

Games From Folktales

A free podcast for
the Ars Magica
and Magonomia
roleplaying games

Cellini swears his statue of Mars is not haunted

The Magonomia Bestiary Kickstarter

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Cellini and the oddities of medicine

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Cellini swears his statue of Mars is not haunted

A brief one for this week, to prepare for the intense work on the Magonomia Bestiary Kickstarter

Being then refreshed in strength and spirits, I attacked the great statue of Mars, which I had set up solidly upon a frame of well-connected woodwork. Over this there lay a crust of plaster, about the eighth of a cubit in thickness, carefully modelled for the flesh of the Colossus. Lastly, I prepared a great number of moulds in separate pieces to compose the figure, intending to dovetail them together in accordance with the rules of art; and this task involved no difficulty.

I will not here omit to relate something which may serve to give a notion of the size of this great work, and is at the same time highly comic. It must first be mentioned that I had forbidden all the men who lived at my cost to bring light women into my house or anywhere within the castle precincts. Upon this point of discipline I was extremely strict. Now may lad Ascanio loved a very handsome girl, who returned his passion. One day she gave her mother the slip, and came to see Ascanio at night. Finding that she would not take her leave, and being driven to his wits' ends to conceal her, like a person of resources, he hit at last upon the plan of installing her inside the statue. There, in the head itself, he made her up a place to sleep in; this lodging she occupied some time, and he used to bring her forth at whiles with secrecy at night. I meanwhile having brought this part of the Colossus almost to completion, left it alone, and indulged my vanity a bit by exposing it to sight; it could, indeed be seen by more than half Paris. The neighbours, therefore, took to climbing their house-roofs, and crowds came on purpose to enjoy the spectacle. Now there was a legend in the city that my castle had from olden times been haunted by a spirit, though I never noticed anything to confirm this belief; and folk in Paris called it popularly by the name of Lemmonio Boreò. The girl, while she sojourned in

the statue's head, could not prevent some of her movements to and fro from being perceptible through its eye-holes; this made stupid people say that he ghost had got into the body of the figure, and was setting its eyes in motion, and its mouth, as though it were about to talk. Many of them went away in terror; others, more incredulous, came to observe the phenomenon, and when they were unable to deny the flashing of the statue's eyes, they too declared their credence in a spirit—not guessing that there was a spirit there, and sound young flesh to boot.

The Laidly Worm of Spindleston Heugh

The Laidly Toad is the villain from "*The Laidly Worm of Spindleston Heugh*" which is a story from the English Borders. I've also mixed in a little from a variant called "*Kempe Owen*", which was collected in the *Child Ballads*.

The story was part of the material collected by the author of *Reliques of Ancient English Poetry*, but was not used. Its contributor, Reverend Robert Lambe, claimed it was from a manuscript written around 1270 by a poet called Duncan Frasier, but there is no other work, nor any other record, of this poet's existence. Lambe claimed the original was in Latin and that he had reworked and translated it, but the original cannot be found. It was eventually published in *Rhymes of the Northern Bards* in 1812. I'm mentioning these titles because we have mined them heavily for story ideas. Grim, King of the Ghosts is in *Reliques*. The haunted instrument is in the *Child Ballads*. I'll discuss them in later episodes

The recording that follows is by MaybeCordelia, and released through Librivox. Her version was written by Joseph Jacobs. It's been modernised a little. We'll be returning to him later in the year for a folk saint. Thanks to MaybeCordelia and her production team.

In Bamborough Castle once lived a king who had a fair wife and two children, a son named Childe Wynd and a daughter named Margaret. Childe Wynd went forth to seek his fortune, and soon after he had gone the queen his mother died. The king mourned her long and faithfully, but one day while he was hunting he came across a lady of great beauty, and became so much in love with her that he determined to marry her. So he sent word home that he was going to bring a new queen to Bamborough Castle.

Princess Margaret was not very glad to hear of her mother's place being taken, but she did not repine but did her father's bidding. And at the appointed day came down to the castle gate with the keys all ready to hand over to her stepmother. Soon the procession drew near, and the new queen came towards Princess Margaret who bowed low and handed her the keys of the castle. She stood there with blushing cheeks and eye on ground, and said: "O welcome, father dear, to your halls and bowers, and welcome to you my new mother, for all that's here is yours," and again she offered the keys. One of the king's knights who had escorted the new queen, cried out in admiration: "Surely this northern Princess is the loveliest of her kind." At that the new queen flushed up and cried out: "At least your courtesy might have excepted me," and then she muttered below her breath: "I'll soon put an end to her beauty."

That same night the queen, who was a noted witch, stole down to a lonely dungeon wherein she did her magic and with spells three times three, and with passes nine times nine she cast Princess Margaret under her spell. And this was her spell:

*I weird ye to be a Laidly Worm,
And borrowed shall ye never be,
Until Childe Wynd, the King's own son
Come to the Heugh and thrice kiss thee;
Until the world comes to an end,
Borrowed shall ye never be.*

So Lady Margaret went to bed a beauteous maiden, and rose up a Laidly Worm. And when her maidens came in to dress her in the morning they found coiled up on the bed a dreadful dragon, which uncoiled itself and came towards them. But they ran away shrieking, and the Laidly Worm crawled and crept, and crept and crawled till it reached the Heugh or rock of the Spindleston, round which it coiled itself, and lay there basking with its terrible snout in the air.

Soon the country round about had reason to know of the Laidly Worm of Spindleston Heugh. For hunger drove the monster out from its cave and it used to devour everything it could come across. So at last they went to a mighty warlock and asked him what they should do. Then he consulted his works and his familiar, and told them: "The Laidly Worm is really the Princess Margaret and it is hunger that drives her forth to do such deeds. Put aside for her seven kine, and each day as the sun goes down, carry every drop of milk they yield to the stone trough at the foot of the Heugh, and the Laidly Worm will trouble the country no longer. But if ye would that she be borrowed to her natural shape, and that she who bespelled her be rightly punished, send over the seas for her brother, Childe Wynd."

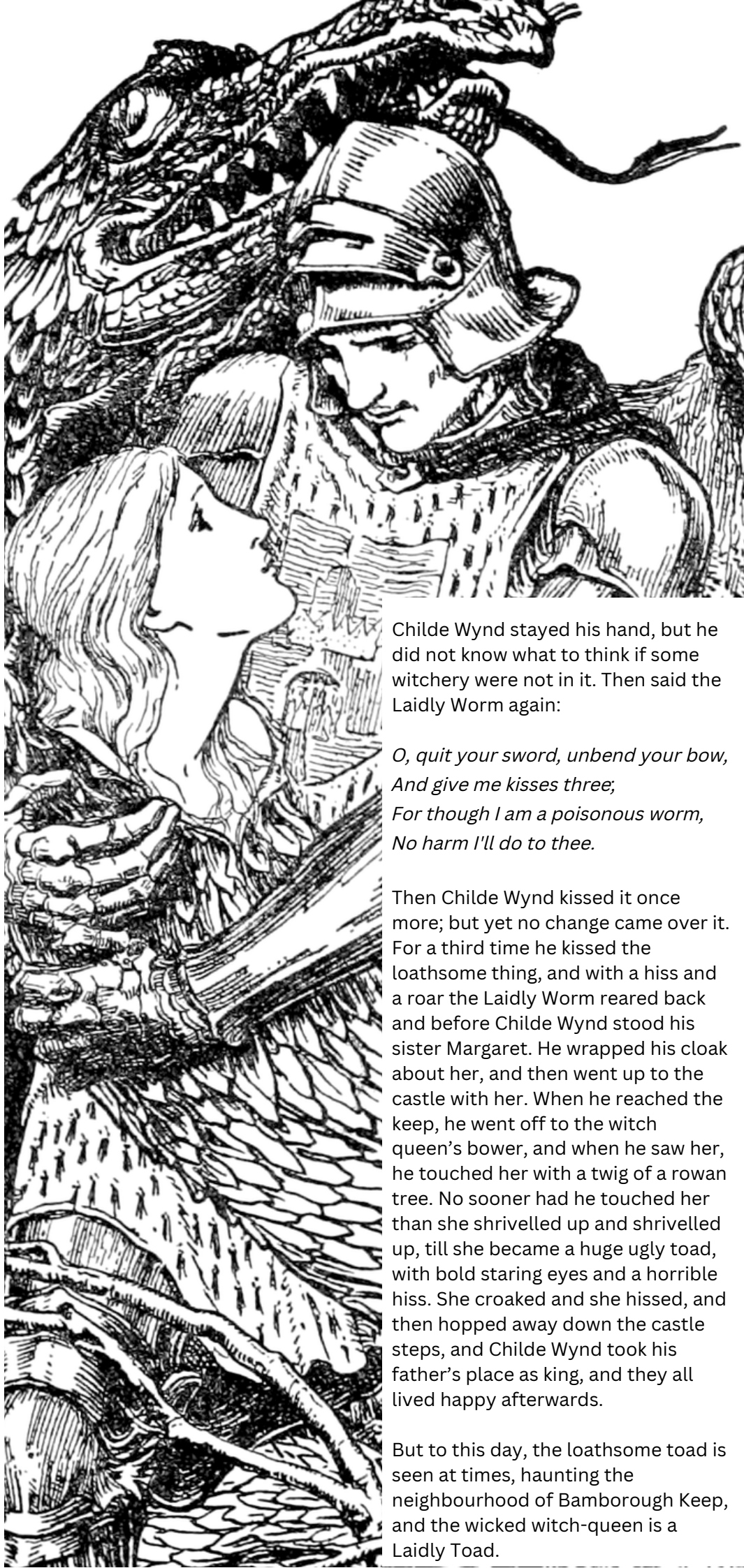
All was done as the warlock advised, the Laidly Worm lived on the milk of the seven kine, and the country was troubled no longer. But when Childe Wynd heard the news, he swore a mighty oath to rescue his sister and revenge her on her cruel stepmother. And three-and-thirty of his men took the oath with him. Then they set to work and built a long ship, and its keel they made of the rowan tree. And when all was ready, they out with their oars and pulled sheer for Bamborough Keep.

But as they got near the keep, the stepmother felt by her magic power that something was being wrought against her, so she summoned her familiar imps and said: "Childe Wynd is coming over the seas; he must never land. Raise storms, or bore the hull, but nohow must he touch shore." Then the imps went forth to meet Childe Wynd's ship, but when they got near, they found they had no power over the ship, for its keel was made of the rowan tree. So back they came to the queen witch, who knew not what to do. She ordered her men-at-arms to resist Childe Wynd if he should land near them, and by her spells she caused the Laidly Worm to wait by the entrance of the harbour.

As the ship came near, the Worm unfolded its coils, and dipping into the sea, caught hold of the ship of Childe Wynd, and banged it off the shore. Three times Childe Wynd urged his men on to row bravely and strong, but each time the Laidly Worm kept it off the shore. Then Childe Wynd ordered the ship to be put about, and the witch-queen thought he had given up the attempt. But instead of that, he only rounded the next point and landed safe and sound in Budle Creek, and then, with sword drawn and bow bent, rushed up followed by his men, to fight the terrible Worm that had kept him from landing.

But the moment Childe Wynd had landed, the witch-queen's power over the Laidly Worm had gone, and she went back to her bower all alone, not an imp, nor a man-at-arms to help her, for she knew her hour was come. So when Childe Wynd came rushing up to the Laidly Worm it made no attempt to stop him or hurt him, but just as he was going to raise his sword to slay it, the voice of his own sister Margaret came from its jaws saying:

*O, quit your sword, unbend your bow,
And give me kisses three;
For though I am a poisonous worm,
No harm I'll do to thee.*



Childe Wynd stayed his hand, but he did not know what to think if some witchery were not in it. Then said the Laidly Worm again:

*O, quit your sword, unbend your bow,
And give me kisses three;
For though I am a poisonous worm,
No harm I'll do to thee.*

Then Childe Wynd kissed it once more; but yet no change came over it. For a third time he kissed the loathsome thing, and with a hiss and a roar the Laidly Worm reared back and before Childe Wynd stood his sister Margaret. He wrapped his cloak about her, and then went up to the castle with her. When he reached the keep, he went off to the witch queen's bower, and when he saw her, he touched her with a twig of a rowan tree. No sooner had he touched her than she shrivelled up and shrivelled up, till she became a huge ugly toad, with bold staring eyes and a horrible hiss. She croaked and she hissed, and then hopped away down the castle steps, and Childe Wynd took his father's place as king, and they all lived happy afterwards.

But to this day, the loathsome toad is seen at times, haunting the neighbourhood of Bamborough Keep, and the wicked witch-queen is a Laidly Toad.

Grim, King of the Ghosts

In the *Magonomia Bestiary* I've introduced you to Grim, the Ghost King, so in this episode I'd like to give you the source documents and illustrations which led to his inclusion.

I'm not a singer myself, so here are three versions of the song he appears in. I'd note each varies the title a little. The poem itself is called "The Lunatick Lover", but by the time it is being sold in broadsheets its "Grim, King of the Ghosts" because they title by first line. The third version is called "Dolorous King of Ghosts", and in that case "grim" has been read not as his name, but as a description of his attitude.

A modern Irish folk version, which is my favourite:

<https://youtu.be/OWZbwsHhLZ4>

An Elizabethan styled version:

https://youtu.be/Olj2hZJQz_A

The psalter version I mentioned in the recording is, the performer states a Welsh song which is completely different from Grim, but have a listen and see what you think. https://youtu.be/M7_iiNgzKCI

Grim king of the ghosts, make haste,
And bring hither all your train;
See how the pale moon does waste,
And just now is in the wane.
Come, you night-hags, with all your charms,
And revelling witches away,
And hug me close in your arms;
To you my respects I'll pay.

I'll court you and think you fair,
Since love does distract my brain;
I'll go, I'll wed the night-mare,
And kiss her, and kiss her again;
But if she prove peevish and proud,
Then, a pise on her love, let her go!
I'll seek me a winding shroud,
And down to the shades below.

A lunacy sad I endure,
Since reason departs away;
I call to those hags for a cure,
As knowing not what I say.
The beauty, whom I do adore,
Now slights me with scorn and disdain;
I never shall see her more:
Ah! how shall I bear my pain?

I ramble and range about
To find out my charming saint;
While she at my grief does flout,
And smiles at my loud complaint.
Distraction I see is my doom,
Of this I am now too sure;
A rival is got in my room
While torments I do endure.

Strange fancies do fill my head;
While wandering in despair
I am to the desarts lead,
Expecting to find her there.
Methinks in a spangled cloud
I see her enthroned on high;
Then to her I crie aloud,
And labour to reach the sky.

When thus I have raved awhile
And wearyed myself in vain,
I lye on the barren soil
And bitterly do complain.
Till slumber hath quieted me
In sorrow I sigh and weep;
The clouds are my canopy
To cover me while I sleep.

I dream that my charming fair
Is then in my rival's bed,
Whose tresses of golden hair
Then this doth my passion inflame:
I start, and no longer can lie:
Ah! Sylvia, art thou not to blame
To ruin a lover? I cry.

Grim king of the ghosts, be true,
And hurry me hence away;
My languishing life to you
A tribute I freely pay.
To the Elysian shades I post
In hopes to be freed from care,
Where many a bleeding ghost
Is hovering in the air.

So, this is a lovely set up, because its literally an evocation, but it doesn't give a lot of detail about Grim. I was looking up *The Dance of Death* by Hans Holbein for something else at the time, and stumbled upon a meme. I also found that there was a parody of the work of "Monk" Lewis that included a detailed story of Grim, so I mixed the two. Here's the parody story, again in poetic form, from *Tales of Terror*, which was anonymously published. You'll note I change the ending a bit.

WHY, how now, old sexton? why shake you with dread?
Why haunt you this street, where you're sure to catch cold?
Full warm is your blanket, full snug is your bed!
And long since, by the steeple -chimes, twelve has been told!

Tom Tap, on this night my retreat you'll approve,
For my churchyard will swarm with its shroud cover'd hosts;
Who will tell, with loud shriek, that resentment and love
Still nip the cold heart of Grim, King of the Ghosts.

One eve, as the fiend wanders through the thick gloom,
Towards my newly - tiled cot he directed his sight;
And, casting a glance in my little back - room,
Gazed on Nancy, my daughter, with wanton delight.

Yet Nancy was proud, and disdainful was she,
In affection's fond speech she'd no pleasure or joy;
And vainly he sued, though he knelt at her knee,
Bob Brisket, so comely, the young butcher's boy!

For you, dearest Nancy, I've oft been a thief,
Yet my theft it was venial, a theft if it be;
For who could have eyes, and not see you loved beef?
Or who see a steak, and not steal it for thee?

Remember, dear beauty, dead flesh cannot feel;
With frowns you my heart and its passion requite;
Yet oft have I seen you, when hungry at meal,
On a dead bullock's heart gaze with tender delight.

When you dress it for dinner, so hard and so tough,
I wish the employ your stern breast would improve;
And, the dead bullock's heart, while with onions you stuff,
You would stuff your own heart, cruel virgin, with love.

Young rascal! presumest thou, with butcher - like phrase,
To foul stinking onions my love to compare;
Who have set Wick, the candle - man, ' all in a blaze,
And Alderman Paunch, who has since been the Mayor?

You bid me remember dead flesh cannot feel?
Then I vow, by my father's old pick axe and spade,
Till some prince from the tombs shall behave so genteel
As to ask me to wed, I'll continue a maid!

Nor him will I wed, till (these terms must he own)
Of my two first commands the performance he boasts; -
Straight, instead of a footman, a deep -pealing groan
Announced the approach of Grim, King of the Ghosts!

No flesh had the spectre, his skeleton skull
Was loosely wrapped round with a brown shrivel'd skin;
His bones, 'stead of marrow, of maggots were full,
And the worms they crawled out; and the worms they crawled in.

His shoes they were coffins, his dim eye reveal'd
The gleam of a grave-lamp with vapours oppressed;
And a dark crimson necklace of blood -drops congealed,
Reflected each bone that jagged out of his breast.

In a hoarse hollow whisper - thy beauties,' he cried,
Have drawn up a 'spirit to give thee a kiss;
No butcher shall call thee, proud Nancy, his bride;
The grim King of Spectres demands thee for his.

My name frightens infants, my word raises ghosts,
My tread wakes the echoes which breathe through the aisle;
And lo! here stands the Prince of the Churchyard, who boasts
The will to perform thy commands for a smile.'

He said, and he kissed her: she packed up her clothes,
And straight they eloped through the window with joy;
Yet long in her ears rang the curses and oaths
Which growl'd at his rival the gruff butcher's boy.

At the charnel -house palace soon Nancy arrived,
When the fiend, with a grin which her soul did appal,
Exclaimed I must warn my pale subjects I'm wived,
And bid them prepare a grand supper and ball!

Thrice swifter than thought on his heel round he turns,
Three capers he cut, and then motionless stood;
Then on cards, made of dead men's skin, Nancy discerns
His lank fingers to scrawl invitations in blood.

His quill was a wind - pipe, his ink -horn a skull,
A blade-bone his pen -knife, a tooth was his seal;
Soon he ordered the cards, in a voice deep and dull,
To haste and invite all his friends to the meal.

Away flew the cards to the south and the north,
Away flew the cards to the east and the west;
Straight with groans, from their tombs, the pale spectres
stalked forth,
In deadly apparel; and shrouding-sheets dress'd.

And quickly scared Nancy, with anxious affright,
Hears the tramp of a steed, and a knock at the gate;
On an hell -horse so gaunt, 'twas a grim ghastly sprite,
On a pillion behind a she-skeleton sate!

The poor maiden she thought 'twas a dream or a trance,
While the guests they assembled gigantic and tall;
Each sprite asked a skeleton lady to dance,
And King Grim with fair Nancy now open'd the ball.

Pale spectres send music from dark vaults above,
Withered legs, 'stead of drum - sticks, they brandish on high;
Grinning ghosts, sheeted spirits, skipping skeletons, move,
While hoarse whispers and rattling of bones shake the sky.

With their pliable joints the Scotch steps they do well,
Nancy's hand with their cold clammy fingers they squeeze;
Now sudden, appalled, the maid hears a death -bell,
And straight dark and dismal the supper she sees!

A tomb was the table: now each took his seat,
Every sprite next his partner so pale and so wan.
Soon as ceased was the rattling of skeleton feet,
The clattering of jaw -bones directly began?

Of dead aldermen's fat the mould candles were made,
Stuck in sockets of bone they gleam'd dimly and blue;
Their dishes were scutcheons, and corpses decayed
Were the viands that glutted this ravenous crew!

Through the nostrils of skulls their blood - liquor they pour,
The black draught in the heads of young infants they quaff;
The vice - president rose, with his jaws dripping gore,
And addressed the pale damsel with horrible laugh.

“ – Feast, Queen of the Ghosts the repast do not scorn ;
 Feast, Queen of the Ghosts’ 1 perceive thou hast food ;
 To-morrow again shall we feast, for at noon
 Shall we feast on thy flesh , shall we drink of thy blood.’

Then cold as a cucumber Nancy she grew ;
 Her proud stomach came down, and she blared, and she cried ,
 “Oh tell me, dear Grim , does that spectre speak true,
 And will you not save from his clutches your
 bride ?”

“Vain your grief, silly maid; when the matin bells ring,
 The bond becomes due, which long since did I sign ;
 For she, who at night weds the grizzly Ghost Kings
 Next morn must be dressed for his subjects to dine.”

“In silks and in satins for you I’ll be dressed ;
 “ My soft tender limbs let their fangs never crunch !:”
 “Fair Nancy, yon ghosts, should I grant your request,
 Instead of at dinner would eat you at lunch ! “

” -But vain , ghostly King, is your cunning and guile;
 That bond must be void which you never can pay ;
 Lo ! I ne’er will be yours, till, to purchase my smile,
 My two first commands (as you swore) you obey: –“

“ – Well say’st thou, fair Nancy; thy wishes impart;
 But think not to puzzle Grim , King of the Ghosts.”
 Straight she turns o’er each difficult task in her heart,
 “ And – I’ve found out a poser,’ exultingly boasts.

You vowed that no butcher should call me his bride.
 That this vow you fulfil my first asking shall be ;
 And since so many maids in your clutches have died ,
 Than yourself show a bloodier butcher, –said she.

Then shrill scream the spectres ; the charnel -house gloom
 Swift lightnings disperse, and the palace destroy;
 Again Nancy stood in the little back -room ,
 And again at her knee knelt the young butcher’s boy !

” I’ll have done with dead husbands,” she Brisket bespeaks;
 “ I’ll now take a live one, so fetch me a ring !
 “ And when pressed to her lips were his red beefin cheeks,
 She loved him much more than the shrivel’d Ghost King.

No longer his steaks and his cutlets she spurns,
 No longer he fears his grim rival’s pale band;
 Yet still when the famed first of April returns,
 The sprites rise in squadrons, and Nancy demand.

This informs you, Tom Tap, why to -night I remove,
 For I dread the approach of the shroud -cover’d hosts,
 Who tell, with loud shriek, that resentment and love,
 Still nip the cold heart of Grim , King of the Ghosts !



From Matthus Merian's "Todten Tanz "

Used in a modern meme to suggest a smooth skeleton stole your dog and moonwalked away. The belief expressed here is that the blind are paralysed without their dogs.

I’ve changed the ending for a couple of reasons, the first is that it has the same solution as *King of the Air* which it is parodying, and the solution is set up so that Lewis can note how important it is for ladies to be able to tell one kind of verb from another. As a joke it wasn’t great at the time and falls even flatter now. The second is that for Grim it doesn’t work because he can call up the ghosts of the famous dead.

“Show me a greater butcher than you!”

“Well, this is Tamburlaine, who killed everyone living in several cities and piled their heads in pyramids. You may have seen Mr Marlowe’s play about him?”

“Darn.”

The Necromance arc just kind of came to me, because I wanted you to have a reason to interact with Grim other than as a combat opponent. Vanth is one of the few death goddesses who doesn’t kill people, she’s just part of the process of ministering to the dead. Also, she’s winged, so she suited the imps.

Malkins

Malkins appear in a variety of books in the period. I took the name from the cat familiar in a play called *The Witch* by Thomas Middleton. “Malkin” is a period diminutive of the name “Maud” or “Matilda”, popular for cats. Middleton notes the play was “ill-fated” and that was thought for some time to mean it did not make any money, but it is possible, particularly in our game, that it means it was suppressed by the censors. Middleton used *The Discovery of Witchcraft* as his source for *The Witch*, although he stripped out the scoffing tone. It’s a sceptical guide, written in period, to the claims of folk witches and those who oppress them – it also includes an early discussion of what we’d now call stage magic or close magic.

Malkins as an idea go back far further, however. We have a heap of folk stories about speaking, social feline spirits. *King o’ the Cats*. turns up all over the place, but there’s some argument that *Beware the Cat*, which is discussed in the *Bestiary*, predates and is the source for it. It’s certainly the earliest recorded use of “greymalkin” to mean a grey cat. The version of *King o’ the Cats* I used is a Cumbrian one.. The audio given later is from Joseph Jacobs, a Victorian collector of folklore who is getting quite a run of the podcast this year.

Dick Whittington was the Lord Mayor of London in the 15th century, and his story becomes popular at the end of Elizabeth’s reign. Two of the earliest plays concerning him have been lost and are known only by registered titles: a third one, in 1612, clearly involves his cat as the source of his good fortune. Puss in Boots is in the *The Facetious Nights of Straparola*, which was published around 1550, and continues into the *Pentamerone*. I’ve covered that version in episode 308, but I’d note that it, too, ends in the cat being betrayed by his master. All of these are bundled together in our malkins,

along with an odd bit of English folklore about a nobleman who owed his life to a cat, and an odd English custom surrounding the government that continues to this day. For those, however, you’ll need to check out the book.

Here are some recordings of source legends. *King o’ the Cats* was recorded by Dale Grothmann. *Whittington and his Cat* was recorded by Joy Chan.

Thanks to them, and their production teams at Librivox.

The King o’ the Cats

One winter’s evening the sexton’s wife was sitting by the fireside with her big black cat, Old Tom, on the other side, both half asleep and waiting for the master to come home. They waited and they waited, but still he didn’t come, till at last he came rushing in, calling out, “Who’s Tommy Tildrum?” in such a wild way that both his wife and his cat stared at him to know what was the matter.

“Why, what’s the matter?” said his wife, “and why do you want to know who Tommy Tildrum is?”

“Oh, I’ve had such an adventure. I was digging away at old Mr. Fordyce’s grave when I suppose I must have dropped asleep, and only woke up by hearing a cat’s Miaou.”

“Miaou!” said Old Tom in answer.

“Yes, just like that! So I looked over the edge of the grave, and what do you think I saw?”

“Now, how can I tell?” said the sexton’s wife.

“Why, nine black cats all like our friend Tom here, all with a white spot on their chestesses. And what do you think they were carrying? Why, a small coffin covered with a black velvet pall, and on the pall was a small coronet all of gold, and at every third step they took they cried all together, Miaou—”

“Miaou!” said Old Tom again.

“Yes, just like that!” said the Sexton; “and as they came nearer and nearer to me I could see them more distinctly, because their eyes shone out with a sort of green light. Well, they all came towards me, eight of them carrying the coffin, and the biggest cat of all walking in front for all the world like—but look at our Tom, how he’s looking at me. You’d think he knew all I was saying.”

“Go on, go on,” said his wife; “never mind Old Tom.”

“Well, as I was a-saying, they came towards me slowly and solemnly, and at every third step crying all together, Miaou!—”

“Miaou!” said Old Tom again.

“Yes, just like that, till they came and stood right opposite Mr. Fordyce’s grave, where I was, when they all stood still and looked straight at me. I did feel queer, that I did! But look at Old Tom; he’s looking at me just like they did.”

“Go on, go on,” said his wife; “never mind Old Tom.”

“Where was I? Oh, they all stood still looking at me, when the one that wasn’t carrying the coffin came forward and, staring straight at me, said to me—yes, I tell ‘ee, said to me, with a squeaky voice, ‘Tell Tom Tildrum that Tim Toldrum’s dead,’ and that’s why I asked you if you knew who Tom Tildrum was, for how can I tell Tom Tildrum Tim Toldrum’s dead if I don’t know who Tom Tildrum is?”

“Look at Old Tom, look at Old Tom!” screamed his wife.

And well he might look, for Tom was swelling and Tom was staring, and at last Tom shrieked out, “What—old Tim dead! then I’m the King o’ the Cats!” and rushed up the chimney and was never more seen.

Whittington and his Cat by Joseph Jacobs

In the reign of the famous King Edward III. there was a little boy called Dick Whittington, whose father and mother died when he was very young. As poor Dick was not old enough to work, he was very badly off; he got but little for his dinner, and sometimes nothing at all for his breakfast; for the people who lived in the village were very poor indeed, and could not spare him much more than the parings of potatoes, and now and then a hard crust of bread.

Now Dick had heard a great many very strange things about the great city called London; for the country people at that time thought that folks in London were all fine gentlemen and ladies; and that there was singing and music there all day long; and that the streets were all paved with gold.

One day a large waggon and eight horses, all with bells at their heads, drove through the village while Dick was standing by the sign-post. He thought that this waggon must be going to the fine town of London; so he took courage, and asked the waggoner to let him walk with him by the side of the waggon. As soon as the waggoner heard that poor Dick had no father or mother, and saw by his ragged clothes that he could not be worse off than he was, he told him he might go if he would, so off they set together.

So Dick got safe to London, and was in such a hurry to see the fine streets paved all over with gold, that he did not even stay to thank the kind waggoner; but ran off as fast as his legs would carry him, through many of the streets, thinking every moment to come to those that were paved with gold; for Dick had seen a guinea three times in his own little village, and remembered what a deal of money it brought in change; so he thought he had nothing to do but to take up some little bits of the pavement, and should then have as much money as he could wish for.

Poor Dick ran till he was tired, and had quite forgot his friend the waggoner; but at last, finding it grow dark, and that every way he turned he saw nothing but dirt instead of gold, he, sat down in a dark corner and cried himself to sleep.

Little Dick was all night in the streets; and next morning, being very hungry, he got up and walked about, and asked everybody he met to give him a halfpenny to keep him from starving; but nobody stayed to answer him, and only two or

three gave him a halfpenny; so that the poor boy was soon quite weak and faint for the want of victuals.

In this distress he asked charity of several people, and one of them said crossly: "Go to work, for an idle rogue." "That I will," says Dick, "I will to go work for you, if you will let me." But the man only cursed at him and went on.

At last a good-natured looking gentleman saw how hungry he looked. "Why don't you go to work my lad?" said he to Dick. "That I would, but I do not know how to get any," answered Dick. "If you are willing, come along with me," said the gentleman, and took him to a hay-field, where Dick worked briskly, and lived merrily till the hay was made.

After this he found himself as badly off as before; and being almost starved again, he laid himself down at the door of Mr. Fitzwarren, a rich merchant. Here he was soon seen by the cook-maid, who was an ill-tempered creature, and happened just then to be very busy dressing dinner for her master and mistress; so she called out to poor Dick: "What business have you there, you lazy rogue? there is nothing else but beggars; if you do not take yourself away, we will see how you will like a sousing of some dish-water; I have some here hot enough to make you jump."

Just at that time Mr. Fitzwarren himself came home to dinner; and when he saw a dirty ragged boy lying at the door, he said to him: "Why do you lie there, my boy? You seem old enough to work; I am afraid you are inclined to be lazy."

"No, indeed, sir," said Dick to him, "that is not the case, for I would work with all my heart, but I do not know anybody, and I believe I am very sick for the want of food."

"Poor fellow, get up; let me see what ails you." Dick now tried to rise, but was obliged to lie down again, being too weak to stand, for he had not eaten any food for three days, and was no longer able to run about and beg a halfpenny of people in the street. So the kind merchant ordered him to be taken into the house, and have a good dinner given him, and be kept to do what work he was able to do for the cook.

Little Dick would have lived very happy in this good family if it had not been for the ill-natured cook. She used to say: "You are under me, so look sharp; clean the spit and the dripping-pan, make the fires, wind up

the jack, and do all the scullery work nimbly, or—" and she would shake the ladle at him. Besides, she was so fond of basting, that when she had no meat to baste, she would baste poor Dick's head and shoulders with a broom, or anything else that happened to fall in her way. At last her ill-usage of him was told to Alice, Mr. Fitzwarren's daughter, who told the cook she should be turned away if she did not treat him kinder.

The behaviour of the cook was now a little better; but besides this Dick had another hardship to get over. His bed stood in a garret, where there were so many holes in the floor and the walls that every night he was tormented with rats and mice. A gentleman having given Dick a penny for cleaning his shoes, he thought he would buy a cat with it. The next day he saw a girl with a cat, and asked her, "Will you let me have that cat for a penny?" The girl said: "Yes, that I will, master, though she is an excellent mouser."

Dick hid his cat in the garret, and always took care to carry a part of his dinner to her; and in a short time he had no more trouble with the rats and mice, but slept quite sound every night.

Soon after this, his master had a ship ready to sail; and as it was the custom that all his servants should have some chance for good fortune as well as himself, he called them all into the parlour and asked them what they would send out.

They all had something that they were willing to venture except poor Dick, who had neither money nor goods, and therefore could send nothing. For this reason he did not come into the parlour with the rest; but Miss Alice guessed what was the matter, and ordered him to be called in. She then said: "I will lay down some money for him, from my own purse;" but her father told her: "This will not do, for it must be something of his own."

When poor Dick heard this, he said: "I have nothing but a cat which I bought for a penny some time since of a little girl."

"Fetch your cat then, my lad," said Mr. Fitzwarren, "and let her go."

Dick went upstairs and brought down poor puss, with tears in his eyes, and gave her to the captain; "For," he said, "I shall now be kept awake all night by the rats and mice." All the company laughed at Dick's odd venture; and Miss Alice, who felt pity for him, gave him some money to buy another cat.

This, and many other marks of kindness shown him by Miss Alice, made the ill-tempered cook jealous of poor Dick, and she began to use him more cruelly than ever, and always made game of him for sending his cat to sea.

She asked him: "Do you think your cat will sell for as much money as would buy a stick to beat you?"

At last poor Dick could not bear this usage any longer, and he thought he would run away from his place; so he packed up his few things, and started very early in the morning, on All-hallows Day, the first of November. He walked as far as Holloway; and there sat down on a stone, which to this day is called "Whittington's Stone," and began to think to himself which road he should take.

While he was thinking what he should do, the Bells of Bow Church, which at that time were only six, began to ring, and their sound seemed to say to him:

"Turn again, Whittington, Thrice Lord Mayor of London."

"Lord Mayor of London!" said he to himself. "Why, to be sure, I would put up with almost anything now, to be Lord Mayor of London, and ride in a fine coach, when I grow to be a man! Well, I will go back, and think nothing of the cuffing and scolding of the old cook, if I am to be Lord Mayor of London at last."

Dick went back, and was lucky enough to get into the house, and set about his work, before the old cook came downstairs.

We must now follow Miss Puss to the coast of Africa. The ship with the cat on board, was a long time at sea; and was at last driven by the winds on a part of the coast of Barbary, where the only people were the Moors, unknown to the English. The people came in great numbers to see the sailors, because they were of different colour to themselves, and treated them civilly; and, when they became better acquainted, were very eager to buy the fine things that the ship was loaded with.



Illustration from the original printing of "Beware the Cat"

When the captain saw this, he sent patterns of the best things he had to the king of the country; who was so much pleased with them, that he sent for the captain to the palace. Here they were placed, as it is the custom of the country, on rich carpets flowered with gold and silver. The king and queen were seated at the upper end of the room; and a number of dishes were brought in for dinner. They had not sat long, when a vast number of rats and mice rushed in, and devoured all the meat in an instant. The captain wondered at this, and asked if these vermin were not unpleasant.

"Oh yes," said they, "very offensive, and the king would give half his treasure to be freed of them, for they not only destroy his dinner, as you see, but they assault him in his chamber, and even in bed, and so that he is obliged to be watched while he is sleeping, for fear of them."

The captain jumped for joy; he remembered poor Whittington and his cat, and told the king he had a creature on board the ship that would despatch all these vermin immediately. The king jumped so high at the joy which the news gave him, that his turban dropped off his head. "Bring this creature to me," says he; "vermin are dreadful in a court, and if she will perform what you say, I will load your ship with gold and jewels in exchange for her."

The captain, who knew his business, took this opportunity to set forth the merits of Miss Puss. He told his majesty; "It is not very convenient to part with her, as, when she is gone, the rats and mice may destroy the goods in the ship—but to oblige your majesty, I will fetch her."

"Run, run!" said the queen; "I am impatient to see the dear creature."

Away went the captain to the ship, while another dinner was got ready. He put Puss under his arm, and arrived at the place just in time to see the table full of rats. When the cat saw them, she did not wait for bidding, but jumped out of the captain's arms, and in a few minutes laid almost all the rats and mice dead at her feet. The rest of them in their fright scampered away to their holes.

The king was quite charmed to get rid so easily of such plagues, and the queen desired that the creature who had done them so great a kindness might be brought to her, that she might look at her. Upon which the captain called: "Pussy, pussy, pussy!" and she came to him. He then presented her to the queen, who started back, and was afraid to touch a creature

who had made such a havoc among the rats and mice. However, when the captain stroked the cat and called: "Pussy, pussy," the queen also touched her and cried: "Putty, putty," for she had not learned English. He then put her down on the queen's lap, where she purred and played with her majesty's hand, and then purred herself to sleep.

The king, having seen the exploits of Mrs. Puss, and being informed that her kittens would stock the whole country, and keep it free from rats, bargained with the captain for the whole ship's cargo, and then gave him ten times as much for the cat as all the rest amounted to.

The captain then took leave of the royal party, and set sail with a fair wind for England, and after a happy voyage arrived safe in London.

One morning, early, Mr. Fitzwarren had just come to his counting-house and seated himself at the desk, to count over the cash, and settle the business for the day, when somebody came tap, tap, at the door. "Who's there?" said Mr. Fitzwarren. "A friend," answered the other; "I come to bring you good news

of your ship Unicorn.” The merchant, bustling up in such a hurry that he forgot his gout, opened the door, and who should he see waiting but the captain and factor, with a cabinet of jewels, and a bill of lading; when he looked at this the merchant lifted up his eyes and thanked Heaven for sending him such a prosperous voyage.

They then told the story of the cat, and showed the rich present that the king and queen had sent for her to poor Dick. As soon as the merchant heard this, he called out to his servants:

“Go send him in, and tell him of his fame;
Pray call him Mr. Whittington by name.”

Mr. Fitzwarren now showed himself to be a good man; for when some of his servants said so great a treasure was too much for him, he answered: “God forbid I should deprive him of the value of a single penny, it is his own, and he shall have it to a farthing.” He then sent for Dick, who at that time was scouring pots for the cook, and was quite dirty. He would have excused himself from coming into the counting-house, saying, “The room is swept and my shoes are dirty and full of hob-nails.” But the merchant ordered him to come in.

Mr. Fitzwarren ordered a chair to be set for him, and so he began to think they were making game of him, at the same time said to them: “Do not play tricks with a poor simple boy, but let me go down again, if you please, to my work.”

“Indeed, Mr. Whittington,” said the merchant, “we are all quite in earnest with you, and I most heartily rejoice in the news that these gentlemen have brought you; for the captain has sold your cat to the King of Barbary, and brought you in return for her more riches than I possess in the whole world; and I wish you may long enjoy them!”

Mr. Fitzwarren then told the men to open the great treasure they had brought with them; and said: “Mr. Whittington has nothing to do but to put it in some place of safety.”

Poor Dick hardly knew how to behave himself for joy. He begged his master to take what part of it he pleased, since he owed it all to his kindness. “No, no,” answered Mr. Fitzwarren,



Woodcut from an early variant of the Dick Whittington story. His cat is under his arm.

“this is all your own; and I have no doubt but you will use it well.”

Dick next asked his mistress, and then Miss Alice, to accept a part of his good fortune; but they would not, and at the same time told him they felt great joy at his good success. But this poor fellow was too kind-hearted to keep it all to himself; so he made a present to the captain, the mate, and the rest of Mr. Fitzwarren’s servants; and even to the ill-natured old cook.

After this Mr. Fitzwarren advised him to send for a proper tailor and get himself dressed like a gentleman; and told him he was welcome to live in his house till he could provide himself with a better.

When Whittington’s face was washed, his hair curled, his hat cocked, and he was dressed in a nice suit of clothes he was as handsome and genteel as any young man who visited at Mr. Fitzwarren’s; so that Miss Alice, who had once been so kind to him, and thought of him with pity, now looked upon him as fit to be her sweetheart; and the more so, no doubt, because Whittington was now always thinking what he could do to oblige her, and making her the prettiest presents that could be.

Mr. Fitzwarren soon saw their love for each other, and proposed to join them in marriage; and to this they both readily agreed. A day for the wedding was soon fixed; and they were attended to church by the Lord Mayor, the court of aldermen, the sheriffs, and a great number of the richest merchants in London, whom they afterwards treated with a very rich feast.

History tells us that Mr. Whittington and his lady liven in great splendour, and were very happy. They had several children. He was Sheriff of London, thrice Lord Mayor, and received the honour of knighthood by Henry V.

He entertained this king and his queen at dinner after his conquest of France so grandly, that the king said “Never had prince such a subject;” when Sir Richard heard this, he said: “Never had subject such a prince.”

The figure of Sir Richard Whittington with his cat in his arms, carved in stone, was to be seen till the year 1780 over the archway of the old prison of Newgate, which he built for criminals.

The Two Sisters - A tale of murder and haunting

Although it is disguised a little with variants, the creature called Eala in the Magonomia Bestiary is the haunted harp found in one of the most popular folksongs of the British Isles. To keep things English, which was the remit of the book, I deliberately used a variant from Berwickshire, but we can look at the others for potential inspirations. Several of the versions take place in London.

The Twa Sisters is recorded in the *Child Ballads*, which aren't nursery rhymes: they were collected by a folklorist named Francis Child. As a sign of its antiquity, it's the tenth ballad recorded, in his five volume work. Textually he can trace it as far back as 1656, to a broadsheet called *Wit Restor'd* by a comedic author called James Smith, but the story appears so widely that it seems likely he did not pen it, but instead adapted something already known. Child himself finds it in the four nations of Britain, and in Poland, Estonia, Norway, Iceland, Denmark, Sweden and Germany. More recent research has turned up variants as distant as Hungary.

There's some variation in the stories, and this is why when someone tries to glue parts together, they have continuity errors. My favourite version of this song is "The Bonny Swans" by Loreena McKennitt, but you'll notice that in her first verse there are three daughters of a farmer, and in the third verse there are two daughters of a king. In some versions the younger daughter offers to give up her lover, in others she refuses. In some she is drowned in the sea, or a river. In some they go to the water to wash, do laundry or look out for their father's ship. You can twist this story very heavily to suit your PCs and stay within the folkloristic tradition.

The drowned girl's body, or part of her body, are almost always used to make an instrument. A viol is popular

in some versions, and a harp in others. I used the viol because it's something players will have less experience with, and because my daughter plays a vague relative of the viol. The part used varies substantially. It can be as little as her hair used for strings, but it eventually becomes a lengthy list. In some versions her trunk, skull, limbs, nose, hair, teeth, veins and fingers are used. One Swedish version has her body wash ashore, grow into a linden, and have a harper make an instrument from that.

Usually the instrument is taken to a wedding feast and breaks things up. The English versions of the song, in Child's time, were so degraded that instead the harp is taken to the king. In McKennitt's version that's why the girl seems to change families midstory. In some versions the instrument sounds without human aid, in some it compels a musician to play it, in others it just takes its chance when another tune is begun.

In the Icelandic versions, the song of the instrument is, of itself, fatal.

*The first string made response: '
The bride was my sister once.'*

*The bride on the bench, she spake: '
The harp much trouble doth make.'*

*The second string answered the other:
'She is parting me and my lover.'*

*Answered the bride, red as gore:
'The harp is vexing us sore.'*

*The canny third string replied:
'I owe my death to the bride.'*

*He made all the harp-strings clang,
The bride's heart burst with the pang.*

The murderess is often burned. In one variant she is stabbed by the bridegroom. In a third she is banished after her sister is restored to life and pleads on her behalf. The younger sister rarely comes back to life: one variant has the harper smash his instrument after receiving a bribe from the bride. This disenchant the girl, who then has her sister sent into exile. It might serve as a guide to the NPC in Magonomia. Smashing the harp may be all she needs.

Here's version A. Compare it with McKennitt,
<https://youtu.be/JsNJuhBfbPg>
to see how far it travels.

There were two sisters, they went playing,
With a hie downe downe a downe-a
To see their father's ships come sayling in.
With a hy downe downe a downe-a

And when they came unto the sea-brym,
The elder did push the younger in.
O sister, O sister, take me by the gowne,
And drawe me up upon the dry ground.'

O sister, O sister, that may not bee,
Till salt and oatmeale grow both of a tree.'

Somtyes she sanke,
somtyes she swam,
Until she came unto the mill-dam.

The miller runne hastily downe the cliffe,
And up he betook her withouten her life.

What did he doe with her brest-bone?
He made him a violl to play thereupon.

What did he doe with her fingers so small?
He made him peggs to his violl withall.

What did he doe with her nose-ridge?
Unto his violl he made him a bridge.

What did he doe with her veynes so blew?
He made him strings to his violl thereto.

What did he doe with her eyes so bright?
Upon his violl he played at first sight.

What did he doe with her tongue so rough?
Unto the violl it spake enough.

What did he doe with her two shinnes?
Unto the violl they danc'd Moll Syms.

Then bespake the treble string,
'O yonder is my father the king.'

Then bespake the second string,
'O yonder sitts my mother the queen.'

And then bespake the strings all three,
'O yonder is my sister that drowned mee.'

Now pay the miller for his payne,
And let him bee gone in the divel's name.'



The Demon of the Hooting Cairn

Kenidjack, the demon who oversees the wrestling in Cornwall, has been briefly mentioned on the blog before, as a minor character in some *Ars Magica* material, but here's his complete story from Hunt's "Popular Romances of the West of England". It starts with a quotation from an older work, where our fellow is mentioned, in a way.

"A weird tract is that of Kenidzhek and the Gump, and of ill repute. The old, half-starved horses on the common, with their hides grown rusty brown, like dried and withered grass, by exposure, are ridden by the archfiend at night. He is said to hunt lost souls over this heath; and an old stile hard by bears an evil name, for there the souls are sure to be caught, none being able to get over it. The people tell of midnight fights by demons, and of a shadowy form holding a lantern to the combatants."
— *Blight*.

One of the tales which I have heard may be given as a strange mixture of the Celtic and the monastic legend.

Two miners who had been working in one of the now abandoned mines in Morvah, had, their labours being over, been, as was common, "half-pinting" in the public-house in Morvah Church.. town. It was after dark, but not late; they were very quiet men, and not drunk. They had walked on, talking of the prospects of the mine, and speculating on the promise of certain "pitches," and were now on the Common, at the base of the Hooting Cairn. No miner ever passed within the shadow of Cairn Kenidzhek who dared to indulge in any frivolous talk: at least, thirty years since, the influence akin to fear was very potent upon all.

Well, our two friends became silent, and trudged with a firm, a resolved footstep onward.

There was but little wind, yet a low moaning sound came from the cairn, which now and then arose into a hoot. The night was dark, yet a strange gleaming light rendered the rocks on the cairn visible, and both the miners fancied they saw gigantic forms passing in and about the intricate rocks. Presently they heard a horse galloping at no great distance

behind them. They turned and saw, mounted on a horse which they knew very well, since the bony brute had often worked the "whim" on their mine, a dark man robed in a black gown and a hood over his head, partly covering his face

"Hallo! hallo!" shouted they, fearing the rider would ride over them.

"Hallo to you," answered a gruff voice.

"Where be'st goen then?" asked the bravest of the miners.

"Up to the cairn to see the wrastling," answered the rider; "come along! come along!"

Horse and rider rushed by the two miners, and, they could never tell why, they found themselves compelled to follow.

They did not appear to exert themselves, but without much effort they kept up with the galloping horse. Now and then the dark rider motioned them onward with his hand, but he spoke not. At length the miners arrived at a mass of rocks near the base of the hill, which stopped their way; and, since it was dark, they knew not how to get past them. Presently they saw the rider ascending the hill, regardless of the masses of rock; passing unconcernedly over all, and, as it seemed to them, the man, the horse, and the rocks were engaged in a "three man's song," [a] the chorus to which was a piercing hoot. A great number of uncouth figures were gathering together, coming, as it seemed, out of the rocks themselves. They were men of great size and strength, with savage faces, rendered more terrible by the masses of uncombed hair which hung about them, and the colours with which they had painted their cheeks. The plain in front of the rocks which had checked the miners' progress was evidently to be the wrestling ground. Here gathered those monstrous-looking men, all anxiety, making a strange noise. It was not long ere they saw the rider, who was now on foot, descending the hill with two giants of men, more terrible than any they had yet seen.

A circle was formed; the rider, who had thrown off his black gown, and discovered to the miners that he was no other than Old Nick, placed the two men, and seated himself in a very odd manner upon the ground.

The miners declared the wrestlers were no other than two devils, although the horns and tail were wanting. There was a shout, which, as if it indicated that the light was insufficient, was answered by the squatting demon by flashing from his eyes two beams of fire, which shed an unearthly glow over everything. To it the wrestlers went, and better men were never seen to the west of Penzance. At length one of them, straining hard for the mastery, lifted his antagonist fairly high in the air, and flung him to the ground, a fair back fall. The rocks trembled, and the ground seemed to thunder with the force of the fall. Old Nick still sat quietly looking on, and notwithstanding the defeated wrestler lay as one dead, no one went near him. All crowded around the victor, and shouted like so many wild beasts.

The love of fair play was strong in the hearts of the miners; they scorned the idea of deserting a fallen foe; so they scrambled over the rocks, and made for the prostrate giant, for so, for size, he might well be called. He was in a dreadful strait. Whether his bones were smashed or not by the fall, they could not tell, but he appeared "passing away." The elder miner had long been a professor of religion. It is true he had fallen back; but still he knew the right road. He thought, therefore, that even a devil might repent, and he whispered in the ear of the dying man the Christian's hope.

If a thunderbolt had fallen amongst them, it could not have produced such an effect as this. The rocks shook with an earthquake; everything became pitchy dark; there was a noise of rushing hither and thither, and all were gone, dying man and all, they knew not whither. The two miners, terrified beyond measure, clung to each other on their knees; and, while in this position, they saw, as if in the air, the two blazing eyes of the demon passing away into the west, and at last disappear in a dreadfully black cloud. These two men were, although they knew the ground perfectly well, inextricably lost; so, after vainly endeavouring to find the right road off the Common, they lay down in each other's arms under a mass of granite rock, praying that they might be protected till the light of day removed the spell which was upon them.

Beer, satyrs, and lions

Satyrs are a problem. We wanted them for Magonomia., because they turn up in the folklore. They are, however, really rapey. That's also considered a bit humorous in some period work. So, we wanted satyrs, but without any of the baggage. I took it three ways to get there.

Satyrs change form over time. The earliest ones are ipotanes: horse headed humans with huge generative members. These become the modern goat satyrs well before period. That's why we have an older and a younger form in the story, and why we have space to generate a third general form. There's an idea in alchemy that you can grow artificial humans, which are sometimes called homunculi. I drew on that, because it lets me cut all the rapes out.

The idea that they are generated in wine, and that wine is not common in Britain, let me bring in interesting changes in technology, like fortified wine. I also wanted to bring in folklore about beer, but a lot of it was removed because I was showing too much of my research, and not pitching directly to people's play experience. I've discussed Thirteenth Century brewing in episode 47 but fortified wines hit Britain later than this period. I needed a fortified beverage, so I deliberately used some ortolan folklore from a episode 63. That brings us to beer.

Most of the origin folklore for beer comes from Germany. I had a heap of it, and then looking at it thought "There are a heap of people, ages away from the player characters, doing irrelevant stuff, here" so I cut it out. It's about King Gambrinus, and I thought I'd be dragging him into Britain through the Dutch immigrants fleeing the Spanish in the Netherlands. What I didn't know, and do now, is that some British people had claimed him, the inventor of beer, as a mythical English king.

I'm not quite sure how a drinking song can have 59 stanzas. Australian drinking songs tend to be far simpler. I mention this because that's the stanza of "*The Ex-ale-tation of Ale*" that mentions him. Time for a quote – I won't sing because life is hard enough.

*To the praise of Gambrivius, that good British king
That devis'd for the nation by the Welshmen's tale
Seventeen hundred years before Christ did spring
The happy invention of a pot of good ale.*

This goes back to a history of Bavaria which was released in 1523, which mixed the folktale that a German king invented ale with the known fact that the Egyptians had beer, by suggesting he was Isis's lover. There are several potential kings that people associate with Gambrivius, and the one I chose to use was John I, Duke of Brabant. He was a folk hero of the area which later became the Spanish Netherlands, so his people coming across the Channel worked out for me. He loved drinking, jousts and fathering illegitimate children. His heraldic symbol is the lion. Brewing has been a feminised profession for some time, so I went with lionesses.

Did I accidentally invent catgirls from scratch? Yes, I did. Sorry.

Early in 2023, the podcast will include a story called "*The Draught of Fishes*" which shows a Rhineland faerie lord called Gambrinus, who is clearly of the same folkloric stock. I first read of him after the podcast episodes were already prepared and loaded on timers.

The Street Cry of the Afanc Egg Seller

I took a few liberties with the history of street cries here. Let's step back for some context.

The biggest market in London during the reign was Stocks Market. If you're looking for its historic site, due to one of those twists of history, it is underneath Mansion House, the formal residence of the Lord Mayor of London. The market was set up for the coronation of Edward I in 1272, because people thought all the hawkers along Cheapside were a security threat to his coronation procession, or at least they were unsightly, poor, and noisy. They were all moved to the new site, and laws were passed to make stallholding where people had traditionally held markets illegal. This did not work. Similarly monarchs since, including Elizabeth, attempted to stamp out street pedlars, and force people to go to the market. This, also, did not work at all. In 1345 the poulterers, fish-sellers and butchers of Cheapside were again moved on to Stocks Market. Eventually the market became too large and smaller parts broke off for other premises. Speaking loosely, the stocks was the "fish and flesh" market. Annoyingly if you wanted vegetables, you'd need to hike over to Saint Paul's Churchyard. We have to visit that area in Magonomia eventually. It was also the centre of London's book trade.

If you were rich, you'd want meat from the Stocks Market just because people who bought from there were sick there less often. It was by one of the little rivers that snaked through London, Wallbrook. Water from it was used to wash things down. It even had a rudimentary sort of flushing toilets in period. By the game period it was controlled by the Wardens of London Bridge, who rented out canopies for life tenures.

Its name comes from the stocks, the punishment device, which was in Stocks Market. I'd have put it near the fruit sellers, but they didn't ask me. This was the one set of stocks for the city of London. This seems less unlikely when you remember that, at this point, many parts of modern London were separate towns and villages. This is also the origin of the modern word "stockmarket" although if you wanted to invest and do financial things in period, you'd do better over at coffee houses near the Royal Exchange. Stockbrokers weren't allowed in the Royal Exchange itself, because their manners were bad, something they really

leaned in on with the "men shouting in a pit" model that immediately predated computerisation.

So, the stock market is crowded and loud, and if you are street peddling you need people to look up from their work and come out into the street to buy your stuff. Enter the street cry. Street cries have been recorded since Roman times, but the sort of melodic street cry we have included here is most well known from the Victorian period.

It's very long for a street cry, but there are recorded examples which are even longer. These focus on goods the customers do not know, and would not otherwise wish to buy. So, the street cry in London for fresh fish was a couple of words, whereas the street cries for apothecaries, which are the closest thing we get to street cries from magicians, sound more like snake-oil patter. They talk about how rare the ingredients are, how far they have been shipped, and how many things they can cure.

Eventually, in London and other cities with strong guilds, people with staples developed a single cry for each product, so if you heard a particular tune, even if you couldn't make out the words, you'd know it was being said. Over in the Venetian stories we had the alternative, the American consul to Venice reported he kept seeing a girl with bloodshot eyes in his street, and he discovered she was a pear seller who yelled the name of her wares so loud each day that it caused the haemorrhaging. I'm reminded that locally a company has reconditioned a set of old ice cream trucks, and so my children have learned that a truck playing Greensleeves in the street is offering ice cream. Greensleeves really wasn't written by Henry VIII to seduce the Queen's mother, but you could use it that way if you wanted. We know King Hal had his own band and performed on stage.

We know there were street cries in London a century before Elizabeth's reign, because a poem from 1410 says that vendors were crying "strawberries ripe and cherries on the rise". I should record that poem eventually: it's called The London Lickpenny and has a man touring the capital and being ripped off. You've probably heard the Victorian version of "*Strawberries Ripe*". It is in the musical "*Oliver!*" as part of the market cry melody. I'm not a musical person, so I won't torture you with any of the instruments I play badly. I'm not sure when it swapped from a plain cry to a melodic cry, but there's my tenuous link to

say that a likely lad could have come up with a performance poem to sell monster eggs, and because they are a new product, he needed it to be long.

Lad, in this case, because I came up with it when I was standing about doing COVID chaperoning at work when, I had a day dream as clear as day in which a version of the Artful Dodger came up to me and said "Scoop of the arsebiter eggs, gov? Fresh today." He would not, in the real world have said "fresh", which in period meant "unsalted". He would have said "new": there are period records of fishwives calling that they had "new salmon", for example.

When I was writing it, I did have a tune in mind. It's the second line of Three Blind Mice, but with the pauses moved around ("See how they-run" becomes "arse bi-ter eggs"). The even verses us a version of Pop Goes the Weasel with a similar bit of shifting about. The sad thing here is that I have accidentally used the very best known of the surviving street cries for an already existing product, and no-one in period would have done that. Three Blind Mice shares its tune with Hot Cross Buns which managed to escape extinction by becoming a nursery rhyme. There's a way out for me, yet, though.

A few other cries have similarly survived as fossils in other work. The somewhat chesty lady in the episode art is a statue representing Molly Malone, a famous fishmonger and ghost of old Dublin town whose cry you can hear in many Irish pubs on the regular. As anyone who has gone to these things knows, there are traditional gestures for when drunkenly sings the bit about "cockles and mussels" To make the arse bitter eggs song different from Hot Cross Buns, you just need to slap your arse hard enough for it to be a percussive element before each line. In a way this is an unnecessary precaution, because hot cross buns used to be a festive food only available for a brief window after Lent. Some versions of the song say that they are made only on Good Friday. It seems odd that something heard so little is the great survivor of the Darwinian song contest of the market, but they were pitched as a treat for children, which is how the song slid across to the nursery.

A second thought on Urban Wisps

This is a short piece, compared to some of the others for the *Bestiary* series. My goals for the wisps were straightforward, so I got there without a lot of surplus material. When I wrote the urban wisps for the Magonomia Bestiary I wanted to introduce the Royal Exchange and suggest that the creatures were the source of the Gruen transfer, which blights shoppers in malls to this day. The Gruen transfer is a psychological trick, a sort of confusion or trance-like state, which is an involuntary response to deliberately-included architectural features. In the real world it causes people to wander about and impulse buy.

I first knew I'd missed a trick on urban wisps when I was listening to a quatrain by Madison Cawein. Cawein was an author from Kentucky whose work was in the same sort of vein as Shelley and Keats. He wrote around the turn of the Twentieth Century, and has some right to claim T S Eliot bit him for the idea of The Waste Land. There are several pieces which might be useful for games like *Ars Magica* and *Magonomia*, because he likes playing with the idea that there are forces behind natural features.

Before you go wading in, a quick note: with Cawein you'll be zipping through his pastorals and stealing monsters when suddenly there's a poem about the laws and methods of the Ku Klux Klan. Some people have tried to defend his views on race because he doesn't actually say that the "we" in the poem includes himself, but...it's a sudden shock to go from one tone to another. There are a couple of other works which pretty clearly put him over on the cross-burning side of society. That being said, he's been dead for a hundred years and no-one is going to profit financially from these quotations.

Moths and Fireflies

*Since Fancy taught me in her school of spells
I know her tricks—These are not moths at all,
Nor fireflies, but masking Elfland belles
Whose link-boys torch them to Titania's ball.*

A linkboy is a child who is paid to escort a pedestrian at night, and provide illumination. Sometimes they lead the person to where they can find a sedan chair instead, and then follow them from the chair's end point to their house. The "link" in the name is a sort of cotton which is used in their torches. The term appears in Shakespeare so we know it's in period for Magonomia. Falstaff says to Bardolph "Thou hast saved me a thousand marks in links and torches, walking with thee in the night betwixt tavern and tavern", because Bardolph's face is constantly red from alcoholism. A mark is two thirds of a pound, so that's serious money.

Using linkboys was sometimes dangerous, because you could be led astray, into ambushes with footpads in dark alleys. This, to me, seemed a perfect way to envision urban wisps, leading people into danger. Some people had personal linkboys to prevent this occurring, but the position was considered low and menial. This may be where the expression "can't hold a candle to X" comes from: the described thing is even to be a linkboy for X.

I was reading a lot about John Stow at the time. It seemed to me that having a friendly urban wisp essentially meant you had a safe linkboy, who could guide you about the streets. If I'd thought of it in time, I'd have made the Wisp Extra have the power to always lead their character home, which is useful for the lost and inebriated. It also seems like a good marker for my theoretical order of urban magicians based on Stow's work: they all carry lamps with surprisingly active flames.

Cawein has another couple of poems about wisps which give us variants on what they think and do. In *Fen-fire* he posits a spirit that loves as it destroys.

Fen-fire

*The misty rain makes dim my face,
The night's black cloak is o'er me;
I tread the dripping cypress-place,
A flickering light before me.*

*Out of the death of leaves that rot
And ooze and weedy water,
My form was breathed to haunt this spot,
Death's immaterial daughter.*

*The owl that whoops upon the yew,
The snake that lairs within it,
Have seen my wild face flashing blue
For one fantastic minute.*

*But should you follow where my eyes
Like some pale lamp decoy you,
Beware! lest suddenly I rise
With love that shall destroy you.*

Again in *Mill-Water* he has wisps as sprites who are doing something sneaky and idyllic, until you see beneath the superficial.

Mill-Water

*The water-flag and wild cane grow
'Round banks whereon the sunbeams sow
Fantastic gold when, on its shores,
The wind sighs through the sycamores.*

*In one green angle, just in reach,
Between a willow-tree and beech,
Moss-grown and leaky lies a boat
The thick-grown lilies keep afloat.*

*And through its waters, half awake,
Slow swims the spotted water-snake;
And near its edge, like some gray streak,
Stands gaunt the still fly-up-the-creek.*

*Between the lily-pads and blooms
The water-spirits set their looms,
That weave the lace-like light that dims
The glimmering leaves of under limbs.*

*Each lily is the hiding-place
Of some dim wood-imp's elvish face,
That watches you with gold-green eyes
Where bubbles of its breathing rise.*

*I fancy, when the waxing moon
Leans through the trees and dreams of June,
And when the black bat slants its wing,
And lonelier the green-frogs sing,
I fancy, when the whippoorwill*

*In some old tree sings wild and shrill,
With glow-worm eyes that dot the dark,
Each holding high a firefly spark*

*To torch its way, the wood-imps come:
And some float rocking here; and some
Unmoor the lily leaves and oar
Around the old boat by the shore.*

*They climb through oozy weeds and moss;
They swarm its rotting sides and toss
Their firefly torches o'er its edge
Or hang them in the tangled sedge.*

*The boat is loosed. The moon is pale.
Around the dam they slowly sail.
Upon the bow, to pilot it,
A jack-o'-lantern gleam doth sit.*

*Yes, I have seen it in my dreams!
Naught is forgotten! naught, it seems!
The strangled face, the tangled hair
Of the drown'd woman trailing there.*

Cut plot hooks relating to sexual violence

I took over the unicorn and basilisk after another author had to step aside from this project, and initially I wrote them both closely tied to folklore. The unicorn needed a serious rework after I'd finished it. I didn't get past our sensitivity reader because I was working the "virginity" angle as a plot hook.

Unicorn

To me it seemed like a worthwhile connection. Elizabeth makes a lot of political capital out of her virginity. She's constantly offering to consider marriage to foreign nobles, and then moving on. For American readers, the first English colony in your country was named Virginia in a complement to her. It could have been Gloriana, but no. I live in a state called Queensland in Australia. No, though, they went with Virginia. Similarly the first European-descended baby in the colony was Virginia Dare. She's got a Wikipedia page and shows up in your art. I first heard about her when I was a twentysomething listening to Tori Amos. Some of the Americans reading this know Dare's name, but don't know how weird that is. Other colonial governors didn't deliberately name their grandkids to flatter the monarch, let alone her virginity.

I'm Australian. What was the name of the first white baby in Australia? We don't know. No-one made a fuss about it and as I've aged, different answers have emerged from historians scraping ideas out of period accounts. The name that I was told might be right, when I was an undergraduate, doesn't even appear on the lists anymore. The name that was the consensus for a while after that, Rebecca Small, was discredited when someone noticed she was, in the the period account, the first "free-born" baby. Most historians believe there were approximately twenty babies born to convict mothers before her. We have no idea who most of them were.

The dark horse in this historical puzzle is Seebaer van Nieuwelant, who was born to a woman on a Dutch whaling vessel before New South Wales was settled. The problem is his name literally means "Seaborn in the New Land", so was he born on ship, or on Dirk Hartog Island? We don't know, and regardless, he's not named after Queen Victoria's hymen. I'm only mentioning him because I think his name's perfect for a selkie.

So, a plot hook was cut. It mentions that Elizabeth had a guardian who tried to sexually abuse her into marriage. This was Thomas Seymour, a perfect villain for games in which King Edward or Queen Jane survive. He was the brother of Jane Seymour (previous Queen and mother of King Edward). After Henry VIII died he married Katherine Parr, Henry's final wife. She was one of the richest women in the kingdom and Elizabeth's formal guardian. Thomas's brother, yet another Edward, was effectively regent for the prince. He thought his brother was a worm and tried to get him to go away with an enormous bribe. A barony and the Admiralty worked for a while, but eventually Thomas became his nephew's favourite relative.

Thomas waged several campaigns to marry Elizabeth. There was, at this point, no strong claim that she would ever become Queen. King Edward would, it was hoped, have children. Henry VIII's will removed his daughters from the line of succession. King Edward, likewise, pushed the crown to his cousin, Lady Jane Grey, so that his Catholic, legally illegitimate, sister would be excluded. There is a chance, though, that he though he might be king.

Remember that at this stage, our modern belief that the husband of the Queen is just some random guy wasn't certain then. Skipping Jane, the next regnant Queen, Mary, gave the title of King to her husband,

Phillip of Spain. Similarly, the first regnant queen after Elizabeth, Mary, was co-ruler with her husband King William. Our modern certainty that the queen's husband is just a guy comes, I believe, from Queen-Empress Victoria telling everyone it was so.

Elizabeth held Thomas off with legions of maids, shrew politics, and cutting letters

Here's the hook:

The Virginity Test

Monarchs maintain menageries of odd creatures as a show of opulence and influence. England's is in the Tower of London. A friendly non-player wishes to give a unicorn to Her Majesty. To ensure they gain the maximum social cachet they want to present it as a surprise gift at court. As an alternative, the Spanish ambassador may bring it as a gift. This is a dreadfully bad idea. characters may be sent to steal or surreptitiously kill a unicorn that the intelligence services have heard is to be presented to Her Majesty. Poison won't work, so the characters will need to find a different, but equally discrete, way of killing or removing the animal.

If the unicorn refuses to put its head on the Virgin Queen's lap, then her statements to foreign princes that she might be available for marriage no longer carry weight. Her story that she is "married to the realm" is damaged. Catholic rumours that she is living adulterously with Lord Darnley are furthered. If she refuses to face the test of the unicorn, that is interpreted as a confession. Even if Elizabeth is not having a relationship with Darnley, she may want to refuse the test, because rumours insist one of her early guardians attempted to force her into marriage by molesting her.

Satyrs

Similarly, there was a plot hook cut from satyrs because there was a theme of sexual violence to it. Eventually the satyrs were completely reworked as fauns, creatures from Industrial Era folklore. The idea that the reason you don't see satyrs anymore is because trooping faeries have hunted them to extinction is from *Lamia* by John Keats, a Romantic poet from the 19th Century. The part I'm referencing is:

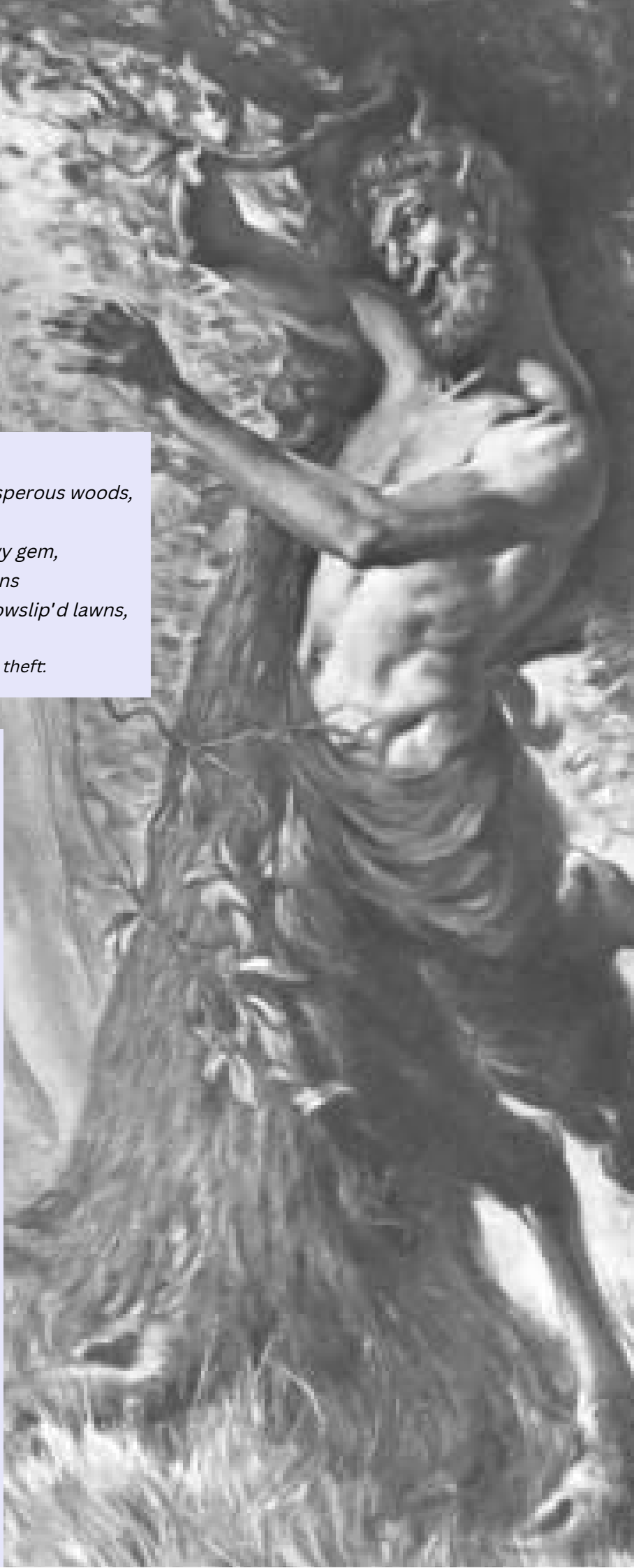
*Upon a time, before the faery broods
Drove Nymph and Satyr from the prosperous woods,
Before King Oberon's bright diadem,
Sceptre, and mantle, clasp'd with dewy gem,
Frighted away the Dryads and the Fauns
From rushes green, and brakes, and cowslip'd lawns,
The ever-smitten Hermes empty left
His golden throne, bent warm on amorous theft.*

Here's the hook:

Peace with Titania

Titania's hatred of satyrs is based on her knowing most of the women in Ovid's *Metamorphoses* which is filled with gods and mystical beings either raping women or women fleeing attempted rape until they are transformed into trees and animals, which isn't acknowledged as harm. She's not correct that all satyrs behave like this: each silenus has raised his sons differently and the tribes who have survived are those who are cautious of interacting with humans.

Titania's hatred of satyrs is a prejudice she formed thousands of years ago on the other side of the continent. If the player characters can convince her local satyrs are not the same as the ancient tribes, her policy to them can change. The satyrs she remembers were riotous mobs of Dionysius worshippers accompanied by drug-frenzied humans. The player characters might convince her that satyrs have a place in her court. Some could serve as counsellors, warriors or musicians in exchange for her protection for the rest of their tribe. The player characters might, instead, demonstrate that the satyrs are insignificant, compared to the other enemies which could be faced.



The Piper at the Gates of Dawn

The character we moved toward is *The Piper At The Gates of Dawn*, which comes from *The Wind in the Willows*. As a setup to this extract, a young otter named Portly has gone missing, so Rat and Mole paddle upriver to look for him. Rat begins to hear an ethereal music within the sounds of nature. *Ars Magica* players will spot the regio right away. The reader for this extract is Cori Samuels, who released it into the public domain via Librivox. Thanks to Cori and her production team.

“It’s gone!” sighed the Rat, sinking back in his seat again. “So beautiful and strange and new! Since it was to end so soon, I almost wish I had never heard it. For it has roused a longing in me that is pain, and nothing seems worth while but just to hear that sound once more and go on listening to it for ever. No! There it is again!” he cried, alert once more. Entranced, he was silent for a long space, spellbound.

“Now it passes on and I begin to lose it,” he said presently. “O Mole! the beauty of it! The merry bubble and joy, the thin, clear, happy call of the distant piping! Such music I never dreamed of, and the call in it is stronger even than the music is sweet! Row on, Mole, row! For the music and the call must be for us.”

The Mole, greatly wondering, obeyed. “I hear nothing myself,” he said, “but the wind playing in the reeds and rushes and osiers.”

The Rat never answered, if indeed he heard. Rapt, transported, trembling, he was possessed in all his senses by this new divine thing that caught up his helpless soul and swung and dandled it, a powerless but happy infant in a strong sustaining grasp.

In silence Mole rowed steadily, and soon they came to a point where the river divided, a long backwater branching off to one side. With a slight movement of his head Rat, who had long dropped the rudder-lines,

directed the rower to take the backwater. The creeping tide of light gained and gained, and now they could see the colour of the flowers that gemmed the water’s edge.

“Clearer and nearer still,” cried the Rat joyously. “Now you must surely hear it! Ah—at last—I see you do!”

Breathless and transfixed, the Mole stopped rowing as the liquid run of that glad piping broke on him like a wave, caught him up, and possessed him utterly. He saw the tears on his comrade’s cheeks, and bowed his head and understood. For a space they hung there, brushed by the purple loosestrife that fringed the bank; then the clear imperious summons that marched hand-in-hand with the intoxicating melody imposed its will on Mole, and mechanically he bent to his oars again. And the light grew steadily stronger, but no birds sang as they were wont to do at the approach of dawn; and but for the heavenly music all was marvellously still.

On either side of them, as they glided onwards, the rich meadow-grass seemed that morning of a freshness and a greenness unsurpassable. Never had they noticed the roses so vivid, the willow-herb so riotous, the meadow-sweet so odorous and pervading. Then the murmur of the approaching weir began to hold the air, and they felt a consciousness that they were nearing the end, whatever it might be, that surely awaited their expedition.

A wide half-circle of foam and glinting lights and shining shoulders of green water, the great weir closed the backwater from bank to bank, troubled all the quiet surface with twirling eddies and floating foam-streaks, and deadened all other sounds with its solemn and soothing rumble. In midmost of the stream, embraced in the weir’s shimmering arm-spread, a small island lay anchored, fringed close with willow and silver birch and alder. Reserved, shy, but full of significance, it hid whatever it might hold behind a veil, keeping it till the hour should come, and, with the hour, those who were called and chosen.

Slowly, but with no doubt or hesitation whatever, and in something of a solemn expectancy, the two animals passed through the broken, tumultuous water and moored their boat at the flowery margin of the island. In silence they landed, and pushed through the blossom and scented herbage and undergrowth that led up to the level ground, till they stood on a little lawn of a marvellous green, set round with Nature’s own orchard-trees—crab-apple, wild cherry, and sloe.

“This is the place of my song-dream, the place the music played to me,” whispered the Rat, as if in a trance. “Here, in this holy place, here if anywhere, surely we shall find Him!”

Then suddenly the Mole felt a great Awe fall upon him, an awe that turned his muscles to water, bowed his head, and rooted his feet to the ground. It was no panic terror—indeed he felt wonderfully at peace and happy—but it was an awe that smote and held him and, without seeing, he knew it could only mean that some august Presence was very, very near. With difficulty he turned to look for his friend, and saw him at his side, cowed, stricken, and trembling violently. And still there was utter silence in the populous bird-haunted branches around them; and still the light grew and grew.

Perhaps he would never have dared to raise his eyes, but that, though the piping was now hushed, the call and the summons seemed still dominant and imperious. He might not refuse, were Death himself waiting to strike him instantly, once he had looked with mortal eye on things rightly kept hidden. Trembling he obeyed, and raised his humble head; and then, in that utter clearness of the imminent dawn, while

Nature, flushed with fulness of incredible colour, seemed to hold her breath for the event, he looked in the very eyes of the Friend and Helper; saw the backward sweep of the curved horns, gleaming in the growing daylight; saw the stern, hooked nose between the kindly eyes that were looking down on them humorously, while the bearded mouth broke into a half-smile at the corners; saw the rippling muscles on the arm that lay across the broad chest, the long supple hand still holding the pan-pipes only just fallen away from the parted lips; saw the splendid curves of the shaggy limbs disposed in majestic ease on the sward; saw, last of all, nestling between his very hooves, sleeping soundly in entire peace and contentment, the little, round, podgy, childish form of the baby otter. All this he saw, for one moment breathless and intense, vivid on the morning sky; and still, as he looked, he lived; and still, as he lived, he wondered.

“Rat!” he found breath to whisper, shaking. “Are you afraid?”

“Afraid?” murmured the Rat, his eyes shining with unutterable love. “Afraid! Of Him? O, never, never! And yet—and yet—O, Mole, I am afraid!”

Then the two animals, crouching to the earth, bowed their heads and did worship.

Sudden and magnificent, the sun’s broad golden disc showed itself over the horizon facing them; and the first rays, shooting across the level water-meadows, took the animals full in the eyes and dazzled them. When they were able to look once more, the Vision had vanished, and the air was full of the carol of birds that hailed the dawn.

As they stared blankly, in dumb misery deepening as they slowly realised all they had seen and all they had lost, a capricious little breeze, dancing up from the surface of the water, tossed the aspens, shook the dewy roses, and blew lightly and caressingly in their faces; and with its soft touch came instant oblivion. For this is the last

best gift that the kindly demi-god is careful to bestow on those to whom he has revealed himself in their helping: the gift of forgetfulness. Lest the awful remembrance should remain and grow, and overshadow mirth and pleasure, and the great haunting memory should spoil all the after-lives of little animals helped out of difficulties, in order that they should be happy and light-hearted as before.

Mole rubbed his eyes and stared at Rat, who was looking about him in a puzzled sort of way. “I beg your pardon; what did you say, Rat?” he asked.

“I think I was only remarking,” said Rat slowly, “that this was the right sort of place, and that here, if anywhere, we should find him. And look! Why, there he is, the little fellow!” And with a cry of delight he ran towards the slumbering Portly.

But Mole stood still a moment, held in thought. As one wakened suddenly from a beautiful dream, who struggles to recall it, and can recapture nothing but a dim sense of the beauty of it, the beauty! Till that, too, fades away in its turn, and the dreamer bitterly accepts the hard, cold waking and all its penalties; so Mole, after struggling with his memory for a brief space, shook his head sadly and followed the Rat.

Portly woke up with a joyous squeak, and wriggled with pleasure at the sight of his father’s friends, who had played with him so often in past days. In a moment, however, his face grew blank, and he fell to hunting round in a circle with pleading whine. As a child that has fallen happily asleep in its nurse’s arms, and wakes to find itself alone and laid in a strange place, and searches corners and cupboards, and runs from room to room, despair growing silently in its heart, even so Portly searched the island and searched, dogged and unwearying, till at last the black moment came for giving it up, and sitting down and crying bitterly.

The Mole ran quickly to comfort the little animal; but Rat, lingering, looked long and doubtfully at certain hoof-marks deep in the sward.

“Some—great—animal—has been here,” he murmured slowly and thoughtfully; and stood musing, musing; his mind strangely stirred.

“Come along, Rat!” called the Mole. “Think of poor Otter, waiting up there by the ford!”

Portly had soon been comforted by the promise of a treat—a jaunt on the river in Mr. Rat’s real boat; and the two animals conducted him to the water’s side, placed him securely between them in the bottom of the boat, and paddled off down the backwater. The sun was fully up by now, and hot on them, birds sang lustily and without restraint, and flowers smiled and nodded from either bank, but somehow—so thought the animals—with less of richness and blaze of colour than they seemed to remember seeing quite recently somewhere—they wondered where.

The main river reached again, they turned the boat’s head upstream, towards the point where they knew their friend was keeping his lonely vigil. As they drew near the familiar ford, the Mole took the boat in to the bank, and they lifted Portly out and set him on his legs on the tow-path, gave him his marching orders and a friendly farewell pat on the back, and shoved out into mid-stream. They watched the little animal as he waddled along the path contentedly and with importance; watched him till they saw his muzzle suddenly lift and his waddle break into a clumsy amble as he quickened his pace with shrill whines and wriggles of recognition. Looking up the river, they could see Otter start up, tense and rigid,

from out of the shallows where he crouched in dumb patience, and could hear his amazed and joyous bark as he bounded up through the osiers on to the path. Then the Mole, with a strong pull on one oar, swung the boat round and let the full stream bear them down again whither it would, their quest now happily ended.

"I feel strangely tired, Rat," said the Mole, leaning wearily over his oars, as the boat drifted. "It's being up all night, you'll say, perhaps; but that's nothing. We do as much half the nights of the week, at this time of the year. No; I feel as if I had been through something very exciting and rather terrible, and it was just over; and yet nothing particular has happened."

"Or something very surprising and splendid and beautiful," murmured the Rat, leaning back and closing his eyes. "I feel just as you do, Mole; simply dead tired, though not body-tired. It's lucky we've got the stream with us, to take us home. Isn't it jolly to feel the sun again, soaking into one's bones! And hark to the wind playing in the reeds!"

"It's like music—far-away music," said the Mole, nodding drowsily.

"So I was thinking," murmured the Rat, dreamful and languid. "Dance-music—the lilting sort that runs on without a stop—but with words in it, too—it passes into words and out of them again—I catch them at intervals—then it is dance-music once more, and then nothing but the reeds' soft thin whispering."

"You hear better than I," said the Mole sadly. "I cannot catch the words."

"Let me try and give you them," said the Rat softly, his eyes still closed. "Now it is turning into words again—faint but clear—*Lest the awe should dwell—And turn your frolic to fret—You shall look on my power at the helping hour—But then you shall forget! Now the reeds take it up—forget, forget,* they sigh, and it dies away in a rustle and a whisper. Then the voice returns—

"Lest limbs be reddened and rent—I spring the trap that is set—As I loose the snare you may glimpse me there—For surely you shall forget! Row nearer, Mole, nearer to the reeds! It is hard to catch, and grows each minute fainter.

"Helper and healer, I cheer—Small waifs in the woodland wet—Strays I find in it, wounds I bind in it—Bidding them all forget! Nearer, Mole, nearer! No, it is no good; the song has died away into reed-talk."

"But what do the words mean?" asked the wondering Mole.

"That I do not know," said the Rat simply. "I passed them on to you as they reached me. Ah! now they return again, and this time full and clear! This time, at last, it is the real, the unmistakable thing, simple—passionate—perfect—"

"Well, let's have it, then," said the Mole, after he had waited patiently for a few minutes, half-dozing in the hot sun.

But no answer came. He looked, and understood the silence. With a smile of much happiness on his face, and something of a listening look still lingering there, the weary Rat was fast asleep.

Monsters that didn't make it

Two creatures that I considered pitching didn't make it as far as me offering them for the Bestiary. They're still suitable for your table, but not right for the tone of this book. x

George, the Minotaur d'Amour

This minotaur was originally designed as the creature at the centre of the Royal Exchange. He was to twist the perception on the humans nearby. This would make the world's first shopping centre confusingly labyrinthine, and explain impulse purchases. I couldn't land the idea, so I reworked it all in the Urban Wisps.

HC: The Minotaur d'Amour

T: Lives in a society that equates beauty and goodness

A: Misplaced Classical monster

A: Just a normal, workmanlike guy once you get past the whole minotaur thing.

S: Parting is such sorrow: See the Urban Wisps in the Magonomia Bestiary for the spell here. I sold it to Andrew....(shrugs).

S: Cheap imitations of heirlooms of old: If George can handle a monetarily-valuable object, he can make a passable forgery of it in his workshop.

Skills: Crafts 5, Fighting 4, Physique 4, Athletics 3, Notice 3, Resource 3, Empathy 2, Lore 2, Stealth 2, Will 2, Contacts 1, Investigation 1, Provocation 1, Rapport 1.

Stress Physical 6, Mental 4.

Consequences: Mild, Medium, Severe.

The problems with the minotaur are several. In the original myth, the minotaur is a single guy, called Asterion. He's not representative of a faerie race: he's the lovechild of a queen and a sacred bull. How do I get him into Elizabethan London without doing something odd about the Queen, or using time travel? There are options (a statute bought to life, for example) but they are tough to work through. Even if you find one you like (for example that Jane Seymour died in childbed because she had twins, one a minotaur and the other King Edward VI) you still need to explain why he's in the basement of the shopping centre.

His name comes from the plot hook that he was going to be desired to supplement the enchantment of for Robert Dudley's Love Castle. This doesn't work for a couple of reasons. Americans don't pronounce minotaur to rhyme with amour. Also, at least one early reader thought I was making up Dudley's Love Castle, by which I meant the entirely real Kenilworth. Dudley tries to convince Elizabeth to marry him during a 19 day stay there in 1575.

The word "amour", which is Latin and French for "love" is believed in period to etymologically derive from the word for "hook". For a while I toyed with him being able to take hearts and keep them alive outside the body, or take the beats out of hearts so that people felt listless when outside the shops. This was too powerful for what I wanted. Also, I thought for a while of him using a hook and chain as his weapon (+2). It's a popular piece of tackle used for loading cargo, so it doesn't require a stretch for him to have one in the warehouse sections of the shops, but I'm not sure he's best as a combat menace.

This creature is based on a deliberate misreading of the lyrics of a tune called "Moonlight Shadow" by Mike Oldfield.. On my podcast I get a lot of mileage out of taking metaphorical things literally. She didn't pass muster because she's not so much a character as an embodied inciting incident. Also, she's presumably a derived work. I don't think Moonlight Shadow is based on folklore, so I couldn't have sold her to Andrew. X

The Moonlight Shadow Witch

HC: Recursive Witch

T: Is trapped in a mirror

A: Unshakeable love

A; Famous artefact in among British magicians

S: Come to, talk to, me: The haunted mirror can sense divinationary skill and surreptitiously move toward those who have it. Imagine how the One Ring seems to find its way Sauronwards when not held up by hobbits.

S: Stars move slowly: When divining using the possessed mirror, a character gains +2.

Skills: Astronomy 4, Lore 3, Notice 3, Fighting 2, Rapport 2, Will 2, Crafts 1, Empathy 1, Investigation 1, Physique 1

Stress: Physical 3, Mental 4

Consequences: Mild, moderate, severe

The problems with the minotaur are several. In the original myth, the minotaur is a single guy, called Asterion. He's not representative of a faerie race: he's the lovechild of a queen and a sacred bull. How do I get him into Elizabethan London without doing something odd about the Queen, or using time travel? There are options (a statute bought to life, for example) but they are tough to work through. Even if you find one you like (for example that Jane Seymour died in childbed because she had twins, one a minotaur and the other King Edward VI) you still need to explain why he's in the basement of the shopping centre.

There's a witch who gets a bad feeling (from the whispering winds in the trees) and scries her lover in a mirror. She sees him shot by a man on the run, while in the middle of a crowd. She tries to reach him with magic, but cannot. She pushes her power well past what's possible for her, and dies.

This being the great tragedy of her life, the event leaves a ghost. Any skilled player character who tries to scry with her mirror on the anniversary of her death sees the witch, scrying in the same mirror, and seeing her lover die. Even unskilled people can see her at the moment of the anniversary, but given that's at 4 am, not a lot of people are up and about.

The player characters can conclude the whole thing by finding the lover's remains and reburial by the witch's. This leaves her mirror unhaunted, and grants it as a treasure. For example, perhaps this is how the player character explains a higher level of skill in a Science, or the availability of a new spell. The mechanics are embodied in the game setting by the antique scrying mirror.

Long Lankin

Lankin is a killer who murders a baby and mother, and he's found in the Child Ballads and various other places. My problem with him is that there wasn't enough specificity to make him a distinct monster. There are two variants to the story. The older, found mostly in Scotland says that Lankin was a mason who had been refused his wages by the lord after building a castle. The version below, which is found more often in England, has him as a shapeshifting spirit of the fens and waters. That arguably makes him a troll, but not in the sense that its being used in the rest of the Magonomia Bestiary, but in the Danish sense of trollishness being an attribute one can gain and lose. There's a touch of folklore about that suggests his name, which is often given as "lambkin" indicated he had pale skin, as a symptom of leprosy, and that the blood of a baby was though a curative. I didn't want to use any of that. This left me stymied for a reason to give him supernatural gifts.

Since the book has come out, I did find another poem that has given me what I needed, though. Let's look at the two texts. Here's one version of Long Lankin. There is, by the way, a good recording of this by Steeleye Span you could use as a gaming prop.

SAID my lord to his ladye,
as he mounted his horse,
Take care of Long Lankyn,
who lies in the moss.

'We'll prick him, and prick him,
all over with a pin,
And that will make your ladye
to come down to him.'

'Oh spare m, Long Lankyn,
oh spare me till twelve o'clock,
you shall have as much gold
as you can carry on your back.'

Said my lord to his ladye,
as he rode away,
Take care of Long Lankyn,
who lies in the clay.

So she pricked him and pricked,
all over with a pin,
And the nurse held a basin
for the blood to run in.

'If I had as much gold
as would build me a tower,'
. (Two lines are missing from the original
here)

Let the doors be all bolted,
and the windows all pinned,
And leave not a hole
for a mouse to creep in.

'Oh nurse, how you sleep!
Oh nurse, how you snore!
And you leave my little son Johnstone
to cry and to roar.'

'Oh spare me, Long Lankyn,
oh spare me one hour,
You shall have my daughter Betsy,
She is a sweet flower.'

Then he kissed his fair ladye,
and he rode away;
He must be in London
before break of day.

I've tried him with suck,
and I've tried him with pap;
So come down, my fair ladye,
and nurse him in your lap.'

'Where is your daughter Betsy?
she may do some good;
She can hold the silver basin,
to catch your heart's blood.'

The doors were all bolted,
and the windows were pinned,
All but one little window,
where Long Lankyn crept in.

'Oh nurse, how you sleep!
Oh nurse, how you snore!
And you leave my little son Johnstone
to cry and to roar.'

Lady Betsy was sitting
in her window so high,
And she saw her father,
as he was riding by.

'Where is the lord of this house?'
said Long Lankyn:
'He is gone to fair London,'
said the false nurse to him.

'I've tried him with apples,
I've tried him with pears;
So come down, my fair ladye,
and rock him in your chair.'

Oh father, oh father,
don't lay the blame on me;
'Twas the false nurse and Long Lankyn
that killed your ladye.'

'Where is the ladye of this house?'
said Long Lankyn:
'She's asleep in her chamber,'
said the false nurse to him.

'How can I come down,
'tis so late in the night,
When there's no candle burning,
nor fire to give light?'

Then Long Lankyn was hanged
on a gallows so high,
And the false nurse was burnt
in a fire just by.

'Where is the heir of this house?'
said Long Lankyn:
'He's asleep in his cradle,'
said the false nurse to him.

'You have three silver mantles
as bright as the sun;
So come down, my fair ladye,
by the light of one.'

One way to have extended it would have been to use a hint from *The Highwayman's Ghost* by Richard Garret. Note that ghosts in the Tudor period had a distinct solidness to them: they didn't so much walk through doors as supernaturally push them open. The following reading is via Librivox, with thanks to JakeW.

'TWELVE o'clock—a misty night—
Glimpsing hints of buried light—
Six years strung in an iron chain—
Time I stood on the ground again!
So—by your leave! Slip, easy enough,
Withered wrists from the rusty cuff,
The old chain rattles, the old wood groans,
O the clatter of clacking bones!
Here I am, uncoated, unhatted,
Shirt all mildewed, hair all matted,
Sockets that each have royally
Fed the crow a precious eye.
O for slashing Bess the brown!
Where, old lass, have they earthed thee down?
Sobb'st beneath a carrier's thong?
Strain'st a coalman's cart along?
Shame to foot it!—must be so.
See, the mists are smitten below;
Over the moorland, wide away,
Moonshine pours her watery day.
There the long white-dusted track,
There a crawling speck of black.
The Northern mail, ha, ha! and he
There on the box is Anthony.
Coachman I scared him from brown or grey,
Witness he lied my blood away.Haste,
Fred! haste, boy! never fail!
Now or never! catch the mail!
The horses plunge, and sweating stop.
Dead falls Tony, neck and crop.
Nay, good guard, small profit thus,
Shooting ghosts with a blunderbuss!
Crash wheel! coach over! How it rains
Hampers, ladies, wigs, and canes!
O the spoil! to sack it and lock it!
But, woe is me, I have never a pocket!



"The Nobleman" from *The Dance of Death* by Hans Holbein.
I personally like the idea that Grim, King of the Ghosts, was his model.

So, this give me a sort of revenant Lankin for the player characters to seek.

HC: Highwayman's Revenant

T: Wants to have the pleasures of mortality, but is a wind-mummified corpse.

A: Driven by resentment

A: Diabolic reputation

S: The slightly-rubbery form of this monster allows him to enter into tiny spaces (Burglary +2, when he can use his odd physiology to surprise)

S: Knows the land for miles about (+2 Lore for his local area)

S: If he suddenly appears, he can cause a severe shock to most people (Will +2 to Create Advantage Severe Shock).

Skills: Burglary 5, Fighting 4, Riding 4, Athletics 3, Lore 3, Stealth 3, Contacts 2, Notice 2

Physique 2, Shooting 2, Crafts 1, Investigation 1, Resources 1, Warcraft 1, Will 1.

Stress: Physical 4, Mental 4.

Consequences: Mild, moderate, severe

The Hours from Thomson's "Insomnia"

This poem, which the author claimed as autobiographical, contains angels or demons of the hours, which are progressively more terrible as the night continues. They sap the man's ability to sleep, such that he becomes like a ghost. Death in life is one of Thomson's core artistic preoccupations. One note on the contents: "Malebolges" mentioned near the end are a reference to Virgil's Inferno. Maleboge is his Eighth Circle of Hell. It is a vast funnel-shaped cavern, in which there are ten ditches. Into this various sinners are deposited, and in the centre lies the Ninth and final Circle.

The reader for this poem is MoonLilyth from Librivox. Thanks to them and their production team.

Stats eventually.

I HEARD the sounding of the midnight hour ;
The others one by one had left the room,
In calm assurance that the gracious power
Of Sleep's fine alchemy would bless the gloom,
Transmuting all its leaden weight to gold,
To treasures of rich virtues manifold,
New strength, new health, new life ;
Just weary enough to nestle softly, sweetly,
Into divine unconsciousness, completely
Delivered from the world of toil and care and strife.

Just weary enough to feel assured of rest,
Of Sleep's divine oblivion and repose,
Renewing heart and brain for richer zest,
Of waking life when golden morning glows,
As young and pure and glad as if the first
That ever on the void of darkness burst
With ravishing warmth and light ;
On dewy grass and flowers and blithe birds singing,
And shining waters, all enraptured springing,
Fragrance and shine and song, out of the womb of night.

But I with infinite weariness outworn,
Haggard with endless nights unblessed by sleep,
Ravaged by thoughts unutterably forlorn,
Plunged in despairs unfathomably deep,
Went cold and pale and trembling with affright
Into the desert vastitude of Night,
Arid and wild and black ;
Foreboding no oasis of sweet slumber,
Counting beforehand all the countless number
Of sands that are its minutes on my desolate track.

And so I went, the last, to my drear bed,
Aghast as one who should go down to lie
Among the blissfully unconscious dead,
Assured that as the endless years flowed by
Over the dreadful silence and deep gloom
And dense oppression of the stifling tomb,
He only of them all, Nerveless and impotent to madness, never
Could hope oblivion's perfect trance for ever :
An agony of life eternal in death's pall.

But that would be for ever, without cure !
And yet the agony be not more great ;
Supreme fatigue and pain, while they endure,
Into Eternity their time translate ;
Be it of hours and days or countless years,
And boundless aeons, it alike appears
To the crushed victim's soul ;
Utter despair foresees no termination,
But feels itself of infinite duration ;
The smallest fragment instant comprehends the
whole.

The absolute of torture as of bliss
Is timeless, each transcending time and space ;
The one an infinite obscure abyss,
The other an eternal Heaven of grace.
Keeping a little lamp of glimmering light
Companion through the horror of the night,
I laid me down aghast
As he of all who pass death's quiet portal
Malignantly reserved alone immortal,
In consciousness of bale that must for ever last.

I laid me down and closed my heavy eyes,
As if sleep's mockery might win true sleep ;
And grew aware, with awe but not surprise,
Blindly aware through all the silence deep,
Of some dark Presence watching by my bed,
The awful image of a nameless dread ;
But I lay still fordone ;
And felt its Shadow on me dark and solemn
And steadfast as a monumental column,
And thought drear thoughts of Doom, and heard the
bells chime One.

And then I raised my weary eyes and saw,
By some slant moonlight on the ceiling thrown
And faint lamp-gleam, that Image of my awe,
Still as a pillar of basaltic stone,
But all enveloped in a sombre shroud
Except the wan face drooping heavy-browed,
With sad eyes fixed on mine ;
Sad weary yearning eyes, but fixed remorseless
Upon my eyes yet wearier, that were forceless
To bear the cruel pressure ; cruel, unmalign.

Wherefore I asked for what I knew too well :
O ominous midnight Presence, What art Thou ?
Whereto in tones that sounded like a knell : “
I am the Second Hour, appointed now
To watch beside thy slumberless unrest”
Then I : Thus both, unlike, alike unblest ;
For I should sleep, you fly :
Are not those wings beneath thy mantle moulded ?
O Hour ! unfold those wings so straitly folded,
And urge thy natural flight beneath the moonlit sky.

” My wings shall open when your eyes shall close
In real slumber from this waking drear ;
Your wild unrest is my enforced repose ;
Ere I move hence you must not know me here.”
Could not your wings fan slumber through my brain,
Soothing away its weariness and pain ?
” Your sleep must stir my wings :
Sleep, and I bear you gently on my pinions
Athwart my span of hollow night’s dominions,
Whence hour on hour shall bear to morning’s golden springs.”

That which I ask of you, you ask of me,
O weary Hour, thus standing sentinel
Against your nature, as I feel and see
Against my own your form immovable :
Could I bring Sleep to set you on the wing,
What other thing so gladly would I bring ?
Truly the Poet saith : If that is best whose absence
we deplore most,
Whose presence in our longings is the foremost,
What blessings equal Sleep save only love and death ?

I let my lids fall, sick of thought and sense,
But felt that Shadow heavy on my heart ;
And saw the night before me an immense
Black waste of ridge-walls, hour by hour apart,
Dividing deep ravines : from ridge to ridge
Sleep’s flying hour was an aerial bridge ;
But I, whose hours stood fast,
Must climb down painfully each steep side hither,
And climb more painfully each steep side thither,
And so make one hour’s span for years of travail last.

Thus I went down into that first ravine,
Wearily, slowly, blindly, and alone,
Staggering, stumbling, sinking depths unseen,
Shaken and bruised and gashed by stub and stone;
And at the bottom paven with slipperiness,
A torrent-brook rushed headlong with such stress
Against my feeble limbs,
Such fury of wave and foam and icy bleakness
Buffeting insupportably my weakness
That when I would recall, dazed memory swirls and swims.

How I got through I know not, faint as death ;
And then I had to climb the awful scarp,
Creeping with many a pause for panting breath,
Clinging to tangled root and rock-jut sharp ;
Perspiring with faint chills instead of heat,
Trembling, and bleeding hands and knees and feet ;
Falling, to rise anew ;
Until, with lamentable toil and travel
Upon the ridge of arid sand and gravel
I lay supine half-dead and heard the bells chime
Two;

And knew a change of Watchers in the room,
Without a stir or sound beside my bed ;
Only the tingling silence of the gloom,
The muffled pulsing of the night’s deep dread ;
And felt an image mightier to appal,
And looked ; the moonlight on the bed-foot wall
And corniced ceiling white
Was slanting now ; and in the midst stood solemn
And hopeless as a black sepulchral column
A steadfast shrouded Form, the Third Hour of the
night.

The fixed regard implacably austere,
Yet none the less ineffably forlorn.
Something transcending all my former fear
Came jarring through my shattered frame outworn:
I knew that crushing rock could not be stirred ;
I had no heart to say a single word,
But closed my eyes again ;
And set me shuddering to the task stupendous
Of climbing down and up that gulph tremendous
Unto the next hour-ridge beyond Hope’s farthest
ken.

Men sigh and plain and wail how life is brief :
Ah yes, our bright eternities of bliss
Are transient, rare, minute beyond belief,
Mere star-dust meteors in Time’s night-abyss ;
Ah no, our black eternities intense
Of bale are lasting, dominant, immense,
As Time which is their breath ;
The memory of the bliss is yearning sorrow,
The memory of the bale clouds every morrow
Darkening through nights and days unto the night of
Death.

No human words could paint my travail sore
In the thick darkness of the next ravine,
Deeper immeasurably than that before ;
When hideous agonies, unheard, unseen,
In overwhelming floods of torture roll,
And horrors of great darkness drown the soul,
To be is not to be
In memory save as ghestliest impression,
And chaos of demoniacal possession
shuddered on the ridge, and heard the bells chime
Three.

And like a pillar of essential gloom,
Most terrible in stature and regard,
Black in the moonlight filling all the room
The Image of the Fourth Hour, evil-starred,
Stood over me ; but there was Something more,
Something behind It undiscerned before,
More dreadful than Its dread,
Which overshadowed it as with a
fateful Inexorable fascination hateful,
A wan and formless Shade from regions of the dead.

I shut my eyes against that spectral Shade,
Which yet allured them with a deadly charm,
And that black Image of the Hour, dismayed
By such tremendous menacing of harm ;
And so into the gulph as into Hell ;
Where what immeasurable depths I fell,
With seizures of the heart
Whose each clutch seemed the end of all pulsation,
And tremors of exanimate prostration,
Are horrors in my soul that never can depart.

If I for hope or wish had any force,
It was that I might rush down sharply hurled
From rock to rock until a mangled corse
Down with the fury of the torrent whirled,
The fury of black waters and white foam,
To where the homeless find their only home,
In the immense void Sea,
Whose isles are worlds, surrounding, unsurrounded,
Whose depths no mortal plummet ever sounded,
Beneath all surface storm calm in Eternity.

Such hope or wish was as a feeble spark,
' A little lamp's pale glimmer in a tomb,
To just reveal the hopeless deadly dark
And wordless horrors of my soul's fixed doom :
Yet some mysterious instinct obstinate,
Blindly unconscious as a law of Fate,
Still urged me on and bore
My shattered being through the unfeared peril
Of death less hateful than the life as sterile :
I shuddered on the ridge, and heard the bells chime Four.

The Image of that Fifth Hour of the night
Was blacker in the moonlight now aslant
Upon its left than on its shrouded right ;
And over and behind It, dominant,
The Shadow not Its shadow cast its spell,
Most vague and dim and wan and terrible,
Death's ghastly aureole,
Pregnant with overpowering fascination,
Commanding by repulsive instigation,
Despair's envenomed anodyne to tempt the Soul.

I closed my eyes, but could no longer keep
Under that Image and most awful Shade,
Supine in mockery of blissful sleep,
Delirious with such fierce thirst unallayed ;
Of all worst agonies the most unblest
Is passive agony of wild unrest :
Trembling and faint I rose,
And dressed with painful efforts, and descended
With furtive footsteps and with breath suspended,
And left the slumbering house with my
unslumbering woes.

Constrained to move through the unmoving hours,
Accurst from rest because the hours stood still ;
Feeling the hands of the Infernal Powers
Heavy upon me for enormous ill,
Inscrutable intolerable pain,
Against which mortal pleas and prayers are vain,
Gaspings of dying breath,
And human struggles, dying spasms yet vainer :
Renounce defence when Doom is the Arraigner ;
Let impotence of Life subside appeased in Death.

I paced the silent and deserted streets
In cold dark shade and chillier moonlight grey ;
Pondering a dolorous series of defeats
And black disasters from life's opening day,
Invested with the shadow of a doom
That filled the Spring and Summer with a gloom
Most wintry bleak and drear ;
Gloom from within as from a sulphurous censer
Making the glooms without for ever denser,
To blight the buds and flowers and fruitage of my
year.

Against a bridge's stony parapet
I leaned, and gazed into the waters black ;
And marked an angry morning red and wet
Beneath a livid and enormous rack
Glare out confronting the belated moon,
Huddled and wan and feeble as the swoon
Of featureless Despair :
When some stray workman, half-asleep but lusty,
Passed urgent through the rainpour wild and gusty,
I felt a ghost already, planted watching there.

As phantom to its grave, or to its den
Some wild beast of the night when night is sped,
I turned unto my homeless home again
To front a day only less charged with dread
Than that dread night ; and after day, to front
Another night of what would be the brunt ?
I put the thought aside,
To be resumed when common life unfolded
In common daylight had my brain remoulded ;
Meanwhile the flaws of rain refreshed and fortified.

The day passed, and the night ; and other days,
And other nights ; and all of evil doom ;
The sun-hours in a sick bewildering haze,
The star-hours in a thick enormous gloom,
With rending lightnings and with thunder-knells ;
The ghastly hours of all the timeless Hells :
Bury them with their bane ! I look back on the words already written,
And writhe by cold rage stung, by self-scorn smitten,
They are so weak and vain and infinitely inane. . .

.
” How from those hideous Malebolges deep
I ever could win back to upper earth,
Restored to human nights of blessed sleep
And healthy waking with the new day’s birth ? “-
How do men climb back from a swoon whose stress,
Crushing far deeper than all consciousness,
Is deep as deep death seems ?
Who can the steps and stages mete and number
By which we re-emerge from nightly slumber?
Our poor vast petty life is one dark maze of dreams.

All Hallows by Walter de la Mare

I've been looking forward to reading this for you, because it's a lovely example of an infernal regio for Ars Magica. Clearly it's the work of Architectus from *Realms of Power: the Infernal*. It also works for Magonomia, but as a particular creature, not a thing that a Realm of Power does as a standard activity..

'And because time in itself...can receive no alteration, the hallowing...must consist in the shape or countenance which we put upon the affaires that are incident in these days.'

RICHARD HOOKER

It was about half-past three on an August afternoon when I found myself for the first time looking down upon All Hallows. And at glimpse of it, fatigue and vexation passed away. I stood 'at gaze', as the old phrase goes—like the two children of Israel sent in to spy out the Promised Land. How often the imagined transcends the real. Not so All Hallows. Having at last reached the end of my journey—flies, dust, heat, wind—having at last come limping out upon the green sea-bluff beneath which lay its walls—I confess the actuality excelled my feeble dreams of it.

What most astonished me, perhaps, was the sense not so much of its age, its austerity, or even its solitude, but its air of abandonment. It lay couched there as if in hiding in its narrow sea-bay. Not a sound was in the air; not a jackdaw clapped its wings among its turrets. No other roof, not even a chimney, was in sight; only the dark-blue arch of the sky; the narrow snowline of the ebbing tide; and that gaunt coast fading away into the haze of a west over which were already gathering the veils of sunset.

We had met, then, at an appropriate hour and season. And yet—I wonder. For it was certainly not the 'beauty' of All Hallows, lulled as if into a dream in this serenity of air and heavens, which was to leave the sharpest impression upon me. And what kind of first showing would it have made, I speculated, if an autumnal gale had been shrilling and trumpeting across its narrow bay—clots of wind-borne spume floating among its dusky pinnacles—and the roar of the sea echoing against its walls! Imagine it frozen stark in winter, icy hoar-

-frost edging its every boss, moulding, finial, crocket, cusp!

Indeed, are there not works of man, legacies of a half-forgotten past, scattered across this human world of ours from China to Peru, which seem to daunt the imagination with their incomprehensibility? Incomprehensible, I mean, in the sense that the passion that inspired and conceived them is incomprehensible. Viewed in the light of the passing day, they might be the monuments of a race of demi-gods. And yet, if we could but free ourselves from our timidities, and follies, we might realize that even we ourselves have an obligation to leave behind us similar memorials—testaments to the creative and faithful genius not so much of the individual as of Humanity itself.

However that may be, it was my own personal fortune to see All Hallows for the first time in the heat of the Dog Days, after a journey which could hardly be justified except by its end. At this moment of the afternoon the great church almost cheated one into the belief that it was possessed of a life of its own. It lay, as I say, couched in its natural hollow, basking under the dark dome of the heavens like some half-fossilized monster that might at any moment stir and awaken out of the swoon to which the wand of the enchanter had committed it. And with every inch of the sun's descending journey it changed its appearance.

That is the charm of such things. Man himself, says the philosopher, is the sport of change. His life and the life around him are but the flotsam of a perpetual flux. Yet, haunted by ideals, egged on by impossibilities, he builds his vision of the changeless; and time diversifies it with its colours and its 'effects' at leisure. It was drawing near to harvest now; the summer was nearly over; the corn would soon be in stook; the season of silence had come, not even the robins had yet begun to practice their autumnal lament. I should have come earlier.

The distance was of little account. But nine flinty hills in seven miles is certainly hard commons. To plod (the occupant of a cloud of dust) up one steep incline and so see another; to plod up that and so see a third; to surmount that and, half-choked, half-roasted, to see (as if in unbelievable mirage) a fourth—and always stone walls, discoloured grass, no flower but ragged

ragwort, whited fleabane, moody nettle, and the exquisite stubborn bindweed with its almond-burdened censors, and always the glitter and dazzle of the sun—well, the experience grows irksome. And then that endless flint erection with which some jealous Lord of the Manor had barricaded his verdurous estate! A fly-infested mile of the company of that wall was tantamount to making one's way into the infernal regions—with Tantalus for fellow-pilgrim. And when a solitary and empty dung-cart had lumbered by, lifting the dumb dust out of the road in swirling clouds into the heat-quivering air, I had all but wept aloud.

No, I shall not easily forget that walk—or the conclusion of it—when footsore, all but dead beat—dust all over me, cheeks, lips, eyelids, in my hair, dust in drifts even between my naked body and my clothes—I stretched my aching limbs on the turf under the straggle of trees which crowned the bluff of that last hill still blessedly green and verdant, and feasted my eyes on the cathedral beneath me. How odd Memory is—in her sorting arrangements. How perverse her pigeon-holes.

It had reminded me of a drizzling evening many years ago. I had stayed a moment to listen to an old Salvation Army [Pg 291] officer preaching at a street corner. The sopped and squalid houses echoed with his harangue. His penitents' drum resembled the block of an executioner. His goatish beard wagged at every word he uttered. 'My brothers and sisters,' he was saying, 'the very instant our fleshly bodies are born they begin to perish; the moment the Lord has put them together, time begins to take them to pieces again. Now at this very instant if you listen close, you can hear the nibblings and frettings of the moth and rust within—the worm that never dies. It's the same with human causes and creeds and institutions—just the same. O, then, for that Strand of Beauty where all that is mortal shall be shed away and we shall appear in the likeness and verisimilitude of what in sober and awful truth we are!'

The light striking out of an oil-and-colourman's shop at the street corner lay across his cheek and beard and glassed his eye. The soaked circle of humanity in which he was gesticulating stood staring and motionless—the lassies, the probationers, the melancholy idlers. I had had enough. I went away. But it is odd that so utterly inappropriate a recollection

should have edged back into my mind at this moment. There was, as I have said, not a living soul in sight. Only a few seabirds—oyster-catchers maybe—were jangling on the distant beach.

It was now a quarter to four by my watch, and the usual pensive 'lin-lan-lone' from the belfry beneath me would soon no doubt be ringing to evensong. But if at that moment a triple bob-major had suddenly clanged its alarm over sea and shore I couldn't have stirred a finger's breadth. Scanty though the shade afforded by the wind-shorn tuft of trees under which I lay might be—I was ineffably at peace.

No bell, as a matter of fact, loosed its tongue that stagnant half-hour. Unless then the walls beneath me already concealed a few such chance visitors as myself, All Hallows would be empty. A cathedral not only without a close but without a [Pg 292] congregation—yet another romantic charm. The Deanery and the residences of its clergy, my old guide-book had long since informed me, were a full mile or more away. I determined in due time, first to make sure of an entry, and then having quenched my thirst, to bathe.

How inhuman any extremity—hunger, fatigue, pain, desire—makes us poor humans. Thirst and drouth so haunted my mind that again and again as I glanced towards it I supped up in one long draught that complete blue sea. But meanwhile, too, my eyes had been steadily exploring and searching out this monument of the bygone centuries beneath me.

The headland faced approximately due west. The windows of the Lady Chapel therefore lay immediately beneath me, their fourteenth-century glass showing flatly dark amid their traceries. Above it, the shallow V-shaped, leaden ribbed roof of the chancel converged towards the unfinished tower, then broke away at right angles—for the cathedral was cruciform. Walls so ancient and so sparsely adorned and decorated could not but be inhospitable in effect. Their stone was of a bleached bone-grey; a grey that none the less seemed to be as immaterial as flame—or incandescent ash. They were substantial enough, however, to cast a marvellously lucent shadow, of a blue no less vivid but paler than that of the sea, on the shelving sward beneath them. And that shadow was steadily shifting as I watched. But even if the complete edifice had vanished into the

void, the scene would still have been of an incredible loveliness. The colours in air and sky on this dangerous coast seemed to shed a peculiar unreality even on the rocks of its own outworks.

So, from my vantage place on the hill that dominates it, I continued for a while to watch All Hallows; to spy upon it; and no less intently than a sentry who, not quite trusting his own eyes, has seen a dubious shape approaching him in the dusk. It may sound absurd, but I felt that at any moment I too might surprise All Hallows in the act of revealing what in very truth it looked like—and was, when no human witness was there to share its solitude.

Those gigantic statues, for example, which flanked the base of the unfinished tower—an intense bluish-white in the sunlight and a bluish-purple in shadow—images of angels and of saints, as I had learned of old from my guide-book. Only six of them at most could be visible, of course, from where I sat. And yet I found myself counting them again and yet again, as if doubting my own arithmetic. For my first impression had been that seven were in view—though the figure furthest from me at the western angle showed little more than a jutting fragment of stone which might perhaps be only part and parcel of the fabric itself.

But then the lights even of day may be deceitful, and fantasy plays strange tricks with one's eyes. With exercise, none the less, the mind is enabled to detect minute details which the unaided eye is incapable of particularizing. Given the imagination, man himself indeed may some day be able to distinguish what shapes are walking during our own terrestrial midnight amid the black shadows of the craters in the noonday of the moon. At any rate, I could trace at last frets of carving, minute weather marks, crookednesses, incrustations, repairings, that had before passed unnoticed. These walls, indeed, like human faces, were maps and charts of their own long past.

In the midst of this prolonged scrutiny, the hypnotic air, the heat, must suddenly have overcome me. I fell asleep up there in my grove's scanty shade; and remained asleep, too, long enough (as time is measured by the clocks of sleep), to dream an immense panoramic dream. On waking, I could recall only the faintest vestiges of it, and found that the hand of my watch had crept on but a few minutes in the interval. It was eight minutes past four.

I scrambled up—numbed and inert—with that peculiar sense of panic which sometimes follows an uneasy sleep. What folly to have been frittering time away within sight of my goal at an hour when no doubt the cathedral would soon be closed to visitors, and abandoned for the night to its own secret ruminations. I hastened down the steep rounded incline of the hill, and having skirted under the sunlit expanse of the walls, came presently to the south door, only to discover that my forebodings had been justified, and that it was already barred and bolted. The discovery seemed to increase my fatigue fourfold. How foolish it is to obey mere caprices. What a straw is a man!

I glanced up into the beautiful shell of masonry above my head. Shapes and figures in stone it showed in plenty—symbols of an imagination that had flamed and faded, leaving this signature for sole witness—but not a living bird or butterfly. There was but one faint chance left of making an entry. Hunted now, rather than the hunter, I hastened out again into the full blazing flood of sunshine—and once more came within sight of the sea; a sea so near at last that I could hear its enormous sallies and murmurings. Indeed I had not realized until that moment how closely the great western doors of the cathedral abutted on the beach.

It was as if its hospitality had been deliberately designed, not for a people to whom the faith of which it was the shrine had become a weariness and a commonplace, but for the solace of pilgrims from over the ocean. I could see them tumbling into their cockle-boats out of their great hollow ships—sails idle, anchors down; see them leaping ashore and straggling up across the sands to these all-welcoming portals—'Parthians and Medes and Elamites; dwellers in Mesopotamia and in the parts of Egypt about Cyrene; strangers of Rome, Jews and Proselytes—we do hear them speak in our own tongue the wonderful works of God.'

And so at last I found my way into All Hallows—entering by a rounded dwarfish side-door with zigzag mouldings. There hung for corbel to its dripstone a curious leering face, with its forked tongue out, to give me welcome. And an appropriate one, too, for the figure I made!

But once beneath that prodigious roof-tree, I forgot myself and everything that was mine. The hush, the coolness, the unfathomable twilight drifted in on my small human consciousness. Not even the ocean itself is able so completely to receive one into its solacing bosom. Except for the windows over my head, filtering with their stained glass the last western radiance of the sun, there was but little visible colour in those great spaces, and a severe economy of decoration. The stone piers carried their round arches with an almost intimidating impassivity.

By deliberate design, too, or by some illusion of perspective, the whole floor of the building appeared steadily to ascend towards the east, where a dark wooden multitudinously figured rood-screen shut off the choir and the high altar from the nave. I seemed to have exchanged one universal actuality for another: the burning world of nature, for this oasis of quiet. Here, the wings of the imagination need never rest in their flight out of the wilderness into the unknown.

Thus resting, I must again have fallen asleep. And so swiftly can even the merest freshet of sleep affect the mind, that when my eyes opened, I was completely at a loss.

Where was I? What demon of what romantic chasm had swept my poor drowsy body into this immense haunt? The din and clamour of an horrific dream whose fainting rumour was still in my ear, became suddenly stilled. Then at one and the same moment, a sense of utter dismay at earthly surroundings no longer serene and peaceful, but grim and forbidding, flooded my mind, and I became aware that I was no longer alone. Twenty or thirty paces away, and a little this side of the rood-screen, an old man was standing.

To judge from the black and purple velvet and tassel-tagged gown he wore, he was a verger. He had not yet realized, it seemed, that a visitor shared his solitude. And yet he was listening. His head was craned forward and leaned sideways on his rusty shoulders. As I steadily watched him, he raised his eyes, and with a peculiar stealthy deliberation scanned the complete upper regions of the northern transept. Not the faintest rumour of any sound that may have attracted his attention reached me where I sat. Perhaps a wild bird had made its entry through a broken pane of glass and

with its cry had at the same moment awakened me and caught his attention. Or maybe the old man was waiting for some fellow-occupant to join him from above

I continued to watch him. Even at this distance, the silvery twilight cast by the clerestory windows was sufficient to show me, though vaguely, his face: the high sloping nose, the lean cheekbones and protruding chin. He continued so long in the same position that I at last determined to break in on his reverie.

At sound of my footsteps his head sunk cautiously back upon his shoulders; and he turned; and then motionlessly surveyed me as I drew near. He resembled one of those old men whom Rembrandt delighted in drawing: the knotted hands, the black drooping eyebrows, the wide thin-lipped ecclesiastical mouth, the intent cavernous dark eyes beneath the heavy folds of their lids. White as a miller with dust, hot and draggled, I was hardly the kind of visitor that any self-respecting custodian would warmly welcome, but he greeted me none the less with every mark of courtesy.

I apologized for the lateness of my arrival, and explained it as best I could. 'Until I caught sight of you,' I concluded lamely, 'I hadn't ventured very far in: otherwise I might have found myself a prisoner for the night. It must be dark in here when there is no moon.'

The old man smiled—but wryly. 'As a matter of fact, sir,' he replied, 'the cathedral is closed to visitors at four—at such times, that is, when there is no afternoon service. Services are not as frequent as they were. But visitors are rare too. In winter, in particular, you notice the gloom—as you say, sir. Not that I ever spend the night here: though I am usually last to leave. There's the risk of fire to be thought of and...I think I should have detected your presence here, sir. One becomes accustomed after many years.'

There was the usual trace of official pedantry in his voice, but it was more pleasing than otherwise. Nor did he show any wish to be rid of me. He continued his survey, although his eye was a little absent and his attention seemed to be divided.

'I thought perhaps I might be able to find a room for the night and really explore the cathedral to-morrow morning. It has been a tiring journey; I come from B—'

'Ah, from B—; it is a fatiguing journey, sir, taken on foot. I used to walk in there to see a sick daughter of mine. Carriage parties occasionally make their way here, but not so much as once. We are too far out of the hurly-burly to be much intruded on. Not that them who come to make their worship here are intruders. Far from it. But most that come are mere sightseers. And the fewer of them, I say, in the circumstances, the better.'

Something in what I had said or in my appearance seemed to have reassured him. 'Well, I cannot claim to be a regular churchgoer,' I said. 'I am myself a mere sightseer. And yet—even to sit here for a few minutes is to be reconciled.'

'Ah, reconciled, sir:' the old man repeated, turning away. 'I can well imagine it after that journey on such a day as this. But to live here is another matter.'

'I was thinking of that,' I replied in a foolish attempt to retrieve the position. 'It must, as you say, be desolate enough in the winter—for two-thirds of the year, indeed.'

'We have our storms, sir—the bad with the good,' he agreed, 'and our position is specially prolific of what they call sea-fog. It comes driving in from the sea for days and nights together—gale and mist, so that you can scarcely see your open hand in front of your eyes even in broad daylight. And the noise of it, sir, sweeping across overhead in that wooliness of mist, if you take me, is most peculiar. It's shocking to a stranger. No, sir, we are left pretty much to ourselves when the fine-weather birds are flown.... You'd be astonished at the power of the winds here. There was a mason—a local man too—not above two or three years ago was blown clean off the roof from under the tower—tossed up in the air like an empty sack. But'—and the old man at last allowed his eyes to stray upwards to the roof again—but there's not much doing now.' He seemed to be pondering. 'Nothing open.'

'I mustn't detain you,' I said, 'but you were saying that services are infrequent now. Why is that? When one thinks of—' But tact restrained me.

'Pray don't think of keeping me, sir. It's a part of my duties. But from a remark you let fall I was supposing you may have seen something that appeared, I understand, not many months ago in the newspapers. We lost our dean—Dean Pomfrey—last

November. To all intents and purposes, I mean; and his office has not yet been filled. Between you and me, sir, there's a hitch—though I should wish it to go no further. They are greedy monsters—those newspapers: no respect, no discretion, no decency, in my view. And they copy each other like cats in a chorus.

'We have never wanted to be a notoriety here, sir: and not of late of all times. We must face our own troubles. You'd be astonished how callous the mere sightseer can be. And not only them from over the water whom our particular troubles cannot concern—but far worse—parties as English as you or me. They ask you questions you wouldn't believe possible in a civilized country. Not that they care what becomes of us—not one iota, sir. We talk of them masked-up Inquisitors in olden times, but there's many a human being in our own would enjoy seeing a fellow-creature on the rack if he could get the opportunity. It's a heartless age, sir.'

This was queerish talk in the circumstances: and after all I myself was of the glorious company of the sightseers. I held my peace. And the old man, as if to make amends, asked me if I would care to see any particular part of the building. 'The light is smalling,' he explained, 'but still if we keep to the ground level there'll be a few minutes to spare; and we shall not be interrupted if we go quietly on our way.'

For the moment the reference eluded me: I could only thank him for the suggestion and once more beg him not to put himself to any inconvenience. I explained, too, that though I had no personal acquaintance with Dr. Pomfrey, I had read of his illness in the newspapers. 'Isn't he,' I added a little dubiously, 'the author of *The Church and the Folk*? If so, he must be an exceedingly learned and delightful man.'

'Ay, sir.' The old verger put up a hand towards me. 'You may well say it: a saint if ever there was one. But it's worse than "illness", sir—it's oblivion. And, thank God, the newspapers didn't get hold of more than a bare outline.'

He dropped his voice. 'This way, if you please'; and he led me off gently down the aisle, once more coming to a standstill beneath the roof of the tower. 'What I mean, sir, is that there's very few left in this world who have any place in their minds for a sacred confidence—no

reverence, sir. They would as lief All Hallows and all it stands for were swept away tomorrow, demolished to the dust. And that gives me the greatest caution with whom I speak. But sharing one's troubles is sometimes a relief. If it weren't so, why do those Catholics have their wooden boxes all built for the purpose? What else, I ask you, is the meaning of their fasts and penances?

'You see, sir, I am myself, and have been for upwards of twelve years now, the dean's verger. In the sight of no respecter of persons—of offices and dignities, that is, I take it—I might claim to be even an elder brother. And our dean, sir, was a man who was all things to all men. No pride of place, no vauntingness, none of your apron-and-gaiter high-and-mightiness whatsoever, sir. And then that! And to come on us without warning; or at least without warning as could be taken as such.' I followed his eyes into the darkening stony spaces above us; a light like tarnished silver lay over the soundless vaultings. But so, of course, dusk, either of evening or daybreak, would affect the ancient stones. Nothing moved there.

'You must understand, sir,' the old man was continuing, 'the procession for divine service proceeds from the vestry over yonder out through those wrought-iron gates and so under the rood-screen and into the chancel there. Visitors are admitted on showing a card or a word to the verger in charge; but not otherwise. If you stand a pace or two to the right, you will catch a glimpse of the altar-screen—fourteenth-century work, Bishop Robert de Beaufort—and a unique example of the age. But what I was saying is that when we proceed for the services out of here into there, it has always been our custom to keep pretty close together; more seemly and decent, sir, than straggling in like so many sheep.'

'Besides, sir, aren't we at such times in the manner of an array, "marching as to war", if you take me: it's a lesson in objects. The third verger leading: then the choristers, boys and men, though sadly depleted; then the minor canons; then any other dignitaries who may happen to be present, with the canon in residence; then myself, sir, followed by the dean.'

'There hadn't been much amiss up to then, and on that afternoon, I can vouch—and I've repeated it ad nauseum—there was not a single stranger out in this beyond here, sir—nave or transepts. Not within view, that is: one can't be expected to see through four feet of Norman stone. Well, sir, we had gone on our way, and I had actually turned about as usual to bow Dr. Pomfrey into his stall,

when I found to my consternation, to my consternation, I say, he wasn't there! It alarmed me, sir, and as you might well believe if you knew the full circumstances

'Not that I lost my presence of mind. My first duty was to [Pg 301] see all things to be in order and nothing unseemly to occur. My feelings were another matter. The old gentleman had left the vestry with us: that I knew: I had myself robed 'im as usual, and he in his own manner, smiling with his "Well, Jones, another day gone; another day gone." He was always an anxious gentleman for time, sir. How we spend it and all.'

'As I say, then, he was behind me when we swepp out of the gates. I saw him coming on out of the tail of my eye—we grow accustomed to it, to see with the whole of the eye, I mean. And then—not a vestige; and me—well, sir, nonplussed, as you may imagine. I gave a look and sign at Canon Ockham, and the service proceeded as usual, while I hurried back to the vestry thinking the poor gentleman must have been taken suddenly ill. And yet, sir, I was not surprised to find the vestry vacant, and him not there. I had been expecting matters to come to what you might call a head.'

'As best I could I held my tongue, and a fortunate thing it was that Canon Ockham was then in residence and not Canon Leigh Shougar, though perhaps I am not the one to say it. No, sir, our beloved dean—as pious and unworldly a gentleman as ever graced the Church—was gone for ever. He was not to appear in our midst again. He had been'—and the old man with elevated eyebrows and long lean mouth nearly whispered the words into my ear—'he had been absconded—abducted, sir.'

'Abducted!' I murmured.

The old man closed his eyes, and with trembling lids added, 'He was found, sir, late that night up there in what they call the Trophy Room—sitting in a corner there, weeping. A child. Not a word of what had persuaded him to go or misled him there, not a word of sorrow or sadness, thank God. He didn't know us, sir—didn't know me. Just simple; harmless; memory all gone. Simple, sir.'

It was foolish to be whispering together like this beneath these enormous spaces with not so much as a clothes-moth for sign of life within view. But I even lowered my voice still farther: 'Were there no premonitory symptoms? Had he been failing for long?'

The spectacle of grief in any human face is afflicting, but in a face as aged and resigned as this old man's—I turned away in remorse the moment the question was out of my lips; emotion is a human solvent and a sort of friendliness had sprung up between us.

'If you will just follow me,' he whispered, 'there's a little place where I make my ablutions that might be of service, sir. We would converse there in better comfort. I am sometimes reminded of those words in Ecclesiastes: "And a bird of the air shall tell of the matter." There is not much in our poor human affairs, sir, that was not known to the writer of that book.'

He turned and led the way with surprising celerity, gliding along in his thin-soled, square-toed, clerical spring-side boots; and came to a pause outside a nail-studded door. He opened it with a huge key, and admitted me into a recess under the central tower. We mounted a spiral stone staircase and passed along a corridor hardly more than two feet wide and so dark that now and again I thrust out my finger-tips in search of his black velveted gown to make sure of my guide.

This corridor at length conducted us into a little room whose only illumination I gathered was that of the ebbing dusk from within the cathedral. The old man with trembling rheumatic fingers lit a candle, and thrusting its stick into the middle of an old oak table, pushed open yet another thick oaken door. 'You will find a basin and a towel in there, sir, if you will be so kind.'

I entered. A print of the Crucifixion was tin-tacked to the panelled wall, and beneath it stood a tin basin and jug on a stand. Never was water sweeter. I laved my face and hands and drank deep; my throat like a parched river-course after a drought. What appeared to be a tarnished censer lay in one corner of the room; a pair of seven-branched candlesticks shared a recess with a mouse-trap and a book. My eyes passed wearily yet gratefully from one to another of these mute discarded objects while I stood drying my hands.

When I returned, the old man was standing motionless before the spike-barred grill of the window, peering out and down.

'You asked me, sir,' he said, turning his lank waxen face into the feeble rays of the candle, 'you asked me, sir, a question which, if I understood you aright, was this: Was there anything that had occurred previous that would explain what I have been telling you? Well, sir, it's a long story, and one best restricted to them perhaps that have the goodwill of things at heart. All Hallows, I might say, sir, is my second home. I have been here, boy and man, for close on fifty-five years—have seen four bishops pass away and have served under no less than five several deans, Dr. Pomfrey, poor gentleman, being the last of the five.'

'If such a word could be excused, sir, it's no exaggeration to say that Canon Leigh Shougar is a greenhorn by comparison; which may in part be why he has never quite hit it off, as they say, with Canon Ockham. Or even with Archdeacon Trafford, though he's another kind of gentleman altogether. And he is at present abroad. He had what they call a breakdown in health, sir.'

'Now in my humble opinion, what was required was not only wisdom and knowledge but simple common sense. In the circumstances I am about to mention, it serves no purpose for any of us to be talking too much; to be for ever sitting at a table with shut doors and finger on lip, and discussing what to most intents and purposes would hardly be called evidence at all, sir. What is the use of argufying, splitting hairs, objurgating about trifles, when matters are sweeping rapidly on from bad to worse. I say it with all due respect and not, I hope, thrusting myself into what doesn't concern me: Dr. Pomfrey might be with us now in his own self and reason if only common caution had been observed.'

'But now that the poor gentleman is gone beyond all that, there is no hope of action or agreement left, none whatsoever. They meet and they meet, and they have now one expert now another down from London, and even from the continent. And I don't say they are not knowledgable gentlemen either, nor a pride to their profession. But why not tell all? Why keep back the very secret of what we know? That's what I am asking. And, what's the answer? Why simply that what they don't want to believe, what runs counter to their hopes and wishes and credibilities—and comfort—in this world, that's what they keep out of sight as long as decency permits.'

'Canon Leigh Shougar knows, sir, what I know. And how, I ask, is he going to get to grips with it at this late day if he refuses to acknowledge that such things are what every fragment of evidence goes to prove that they are. It's we, sir, and not the rest of the heedless world outside, who in the long and the short of it are responsible. And what I say is: no power or principality here or hereunder can take possession of a place while those inside have faith enough to keep them out. But once let that falter—the seas are in. And when I say no power, sir, I mean—with all deference—even Satan himself.' The lank face had set at the word like a wax mask. The black eyes beneath the heavy lids were fixed on mine with an acute intensity and—though more inscrutable things haunted them—with an unflinching courage. So dense a hush hung about us that the very stones of the walls seemed to be of silence solidified. It is curious what a refreshment of spirit a mere tin basinful of water may be. I stood leaning against the edge of the table so that the candlelight still rested on my companion.

'What is wrong here?' I asked him baldly.

He seemed not to have expected so direct an inquiry. 'Wrong, sir? Why, if I might make so bold,' he replied with a wan, far-away smile and gently drawing his hand down one[Pg 305] of the velvet lapels of his gown, 'if I might make so bold, sir, I take it that you have come as a direct answer to prayer.'

His voice faltered. 'I am an old man now, and nearly at the end of my tether. You must realize, if you please, that I can't get any help that I can understand. I am not doubting that the gentlemen I have mentioned have only the salvation of the cathedral at heart—the cause, sir; and a graver responsibility yet. But they refuse to see how close to the edge of things we are: and how we are drifting.'

'Take mere situation. So far as my knowledge tells me, there is no sacred edifice in the whole kingdom—of a piece, that is, with All Hallows not only in mere size and age but in what I might call sanctity and tradition—that is so open—open, I mean, sir, to attack of this peculiar and terrifying nature.'

'Terrifying?'

‘Terrifying, sir; though I hold fast to what wits my Maker has bestowed on me. Where else, may I ask, would you expect the powers of darkness to congregate in open besiegement than in this narrow valley? First, the sea out there. Are you aware, sir, that ever since living remembrance flood-tide has been gnawing and mumbling its way into this bay to the extent of three or four feet per annum? Forty inches, and forty inches, and forty inches corroding on and on: Watch it, sir, man and boy as I have these sixty years past and then make a century of it. Not to mention positive leaps and bounds.

‘And now, think a moment of the floods and gales that fall upon us autumn and winter through and even in spring, when this valley is liker paradise to young eyes than any place on earth. They make the roads from the nearest towns well-nigh impassable; which means that for some months of the year we are to all intents and purposes clean cut off from the rest of the world—as the Schindels out there are from the mainland. Are you aware, sir, I continue, that as we stand now we are above a mile from traces of the nearest human habitation, and them merely the relics of a burnt-out old farmstead? I warrant that if (and which God forbid) you had been shut up here during the coming night, and it was a near thing but what you weren’t—I warrant you might have shouted yourself dumb out of the nearest window if window you could reach—and not a human soul to heed or help you.’

I shifted my hands on the table. It was tedious to be asking questions that received only such vague and evasive replies: and it is always a little disconcerting in the presence of a stranger to be spoken to so close, and with such positiveness.

‘Well’, I smiled, ‘I hope I should not have disgraced my nerves to such an extreme as that. As a small boy, one of my particular fancies was to spend a night in a pulpit. There’s a cushion, you know!’

The old man’s solemn glance never swerved from my eyes. ‘But I take it, sir,’ he said, ‘if you had ventured to give out a text up there in the dark hours, your jocular young mind would not have been prepared for any kind of a congregation?’

‘You mean,’ I said a little sharply, ‘that the place is haunted?’ The absurd notion flitted across my mind of some wandering tribe of gipsies chancing on a refuge so ample and isolated as this, and taking up its quarters in its secret parts. The old church must be honeycombed with corridors and passages and chambers pretty much like the one in which we were now concealed: and what does ‘cartholic’ imply but an infinite hospitality within prescribed limits? But the old man had taken me at my word.

‘I mean, sir,’ he said firmly, shutting his eyes, ‘that there are devilish agencies at work here.’ He raised his hand. ‘Don’t, I entreat you, dismiss what I am saying as the wanderings of a foolish old man.’ He drew a little nearer. ‘I have heard them with these ears; I have seen them with these eyes; though whether they have any positive substance, sir, is beyond my small knowledge to declare. But what indeed might we expect their substance to be? First: “I take it,” says the Book, “to be such as no man can by learning define, nor by wisdom search out.” Is that so? Then I go by the Book. And next: what does the same Word or very near it (I speak of the Apocrypha) say of their purpose? It says—and correct me if I go astray—“Devils are creatures made by God, and that for vengeance.”

‘So far, so good, sir. We stop when we can go no further. Vengeance. But of their power, of what they can do, I can give you definite evidences. It would be a byword if once the rumour was spread abroad. And if it is not so, why, I ask, does every expert that comes here leave us in haste and in dismay? They go off with their tails between their legs. They see, they grope in, but they don’t believe. They invent reasons. And they hasten to leave us!’ His face shook with the emphasis he laid upon the word. ‘Why? Why, because the experience is beyond their knowledge, sir.’ He drew back breathless and, as I could see, profoundly moved.

‘But surely,’ I said, ‘every old building is bound in time to show symptoms of decay. Half the cathedrals in England, half its churches, even, of any age, have been “restored”—and in many cases with ghastly results. This new grouting and so on. Why, only the other day.... All I mean is, why should you suppose mere wear and tear should be caused by any other agency than —’

The old man turned away. ‘I must apologize,’ he interrupted me with his inimitable admixture of modesty and dignity. ‘I am a

poor mouth at explanations, sir. Decay—stress—strain—settling—dissolution: I have heard those words bandied from lip to lip like a game at cup and ball. They fill me with nausea. Why, I am speaking not of dissolution, sir, but of repairs, restorations. Not decay, strengthening. Not a corroding loss, an awful progress. I could show you places—and chiefly obscured from direct view and difficult of a close examination, sir, where stones lately as rotten as pumice and as fretted as a sponge have been replaced by others fresh-quarried—and nothing of their kind within twenty miles.

‘There are spots where massive blocks a yard or more square have been pushed into place by sheer force. All Hallows is safer at this moment than it has been for three hundred years. They meant well—them who came to see, full of talk and fine language, and went dumb away. I grant you they meant well. I allow that. They hummed and they hawed. They smirked this and they shrugged that. But at heart, sir, they were cowed—horrified: all at a loss. Their very faces showed it. But if you ask me for what purpose such doings are afoot—I have no answer; none.

‘But now, supposing you yourself, sir, were one of them, with your repute at stake, and you were called in to look at a house which the owners of it and them who had it in trust were disturbed by its being re-edificated and restored by some agency unknown to them. Supposing that! Why,’ and he rapped with his knuckles on the table, ‘being human and not one of us mightn’t you be going away too with mouth shut, because you didn’t want to get talked about to your disadvantage? And wouldn’t you at last dismiss the whole thing as a foolish delusion, in the belief that living in out-of-the-way parts like these cuts a man off from the world, breeds maggots in the mind?’

‘I assure you, sir, they don’t—not even Canon Ockham himself to the full—they don’t believe even me. And yet, when they have their meetings of the Chapter they talk and wrangle round and round about nothing else. I can bear the other without a murmur. What God sends, I say, we humans deserve. We have laid ourselves open to it. But when you buttress up blindness and wickedness with downright folly, why then, sir, I sometimes fear for my own reason.’

He set his shoulders as square as his aged frame would permit, and with fingers clutching the lapels beneath his chin, he stood gazing out into the darkness through that narrow inward window.

‘Ah, sir,’ he began again, ‘I have not spent sixty years in this solitary place without paying heed to my own small wandering thoughts and instincts. Look at your newspapers, sir. What they call the Great War is over—and he’d be a brave man who would take an oath before heaven that that was only of human designing—and yet what do we see around us? Nothing but strife and juggleries and hatred and contempt and discord wherever you look. I am no scholar, sir, but so far as my knowledge and experience carry me, we human beings are living to-day merely from hand to mouth. We learn to-day what ought to have been done yesterday, and yet are at a loss to know what’s to be done to-morrow.’

‘And the Church, sir. God forbid I should push my way into what does not concern me; and if you had told me half an hour gone by that you were a regular churchman, I shouldn’t be pouring out all this to you now. It wouldn’t be seemly. But being not so gives me confidence. By merely listening you can help me, sir; though you can’t help us. Centuries ago—and in my humble judgement, rightly—broke away from the parent stem and rooted ourselves in our own soil. But, right or wrong, doesn’t that of itself, I ask you, make us all the more open to attack from him who never wearies in going to and fro in the world seeking whom he may devour?’

‘I am not wishing you to take sides. But a gentleman doesn’t scoff; you don’t find him jeering at what he doesn’t rightly understand. He keeps his own counsel, sir. And that’s where, as I say, Canon Leigh Shougar sets me doubting. He refuses to make allowances; though up there in London things may look different. He gets his company there; and then for him the whole kallyidoscope changes, if you take me.’

The old man scanned me an instant as if inquiring within himself whether, after all, I too might not be one of the outcasts. ‘You see, sir,’ he went on dejectedly, ‘I can bear what may be to come. I can, if need be, live on through what few years may yet remain to me and keep going, as they say. But only if I can be assured that my own inmost senses are not cheating and misleading me. Tell me the worst, and you will have done an old man a service he can never repay. Tell me, on the other hand, that I am merely groping along in a network of devilish delusion, sir—well, in that case I hope to be with my master,

with Dr. Pomfrey, as soon as possible. We were all children once; and now there’s nothing worse in this world for him to come into, in a manner of speaking.

‘Oh, sir, I sometimes wonder if what we call childhood and growing up isn’t a copy of the fate of our ancient forefathers. In the beginning of time there were Fallen Angels, we are told; but even if it weren’t there in Holy Writ, we might have learnt it of our own fears and misgivings. I sometimes find myself looking at a young child with little short of awe, sir, knowing that within its mind is a scene of peace and paradise of which we older folk have no notion, and which will fade away out of it, as life wears on, like the mere tabernacling of a dream.’

There was no trace of unction in his speech, though the phraseology might suggest it, and he smiled at me as if in reassurance. ‘You see, sir—if I have any true notion of the matter—then I say, heaven is dealing very gently with Dr. Pomfrey. He has gone back, and, I take it, his soul is elsewhere and at rest.’

He had come a pace or two nearer, and the candlelight now cast grotesque shadows in the hollows of his brows and cheekbones, silvering his long scanty hair. The eyes, dimming with age, were fixed on mine as if in incommunicable entreaty. I was at a loss to answer him.

He dropped his hands to his sides. ‘The fact is,’ he looked cautiously about him, ‘what I am now being so bold as to suggest, though it’s a familiar enough experience to me, may put you in actual physical danger. But then, duty’s duty, and a deed of kindness from stranger to stranger quite another matter. You seem to have come, if I may say so, in the nick of time; that was all. On the other hand, we can leave the building at once if you are so minded. In any case we must be gone well before dark sets in; even mere human beings are best not disturbed at any night-work they may be after. The dark brings recklessness: conscience cannot see as clear in the dark. Besides, I once delayed too long myself. There is not much of day left even now, though I see by the almanac there should be a slip of moon to-night—unless the sky is overclouded. All that I’m meaning is that our all-in-all, so to speak, is the calm untrammelled evidence of the outer senses, sir. And there comes a time when—well, when one hesitates to trust one’s own.’

I have read somewhere that it is only its setting—the shape, the line, the fold, the angle of the lid and so on—that gives its finer shades of meaning and significance to the human eye. Looking into his, even in that narrow and melancholy illumination, was like pondering over a grey, salt, desolate pool—such as sometimes neighbours the sea on a flat and dangerous coast.

Perhaps if I had been a little less credulous, or less exhausted, I should by now have begun to doubt this old creature’s sanity. And yet, surely, at even the faintest contact with the insane, a sentinel in the mind sends up flares and warnings; the very landscape changes; there is a sense of insecurity. If, too, the characters inscribed by age and experience on a man’s face can be evidence of goodness and simplicity, then my companion was safe enough. To trust in his sagacity was another matter.

But then, there was All Hallows itself to take into account. That first glimpse from my green headland of its louring yet lovely walls had been strangely moving. There are buildings (almost as though they were once copies of originals now half-forgotten in the human mind) that have a singular influence on the imagination. Even now in this remote candle-lit room, immured between its massive stones, the vast edifice seemed to be gently and furtively fretting its impression on my mind.

I glanced again at the old man: he had turned aside as if to leave me, unbiased, to my own decision. How would a lifetime spent between these sombre walls have affected me, I wondered? Surely it would be an act of mere decency to indulge their worn-out hermit! He had appealed to me. If I were ten times more reluctant to follow him, I could hardly refuse. Not at any rate without risking a retreat as humiliating as that of the architectural experts he had referred to—with my tail between my legs.

‘I only wish I could hope to be of any real help.’

He turned about; his expression changed, as if at the coming of a light. ‘Why, then, sir, let us be gone at once. You are with me, sir: that was all I hoped and asked. And now there’s no time to waste.’

He tilted his head to listen a moment—with that large, flat, shell-like ear of his which age alone seems to produce. ‘Matches and candle, sir,’ he had lowered his voice to a whisper, ‘but—though we mustn’t lose each other; you and me, I mean—not, I think, a naked light. What I would suggest, if you have no objection, is your kindly grasping my gown. There is a kind of streamer here, you see—as if made for the purpose. There will be a good deal of up-and-downing, but I know the building blindfold and as you might say inch by inch. And now that the bell-ringers have given up ringing it is more in my charge than ever.’

He stood back and looked at me with folded hands, a whimsical childlike smile on his aged face. ‘I sometimes think to myself I’m like the sentry, sir, in that play by William Shakespeare. I saw it, sir, years ago, on my only visit to London—when I was a boy. If ever there were a villain for all his fine talk and all, commend me to that ghost. I see him yet.’

Whisper though it was, a sort of chirrup had come into his voice, like that of a cricket in a baker’s shop. I took tight hold of the velveteed tag of his gown. He opened the door, pressed the box of safety matches into my hand, himself grasped the candlestick and then blew out the light. We were instantly marooned in an impenetrable darkness. ‘Now, sir, if you would kindly remove your walking shoes,’ he muttered close in my ear, ‘we should proceed with less noise. I shan’t hurry you. And please to tug at the streamer if you need attention. In a few minutes the blackness will be less intense.’

As I stooped down to loose my shoe-laces I heard my heart thumping merrily away. It had been listening to our conversation apparently! I slung my shoes round my neck—as I had often done as a boy when going paddling—and we set out on our expedition.

I have endured too often the nightmare of being lost and abandoned in the stony bowels of some strange and prodigious building to take such an adventure lightly. I clung, I confess, desperately tight to my lifeline and we groped steadily onward—my guide ever and again turning back to mutter warning or encouragement in my ear.

Now I found myself steadily ascending; and then in a while, feeling my way down flights of hollowly worn stone steps, and anon brushing along a gallery or corkscrewing up a newel staircase so narrow that my shoulders all but touched the walls on either side. In spite of the sepulchral chill in these bowels of the cathedral, I was soon suffocatingly hot, and the effort to see became intolerably fatiguing. Once, to recover our breath we paused opposite a slit in the thickness of the masonry, at which to breathe the tepid sweetness of the outer air. It was faint with the scent of wild flowers and cool of the sea. And presently after, at a barred window, high overhead, I caught a glimpse of the night’s first stars.

We then turned inward once more, ascending yet another spiral staircase. And now the intense darkness had thinned a little, the groined roof above us becoming faintly discernible. A fresher air softly fanned my cheek; and then trembling fingers groped over my breast, and, cold and bony, clutched my own.

‘Dead still here, sir, if you please.’ So close sounded the whispered syllables the voice might have been a messenger’s within my own consciousness. ‘Dead still, here. There’s a drop of some sixty or seventy feet a few paces on.’

I peered out across the abyss, conscious, as it seemed, of the huge superincumbent weight of the noble fretted roof only a small space now immediately above our heads. As we approached the edge of this stony precipice, the gloom paled a little, and I guessed that we must be standing in some coign of the southern transept, for what light the evening skies now afforded was clearer towards the right. On the other hand, it seemed the northern windows opposite us were most of them boarded up, or obscured in some fashion. Gazing out, I could detect scaffolding poles—like knitting needles—thrust out from the walls and a balloon-like spread of canvas above them. For the moment my ear was haunted by what appeared to be the droning of an immense insect. But this presently ceased. I fancy it was internal only.

‘You will understand, sir,’ breathed the old man close beside me—and we still stood, grotesquely enough, hand in hand—the scaffolding over there has been in position a good many months now. It was put up when the last gentleman came down from London to inspect the fabric. And there it’s been left ever since. Now, sir!—though I implore you to be cautious.’

I hardly needed the warning. With one hand clutching my box of matches, the fingers of the other interlaced with my companion’s, I strained every sense. And yet I could detect not the faintest stir or murmur under that wide-spreading roof. Only a hush as profound as that which must reign in the Royal Chamber of the pyramid of Cheops faintly swirled in the labyrinths of my ear.

How long we stayed in this position I cannot say; but minutes sometimes seem like hours. And then, without the slightest warning, I became aware of a peculiar and incessant vibration. It is impossible to give a name to it. It suggested the remote whirring of an enormous mill-stone, or that—though without definite pulsation—of revolving wings, or even the spinning of an immense top.

In spite of his age, my companion apparently had ears as acute as mine. He had clutched me tighter a full ten seconds before I myself became aware of this disturbance of the air. He pressed closer. ‘Do you see that, sir?’

I gazed and gazed, and saw nothing. Indeed even in what I had seemed to hear I might have been deceived. Nothing is more treacherous in certain circumstances—except possibly the eye—than the ear. It magnifies, distorts, and may even invent. As instantaneously as I had become aware of it, the murmur had ceased. And then—though I cannot be certain—it seemed the dingy and voluminous spread of canvas over there had perceptibly trembled, as if a huge cautious hand had been thrust out to draw it aside. No time was given me to make sure. The old man had hastily withdrawn me into the opening of the wall through which we had issued; and we made no pause in our retreat until we had come again to the narrow slit of window which I have spoken of and could refresh ourselves with a less stagnant air. We stood here resting awhile.

‘Well, sir?’ he inquired at last, in the same flat muffled tones.

‘Do you ever pass along here alone?’ I whispered.

‘Oh, yes, sir. I make it a habit to be the last to leave—and often the first to come; but I am usually gone by this hour.’

I looked close at the dim face in profile against that narrow oblong of night. 'It is so difficult to be sure of oneself,' I said. 'Have you ever actually encountered anything—near at hand, I mean?'

'I keep a sharp look-out, sir. Maybe they don't think me of enough importance to molest—the last rat, as they say.'

'But have you?'—I might myself have been communicating with the phantasmal genius loci of All Hallows—our muffled voices; this intense caution and secret listening; the slight breathlessness, as if at any instant one's heart were ready for flight: 'But have you?'

'Well yes, sir,' he said. 'And in this very gallery. They nearly had me, sir. But by good fortune there's a recess a little further on—stored up with some old fragments of carving, from the original building, sixth-century, so it's said: stone-capitals, heads and hands, and such like. I had had my warning, and managed to leap in there and conceal myself. But only just in time. Indeed, sir, I confess I was in such a condition of terror and horror I turned my back.'

'You mean you heard, but didn't look? And—something came?'

'Yes, sir, I seemed to be reduced to no bigger than a child, huddled up there in that corner. There was a sound like clanging metal—but I don't think it was metal. It drew near at a furious speed, then passed me, making a filthy gust of wind. For some instants I couldn't breathe; the air was gone.'

'And no other sound?'

'No other, sir, except out of the distance a noise like the sounding of a stupendous kind of gibberish. A calling; or so it seemed—no human sound. The air shook with it. You see, sir, I myself wasn't of any consequence, I take it—unless a mere obstruction in the way. But—I have heard it said somewhere that the rarity of these happenings is only because it's a pain and torment and not any sort of pleasure for such beings, such apparitions, sir, good or bad, to visit our outward world. That's what I have heard said; though I can go no further.'

'The time I'm telling you of was in the early winter—November. There was a dense sea-fog over the valley, I remember. It eddied through that opening there into the candlelight like

flowing milk. I never light up now: and, if may be forgiven the boast, sir, I seem to have almost forgotten how to be afraid. After all, in any walk of life a man can only do his best, and if there weren't such opposition and hindrances in high places I should have nothing to complain of. What is anybody's life, sir (come past the gaiety of youth), but marking time.... Did you hear anything then, sir?'

His gentle monotonous mumbling ceased and we listened together. But every ancient edifice has voices and soundings of its own: there was nothing audible that I could put a name to, only what seemed to be a faint perpetual stir or whirr of grinding such as (to one's over-stimulated senses) the stablest stones set one on top of the other with an ever slightly varying weight and stress might be likely to make perceptible in a world of matter. A world which, after all, they say, is itself in unimaginably rapid rotation, and under the tyranny of time.

'No, I hear nothing,' I answered: 'but please don't think I am doubting what you say. Far from it. You must remember I am a stranger, and that therefore the influence of the place cannot but be less apparent to me. And you have no help in this now?'

'No, sir. Not now. But even at the best of times we had small company hereabouts, and no money. Not for any substantial outlay, I mean. And not even the boldest suggests making what's called a public appeal. It's a strange thing to me, sir, but whenever the newspapers get hold of anything, they turn it into a byword and a sham. Yet how can they help themselves?—with no beliefs to guide them and nothing to stay their mouths except about what for sheer human decency's sake they daren't talk about. But then, who am I to complain? And now, sir,' he continued with a sigh of utter weariness, 'if you are sufficiently rested, would you perhaps follow me on to the roof? It is the last visit I make—though by rights perhaps I should take in what there is of the tower. But I'm too old now for that—clambering and climbing over naked beams; and the ladders are not so safe as they were.'

We had not far to go. The old man drew open a squat heavily-ironed door at the head of a flight of wooden steps. It was latched but not bolted, and admitted us at once to the leaden roof of the building and to the immense amphitheatre of evening. The last faint hues of sunset were fading in the west; and silver-bright Spica shared with the tilted crescent of the moon the serene lagoon-like expanse of sky above the sea. Even at this height, the air was audibly stirred with the low lullaby of the tide.

The staircase by which we had come out was surmounted by a flat penthouse roof about seven feet high. We edged softly along, then paused once more; to find ourselves now all but tête-à-tête with the gigantic figures that stood sentinel at the base of the buttresses to the unfinished tower.

The tower was so far unfinished, indeed, as to wear the appearance of the ruinous; besides which, what appeared to be scars and stains as if of fire were detectable on some of its stones, reminding me of the legend which years before I had chanced upon, that this stretch of coast had more than once been visited centuries ago by pillaging Norsemen.

The night was unfathomably clear and still. On our left rose the conical bluff of the headland crowned with the solitary grove of trees beneath which I had taken refuge from the blinding sunshine that very afternoon. Its grasses were now hoary with faintest moonlight. Far to the right stretched the flat cold plain of the Atlantic—that enormous darkened looking-glass of space; only a distant lightship ever and again stealthily signalling to us with a lean phosphoric finger from its outermost reaches.

The mere sense of that abyss of space—its waste powdered with the stars of the Milky Way; the mere presence of the stony leviathan on whose back we two humans now stood, dwarfed into insignificance beside these gesturing images of stone, were enough of themselves to excite the imagination. And—whether matter-of-fact or pure delusion—this old verger's insinuations that the cathedral was now menaced by some inconceivable danger and assault had set my nerves on edge. My feet were numb as the lead they stood upon; while the tips of my fingers tingled as if a powerful electric discharge were coursing through my body.

We moved gently on—the spare shape of the old man a few steps ahead, peering cautiously to right and left of him as we advanced. Once with a hasty gesture he drew me back and fixed his eyes for a full minute on a figure—at two removes—which was silhouetted at that moment against the starry emptiness: a forbidding thing enough, viewed in this vague luminosity, which seemed in spite of the unmoving stare that I fixed on it to be perceptibly stirring on its windworn pedestal.

But no; 'All's well!' the old man had mutely signalled to me, and we pushed on. Slowly and cautiously; indeed I had time to notice in passing that this particular figure held stretched in its right hand a bent bow, and was crowned with a high weather-worn stone coronet. One and all were frigid company. At last we completed our circuit of the tower, had come back to the place we had set out from, and stood eyeing one another like two conspirators in the clear dusk. Maybe there was a tinge of incredulity on my face.

'No, sir,' murmured the old man, 'I expected no other. The night is uncommonly quiet. I've noticed that before. They seem to leave us at peace on nights of quiet. We must turn in again and be getting home.'

Until that moment I had thought no more of where I was to sleep or to get food, nor had even realized how famished with hunger I was. Nevertheless, the notion of fumbling down again out of the open air into the narrow inward blackness of the walls from which we had just issued was singularly uninviting. Across these wide flat stretches of roof there was at least space for flight, and there were recesses for concealment. To gain a moment's respite, I inquired if I should have much difficulty in getting a bed in the village. And as I had hoped, the old man himself offered me hospitality.

I thanked him; but still hesitated to follow, for at that moment I was trying to discover what peculiar effect of dusk and darkness a moment before had deceived me into the belief that some small animal—a dog, a spaniel I should have guessed—had suddenly and surreptitiously taken cover behind the stone buttress nearby. But that apparently had been a mere illusion. The creature, whatever it might be, was no barker at any rate. Nothing stirred now; and my companion seemed to have noticed nothing amiss.

'You were saying', I pressed him, 'that when repairs—restorations—of the building were in contemplation, even the experts were perplexed by what they discovered? What did they actually say?'

'Say, sir!' Our voices sounded as small and meaningless up here as those of grasshoppers in a noonday meadow. 'Examine that balustrade which you are leaning against at this minute. Look at that gnawing and fretting—that furrowing above the lead. All that is honest wear

and tear—constant weathering of the mere elements, sir—rain and wind and snow and frost. That's honest nature-work, sir. But now compare it, if you please, with this St. Mark here; and remember, sir, these images were intended to be part and parcel of the fabric as you might say, sentries on a castle—symbols, you understand.'

I stooped close under the huge grey creature of stone until my eyes were scarcely more than six inches from its pedestal. And, unless the moon deceived me, I confess I could find not the slightest trace of fret or friction. Far from it. The stone had been grotesquely decorated in low relief with a gaping crocodile—a two-headed crocodile; and the angles, knobs and undulations of the creature were cut as sharp as with a knife in cheese. I drew back.

'Now cast your glance upwards, sir. Is that what you would call a saintly shape and gesture?'

What appeared to represent an eagle was perched on the image's lifted wrist—an eagle resembling a vulture. The head beneath it was poised at an angle of defiance—its ears abnormally erected on the skull; the lean right forearm extended with pointing forefinger as if in derision. Its stony gaze was fixed upon the stars; its whole aspect was hostile, sinister and intimidating. I drew aside. The faintest puff of milk-warm air from over the sea stirred on my cheek.

'Ay, sir, and so with one or two of the rest of them,' the old man commented, as he watched me, 'there are other wills than the Almighty's.'

At this, the pent-up excitement within me broke bounds. This nebulous insinuation talk!—I all but lost my temper. 'I can't, for the life of me, understand what you are saying,' I exclaimed in a voice that astonished me with its shrill volume of sound in that intense lofty quiet. 'One doesn't repair in order to destroy.'

The old man met me without flinching. 'No, sir? Say you so? And why not? Are there not two kinds of change in this world?—a building-up and a breaking-down? To give strength and endurance for evil or misguided purposes, would that be power wasted, if such was your aim? Why, sir, isn't that true even of the human mind and heart? We here are on the outskirts, I grant, but where would you expect the enemy to show himself unless in the outer defences? An institution may be beyond saving, sir: it may be being restored for a worse

destruction. And a hundred trumpeting voices would make no difference when the faith and life within is tottering to its fall.'

Somehow, this muddle of metaphors reassured me. Obviously the old man's wits had worn a little thin: he was the victim of an intelligible but monstrous hallucination.

'And yet you are taking it for granted,' I expostulated, 'that, if what you say is true, a stranger could be of the slightest help. A visitor—mind you—who hasn't been inside the doors of a church, except in search of what is old and obsolete, for years.'

The old man laid a trembling hand upon my sleeve. The folly of it—with my shoes hanging like ludicrous millstones round my neck!

'If you please, sir,' he pleaded, 'have a little patience with me. I'm preaching at nobody. I'm not even hinting that them outside the fold circumstantially speaking aren't of the flock. All in good time, sir; the Almighty's time. Maybe—with all due respect—it's from them within we have most to fear. And indeed, sir, believe an old man: I could never express the gratitude I feel. You have given me the occasion to unbosom myself, to make a clean breast, as they say. All Hallows is my earthly home, and—well, there, let us say no more. You couldn't help me—except only by your presence here. God alone knows who can!'

At that instant, a dull enormous rumble reverberated from within the building—as if a huge boulder or block of stone had been shifted or dislodged in the fabric; a peculiar grinding nerve-wracking sound. And for the fraction of a second the flags on which we stood seemed to tremble beneath our feet.

The fingers tightened on my arm. 'Come, sir; keep close; we must be gone at once' the quavering old voice whispered; 'we have stayed too long.'

But we emerged into the night at last without mishap. The little western door, above which the grinning head had welcomed me on my arrival, admitted us to terra firma again, and we made our way up a deep sandy track, bordered by clumps of hemp agrimony and fennel and hemlock, with viper's bugloss and sea-poppo blooming in the gentle dusk of night at our feet. We turned when we reached the summit of this sandy incline and looked back. All Hallows, vague and

enormous, lay beneath us in its hollow, resembling some natural prehistoric outcrop of that sea-worn rock-bound coast; but strangely human and saturnine

‘The lovely thing!’ I muttered, staring at him. ‘Where is he now, I wonder?’ His mother lifted her face and smiled at me with a drowsy ecstatic happiness, then sighed.

The air was mild as milk—a pool of faintest sweetness—gorse, bracken, heather; and not a rumour disturbed its calm, except only the furtive and stertorous sighings of the tide. But far out to sea and beneath the horizon summer lightnings were now in idle play—flickering into the sky like the unfolding of a signal, planet to planet—then gone. That alone, and perhaps too this feeble moonlight glinting on the ancient glass, may have accounted for the faint vitreous glare that seemed ever and again to glitter across the windows of the northern transept far beneath us. And yet how easily deceived is the imagination. This old man’s talk still echoing in my ear, I could have vowed this was no reflection but the glow of some light shining fitfully from within outwards.

And from out of the distance, there came the first prolonged whisper of a wind from over the sea. It was eleven by my watch, the storm after the long heat of the day seemed to be drifting inland; but All Hallows, apparently, had forgotten to wind its clock.

We paused together beside a flowering bush of fuchsia at the wicket-gate leading into his small square of country garden. ‘You’ll forgive me, sir, for mentioning it; but I make it a rule as far as possible to leave all my troubles and misgivings outside when I come home. My daughter is a widow, and not long in that sad condition, so I keep as happy a face as I can on things. And yet: well, sir, I wonder at times if—if a personal sacrifice isn’t incumbent on them that have their object most at heart. I’d go out myself very willingly, sir, I can assure you, if there was any certainty in my mind that it would serve the cause. It would be little to me if —’ He made no attempt to complete the sentence.

On my way to bed, that night, the old man led me in on tiptoe to show me his grandson. His daughter watched me intently as I stooped over the child’s cot—with that bird-like solicitude which all mothers show in the presence of a stranger.

Her small son was of that fairness which almost suggests the unreal. He had flung back his bedclothes—as if innocence in this world needed no covering or defence—and lay at ease, the dews of sleep on lip, cheek, and forehead. He was breathing so quietly that not the least movement of shoulder or narrow breast was perceptible.

Cellini and the explosive birth of The Perseus

In this episode Cellini gives birth to his masterpiece, the bronze Perseus. It almost kills him and I'd argue that – if it's because he is a Verditus magus – this process draws on his life energy so that he is in risk of death to get this final piece of work done.

I would note, because this is Cellini, at the very end his enemies suggest that no human being could possibly have created something as wonderful as what he's created and therefore he must be a demon. I'd link this into the Paganini story. He was such a good player of the violin that he must have been trained by a demon and to one of our far earlier episodes, The self-made man is a monster.

The following was recorded into the public domain by Sue Anderson through LibriVox. Thanks very much Sue. Thanks to Sue's production team.

This is our second last Cellini. The last one has me going through the work plucking out weird bits of medical alchemy. You'd be amazed how Cellini removes iron splinters from his eyes.

Accordingly I strengthened my heart, and with all the forces of my body and my purse, employing what little money still remained to me, I set to work. First I provided myself with several loads of pinewood from the forests of Serristori, in the neighbourhood of Montelupo. While these were on their way, I clothed my Perseus with the clay which I had prepared many months beforehand, in order that it might be duly seasoned. After making its clay tunic (for that is the term used in this art) and properly arming it and fencing it with iron girders, I began to draw the wax out by means of a slow fire. This melted and issued through numerous air-vents I had made; for the more there are of these, the better will the mould fill.

When I had finished drawing off the wax, I constructed a funnel-shaped furnace all round the model of my Perseus. [1] It was built of bricks, so interlaced, the one above the other, that numerous apertures were left for the fire to exhale at. Then I began to lay on wood by degrees, and kept it burning two whole days and nights. At length, when all the wax was gone, and the mould was well baked, I set to work at digging the pit in which to sink it. This I performed with scrupulous regard to all the rules of art. When I had finished that part of my work, I raised the mould by windlasses and stout ropes to a perpendicular position, and suspending it with the greatest care one cubit above the level of the furnace, so that it hung exactly above the middle of the pit, I next lowered it gently down into the very bottom of the furnace, and had it firmly placed with every possible precaution for its safety.

When this delicate operation was accomplished, I began to bank it up with the earth I had excavated; and, ever as the earth grew higher, I introduced its proper air-vents, which were little tubes of earthenware, such as folk use for drains and such-like purposes. [2] At length, I felt sure that it was admirably fixed, and that the

filling-in of the pit and the placing of the air-vents had been properly performed. I also could see that my work people understood my method, which differed very considerably from that of all the other masters in the trade. Feeling confident, then, that I could rely upon them, I next turned to my furnace, which I had filled with numerous pigs of copper and other bronze stuff. The pieces were piled according to the laws of art, that is to say, so resting one upon the other that the flames could play freely through them, in order that the metal might heat and liquefy the sooner. At last I called out heartily to set the furnace going. The logs of pine were heaped in, and, what with the unctuous resin of the wood and the good draught I had given, my furnace worked so well that I was obliged to rush from side to side to keep it going. The labour was more than I could stand; yet I forced myself to strain every nerve and muscle. To increase my anxieties, the workshop took fire, and we were afraid lest the roof should fall upon our heads; while, from the garden, such a storm of wind and rain kept blowing in, that it perceptibly cooled the furnace.

Battling thus with all these untoward circumstances for several hours, and exerting myself beyond even the measure of my powerful constitution, I could at last bear up no longer, and a sudden fever, [3] of the utmost possible intensity, attacked me. I felt absolutely obliged to go and fling myself upon my bed. Sorely against my will having to drag myself away from the spot, I turned to my assistants, about ten or more in all, what with master-founders, hand-workers, country-fellows, and my own special journeymen, among whom was Bernardino Mannellini of Mugello, my apprentice through several years. To him in particular I spoke: "Look, my dear Bernardino, that you observe the rules which I have taught you; do your best with all despatch, for the

metal will soon be fused. You cannot go wrong; these honest men will get the channels ready; you will easily be able to drive back the two plugs with this pair of iron crooks; and I am sure that my mould will fill miraculously. I feel more ill than I ever did in all my life, and verily believe that it will kill me before a few hours are over. [4] Thus, with despair at heart, I left them, and betook myself to bed.

LXXVI

NO sooner had I got to bed, than I ordered my serving-maids to carry food and wine for all the men into the workshop; at the same time I cried: "I shall not be alive tomorrow." They tried to encourage me, arguing that my illness would pass over, since it came from excessive fatigue. In this way I spent two hours battling with the fever, which steadily increased, and calling out continually: "I feel that I am dying." My housekeeper, who was named Mona Fiore da Castel del Rio, a very notable manager and no less warm-hearted, kept chiding me for my discouragement; but, on the other hand, she paid me every kind attention which was possible. However, the sight of my physical pain and moral dejection so affected her, that, in spite of that brave heart of hers, she could not refrain from shedding tears; and yet, so far as she was able, she took good care I should not see them. While I was thus terribly afflicted, I beheld the figure of a man enter my chamber, twisted in his body into the form of a capital S. He raised a lamentable, doleful voice, like one who announces their last hour to men condemned to die upon the scaffold, and spoke these words: "O Benvenuto! your statue is spoiled, and there is no hope whatever of saving it." No sooner had I heard the shriek of that wretch than I gave a howl which might have been heard from the sphere of flame. Jumping from my bed, I seized my clothes and began to dress. The maids, and my lads, and every one who came around to help me, got kicks or blows of the fist, while I kept crying out in lamentation: "Ah!

traitors! enviers! This is an act of treason, done by malice prepense! But I swear by God that I will sift it to the bottom, and before I die will leave such witness to the world of what I can do as shall make a score of mortals marvel."

When I had got my clothes on, I strode with soul bent on mischief toward the workshop; there I beheld the men, whom I had left erewhile in such high spirits, standing stupefied and downcast. I began at once and spoke: "Up with you! Attend to me! Since you have not been able or willing to obey the directions I gave you, obey me now that I am with you to conduct my work in person. Let no one contradict me, for in cases like this we need the aid of hand and hearing, not of advice." When I had uttered these words, a certain Maestro Alessandro Lastricati broke silence and said: "Look you, Benvenuto, you are going to attempt an enterprise which the laws of art do not sanction, and which cannot succeed." I turned upon him with such fury and so full of mischief, that he and all the rest of them exclaimed with one voice: "On then! Give orders! We will obey your least commands, so long as life is left in us." I believe they spoke thus feelingly because they thought I must fall shortly dead upon the ground. I went immediately to inspect the furnace, and found that the metal was all curdled; an accident which we express by "being caked." [1] I told two of the hands to cross the road, and fetch from the house of the butcher Capretta a load of young oak-wood, which had lain dry for above a year; this wood had been previously offered me by Madame Ginevra, wife of the said Capretta. So soon as the first armfuls arrived, I began to fill the grate beneath the furnace. [2] Now oak-wood of that kind heats more powerfully than any other sort of tree; and for this reason, where a slow fire is wanted, as in the case of gun-foundry, alder or pine is preferred. Accordingly, when the logs took fire, oh! how the cake began to stir beneath that awful heat, to glow and sparkle in a blaze! At the same time I kept stirring up the channels, and sent men upon the roof to stop the conflagration,

which had gathered force from the increased combustion in the furnace; also I caused boards, carpets, and other hangings to be set up against the garden, in order to protect us from the violence of the rain.

LXXVII

WHEN I had thus provided against these several disasters, I roared out first to one man and then to another: "Bring this thing here! Take that thing there!" At this crisis, when the whole gang saw the cake was on the point of melting, they did my bidding, each fellow working with the strength of three. I then ordered half a pig of pewter to be brought, which weighed about sixty pounds, and flung it into the middle of the cake inside the furnace. By this means, and by piling on wood and stirring now with pokers and now with iron rods, the curdled mass rapidly began to liquefy. Then, knowing I had brought the dead to life again, against the firm opinion of those ignoramuses, I felt such vigour fill my veins, that all those pains of fever, all those fears of death, were quite forgotten.

All of a sudden an explosion took place, attended by a tremendous flash of flame, as though a thunderbolt had formed and been discharged amongst us. Unwonted and appalling terror astonished every one, and me more even than the rest. When the din was over and the dazzling light extinguished, we began to look each other in the face. Then I discovered that the cap of the furnace had blown up, and the bronze was bubbling over from its source beneath. So I had the mouths of my mould immediately opened, and at the same time drove in the two plugs which kept back the molten metal. But I noticed that it did not flow as rapidly as usual, the reason being probably that the fierce heat of the fire we kindled had consumed its base alloy. Accordingly I sent for all my pewter platters, porringers, and dishes, to the number of some two hundred pieces, and had a portion of them cast, one by one, into the channels, the rest into the furnace.

This expedient succeeded, and every one could now perceive that my bronze was in most perfect liquefaction, and my mould was filling; whereupon they all with heartiness and happy cheer assisted and obeyed my bidding, while I, now here, now there, gave orders, helped with my own hands, and cried aloud: "O God! Thou that by Thy immeasurable power didst rise from the dead, and in Thy glory didst ascend to heaven!"…. even thus in a moment my mould was filled; and seeing my work finished, I fell upon my knees, and with all my heart gave thanks to God.

After all was over, I turned to a plate of salad on a bench there, and ate with hearty appetite, and drank together with the whole crew. Afterwards I retired to bed, healthy and happy, for it was now two hours before morning, and slept as sweetly as though I had never felt a touch of illness. My good housekeeper, without my giving any orders, had prepared a fat capon for my repast. So that, when I rose, about the hour for breaking fast, she presented herself with a smiling countenance, and said: "Oh! is that the man who felt that he was dying? Upon my word, I think the blows and kicks you dealt us last night, when you were so enraged, and had that demon in your body as it seemed, must have frightened away your mortal fever! The fever feared that it might catch it too, as we did!" All my poor household, relieved in like measure from anxiety and overwhelming labour, went at once to buy earthen vessels in order to replace the pewter I had cast away. Then we dined together joyfully; nay, I cannot remember a day in my whole life when I dined with greater gladness or a better appetite.

After our meal I received visits from the several men who had assisted me. They exchanged congratulations, and thanked God for our success, saying they had learned and seen things done which other masters judged

impossible. I too grew somewhat glorious; and deeming I had shown myself a man of talent, indulged a boastful humour. So I thrust my hand into my purse, and paid them all to their full satisfaction.

That evil fellow, my mortal foe, Messer Pier Francesco Ricci, majordomo of the Duke, took great pains to find out how the affair had gone. In answer to his questions, the two men whom I suspected of having caked my metal for me, said I was no man, but of a certainty some powerful devil, since I had accomplished what no craft of the art could do; indeed they did not believe a mere ordinary fiend could work such miracles as I in other ways had shown. They exaggerated the whole affair so much, possibly in order to excuse their own part in it, that the majordomo wrote an account to the Duke, who was then in Pisa, far more marvellous and full of thrilling incidents than what they had narrated.

The Dong with a Luminous Nose by Edward Lear

We had some Lear last Christmas, so let's make it a tradition. A new will-o-the-wisp.

When awful darkness and silence reign
Over the great Gromboolian plain,
Through the long, long wintry nights; —
When the angry breakers roar
As they beat on the rocky shore; —
When Storm-clouds brood on the towering heights
Of the Hills of the Chankly Bore: —

Then, through the vast and gloomy dark,
There moves what seems a fiery spark,
A lonely spark with silvery rays
Piercing the coal-black night, —
A Meteor strange and bright: —
Hither and thither the vision strays,
A single lurid light.

Slowly it wander, — pauses, — creeps, —
Anon it sparkles, — flashes and leaps;
And ever as onward it gleaming goes
A light on the Bong-tree stems it throws.
And those who watch at that midnight hour
From Hall or Terrace, or lofty Tower,
Cry, as the wild light passes along, —
“The Dong! — the Dong!”
“The wandering Dong through the forest goes!”
“The Dong! the Dong!”
“The Dong with a luminous Nose!”

Long years ago
The Dong was happy and gay,
Till he fell in love with a Jumbly Girl
Who came to those shores one day.
For the Jumblies came in a sieve, they did, —
Landing at eve near the Zemmery Fidd
Where the Oblong Oysters grow,
And the rocks are smooth and gray.
And all the woods and the valleys rang
With the Chorus they daily and nightly sang, —
“Far and few, far and few,
Are the lands where the Jumblies live;
Their heads are green, and the hands are blue
And they went to sea in a sieve.

Happily, happily passed those days!
While the cheerful Jumblies staid;
They danced in circllets all night long,
To the plaintive pipe of the lively Dong,
In moonlight, shine, or shade.
For day and night he was always there
By the side of the Jumbly Girl so fair,
With her sky-blue hands, and her sea-green hair.
Till the morning came of that hateful day
When the Jumblies sailed in their sieve away,
And the Dong was left on the cruel shore
Gazing — gazing for evermore, —
Ever keeping his weary eyes on

That pea-green sail on the far horizon, —
Singing the Jumbly Chorus still
As he sate all day on the grassy hill, —
“Far and few, far and few,
Are the lands where the Jumblies live;
Their heads are green, and the hands are blue
And they went to sea in a sieve.

But when the sun was low in the West,
The Dong arose and said;
— “What little sense I once possessed
Has quite gone out of my head!” —
And since that day he wanders still
By lake and forest, marsh and hills,
Singing — “O somewhere, in valley or plain
“Might I find my Jumbly Girl again!
“For ever I'll seek by lake and shore
“Till I find my Jumbly Girl once more!”

Playing a pipe with silvery squeaks,
Since then his Jumbly Girl he seeks,
And because by night he could not see,
He gathered the bark of the Twangum Tree
On the flowery plain that grows.
And he wove him a wondrous Nose, —
A Nose as strange as a Nose could be!
Of vast proportions and painted red,
And tied with cords to the back of his head.
— In a hollow rounded space it ended
With a luminous Lamp within suspended,
All fenced about
With a bandage stout
To prevent the wind from blowing it out; —
And with holes all round to send the light,
In gleaming rays on the dismal night.

And now each night, and all night long,
Over those plains still roams the Dong;
And above the wail of the Chimp and Snipe
You may hear the squeak of his plaintive pipe
While ever he seeks, but seeks in vain
To meet with his Jumbly Girl again;
Lonely and wild — all night he goes, —
The Dong with a luminous Nose!
And all who watch at the midnight hour,
From Hall or Terrace, or lofty Tower,
Cry, as they trace the Meteor bright,
Moving along through the dreary night, —
“This is the hour when forth he goes,
“The Dong with a luminous Nose!
“Yonder — over the plain he goes;
“He goes!
“He goes;
“The Dong with a luminous Nose!”

Cellini and the oddities of medicine

This week we round out the year with our final episode from the life of Benvenuto Cellini. This one is terribly cut about from his entire biography so I can't thank individual readers. Thank you to everyone who read anything in either of the two volumes and their production teams. It contains each time that alchemy is used to save Cellini's life with a couple of exceptions. I haven't included the poisoning he suffered in prison from being given, what he thought was, a ground diamond. That's a separate episode called "Cellini was poisoned like a prince". Similarly I haven't gone through his entire treatment for one of the fevers he had, although this does contain the bit at the end where he throws up a venomous caterpillar.

Goodbye to Cellini, and I hope everyone else enjoyed this voyage, through the life of what was almost certainly a Verditius magus as much as I did.

I/XXXV

The first which comes to hand is this: Messer Antonio Santacroce had made me come down from the Angel, in order to fire on some houses in the neighbourhood, where certain of our besiegers had been seen to enter. While I was firing, a cannon shot reached me, which hit the angle of a battlement, and carried off enough of it to be the cause why I sustained no injury. The whole mass struck me in the chest and took my breath away. I lay stretched upon the ground like a dead man, and could hear what the bystanders were saying. Among them all, Messer Antonio Santacroce lamented greatly, exclaiming: "Alas, alas! we have lost the best defender that we had." Attracted by the uproar, one of my comrades ran up; he was called Gianfrancesco, and was a bandsman, but was far more naturally given to medicine than to music. On the spot he flew off, crying for a stoop of the very best Greek wine. Then he made a tile red-hot, and cast upon it a good handful of wormwood; after which he sprinkled the Greek wine; and when the wormwood was well soaked, he laid it on my breast, just where the bruise was visible to all. Such was the virtue of the wormwood that I immediately regained my scattered faculties. I wanted to begin to speak; but could not; for some stupid soldiers had filled my mouth with earth, imagining that by so doing they were giving me the sacrament; and indeed they were more like to have excommunicated me, since I could with difficulty come to myself again, the earth doing me more mischief than the blow. However, I escaped that danger, and returned to the rage and fury of the guns, pursuing my work there with all the ability and eagerness that I could summon.

I/LCCCIV

Maestro Francesco then gave orders that I should be removed from my room and carried to one of the hills there are in Rome. Cardinal Cornaro, when he heard of my improvement, had me transported to a place of his on Monte Cavallo. The very evening I was taken with great precautions in a chair, well wrapped up and protected from the cold. No sooner had I reached the place than I began to vomit, during which there came from my stomach a hairy worm about a quarter of a cubit in length: the hairs were long, and the worm was very ugly, speckled of divers colours, green, black, and red. They kept and showed it to the doctor, who said he had never seen anything of the sort before, and afterwards remarked to Felice: "Now take care of your Benvenuto, for he is cured. Do not permit him any irregularities; for though he has escaped this time, another disorder now would be the death of him. You see his malady has been so grave, that if we had brought him the extreme unction, we might not have been in time. Now I know that with a little patience and time he will live to execute more of his fine works." Then he turned to me and said: "My Benvenuto, be prudent, commit no excesses, and when you are quite recovered, I beg you to make me a Madonna with your own hand, and I will always pay my devotions to it for your sake." This I promised to do, and then asked him whether it would be safe for me to travel so far as to Florence. He advised me to wait till I was stronger, and till we could observe how Nature worked in me.

It so happened on one of those mornings, while I was getting some little chisels into trim to work on the Narcissus, that a very fine splinter of steel flew into my right eye, and embedded itself so deeply in the pupil that it could not be extracted. I thought for certain I must lose the sight of that eye. After some days I sent for Maestro Raffaello dé Pilli, the surgeon, who obtained a couple of live pigeons, and placing me upon my back across a table, took the birds and opened a large vein they have beneath the wing, so that the blood gushed out into my eye. I felt immediately relieved, and in the space of two days the splinter came away, and I remained with eyesight greatly improved. Against the feast of S. Lucia, [2] which came round in three days, I made a golden eye out of a French crown, and had it presented at her shrine by one of my six nieces, daughters of my sister Liperata; the girl was ten years of age, and in her company I returned thanks to God and S. Lucia. For some while afterwards I did not work at the Narcissus, but pushed my Perseus forward under all the difficulties I have described. It was my purpose to finish it, and then to bid farewell to Florence.

[\(St Lucia is the patron of eyesight and carries her eyes on a plate.\)](#)

DURING my promenade through the market, I met Giovan Battista Santini, and he and I were taken back to supper by the priest. As I have related above, we supped at the early hour of twenty, because I made it known that I meant to return to Trespiano. Accordingly they made all ready; the wife of Sbietta went bustling about in the company of one Cecchino Buti, their knave of all work. After the salads had been mixed and we were preparing to sit down to table, that evil priest, with a certain nasty sort of grin, exclaimed: "I must beg you to excuse me, for I cannot sup with you; the reason is that some business of importance has occurred which I must transact for my brother Sbietta. In his absence I am obliged to act for him." We all begged him to stay, but could not alter his determination; so he departed and we began our supper. After we had eaten the salads on some common platters, and they were preparing to serve the boiled meat, each guest received a porringer for himself. Santini, who was seated opposite me at table exclaimed: "Do you notice that the crockery they give you is different from the rest? Did you ever see anything handsomer?" I answered that I had not noticed it. He also prayed me to invite Sbietta's wife to sit down with us; for she and that Cecchino Buti kept running hither and thither in the most extraordinary fuss and hurry. At last I induced the woman to join us; when she began to remonstrate: "You do not like my victuals, since you eat so little." I answered by praising the supper over and over again, and saying that I had never eaten better or with heartier appetite. Finally, I told her that I had eaten quite enough. I could not imagine why she urged me so persistently to eat. After supper was over, and it was past the hour of twenty-one, I became anxious to return to Trespiano, in order that I might recommence my work next morning in the Loggia. Accordingly I bade farewell to all the company, and having thanked our hostess, took my leave.

I had not gone three miles before I felt as though my stomach was on fire, and suffered such pain that it seemed a thousand years till I arrived at Trespiano. However, it pleased God that I reached it after nightfall with great toil, and immediately proceeded to my farm, where I went to bed. During the night I got no sleep, and was constantly disturbed by motions of my bowels. When day broke, feeling an intense heat in the rectum, I looked eagerly to see what this might mean, and found the cloth covered with blood. Then in a moment I conceived that I had eaten something poisonous, and racked my brains to think what it could possibly have been. It came back to my memory how Sbietta's wife had set before me plates, and porringers, and saucers different from the others, and how that evil priest, Sbietta's brother, after giving himself such pains to do me honour, had yet refused to sup with us. Furthermore, I remembered what the priest had said about Sbietta's doing such a fine stroke of business by the sale of his farm to an old man for life, who could not be expected to survive a year. Giovanni Sardella had reported these words to me. All things considered, I made my mind up that they must have administered a dose of sublimate in the sauce, which was very well made and pleasant to the taste, inasmuch as sublimate produces all the symptoms. I was suffering from. Now it is my custom to take but little sauce or seasoning with my meat, excepting salt; and yet I had eaten two moderate mouthfuls of that sauce because it was so tasteful. On further thinking, I recollected how often that wife of Sbietta had teased me in a hundred ways to partake more freely of the sauce. On these accounts I felt absolutely certain that they had given me sublimate in that very dish.

CV

ALBEIT I was suffering so severely, I forced myself to work upon my Colossus in the Loggia; but after a few days I succumbed to the malady and took to my bed. No sooner did the Duchess hear that I was ill, than she caused the execution of that unlucky marble to be assigned to Bartolommeo Ammanato. [1] He sent word to me through Messer…. Street, that I might now do what I liked with my model since he had won the marble. This Messer…. was one of the lovers of Bartolommeo Ammanato's wife; and being the most favoured on account of his gentle manners and discretion, Ammanato made things easy for him. There would be much to say upon this topic; however, I do not care to imitate his master, Bandinello, who always wandered from the subject in his talk. Suffice it to say that I told Ammanato's messenger I had always imagined it would turn out thus; let the man strain himself to the utmost in proof of gratitude to Fortune for so great a favour so undeservedly conferred on him by her.

All this while I stayed with sorry cheer in bed, and was attended by that most excellent man and physician, Maestro Francesco da Montevarchi. Together with him Maestro Raffaello de' Pilli undertook the surgical part of my case, forasmuch as the sublimate had so corroded the intestines that I was unable to retain my motions. When Maestro Francesco saw that the poison had exerted all its strength, being indeed insufficient in quantity to overcome my vigorous constitutions, he said one day: "Benvenuto, return thanks to God, for you have won the battle. Have no anxiety, since I mean to cure you in spite of the rogues who sought to work your ruin." Maestro Raffaello then put in: "This will be one of the finest and most difficult cures which was ever heard of; for I can tell you, Benvenuto, that you swallowed a good mouthful of sublimate."

Thereupon Maestro Francesco took him up and said: "It may possibly have been some venomous caterpillar." I replied: "I know for certain what sort of poison it was, and who gave it to me;" upon which we all were silent. They attended me more than six full months, and I remained more than a whole year before I could enjoy my life and vigour.

CVIII

...THE DUKE was staying at Livorno, where I went to visit him in order merely to obtain release from his service. Now that I felt my vigour returning, and saw that I was used for nothing, it pained me to lose time which ought to have been spent upon my art. I made my mind up, therefore, went to Livorno, and found my prince, who received me with exceeding graciousness. Now I stayed there several days, and went out riding daily with his Excellency. Consequently I had excellent opportunities for saying all I wanted, since it was the Duke's custom to ride four miles out of Livorno along the sea-coast to the point where he was erecting a little fort. Not caring to be troubled with a crowd of people, he liked me to converse with him. So then, on one of these occasions, having observed him pay me some remarkable attentions, I entered into the affair of Sbietta and spoke as follows: "My lord, I should like to narrate to your most illustrious Excellency a very singular incident, which will explain why I was prevented from finishing that clay model of Neptune on which I was working in the Loggia. Your Excellency must know that I bought a farm for my life from Sbietta—"

To cut the matter short, I related the whole story in detail, without contaminating truth with falsehood. Now when I came to the poison, I remarked that if I had ever proved an acceptable servant in the sight of his most illustrious Excellency, he ought not to punish Sbietta or those who administered the poison, but rather to confer upon them some great benefit, inasmuch as the poison was not enough to kill me, but had exactly sufficed to cleanse me of a mortal viscosity from which I suffered in my stomach and intestines. "The poison," quoth I, "worked so well, that whereas, before I took it, I had perhaps but three or four years to live, I verily believe now that it has helped me to more than twenty years by bettering my constitution. For this mercy I return thanks to God with greater heartiness than ever; and this proves that a proverb I have sometimes heard spoken is true, which runs as follows:—

'God send us evil, that may work us good.'"

The Duke listened to my story through more than two miles of travel, keeping his attention fixed, and only uttering: "Oh, the villains!" I said, in conclusion, that I felt obliged to them, and opened other and more cheerful subjects of conversation.