

# All Life is in Stages

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## CHILDHOOD

Ann and Mary

"Is this the gate of Heaven?" asked Mary.

"Silly," said Ann. "It's only the gate of the park."

As they walked down a glade, Mary asked,

"Who lives in those trees over there?

Look, they're waving at us."

"It's nobody," said Ann. "Just the shades

dancing over the grass under the trees."

"Let's climb that mound," said Mary.

"Yes, let's," said Ann.

"Does this hill lead to the sky?" asked Mary.

"Of course it doesn't," snapped Ann.

"If you were big like me, you'd see.

the thorns and thistles with purple flowers

on the brow of the hill, you would."

"Are hilly brows like eyebrows?" asked Mary.

"Sort of, only different," said Ann,

looking very deliberate, like mum sometimes.

Mary ran ahead. "Look," she cried.

"You can see a piece of the sky

where there's a hole in the ground."

"Silly," said Ann, "That's the refegshun of the sky

in the lake. Let's go down to the swans."

Once at the lake-side they saw a swan

swimming towards them.

"Is it an angel," asked Mary.

Her elder sister was speechless

for a moment. "It's just lovely," said Ann,  
who had dropped her omniscient guard.

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There Was a Boy

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Once there was a boy  
Whose chief delight it ever was  
to roam wherever fancy led,  
to verdant mead or secret glade,  
to copse or gently sloping hill,

where seated on his mossy throne,  
he might survey his Arcady  
and spy far-off spires and towers.  
As if bound by a fairy spell  
he heard melodies so strange  
and saw yet stranger sights.  
Sometimes he awoke to shouts  
as loud as thunder-claps  
that fell the mighty oak.  
Rousing from his drowsy dreams one day  
he saw standing there a figure,  
more elf than man, goatish, small,  
whose laughing eyes spelt  
mischief but no harm.  
"Hello," he said. "I'm Pan.  
Learn of me, and I shall teach  
the names of shrubs and trees,  
the alder, hawthorn, bay, rowan,  
the blackthorn, birch and ash.  
Learn of me the songs birds sing,  
of chaffinch, thrush, tit, piper,  
the buzzard, rook and jay.  
Learn of me what creeping things  
there are, what life is found  
in burrow, pool and stream.  
Learn what games fox-cubs do play,  
how weasels hunt and rabbits sport,  
and I shall teach you how to tease  
little girls byÂ pullingÂ plaits,  
and bigger ones,Â I'll come to that.  
I'll teach much more, but for the while,  
just listen to this pipe I play."

So sweet the strain that bade him muse

on things from Fancy's store purloined,  
on changing scenes and what they told  
of elves in grottoes, nixies coy  
that bathed in streams by woody dells,  
of golden fields and reapers gladsome,  
yet unmindful of their toil,  
of pastures lush where shepherds danced,  
their gold-fleeced flocks untended grazed,  
for wolves, for sure, were kindly then.  
A voice bade me return to that same spot  
to learn new wonders and explore new lands.

The vision over, sadly I homeward stepped,  
cheered only by the promise I had heard.  
Mine was this sorrow, for, yes, I was that boy.  
I came again and waited there for Pan.  
I waited though the wind was cold  
and clouds, like zealous sentinels,  
would let no sunbeams pass.  
Pan never came, but one came in his stead,  
a little man, in stature only like to Pan.  
His clothes were black, as black as sin,  
his hat was black and very tall.  
Black were his shoes and mirror-shiny, too.  
All was black, in fact, save silver buckles  
on hat and shoe, his silver hair,  
his haggard dead-pan face.  
He also had a black sack on his back  
and a spade held fast by a black strap.  
He placed the black sack and spade  
on the ground and glowered at me.

"Now I shall teach you, boy," he said,

producing a little black book

from a pocket in his black coat.

He opened the black book at chapter one,

and read it to me. This done, he read on

the second chapter, then the third,

the fourth, until the final chapter came,

and this also he read aloud to me.

He taught me words both new and long,

which soon would haunt me in my sleep,

dim in their meaning and dour in sound.

To wit: the Septennial and Triennial Acts,

the pragmatic Sanction and many Latin tags,

indefeasible rights, and other words

the square on the hippopotamus, two apple pie

Isausages triangles, cosine and tangerines,

and other words, mastication, cherry torts,

and gross moral turpentine, and more words,

jussive subjunkthings, ablative ablutions,

speculative Antinomianism, unclear warheads,

overkill, collateral damage, infernal combustion,

and finally words proving inconclusively

that all but a few must perish in perdition,

or, in keeping with this rational age,

a thermonuclear holocaust.

He made me carry the black sack

up to a hill and then handed me his spade,

with which I had to dig a hole.

"Why?" I asked. "Because I say!" said he,

"and because I want you to bury that black sack."

I dared not ask what that sack contained.

My task accomplished, I ran back

my homeward way, surmising as I did  
what that sack might have contained.  
Pan, I fancied, or else perchance, a boy.

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II: Early Adulthood

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Getting Wise

So she finally decided to do  
what she'd always said she'd do.  
She left him! Slam went the door  
with a deafening, mighty wham!  
But scarcely had the landing and  
the top of the banisters been cleared,  
Then she stopped in her tracks,  
and paced back very sprightly,  
opened the door of his seedy flat:  
the same old tatty, sordid scene!  
Number eighteen, Wormwood Scrubbs Terrace.  
It had all looked so different by candle-light.  
Romantic glows conceal cobwebs and grime;  
so too the tinged, dog-eared papering passed unrecorded.  
It was the night, so many moons before,  
when they met. "I'm your host, Mike Randle!"  
"I'm Pauline Day, a friend of Jack Huntley."  
From that moment Mike got to work fast.

"Up from the country are you, dear.  
I expect you find London quite bewildering.  
You'll soon get with the swinging city scene.  
Have some wine, dear, red or white?  
Help yourself to all you fancy on the buffet.  
Bill, could you pass that platter--Edam, cheddar?  
No one who's been to a party of mine  
Leaves hungry, believe you me.  
Care for a little dance in a minute?"  
"A dance, oh dear!" she thought all in a stew.  
She remembered Grandma's warnings about the sin  
devised by the devil and his wicked band  
to make a girl lose grip of all  
she should keep to herself until her wedding day.  
"Try some of this, dear, just a sip."  
Mike had a shrewd idea where things were heading.  
Soon they were reeling to the disco sound.  
"Make the next one slow, there's a good man,"  
said Mike to Disco Dick. Little did she know  
Mike had a nickname, which was Randy Randle.  
Soon locked in his tight and firm embrace  
she was in Heaven. Such sweet nothings he did bandy,  
whispering his banter into her receptive ears.  
While she was dreaming of a cottage and tiny tots  
he was figuring where he'd left those darned dispeptic pills.  
"You're so ... different from the other girls one meets.  
You so remind me of the one girl I truly loved.  
Leucemia, you know." Oh, how the tears did flow!  
Muffling his sobs, his face he buried  
in her flaxen locks. Down her spine  
his fingers like a piper's nimbly raced.  
Why don't we two meet tomorrow for a tete-a-tete?  
There's a very nice little Indian place I know.

Look, how about me meeting you at Shepherd's Bush around eight?

So, over a curried chicken he emptied his heart.

While they were waiting for the suite, he clasped her hand.

"So like her," he sighed. She gave a little start.

Yet her hand remained in his. "Coming on nicely," Randle thought.

"Let's get back to my place for coffee...Waitress, the bill!"

"It's rather late," said Pauline, "I'd better get back home."

"The night is young," said Mike, "Let's live and have our fill."

"Just for half an hour then, but not a minute more."

"I've got a new LP. Just your style. I'll play just one side,"

said Mike, his eyes twinkling, as he opened the front door.

She failed to notice his deft turning of the disc

and by the middle of the second side, he gently kissed her back.

At the end he held her in a clinch. Yes, his style was brisk.

Now with fully opened eyes she spied that same sofa,

and a tear now trickled down her rosy cheek.

Then she looked down on the floor. She sighed.

It was there in that vicinity she lost

what Granny had warned her about not lightly letting go.

"There's none so blind as them that will not see."

Then their trial marriage, as he so aptly termed it!

Soon the sweet nothings turned so strangely sour.

To be at his beck and call she enjoyed the dubious privilege.

What was it first gave the lie? The smug assumption

that she was somehow in his eternal debt, or his habits.

his forgetting to clean the washbasin, to pull the chain,

his toe clippings on the sofa, his snoring, his moods,

his long reads of the Sunday paper at breakfast

that made it oh so clear that she was bloody boring.

But even after she'd found him out, still she lacked the will

to make a break. Habits, good or bad, like iron bands compel.

It seemed she would accept her thralldom as an fact of life



till she decided to eat out one night on her own.

In fact she went to that Tandoori place in Shepherd's Bush.

While waiting for the menu, she heard a not unfamiliar drone:

"You're so different from the other girls one meets.

You so remind me of the first girl I truly loved.

Leucemia, you know...." Oh how the tears did flow.

So she finally decided to do what she'd always said she'd do.

She left him! Slam went the door

with a deafening, mighty thud.

Surprised at her own strength, she left

never to turn back--a virgin

maybe not--but very much the wiser.

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(after old ballad found in the poetry of Johann Wolfgang Goethe)

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Sire Gaddabout one spring-tide morn

his sturdy dappled pard did mount.

for he would wed the highly born

Maid Ethrelda Holyfount

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He plucked his lute and sang an air,

but scarce a league was trod

than came a cry. "Beware, beware!

Here comes the knave, Sire Heaviplodde.

"Sire Heaviplodde, my mortal foe?

Seeks THIS day a fight?

'Tis him or me a mortal blow

must soon dispatch to endless night."

Sir Heaviplodde in armor black

rode up to mock and jeer.

Then said he, holding high a a sack:

"Your head shall be my souvenir."

"Make good, black knight, your foolish boast,"

stern-faced Sire Gaddabout did cry,"

or by ye saints your wretched ghost

anon the Stygian strait must ply."

The shields did clash, the horses snort,  
the dust did fly, the swords did ring,  
and, to cut a long tale short,  
'twas Heaviplodde who felt death's sting.

A fullsome wench with babe at breast <  
stood steadfast in the way.  
Sire Gaddabout at her behest  
stopped to hear what she would say.

She raised her babe for him to see,  
she cocked her head and gave a sneer:  
"Knight-at-arms, remember me?  
You left behind this souvenir."

On seeing this the knight did blush.  
He bade his squire go fetch some beer.  
Then said he to that woman "Hush,  
this bag of gold should help out, dear."

Past hill and hamlet, wood and mire,  
he rode with noble carriage.  
Might even yet the fates conspire  
to dash all hopes of marriage?

Who stood with visage grim and old  
to guard the way before?  
A man in black held up a scroll,  
whereon were writ his debts of yore.

Not all the gold the knight did hold,  
not lands, not herds, nor dowry,  
could e'er redeem his debts of old  
accrued in youthful folly.

"I have sinned," the knight did weep,  
"and mercy is my plea.  
I must to church my pledge to keep  
in holy matrimony."

The grim collector smiled and said:  
"As bridegroom you are free.  
Your past is like a shadow fled.  
What counts today is what shall be."

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Upon a Snow--White Wedding Day

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The black-clad diplomat treads warily,  
and so should we, lest careless feet  
crush the beetle, the centipede or the ant  
all little folk with whom the Emperor,  
his purple robe adorned with golden bees,  
must come to share the same large bed  
the all-giving and all-taking Earth  
with impartial hospitality affords  
her children great and small.

As time flies, the busy spiders spin  
their supple threads with cunning hands,  
as in antique legend the triune Fates  
mete out and cut the many-colored threads,  
strands golden, yarn sea-blue and dark,  
in which are woven every raiment worn  
by man and woman, in sunshine or in storm.

His chalk-white corse in colors three bedecked  
they have borne to the yielding earth,  
and not without that circumstance  
accorded the hero by the nation  
for which he died.

Wreaths of red and yellow flowers recall  
that evening scented by autumnal leaves  
when she, now clad in widow's weeds,  
put on the hues of bounteous summer,  
and danced enchanted by a stranger  
dressed in coat of red with golden epaulets;  
their threads swayed like harvest corn

as he, breached the defending ramparts  
of a heart unready for long sieges.

White flowers recall another and much shorter day  
when the chill midwinter sun half-smiled  
like a mother hearing the tongues of bells  
and rumours by grave sages told  
upon her daughter's wedding day.

"But, Mother, Boney's on Elba,  
tending his mules and rearing his cattle,  
while in Vienna the architects of concord  
have banished war for a thousand years,  
and though it were only for ninety and nine  
we and our children shall in peace."

But soon blind bats sensed distant peals,  
the sickle moon cast down its fallow rays.  
Scarce had the month of warlike Mars begun  
than Apollyon reared up from troubled seas.

"What soldier slays his emperor?"  
cried he who shrewdly guessed the answer,  
and the ensuing moment proved him right!  
Grenoble! Paris! The King flees north.

Marching orders, the parting night,  
the dread no whirlwind's passion can dispell,  
the letter from Brussels on the eve of strife.

"Dearest, it's going to be a son.  
He'll live to become great, a general,  
I wager my last sou. To think,  
that knavish little Corsican  
has caused my dove to fear.

We'll teach him and shake him bone apart! No jest!  
A few hours more, and all will be over."  
I'll bring perfumes from Paris, lace from the Hague,  
We'll sack the French quarters for brandy and wine,

and cozen from Prussia a boatload of hock.

I'll take leave. Await my tap on a pane  
before midnight when the longest day is done."

Alas, at noon on the longest day  
she knew why Mother had faintly smiled  
upon one winter's wedding morn.

"But Madam, however hard the blow, this note  
was signed by none less than the Iron Duke himself."

On a dusty track a wayfarer stands, a man ignored,  
a painter unrecognized, who in youth  
used only colors that were gaily bright,  
whose canvas now declares dark shades have beauty too.

Some evenings, by the fire-side glow he tells his friends  
of a widow beautiful in black:

"I saw her in a jetblack coach  
drawn by four horsed black to match.

Though pure the beauty of a bride in white,  
hers was a beauty yet worthier of a master's brush.

She wore a dress of silk. My eye is trained to catch  
the fleeting sheen of every cloth. The scene  
lives with me still. Though like fugitives,  
she and her beauty have passed from sight.

They left behind a cloud of dust, no more."

O little worm that toils in darkness  
to clothe our mortal limbs in Beauty's sheen,  
whose unfading glory only seems to die  
when we seek it in one place,  
to stay its onward course.

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#### IV: Early Parenthood

##### Father Time

It was one of those splendid mellow golden days  
in early autumn when many trees, though still green,  
begin to betray a trace of red or yellow.

In the afternoon I took little Eleanor to the park  
just round the corner from where we live.

I came across a man whose hair, greying slightly,  
was swept back to hide a bald patch. His cheeks  
were hollow and he wore bifocals:

"Der Hund tut nicht beissen!"--he reassured me  
when Eleanor ran up to one of his hounds.

Only little children and dogs were worth knowing,  
he said, the rest he didn't give a hang for.

Eleanor was accosting all-comers--frosty matrons,  
flint-faced marchers who had calculated that  
the most direct path between A and B led through the park.

Then she joined in a knock-about game of football



till a young Turkish lad, shrewd in psychology,  
gave her a spare ball to play with all on her own.  
Her euphoria was ended when, carrying her trophy off  
she tumbled down a six-inch hole. By the time  
she'd recovered, the ball, ineluctably, was somewhere else.  
Unabashed, she toddled to the playground, where  
she found some children digging away in a sandpit.  
She brought out the mother in a girl of eleven  
and bathed in the glow of much adulation,  
too young to know divisions of language and custom,  
to be aware that the minutes were fast ticking away.  
Then I looked at my watch: Well past six, almost dark.  
Despite my entreaties, Eleanor remained unpersuaded  
that it was really time for us to go.  
With what vehemence she kicked and screamed,  
how transfixing her glares when I got the pushchair  
and strapped her down. She made me feel  
what a pig I was all the way home.

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I'd got the introduction done,  
had the basic facts on tap.

There was a bang! It was my son,

that messy little chap,  
who always makes me lose the thread  
of some abstruse conjecture,  
as I scan the contents of my head  
on the day before a lecture.  
As he looked up  
and I looked down  
his sunny smile  
dispelled my frown.

Kafka, Bertold, Brecht and Proust  
have doubtless come to stay,  
so must the quest fore that mot juste  
await another day.

No lofty flight of higher thought,  
no cerebral endeavour,  
makes good the bitter loss, alack!  
of a joy renounced forever.  
Then Smutty-Face, thee I embrace,  
let gooey hands possess me,  
that Self-Reproach shall have no case  
At length to bring against me.

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V: Life's Decline?

The Man Who Never Missed an Opportunity

At birth he was as hairless as a coot,  
though in his case,  
it would be more appropriate to say.  
"as hairless as a rock face."  
A bare two-year old, he kept  
his parents in suspense  
by clambering up and over  
the furniture--the stools and chairs,  
table tops, window-sills and shelves,  
there, like fledgling, precariously to perch.  
When a boy, he scrambled up apple-trees,  
oaks, cedars, maples and poplars.  
Whenever mewed up in a school room,  
or forced to stay indoors,  
he would pine for another opportunity.  
A youth, he was rock-climbing in Wales  
and then mountaineering in the Alps.  
Having turned professional, he went  
on expeditions in the Rockies,  
the Andes and the Himalayas.  
His copious head of sandy hair  
and patriarchal beard prompted  
the Sherpas to call him:

"shaggy mountain he-goat,"

This I render in English,

not being well-versed

in Sherpa or Nepalese.

He could pick his way

up, down and along

the most perilous crevasse.

He almost married a young Swiss

he met on the south face of the Eiger,

or was it the Jungfrau?

Whichever the case, he gave her up

for a piece of fluff

atop a far-off mountain.

Now he is old and his hair is snowy white.

Few friends are left, especially in

the mountaineering fraternity.

Was he to blame

if some aspiring Icarus said:

"If he can do it, so can I?"

He now lives on a hill,

and finds his way up

something of a climb.

Only in memory, they say,

may he relive those peaks

strung up or pinned up over his chalet walls.

But how come that enigmatic smile of his,

suggesting, I opine, that far from being content

with nostalgic memories

of the snows of yesteryear,

the old boy actually looks forward

to his conquest of a last

and greater summit.

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VI: Death and Retrospect

Unaccustomed as I Am to Rising from the Grave in Public

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They placed me in a wooden box  
and then they put the lid on. They left  
me to shiver the cold night through and  
picked me up next day around eleven a.m.  
I heard dogs bark and children play, I heard  
sweet songs among the dirges; friends and relatives  
said such lovely things about me that afore were quite  
unheard of. Inevitably, old Uncle Jim came out with  
the one about the actress and the archbishop,  
and what the fallen woman said at confessional  
to a rabbi who'd taken over from the priest  
for the day in a spirit most ecumenical. Then  
the pall-bearers at last bore the box to the

spot assigned for burial. "Ashes to ashes,  
dust to dust," said the reverend with  
solemn finality as they let down the  
box with me inside into the yawning  
cavity, and that, if you'll allow me  
add, with something akin to  
alacrity. Then just as he gave  
the final sign  
to set the spades  
showering earth down,  
I lifted the lid of the box where I lay,  
I said to the assembled all gasping and white:  
"Sorry to stop the proceedings so late in the day, but one assumption I  
challenge as completely unfounded, though it's been all too readily  
taken for granted:  
Far be it from me to cause an upset, but I think you should know--I'M  
NOT DEAD YET!"  
Some of the assembled felt very let down,  
and made no bones about it.

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## Dream Cottage

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There are so many locations--but so few places.

Have you noticed?

Where the honeysuckle hangs in the porch,

and the ivy clings to the wall,

where house martins build their nests in the eave,

Oh, there I long to return

I remember the gilded days

when I watched through diamond panes

familiar friends in the garden outside, birds,

stray sheep and the trees,

foals that rubbed their sides on the fence,

and kids at play in the fields.

I remember Father at the garden gate

chatting to old Adams from next door,

who told me tales of distant Mesopotamia;

there, single-handed, it seems, he engaged the Turk in the First World War.

But war or no, he took time to err in Babylon's ruins.

He would babble on for hours about Ur.

And I remember--how could I ever forget - her,

the farmer's flaxen daughter Lin, who

led me rather far down the orchard path, and Cerberus,

the farmer's bull-terrier, the brute,

that tore a patch from my trouser--leg and then,--

the day father summoned me to the brown study:

"I've had to earn my bread by the sweat of my brow. 'Bout time you did the

same, son, don't you think? Instead of gallivanting around, giving Mum and me grey hairs."

It was a grey and dull morning the day

I left for London. What a come-down

having to find digs in Stratford, (no, not on Avon--the other one, near

Mile End, you know,

where the Central Line dives underground,  
or surfaces, if you're optimistically inclined.)

I don't wish to bore you with all the particulars of my curriculum vitae, so  
here's a brief outline:

I joined up with Thorndyke, Thorndyke, Briarly and Thorndyke, a very  
long

established firm of solicitors with a finger and  
thumb in many a lucrative pie.

I courted Briarly's daughter, got married,  
settled down in a semi-detached in Leytonstone,  
the better half of course, large garden, too.

We made a prickly pair. What weekend bliss  
clipping the privet hedge, weeding, mowing the lawn, laying the crazy  
paving,  
trimming the edges with shears.

When Dad passed away, Mum hoped  
she'd be able to stay at the cottage.

Would I be in a position to help out with the costs, rates and payments?

I wanted to, but I had rather a lot on my plate  
at the time, we were expecting our second,  
and, you know, with one thing, then another,  
I declined.

Anyway, she had to leave the place in the end,  
so she came down to Leytonstone.

She'd only been in the area a couple of months when she took poorly;  
we  
found her a home.

It was the winters she couldn't stand.

She got over the first, but not, sad to say,  
the second. In fact she died of pneumonia brought on by the flu, a  
virulent

Asian strain, the doctor said,



that thrives in conditions of dampness and smog.

Beyond that, he suggested, her nervous system

hadn't been able to stand the shock

of an all too sudden environmental change.

I used to get nagged by remorse,

but when I was really down,

my mates at the local did their best to cheer me up. "Don't reproach

yourself, Bill. After all, she was getting on."

It was just after I had become a partner

with the firm of Thorndyke, Thorndyke,

Briarly and Thorndyke that I first

experienced these night visitations - these peculiar dreams.

It was all so vivid, so real - I was back there.

The scent of the honeysuckle in the porch

was just as sweet,

no sweeter than before, and the hue of the flowers was lovelier; there

even

a sparrow

was a bird of paradise.

But dreams must end, and so with these--

I would begin walking down the orchard path,

saw boughs arched by the weight of mellow fruit.

Where rambling weeds once,

now the vine did grow

bearing clusters of grapes

as big as plums.

But

that which

most aroused

desire was the fruit of

a noble and mysterious tree.

I would stretch out my hand to cup its

voluptuous rotundity, to feel the texture  
of its gentle yielding skin, to breathe  
in its aromas, to possess its flesh,  
but just as I assayed to pluck,  
the bough sprang back.

Just then

I would

awake

with

the peal

of hideous

laughter ringing in my ears,

to find myself stretched out,

an unwilling patient on my suburban bed,

staring up at a ceiling that badly needed distemping over walls in no  
lesser need

of repapering; then the wife shouted:

"It's five to eight, you'll be late!"

Like a mouse at bay, my only thought was of escape, but one look out  
of the

window dashed all hope.

The pylons! I'd forgotten the pylons standing guard on the horizon.

Don't

get me wrong.

It's not that I have anything against pylons as such. They are, I grant,  
most necessary,

no laudable things, in their own way. It's just that they betray an  
aspect

which, first thing in the day, strikes one as

somehow less than pleasing.

As it happened I adopted an escape route of a different kind: I became

a

so-called workaholic.

After my first bout of heart trouble, my doctor advised me to move to a flat. I acquired one in Woodford overlooking the park, excellently appointed; lift, large balcony, central heating, double glazing, all mod con, no garden, no weeding, no mowing, alas, just potted flowers.

My dreams became more vivid, more insistant still; my doctor was seriously considering giving me shock treatment. After my second attack I was sent to hospital, where I had to spend several weeks under observation, together with lengthy periods under sedation (enabling me to enjoy extended visits to the cottage and environs), but as I came round, I would find myself wired up, plugged in to this thingamijig, this 'cardiac machine' with its flickering lights, its bewildering array of switches and digits.

The operator, being overworked, poor chap, had little opportunity to pass the time of day, except once when I asked him about this most impressive cardiac machine- His face lit up: "Yes, she'a beaut', isn't she? Latest thing, only four others like it in the entire world. They've got one in Boston, one in Moscow, one in Cape Town, and the fourth is--hold on--Oh, yes--it's in Kuwait."

Don't get me wrong. It's not that I've got anything against these cardiac machines as such.

They are doubtless very necessary and admirable things in their way.

It's

just that,

when the anaesthetic's wearing off, they betray

an aspect which does not altogether please.

One of the nurses reminded me of her. She understood, or at least she

said

she did, when I talked to her about my dreams,

the cottage, the garden and things. It was she who held my hand just

as I suffered my third, and after that

I was obliged, regrettably, to change location once again.

I still dream of the cottage and my youthtime haunts. It's a pity my

visits

now seem to scare

its present incumbent for yes,

no prizes for having guessed,

I no longer reside in a highrise flat,

not even on the ground floor. I am presently located, down in the

basement,

let us say.

The fruit? Delicious ... is not the word.

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The sword of

flame

may

bar

the flesh,

may burn through bone

and marrow,

but never  
shall the  
sword of  
flame  
sunder  
the soul  
and the  
place it  
loving  
hal-  
low-  
s.

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A Joy Deferred--That's Absurd

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III: Weddings and Marriage

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How Sire Gaddabout unto His Nuptials Came