeped out of the air leaving not a whiff of ozone; the rain petered out sulkily. The frilled edge of a cloud glowed briefly, and then slid away from the sun.

Alan and Debbie gaped at Kim in astonishment.

‘This has to stop,’ she said, anger surging up. *‘Now!’*

‘Kim—’ Alan began.

‘Wait—’ said Debbie in the same instant, her eyes wide and frightened.

‘Do you believe in magic?’ asked Kim, rounding on them.

Neither replied.

‘Believe it! It’s *real!’*

‘You did that to the rain?’ Debbie said in a very small voice. ‘How? With the music?’

‘Near enough. Debbie, I can’t explain... or rather, I could, but it’s a long story. Have you got time to read something?’

Mystified, the girl nodded.

‘Wait there,’ said Kim.

Debbie looked uncertainly at Alan, but his eyes were distant, as though he had been switched off. She started to get up, but at that moment Kim returned and pushed a battered block of paper into the girl’s hands.

‘You only need to read as far as the marker,’ Kim told her.

The journal crackled as Debbie turned a page cautiously.

‘What is it?’ asked Alan, but without much interest.

‘Just a journal,’ said Kim. ‘About Roger and Ann; and other things.’

‘Ann,’ repeated Alan musingly.

Debbie started to read, and silence filled the room. Kim let her thoughts wander. Music intruded, as it always did, but gradually a kind of peace descended. There was no imminent demon, but her unfocused mind yielded nothing in its place.

She drifted.

After a time - whether minutes or hours she could not tell - the air in the room began to take on a peculiar dead quality, as though muffled from the world outside. Kim noted it only in passing, for now visions were forming in her mind’s eye: another storm, far greater than that one she had just quelled, as the ocean is greater than a tarn.

Thunderheads, black and tremendous, whirled on a wind like a hurricane. Ancient oaks whipped, bent and snapped. Rivers and seas lashed out of their proper beds, overwhelmed the land. Lightning blazed.

Kim gasped, as though it were her whom the gale buffeted; as if she flew, like an arrow, through the tempest. She tossed her hand over her brow as if to clear it of rain. Blood thundered in her head, and the world went into flux around her. She struggled like a diver in rough seas as it seemed to curdle, and then coalesce; and though she remained aware of her surroundings, she could see, clear in her mind’s eye, scenes which flew by, or which she flew by:

...a golden landscape, the rolling arable land of England’s southern counties (What fields and hedges and farms were those?) lit by a winter sun and chased with the shadows of clouds, laid out beneath her as though she stood upon a high hill. Leafless trees stuck up into the air like black scrubbing-brushes laid on their backs. As she watched, the cloud-shadows turned to blemishes, like ink poured over a watercolour drawing...

...a seascape glowing like liquid fire, its seas and inlets, islands and darkling shores, more like a cloud-

scape seen at evening, when the setting sun transformed the skies into a country you could sail to and yearn for, with all your heart. Twilight overtook it, overwhelmed it, blackened and polluted its fiery seas, quenched its light...

...soaring mountains, steep and high and cold, airless and perilous to humans. Slow-creeping, ominously cracking glaciers in their valleys went unimaginably deep, covering the secrets of thousand of years. Snows, here and there loosened by the unimaginable action of sun and thaw and wind, plummeted from pinnacles too sheer to climb, but the avalanches they began changed to deadly effect as they thundered downwards...

...The great globe itself, yea, all which it inherit, thought Kim, and suddenly she *saw* it as a whole, as something complete and entire in itself, as an orchestra is more than a collection of instruments: something which could work magic. For an instant of epiphany, she saw not only *how* it was, but also *why* it was, and she understood everything.

Music took over, took her over entirely. To many people, music is an emotional experience. For Kim it was, as it had always been, physical. She took the music which was in her and flung it outwards, and felt it tingling all over her body: every hair stood on end, and tears came into her eyes, and the power which rose within her - or was channelled through her - was both greater and more controllable than anything that she had ever known. The hills spoke like horns; the fields' voices were like flutes; the sea thundered like a mighty church organ; and Kim laughed out loud with the certainty of it, and the joy, and wiped out the stain on the landscape, the darkening of the skies, and the cold death of avalanche, with a sweep of glory which was music.

The storms subsided, and Kim saw a face - a face she had seen before. Not Southwell: a younger man, grey-eyed. Now, however, there were white threads in his untidy brown hair (ones which matched her own), and shadows beneath his eyes.

Who this was struck her now, as it could not before; but now she knew a part of his life - a portion of his grief. And she shared some of his troubled thought - born, as he had been, into an alien age. Perhaps it was sorrow which had aged him, for he was not so much older now than the last time she had seen him.

'I think I understand,' said Debbie's voice.

Kim jerked back to her own living-room, but somehow did not lose contact: she had retained an anchor.

'I'm - Ann, in some strange way,' Debbie went on, 'aren't I? But who is Roger/Walter?' She followed Kim's eyes to Alan, whose gaze was still abstracted. Her face reddened. 'Steve?' she whispered.

Alan looked at her, and to Kim his features seemed to fuzz momentarily, as if a lens through which she was observing him had gone out of focus. Debbie clutched at her hand, unexpectedly.

Kim felt for the Victoria Cross in her pocket with the other hand, and squeezed it.

'Roger,' she called softly.

Have a care, whispered a thought in her mind. *Ever remember this with our Roger: he seeks to bend you to his will. An you be certain that it is your own will and not his that you follow, you may thwart his desires. Every secret withheld from him is a weapon you may use.*

There was no interim, this time. Alan simply stared across the room with alien eyes. Debbie gave a little gasp, and her grip tightened on Kim's hand.

'So, magus,' said the high and hateful voice. 'Have you decided?'

‘I have,’ said Kim.

The air seemed to tighten in the room, almost to hum.

He thinks you are avaricious for power, even as he *is. He does not believe a man can deny it, once offered, though it mean that man must acknowledge a master*.

‘And?’ said Southwell greedily.

‘Teach me the use of the power.’

Southwell rose, and Kim stifled a gasp. Now Alan was changed indeed. Changed before her eyes. Grew taller, darker. He laughed, and the laughter was like the grating of a rusty hinge. He held out a hand to Kim, a hand which was broad, black-haired, and broken-nailed.

‘My hand on’t, magus; tell me now your name.’

Tell him not, names are power.

Knowledge exploded in Kim now. *Il mio nome non sai...* she thought, *you do* not *know my name!* And a name she had read came into her mind.

She faced up to Southwell.

‘No, I will not tell you my name,’ she said, and her voice sounded strange in her own ears. ‘But I call the name of your nemesis.’ She saw uncertainty creep into the other’s eyes.

‘*Beelzebul,’* Kim said softly, and gasped in shock at the blow which buffeted her as it rushed in like air into a vacuum. Her breath caught in her throat, her skin crawled. The room stank, an indescribable reek which she could hardly bear to inhale.

‘No!’ shouted Southwell, flinging up his hands.

Kim saw, with a distant revulsion, his fingers sink into his temples, and a grey pocked rottenness steal over his face. She herself was shaking all over. The power she felt now was as great as the glory of her music, but its antithesis. It was destructive, sickening and terrible. It wanted to negate, to unmake. It wanted to torture and to rend; and she knew that it would not, once having been called, be content with Roger Southwell’s essence. And now it knew her, too. Sweat poured off her, cold as melted snow, and nausea made her stomach cramp, and more than her stomach: her mind and soul shuddered with the horror of what she had called. What she had *had* to call.

Behind her, Debbie and the dog Blondie were tightly curled together. One of them was whimpering. She didn’t know when Debbie had relinquished hold of her hand.

‘I am armoured in bronze,’ whispered Kim, sinking to her knees under the paralysing force which beat down upon her. She was clutching the Victoria Cross like a talisman, so tightly that it hurt her hand, but the pain helped keep her hold on reality. ‘All here are under my protection, except the one whose name you know.’

Southwell screamed then, a raw inhuman sound which tore out of his body. She saw blood follow his fingers as he clawed at his disintegrating face, and felt herself shaking like a leaf in a storm, wanting desperately to close her eyes, yet not daring to. She saw the skull beneath the skin, and that too was crumbling: within it was only darkness, and then she did close her eyes for an instant as she swallowed nausea, only to force them open once more a moment later.

Sucked out, finally, Alan collapsed on the floor, but she could not go to him, and that was almost the worst thing of all. The presence turned its attention on Kim: the room seemed full of mist now, swirling before her

vision, catching her voice in her throat. If it had been terrifying before, now, with its full malice bent upon her and somehow recognising her in ways she did not understand and did not want to contemplate, it was unbearable. She no longer believed herself capable of motion or thought, but she still felt, when she reached for it, her strong anchor, and with it, her powers of speech.

In the face of the invisible horror which hovered in the room, Kim shouted aloud.

'Go. Begone. Get you hence. Be banished and buried!'

Its reluctance was like claws in her innermost being: agony flared as she felt it tearing at her. Gathering all her fading strength, she focused it like a laser and she sang one line, her voice rising to a crescendo.

'L'ultima volta, addio! For the last time, farewell!' And the presence was gone, vanished as utterly as if it had never bruised the air as if with leathery wings. Kim crawled towards Alan, still shuddering. With dread, she turned him over.

Debbie lifted a white and tear-stained face from where she had buried it in her dog's blond fur. 'Is he all right?'

'Yes,' breathed Kim in relief, feeling his side rise and fall. 'It's Alan. Southwell's gone.'

'Gone... what was that?'

'A devil. A demon. I don't know. Something... killing you would be too kind for it. Something out of Hell, if you believe in it.'

'Now I do,' said Debbie.

Alan Bellman opened his eyes. He felt as though he had been ill for a long time, but was now waking free of sickness. Frowning at Kim and Debbie Griffiths, he wondered why they were sitting on the floor.

'You okay?' Kim asked.

'I think so,' he replied. 'What happened? Did I pass out?'

'Sort of. Sure you're all right?'

'Yes,' said Alan, considering, 'Except - I think I'm rather hungry.'

'He must be all right,' exclaimed Debbie, with a nervous smile.

'How are you at frying bacon?' Kim asked her.

'All right, I suppose.'

'Let's go, then.'

Kim helped Alan onto the sofa. He was still a little puzzled, but sank back into the cushions amenably enough. There was something different about Kim, he thought. But what was it? A powerful sense of inner strength, certainly, but that was nothing new. So what...?

His gaze lighted upon an ancient-looking, crudely bound quarto volume, and his antiquarian instincts surged up. He picked it up avidly, dating it at a glance towards the end of the seventeenth century, and began to read:

> *'It is a Proverb with us in England (That Every Pavan has his Galliard) by which expression is declared, That be a man never so Wise or Learned, yet every Sage hath his moments of Folly. Which expression is most Apt in the matter of All men, for who can declare himself free from Folly, whether it be in the cause of Love, or Avarice, or Power over other men.'*

September 5 1658

Dearest Jennet

I find myself, having a moment of idleness, moved to put pen to paper, and bethought me that I would write and in such wise draw nearer to you. Indeed having lately presented to your father my credentials nor being in receipt on any word of him, I am sore concerned that he may think ill on me.

Of late have been many tempestuous wind and storms, which threw down many great trees and did much mischief all England over; then in the midst of the greatest storm of all did die at Hampton-court Oliver Cromwell, and now we must all trust in better times to come, that the Puritans be no more in the ascendant.

On that very same night of the 3rd of September I myself did witness one of the most strangest and curious dreams that I ever did see. I never did have with you a deal of speech concerning my poor wife Catherine that did dye in child-bed; 'twas all moiled up with magery and such-like; and I have been witness to the summoning of spirits; and dreamt on it so.

Thus was my dream:

That I sate alone and viewed in a scrying-glass, and in it I did see visions, a magus that was like unto a mere boy in countenance though I now believe 'twas a woman clad in boy's garments, that did do battle with with a demon, and also with mine old acquaintance Roger Southwell that did desire to take her power for his own.

Yet she did turn the demon back onto the man and it devoured him. And all this was such a prodigy that I must needs set it down, for I do know that Roger S. doth yet live and prosper in the town of Fenstanton.

It may be, that you being possessed of an excellent wit, can riddle me this dream: *Felix qui potuit rerum cognoscere causas*,[1] as Vergilius doth say; yet an you do tell me tis but naught, I shall accept your word on't. When all's said and done, there must be sufficient in the world yet to discover, and not concern ourselves with prophecies and dreams.

Trusting that we may meet again ere many days are passed; you dwell ever in my thoughts.

Fabian.

THE END

[1] He is happy who can understand the causes of things