

## **The Glittering Gate**

BY EDWARD JOHN DUNSANY

PERSONS

JIM, *lately a burglar* }  
BILL, *lately a burglar* } *Both dead*

*Scene: A Lonely Place.*

*Time: The present.*

### THE GLITTERING GATE

*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 the 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 house-holder shot me. And he needn't have done it, either, *I* wasn'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 isn't for the likes of us.

BILL

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

JIM (*wearily*)

Hullo.

BILL

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

JIM

I *am* 'ere 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 hadn'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 wasn't, Jim. I couldn't climb like you. And I couldn'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 didn't know of, who has nothing to do but to 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 isn'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 wasn'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 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 isn't any hope here. And when there isn't any hope there isn't any future. And when there isn't any future there isn't any past. It's just the present here. I tell you we're stuck. There aren'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 called Shakespeare used to make them. But there isn'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, isn'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 good to you whatever it is. Not even if it is 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 those 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 couldn'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. These doors are meant to open outward. They couldn't do that if they were more than four inches 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 isn'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 of 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 the Euphrates. I shouldn'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 weren'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.*