

The Glittering Gate

by Lord Dunsany

Persons

Jim, lately a burglar _ Both dead

Bill, " " " /

Scene: A Lonely Place.

Time: The present.

{The Lonely Place is strewn with large black rocks and uncorked beer-bottles, the latter in great profusion. At

back is a wall of granite built of great slabs, and in it
the Gate of Heaven. The door is of gold.

Below the Lonely Place is an abyss hung with stars.

The rising curtain reveals Jim wearily uncorking a
beer-bottle. Then he tilts it slowly and with infinite
care. It proves to be empty. Faint and unpleasant laughter
is heard off. This action and accompanying far laughter are
repeated continually throughout the play. Corked bottles
are discovered lying behind rocks, and more descend
constantly through the air, within reach of Jim. All prove
to be empty.

Jim uncorks a few bottles.}

Jim: {weighing one carefully}

That's a full one. {It is empty, like all}

{Singing is heard off left.}

Bill: {enters from left with a bullet-hole over his eye,

singing} Rule Britannia, Britannia rule the waves.

{Breaking off his song} Why, 'ullo. 'Ere's a bottle

of beer. {Finds it empty; looking off and downward}

I'm getting a bit tired of those blooming great stars

down there and this rocky ledge. I've been walking

along under this wall ever since. Why, it must be

twenty-four hours since that householder shot me. And

he need n't have done it, either, *I* was n't going to hurt the bloke. I only wanted a bit of his silver stuff. It felt funny, that did. Hullo, a gate. Why, that's the Gate of Heaven. Well, well. So that's all right. {Looks up and up for some time} No. I can't climb *that* wall. Why, it's got no top to it. Up and up it goes. {Knocks at the door and waits}

Jim:

That is n't for the likes of us.

Bill:

Why, hullo, there's another bloke. Why, somebody's been hanging him. Why, if it is n't old Jim! Jim!

Jim: {wearily}

Hullo.

Bill:

Why, Jim! 'Ow long 'ave you been here?

Jim:

I *am* here always.

Bill:

Why, Jim, don't you remember me? Why, you taught Bill to pick locks years and years ago when he was a little boy, and had never learnt a trade and had n't a penny in the world, and never would have had but for you, Jim. {Jim stares vaguely} I never forgot *you*, Jim. I broke into scores of houses. And then I took on big houses. Out in the country, you know, real big ones. I got rich, Jim, and respected by all who knew me. I was a citizen, Jim, one who dwelt in our midst. And of an evening, sitting over the fire, I used to say, "I am as clever as Jim." But I was n't, Jim. I could n't climb like you. And I could n't walk like you on a creaky stair, when everything's quite still and there's a dog in the house and little rattly things left lying about, and a door that whines if you touch it, and someone ill upstairs that you did n't know of, who has nothing to do but listen for *you* 'cause she can't get to sleep. Don't you remember little Bill?

Jim:

That would be somewhere else.

Bill:

Yes, Jim, yes. Down on Earth.

Jim:

But there is n't anywhere else.

Bill:

I never forgot you, Jim. I'd be pattering away with my tongue, in Church, like all the rest, but all the time I'd be thinking of you in that little room at Putney and the man searching every corner of it for you with a revolver in one hand and a candle in the other, and you almost going round with him.

Jim:

What is Putney?

Bill:

Oh, Jim, can't you remember? Can't you remember the day you taught me a livelihood? I was n't more than twelve, and it was spring, and all the may was in blossom outside the town. And we cleared out No. 25 in the new street. And the next day we saw the man's fat, silly face. It was thirty years ago.

Jim:

What are years?

Bill:

Oh, *Jim!*

Jim:

You see there is n't any hope here. And when there isn't any hope there is n't any future. And when there is n't any future there is n't any past. It's just the present here. I tell you we're stuck. There are n't no years here. Nor no nothing.

Bill:

Cheer up, Jim. You're thinking of a quotation, "Abandon hope, all ye that enter here." I used to learn quotations; they are awfully genteel. A fellow named Shakespeare used to make them. But there is n't any sense in them. What's the use of saying "ye" when you mean "you"? Don't be thinking of quotations, Jim.

Jim:

I tell you there is no hope here.

Bill:

Cheer up, Jim. There's plenty of hope there, is n't there? {Points to the Gate of Heaven}

Jim:

Yes, and that's why they keep it locked up so. They

won't let us have any. No. I begin to remember Earth again now since you've been speaking. It was just the same there. The more they'd got the more they wanted to keep *you* from having a bit.

Bill:

You'll cheer up a bit when I tell you what I've got. I say, Jim, have you got some beer? Why, so you have. Why, *you* ought to cheer up, Jim.

Jim:

All the beer you're ever likely to see again. They're empty.

Bill: {half rising from the rock on which he has seated himself, and pointing his finger at Jim as he rises; very cheerfully} Why, you're the chap that said there was no hope here, and you're hoping to find beer in every bottle you open.

Jim:

Yes; I *hope* to see a drop of beer in one some day, but I *know* I won't. Their trick *might* not work just once.

Bill:

How many have you tried, Jim?

Jim:

Oh, I don't know. I've always been at it, working as fast as I can, ever since -- ever since -- {Feels his neck meditatively and up toward his ear} Why, ever since, Bill.

Bill:

Why don't you stop it?

Jim:

I'm too thirsty, Bill.

Bill:

What do you think *I've* got, Jim?

Jim:

I don't know. Nothing's any use.

Bill: {as yet another bottle is shown to be empty}

Who's that laughing, Jim?

Jim: {astonished at such a question, loudly and

emphatically} Who's that laughing?

Bill: {looks a little disconcerted at having apparently
asked a silly question} Is it a pal?

Jim:

A pal! -- {laughs} {The laugh off joins in loudly and
for long}

Bill:

Well, I don't know. But, Jim, what do you think I've
got?

Jim:

It isn't any use to you whatever it is. Not even if
it's a ten-pound note.

Bill:

It's better than a ten-pound note, Jim. Jim, try and
remember, Jim. Don't you remember the way we used to
go for these iron safes? Do you remember anything,
Jim?

Jim:

Yes, I am beginning to remember now. There used to be
sunsets. And then there were great yellow lights. And

one went in behind them through a swinging door.

Bill:

Yes, yes, Jim. That was the Blue Bear down at
Wimbledon.

Jim:

Yes, and the room was all full of golden light. And
there was beer with light in it, and some would be
spilt on the counter and there was light in that too.
And there was a girl standing there with yellow hair.
She'd be the other side of that door now, with
lamplight in her hair among the angels, and the old
smile on her lips if one of them chaffed her, and her
pretty teeth a-shining. She would be very near the
throne; there was never any harm in Jane.

Bill:

No, there was never any 'arm in Jane, Jim.

Jim:

Oh, I don't want to see the angels, Bill. But if I
could see Jane again {points in direction of laugh} he
might laugh as much as he cared to whenever I wanted to
cry. You can't cry here, you know, Bill.

Bill:

You shall see her again, Jim.

{Jim takes no interest in this remark; he lowers his eyes and goes on with his work.}

Bill:

Jim, you shall see her again. You want to get into Heaven, don't you?

Jim: {not raising his eyes}

Want!

Bill:

Jim. Do you know what I've got, Jim?

{Jim makes no answer, goes on wearily with his work.}

Bill:

You remember those iron safes, Jim, how we used to knock them open like walnuts with "Old Nut-cracker"?

Jim: {at work, wearily}

Empty again.

Bill:

Well, I've got Old Nut-cracker. I had him in my hand at the time, and they let me keep him. They thought it would be a nice proof against me.

Jim:

Nothing is any good here.

Bill:

I'll get in to Heaven, Jim. And you shall come with me because you taught me a livelihood. I could n't be happy there, like those angels, if I knew of anyone being outside. I'm not like that.

{Jim goes on with his work.}

Bill:

Jim, Jim. You'll see Jane there.

Jim:

You'll never get through those gates, Bill. You'll never do it.

Bill:

They're only gold, Jim. Gold's soft like lead. Old Nut-cracker would do it if they were steel.

Jim:

You'll never do it, Bill.

{Bill puts a rock against the gates, stands on it to reach the lock and gets to work on the lock. A good instrument to use is an egg-whipper. Jim goes on wearily with his work. As Bill works away, fragments and golden screws begin to fall on the floor.}

Bill:

Jim! Old Nut-cracker thinks nothing of it. It's just like cheese to Old Nut-cracker.

Jim:

They won't let you do it, Bill.

Bill:

They don't know what I've got. I'm getting through it like cheese, Jim.

Jim:

Suppose it's a mile thick. Suppose it's a million miles thick. Suppose it's a hundred million miles thick.

Bill:

Can't be, Jim. Those doors are meant to open outward.

They could n't do that if they were more than four inches thick at the most, not for an Archbishop.

They'd stick.

Jim:

You remember that great safe we broke open once, what had coal in it.

Bill:

This is n't a safe, Jim, this is Heaven. There'll be the old saints with their halos shining and flickering, like windows o' wintry nights. {Creak, creak, creak} And angels thick as swallows along a cottage roof the day before they go. {Creak, creak, creak} And orchards full of apples as far as you can see, and the rivers Tigris and Euphrates, so the Bible says; and a city of gold, for those that care for cities, all full of precious stones; but I'm a bit tired of cities and precious stones. {Creak, creak, creak} I'll go out into the fields where the orchards are, by the Tigris and Euphrates. I should n't be surprised if my old mother was there. She never cared much for the way I earned my livelihood {creak, creak}, but she was a good

mother to me. I don't know if they want a good mother
in there who would be kind to the angels and sit and
smile at them when they sang and soothe them if they
were cross. If they let all the good ones in she'll be
there all right. {Suddenly} Jim! They won't have
brought me up against her, will they? That's not fair
evidence, Jim.

Jim:

It would be just like them to. Very like them.

Bill:

If there's a glass of beer to be got in Heaven, or a
dish of tripe and onions, or a pipe of 'bacca she'll
have them for me when I come to her. She used to know
my ways wonderful; and what I liked. And she used to
know when to expect me almost anywhere. I used to
climb in through the window at any hour and she always
knew it was me. {Creak, creak} She'll know it's me at
the door now, Jim. {Creak, creak} It will be all a
blaze of light, and I'll hardly know it's her till I
get used to it... But I'll know her among a million
angels. There were n't none like her on Earth and
there won't be none like her in Heaven... Jim! I'm
through, Jim! One more turn, and Old Nut-cracker's

done it! It's giving! It's giving! I know the feel
of it. *Jim*!

{At last there is a noise of falling bolts; the gates
swing out an inch and are stopped by the rock.}

Bill:

Jim! Jim! I've opened it, Jim. I've opened the Gate
of Heaven! Come and help me.

Jim: {looks up for a moment with open mouth. Then he
mournfully shakes his head and goes on drawing a cork}
Another one empty.

Bill: {looks down once into the abyss that lies below the
Lonely Place} Stars. Blooming great stars.

{Then he moves away the rock on which he stood. The
gates move slowly. Jim leaps up and runs to help; they
each take a gate and move backward with their faces
against it.}

Bill:

Hullo, mother! You there? Hullo! You there? It's
Bill, mother.

{The gates swing heavily open, revealing empty night
and stars.}

Bill: {staggering and gazing into the revealed Nothing, in
which far stars go wandering} Stars. Blooming great
stars. There **ain't** no Heaven, Jim.

{Ever since the revelation a cruel and violent laugh
has arisen off. It increases in volume and grows
louder and louder.}

Jim:

That's like them. That's very like them. Yes, they'd
do that!

{The curtain falls and the laughter still howls on.}