

# SOMNIUM

· STEVE MOORE ·

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**SOMNIUM**  
A Fantastic Romance

**STEVE MOORE**

Afterword by  
**ALAN MOORE**

Somnium Press  
MMXI

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For certain ladies of my acquaintance. And, of course, for Selene.

Steve Moore



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Always, O Moon, you hold my heart in thrall:  
Delightful at the full, all golden light,  
Or silver-sickled new, in early night;  
Red-faced and grim, eclipsed, when witches call  
And down from out the sky they cause your fall,  
Belaboured into shedding foam, so white,  
Lest they destroy you with their sorc'rous might.  
Each phase that differs: same my love for all.

Since time began, the Moon was more than this.  
Exquisite Goddess, sparkle-eyed with love,  
Latmos called, and so you swift descended:  
Endymion received your dotting kiss.  
Now once again you come down from above,  
Endless joy to bring, so long portended.

*Christopher Morley, 1803*

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*For sweet Elizabeth and the radiant Moon, my lovely Muses both.*

*Wednesday, 19th September 1803*

So all the world is changed, and here I am alone. I'm not sure I can bear it.

I wrote the dedication here above, and how my hand it shook; I'd thought to start my journal with those words since just before I left old London, but when the time had come to write them I could hardly see for tears. One Muse I have and always will, who's now a silver crescent in the sky; the other is not with me.

Oh, Liz, this is so hard.

*Thursday, 20th September 1803*

Last night, I could not write for thinking; neither could I sleep. I do not know if what I've done is right; some part of me it says it is, another that it's not. I tossed and turned for several hours while my two selves played cudgels in my brain. I suppose I must have dozed at last, for my remembered dreams were much the same as usual: great marble palaces glinting 'neath the scattered stars, and lovely large-eyed ladies; then on the sudden I woke up and found that it was daylight. I wondered where I was. I knew it was not home; the seconds raced before I could remember.

This morning, let me gather up my thoughts; for I had promised Lizzie and myself that I would keep a journal. And I would break a thousand oaths before a promise to my sister.

I miss my dear Elizabeth (so sweet to write her name in full, I hardly like to shorten it); a whole day's passed since last I held her in my arms and kissed her fond farewell. I wish I'd never done it. I miss the family home as well, so close to Oxford Street, and all its dear-loved memories: the attic playroom with its wooden steed (to me the Trojan Horse, to her the Princess Liz's much-loved pony); the staircase where I fell, and how she kissed my bruises better; the little garden where, in years gone by, we played at catch-me-if-you-can. It's strange that, now I'm gone, my thoughts run back to my innocent childhood days. The apple tree she was too short to reach, and how I teased her for it; how big-eyed she was when at the last I let her eat the fruit. Or how an apple and a twig became the orb and sceptre, the garden seat a throne; and she was Gloriana, I the Earl of Leicester. Or Raleigh on another time, or Essex; but she was always Virgin Queen. Elizabeth, who made me knight with but a stick, and with such a charming giggle; and me so earnest in acceptance, nine years old and all my honour and my heart enchained to her forever. And so my thoughts grow maudlin once again.

Yet here I am in Kent. It's true that back in London, I was quite reclusive; I simply had no cause to wish for mingling with others. Here I am surrounded all about with unfamiliar faces; and so I realise I never did quite learn the art of charming strangers, too busy was I with my books. How I wish that Liz was with me; for if she has no greater social graces, at least I know she loves me. What other people think of me, I simply cannot tell.

I know I could not stay in London; yet leaving, it seems such a great mistake.

I left; it was so painful. And yet I did not leave her all alone. Old Mistress Jones will see to all her comforts, her virtue and her safety; and there are all the other maids and servants too. I know if I remained behind, I'd never write a word; and I just want to write for her, to show her all my dreams made real. She wants to see me famous; all her admiration of me is so sweet. And yet I know her eyes will never see my faults; and any words I write, I know she'll love them. If others, all unknown, could love my words the way she loves my person; why then I'll know I've written something well, and

worthy of my Liz. I hope the Moon will help me do it.

~~And there's another reason too, to flee. Sometimes I fear we act out ancient myths; and one or two of them perhaps may be quite central to our lives entire, while other times we take on lesser roles. And if with that celestial Muse I like to think I might aspire (with all the Gods a-willing) to be her own Endymion, with her below... I hardly dare to write it here... I would I were not Caunus, but rather feeble I am; for oft I think of her as Byblis. And so as Caunus fled, then so did I; and neither he nor I, I know would wish to.~~

But see? My Liz she has me in her thrall, though nine miles or more they intervene. She laughed aloud when first I told her she had witchcraft, thought I jested; joked of warty noses, bended backs and chins that reached down to her knees. I told her olden witches had no power; young sweet sorceresses never could be quite escaped. She laughed again and said I was so silly. I told her in return that she was lovely; and so we lapsed then into silence. I remember how she looked that night, all dressed in white and laced with gold beneath a beaming gibbous Moon. I thought she looked a Goddess or a Star nymph; told her that as well. I swore she was an ideal form, dropped down from Plato's higher world and that I'd never have a sweetheart less the fair than she. She blushed so sweet, right down below the shoulders; she was too pretty not to kiss. Oh, the heaven I descended from, when once I thought to leave.

Yet yesterday at 12 o'clock I kissed her, hugged her, wiped away my tears. Her chestnut tresses tumbling down; the silk-sewn jasmine flowers, so white and richly scented, tucked above her little ears; her pale throat slightly trembling. I told her that I loved her, promised I would write; it was so melancholy sweet to hear her say the same. And after that my arms would hardly let her go.

My trunk already loaded, I climbed into the coach and cursed it roundly 'neath my breath; prayed for sickly horses or for broken wheels. Alas, the Gods would give me neither. Although my arm would hardly move, I thumped my cane against the roof, and then we were away. I looked back out the window, waved a weakened hand; my Liz she raised an arm and started forward uncontrolled, and near I thought she wiped away a tear. We rattled round a corner then; and how I cursed that wall for cutting off my sight. I felt that she might never yet be seen again. Five minutes passed before I could look round me; till then my eyes were simply shut upon the horrors of the world.

An ancient bald-pate parson, face all full of pox-pits, and a florid snoring man obese enough to terrify a child or horse, they were my only companions; I have to think the both of them quite drunk because they slept throughout the journey's long entirety. And so they did not see me weep.

Crossing over London Bridge, I thought of Shakespeare, Marlowe and *The Globe*; of cock-fighting, bear-bait pits and raucous pleasure-grounds; and tawdry old Elizabethan stews purveying painful claps and pox to both the highest and the low. All gone now, of course (except perhaps disease), though whether Southwark of the present age is any way the better, I doubt me very much. Then out onto the New Cross Turnpike which, I'm told, improves so greatly on the ancient road, one never would believe it; I have to say I didn't. Or rather, if I did, the former road was quite beyond my comprehension. Past Marlowe's Deptford then; another day I would have paused to pay him my respects, for an olden family tradition told me by my ancient uncle has it that we Morleys share collateral descent with long-gone Kentish Marlowes. I like to think we did (for after all, to have the author of *The Tragical History of Dr Faustus* in the family-line would be felicity beyond compare). Then up the hill at hardly more than walking pace to blood-soaked old Blackheath, the scene, some centuries gone, of battles I forget (and yet, ere that, I know, no lesser person than the Emperor of the Byzantines pitched his tents all hereabouts, for talks with English kings; so high our sovereigns thought to draw such embassies, so far indeed from glorious Constantinople of the massy walls and Golden

Horn, ere it fell unto the cursed turbaned Turk).

With change of horse at The Old Green Man, our driver Philips cocked his pistols and then applied the whip. The thievish wander even here, though less oft by the day; although I knew the hill ahead more dangerous yet by far. My companions snored; I hated the both of them quite equally: the one who loved a god I long abhorred, the other's god was nothing but his belly (I will not give the Christian god the honour of a capital, though gladly would I enlarge on Goddess; the latter is the All to me, the former I despise). We passed a hundred minor tomb-mounds on the heath; I thought the happy long-dead blessed that they had never lived to see the wretched 19th century. My sister and myself would preserve; the rest can rot alive in hell. There must be other worlds than this, and finer too beyond; and if we cannot find our way to them, perhaps we can create them in our dreams.

A way across the heath we turned onto the Roman road; I knew it straight away, for now the coach no longer lurched on curves. We rattled on through rolling fields of dark green furze and made good time, despite the road's quite execrable state; the recent rains, they told me when I was arrived, had washed out pot-holes everywhere, and some of them quite deep. The bouncing and the jouncing were hardly to be borne.

And so, approaching Shooters Hill, I knew that hereabouts three centuries since plain Anne of Cleves encamped, in hope forlorn of Henry's love. But most of all, I felt the Legions march beside me; felt them stamp and saw them red and silver; heard their raucous songs of buggered Caesar and lewd Bithynian kings. And loved them for their loud and pagan laughter. Though how a Latin laugh might sound, I merely could conjecture.

They nowise would have laughed at how their road was now decayed. I could not ever say what great relief it was to dismount at the foot of the hill when at the last we were arrived; the road being both so steep and now so muddy that a fully laden coach would have had the greatest difficulty to ascend.

Shooters Hill, it seems, is all of inns: The Fox Under the Hill (though picturesquely named, a hovelish beer-shop and little more than that) at its western foot; The Red Lion halfway up; The Golden Lion down a lane from there; The Bull upon its crest, replacing now The Catherine Wheel; and round its base, on other sides, I gather many more.

The inns were quite apparent; the highwaymen that give the hill its ill-repute were fortunately out of view. I found myself rather disquieted, however, to discover that in recent months these many inns have instituted a system of hiring out armed guards for the journeys made between them, coaches being most vulnerable upon the intervening slopes. I fear to say I have a rather strong impression that these same armed guards, a scarred and surly bunch and quite unwashed, if not hired for the purpose might well turn out to be the very same depredatious villains that they would otherwise be 'protecting us' from. But such is the way of the world, and as I would be staying hereabouts, I paid my contribution willingly enough, and with a gratuity besides. I laughed to see the priestly and the gross fat awoken too for similar exactions. The latter paid the more besides, in order not to walk. For all I know, the climb it would have killed him.

The hill is steep, the walk was hard; yet at the last I was arrived, in daylight and with time to spare for supper (a most excellent oyster and kidney pudding). A vast palatial place, The Bull, almost too big to comprehend on first inspection. The sinking sun was flashing on the thick glass panes and so, for a moment, then, I thought the building all of silver-golden mirrors. My trunk got down (none too gently) from the coach, I stood a moment looking up toward the tower rising high above the entrance door, its lantern-windows designed quite plainly for the sight-seeing; and knew I wanted that room entirely for myself. All else: the dance hall (or 'Assembly Room' as I later discovered it actually s



called), the tap-house, the stables and coach-houses and I know not what, they seem to sprawl in a directions, one, two and three storeys tall, all hardly more than 50 years old, though as I gather The Bull may not have been the first building on the site, some parts might yet be older. Perhaps a great age would add somewhat to the atmosphere, but I confess the modern amenities are more than welcome. There's much here that I've still to explore; an entire pleasure ground stands, I gather, on the hill behind the inn; there was no daylight left to see it.

I had, of course, written beforehand to reserve a room, though as it seems there are no other long-term guests (or right now even short-term ones, as far as I can see) this was perhaps a little less than necessary. I somehow think the new century treats The Bull unkind; that perhaps its glory-days already lie behind it, and now there's naught ahead but slow decline, from florid, gay *jeunesse* stiffened, grey *morbidité* (I must remember not to speak French in public while I'm here, the situation being as it is). My suspicion falls upon the current landlord, recently arrived it seems: if ever there was a man suited to kill the goose that laid the golden eggs, he seems the one to me. I hardly like to mention him here at all; but then again, it gives me opportunity to relieve myself of all my spleen and vituperation.

And so...

My host Jude Brown's a balding, surly wretch who dresses most in colours like his name, and that I do suspect, because they do not show the dirt; I thought him old before his time and, frankly, wish him in his grave. 'Morley the *writer*,' he sneered when I announced my arrival, with all that bristling resentment that only the ignorant can show. I have not cared to enquire how he takes his pleasure; I can only imagine that it somehow involves the torture of small and helpless squealing animals. I thought him oafish and, showing my contempt, I paid him for my room and board a full month in advance, and gave him guineas when he asked for pounds. He became servile. Upon the instant then I knew: I hate him. It pleases me to think ahead and hope I'll hear him screaming as he roasts in hell eternal.

More than this, when I enquired of the tower-room, he bluntly did refuse me. I offered him a guinea more than all I'd paid already. He refused me still, but oh, the torments of cupidity that racked his base and miserable soul; I think I've never felt such deep contempt. He is a worm, as spineless as he is avaricious; and yet, I think, he's poison.

Yet Mistress Brown, his wife, is quite another matter. If dearest Liz was half as old again, she would not look too different: brown eyes so bright, her auburn hair so long, an easy smile, and full of charm. The latest fashions, too, she wears: a long and thin white high-waist dress that almost falls from off her shoulders, and all that fairest flesh exposed above her bosom offset by a chain of garnet. I thought so much of Lizzie then, who wears a dress so like it back at home; but Mistress Brown she fills it rather better than my slim young sister. She showed me to my room and whispered in my ear (charming this, I thought, there being no one near to hear) how Jude Brown charged a penny for admission to the tower room, to those who wished to take the view. I asked her if she thought, late in autumn as it was, 250 people would ascend the tower in the month or so I'd stay there; she gave me such a lopsided look I almost slipped her the guinea anyway. I cannot think (no, more than that, I refuse to think) of she and he abed; she is too fair, he is too foul; I think she could not bear it either, and that they have no children. But why a woman so vivacious should marry such a boor, I simply cannot fathom.

Before supper, I slapped a penny in Brown's grasping hand and had him show me up the tower (the truth, it must be said, it was not furnished up for occupation as I'd hoped), so I could look back, sad, on London. I wished that there were telescopes so powerful that I could see my Liz; instead I saw the

monstrous heap of Wren's St Paul's. It squats there on the landscape like an awful giant candle-snuffing a crushing weight of that foul Christian church that damns all men to hell with sin.

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In Roman times, there was a temple of Diana there.

The views, it must be said, they truly are magnificent, and I could not help but think mayhap that Julius Caesar himself had come this way and, near a century later, Claudius besides, Vespasian perhaps, commander in his army; indeed, that all of them might once have stood (perhaps a little lower) upon the very same spot as I and looked, whether at barely-founded London, or Troya Nova, or whatever existed then or didn't, across the same broad landscape as I myself did in the fading light, a landscape stretched out there as far as distant Harrow-on-the-Hill (though barely seen for choked and rising smoke of myriad household chimneys in between). And if New Troy was but a fantasy of older Welshman Geoffrey, how much the more appealing than the sprawl we have today.

Perhaps to me, though, far more important than the sight of London that I have from here is that I am *not in it*, cannot hear its noise, or smell its stinks, nor feel the claustrophobic oppression of its thronging masses. For all I love my sister and the family home, I do not have that robust nature necessary for London; I know that if I had stayed much longer there, I would have gone quite mad. Here, where the hill rises high above that press, and babble and smoke, and all the war-talk and the cursing of the French; and worse, the unclean streets and crush of carriages; then here at last, I might be able to think. And thinking, then, be able to write my thoughts all down. My chief regret, of course, is that my dearest Liz is not here with me now; but I know that if she was, I would not think of writing down a word.

And if I can but think and write, and dream, what marvel phantom palaces might be built, up here on Shooters Hill...

And yet, perhaps, The Bull itself somehow partakes of all that makes me marvel; or someone living in it.

After supper, Mistress Brown invited me to share a drink with her; I thought this was quite sweet of her to try to make me welcome. And yet I could not. I was too tired, the world was all too strange; I missed my Liz. I asked her to excuse me; when I saw the corners of her lovely mouth a-suddenly drooped, I promised I would drink with her tonight. I almost promised more than this: that if she would but smile again then I would ever be her slave. A moment then she looked at me all quizzical as if I was some beast incomprehensible.

'Young man,' she said (I almost died for shame to hear her call me so), 'a thousand hulking brutes would lay down flat upon the ground for merest chance to drink with me. I do not know if you are wise, or you are stupid; and yet, I think I like you. So go to bed and rest your head; tomorrow night we'll drink so much, that surely you will lose it.'

I did not know if she was kind or she was not; and yet, the moment passed, we smiled, and laughed, and so at last I took me to my room. To my great delight, I've obtained a corner room upon the upper floor with windows facing both to east and south: to east I look out over little villages called Wellin and East Wickham, and across the wide and rolling Kentish country; to south the trees are far enough away across the road for my eyes to wander up and down a vast and starry sky. More to the point, I can look toward the rising Moon and, with this elevated viewpoint, see the first appearance of her lovely radiant head above the far horizon, then gaze for hours upon my beaming Muse as up she sails serenely to the zenith of the dark-night sky (the sunrise, of course, I intend each day to miss). This causes me far more than merest pleasure. I feel myself thus welcomed to my temporary home, and the beginning of my work, by the world's oldest and most beautiful Goddess. My pleasure it was somewhat marred by hearing, down below, some drunken wretch upon the road who would surely

patriotic songs and, worse, 'god save the king.' So, all frustrate, I asked the Moon above, with all her gracious pleasure, to deliver him forthwith into the brutal hands of the nearest ugly press-gang. My evening, it had gone astray.

I looked upon that sweet and silver crescent; I was so sad to be here on the Earth and wished that I was up there in the Moon. The Moon it is a world of ladies; I hate the world of men.

I woke to neighing horses, clattering hooves, slamming doors and squeals of poorly oiled wheels. And, as I said, I did not know quite where I was, except it was too noisy. I realised at last that even in The Bull, the 19th century was too close; I fear I never will escape it.

I slept again a short while then, and know I dreamt of dearest Liz; I think she wept and missed me, worried for my safety too. I woke and missed her just as much; the more because there was so little I could remember of my dream.

I rose, but kept within my room; the day outside had turned to rain. And so the morning's passed with writing in my journal; I'll now to dinner, and then this afternoon, begin my work. I decided on awaking here to call the story *Somnium*. It speaks so sweetly of the Moon, and Goddesses, and an unattainable longed-for love. And hardly formed as it may be so far, I know it's full of joy and pain, and how they coalesce.

Its hero's named Endimion Lee; his darling is Diana.

*Friday, 21st September 1803*

So, yester-afternoon I scribbled many notes, and arrived at a bare schematic of my story; but for too much, I do confess, I thought of dearest Liz. At last I knew the best for me was but to combine the two. I'd made two promises to my sweet young sister: that I would not return until my story it was written, and more, besides, that before Christmas I would again be home (I think foul scorn upon the wretched festival as far as its religion; and yet I do confess to thinking well enough of roasted turkey and brandy-flamed plum-pudding, and dancing with my Liz). And so I'll write this tale for Liz, and surely be home in time to offer it as a gift.

And more, besides: my story's set in that golden-glowed Elizabethan era, so close to both our hearts. So when I write each single word about that puissant Queen, it cannot help but bring another Liz to mind.

I went for supper. I think it was stewed duck; I hardly noticed. For Mistress Brown sat down there with me at my table in the hotel dining room. Before my supper it was even served, she had two glasses there upon the table; an open bottle of claret and a smile I thought was rather wicked.

If I'd offended her the previous night, she had the strangest way to show it. I told myself that, the only rooming guest, she simply wished to make a fuss of me; but, honestly, I do not know the thoughts that put that sparkle in her eye. Young though I may be, I hardly think myself as handsome and beyond that, she knew no single thing about me. And yet I simply knew that last night there'd be no possible escape: I'd drink with her or all my life here in The Bull, it would be hell. And so I let her fill my glass; for if she wished to make me welcome, I could hardly say her nay. I saw her husband glare at me, while passing to the cellar. I wanted then to tell him that I would quite happily be upstairs; I could not.

And yet, for all my earliest misgivings, I would not have missed that evening for the world. The first bottle of claret we drank there while I dined; she plied me with so many eager questions that I told her, if she had been a papist and a man, then she could easily have found extended work with all those villains of the Inquisition. I asked her if she preferred the rack, the pilliwinks or boot. She laughed and threatened me with further claret, pale sack and, if I would not submit at all, she'd have

resort at last, then, to the kiss. For that, I said, a stronger man than me would tell her anything she wished. She laughed the more, and all I ever thought to see of sauciness was there and dancing in her eyes. Of sin, however, I hardly could convict her. For after all, her dress was white, like Liz's, or the Vestal Virgin's, or rather more than this, I thought, the chaste and lovely Goddess of the Moon.

And so, I think, before too long had passed, I told her all she wished to know; I simply could not help it. I told her how the seizure it had carried off my father, so long ago I hardly could remember more recently of fever's grip that took my much-loved mother. Of how I'd learned my Latin and my Greek at old St Olave's and St Saviour's Grammar School in Bermondsey, where they had taught the same since the Virgin Queen was sat upon the throne; but having neither cause nor great desire, I then foregone a place at Oxford. I fear I may have said too much of breweries inherited in the Midlands, that meant I had no need of work, but gave me time to write. I told her how the family now was nothing more than Liz and I, but what I told her else I simply cannot think. I hope I did not make her think me rich, or suggest to overhearing ears there might be aught of value in my trunk. But whatever I said was said, and cannot be recalled.

And she, in turn, she told me tales of The Bull that made me laugh, or made me gape in disbelief. Of fortunes and of mansions lost and won there in the card-rooms; of teeth knocked out with billiard balls; of highwaymen escaping from the law while dressed up in their mistress' clothes; of fornications on the very dance-floor, and how they said that certain present ministers of the crown were conceived there as a result. With such relish did she tell me, I hardly cared at all to think of truth or silly falsehood.

Yet sometimes, when she paused, I thought to see another, stranger light that glinted in her eye. I could not think quite what it was, but somehow (oh, it sounds impossible) I had the impression that someone else was looking out through her large and lovely eyes, and more, from a great distance too. And whoever that someone was, and wherever she was, the both were somehow more supremely real than anything to be found on Earth. And to that cool glance, all the stories dripping from her lips were merely passing entertainments, The Bull a flimsy stage-set, and all this world and all its passing shows but fictions. I confess I do not know if claret made me think this; I am quite certain, though, that with further claret I forgot it.

The bottle that succeeded to the first, we drank it in her private parlour, a room of rather sybaritic comfort (or so it seemed to me) that stands behind the hotel bar-room; the *chaise longue* that she insisted we should share was padded, soft and covered overall with velvet, turquoise-blue and curlicued in gold. She sat quite close and offered up a toast: she to me, and so I offered her another in return. A blazing fire was in the room, and so she cast away the shawl from round her shoulders; and then that fairest skin revealed, betwixt her neck and (oh, let me write it here in private) her breast quite took my breath away. A third bottle of claret then succeeded to the second. By the fourth I thought her rather sweet, although I knew a decade separated her from me. No, I tell a lie. By the second I thought her rather sweet; by the fourth I could not tell quite who she was, but thought her mother, sister, sweetest friend and then I know not what. She confused me more by playing soft upon the harpsichord, and so reminded me of Liz, who entertains me thus at home. Or someone played, I'm sure they did. And someone helped me off to bed; I cannot quite say who.

I dreamed once more of silver towers, but now they were confused, somehow, with this vast Bull-tavern where I sleep, as if from solid brick rose dream-stuff, sparkling and soaring, to flaunt its gemmeous splendours to a Moon-illumined sky. And one palatial door stood open and inviting; yet a step beyond was darkness and I know not what. I was still hesitating on the threshold when at last the dream was ended.

I did not wake before dinner-time, and when I did my head was all a-throb. And going down the stairs I almost fell. I could not quite believe how Mistress Brown was sparkle-eyed and laughing, told her then that all I wished was milk and more, perhaps, a cool wet cloth to wipe across my brow. She looked at me so sweet and so concerned. I thought she was quite lovely.

She said that she was bad, and helped me back upstairs. She laid me down and placed a wet cornerkerchief on my forehead, closed the shutters and told me I should sleep till supper. More, she made me promise that nothing further would I attempt, and when I did so, then she kissed me on the cheek. I knew it was an impulse; she blushed so sweetly pink. I wanted then to call her back and kiss her two times more; but she was out the door before I could. I thought my head was near to kill me, I could not quite believe it. I lay there thinking: 'Mistress Brown, I do not know quite who you are, or what you've done to me. Last night I thought you angel down from heaven; today I think you dearest demon, and yet I do not know quite what to say. But for that kiss, I think, I will forgive you anything, even though my aching skull should crack and all my palpitating brain escape to freedom.'

I lay there till the daylight went and then, at last, began to feel a little better. Mistress Brown she brought my supper on a tray and served me in my room; I thought that rather kind. She brought a bottle of claret and a jug of cold boiled water from the well; made me promise, if I drank at all, I mix the two by halves. I told her that I would, and then I smiled at her weakly; she looked at me so gently. I do not know quite what it is that seems to make dear ladies wish to mother me. I'd think it was because I'd lost my own, but Liz has lost hers too; and when I'm in the grip of illness, then she is more sweet than mother ever was to me.

So after eating supper I felt rather more recovered, and since that time I've lain here on the bed and written all these pages of my journal. The Moon is up, the clouds have cleared; the time has come for work. I'm tempted just to drink the claret, but I have made a promise, and they tell me that the water here is good.

And so, I think, with a half a drink, and a full toast to the Moon, I'll begin to write my story, and bring this world of dreams that's formed within my head to life upon the page.



## SOMNIUM

by Christopher Morley

*(First draft, commenced September 1803. For Liz.)*

When Tiberius Claudius Nero Germanicus Caesar deigned first to set his imperial foot upon the ancient soil of fair Britannia's isle (four entire legions sent before him armed, to teach the warlike locals peace) he progressed triumphant from the Kentish coast toward what would, in latter days, be known as old Londinium, road-building as he came with marvellous speed. Primary road in all the land of Albion, ever the same though many-named... Vitellius' Street, Watling Street, the Dove Road... those of us who stride its straightness nowadays might remember, on occasion, that it was builded by an emperor with a dragging limp, unable to place one foot direct before the other.

Eight miles from London Bridge, old Watling Street runs up, and over, and down high Shooter's Hill, which ever had but a single name, and no one living knows precisely what it means.

But no, like ancient Claudius too, your author stutters in his speech. In the reign of that most glorious Queen Elizabeth Tudor, the Miracle of Time and Wonder of her Age, robber-haunted Shooter's Hill bore an alias besides: the Hill of Blood.

And it is when this tall and wooded eminence bore so sanguinary a title, that our story begs a gentle reader's leave... to begin...

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'Why how now, good my lord?' asked Bartholomew Greene, an otherwisely amicable young page excepting only his addiction to the plays, to the cant phrase, and all too loose iambics. Sir Endimion Lee, reining in his horse, just looked at him askance, and wondered at the crinkled autumn leaf that whirled a-sudden round his head.

'Why stop you here, my lord?' continued Greene. 'This hill has all too ill a name.'

'And you, my Bart, have far too loose a tongue,' Master Lee replied in kind. 'I pause because the breeze blows strange, and stars shine far too early. We're benighted when we should be dusked, and the world, methinks, is somewhat out of joint.'

'Oh, let it not be robbers, lord!' moaned Greene, a-tremble in his saddle. But which of his lords he called upon, not even he could say.

Lee stood up in his stirrups then, and cast his eye around. A mile or so behind them, ancient Eltham Palace stood, three centuries old, or more. To their right rose deeply-wooded Shooters Hill, a dark and brooding threat beneath the nighted sky. Before them, the Well Hall Road (a muddy track) ran on to cross the wide hill-vaulting Dover Road that, running to their left, would take them on toward the lovely Palace of Placentia, sprawled along the riverbank at Greenwich. Placentia, where her Imperial Majesty Elizabeth no doubt awaited Lee's arrival with her usual fickle temper and the irritated fingering drumming of her hot impatient soul. A soul that flamed the colour of her hair, worn loose in virgin style; yet in its cooler moments, storming temper calmed by an oiled and flattering word, would deign to dance with lesser men and courtiers, a goddess reaching down to take the hand of mortals. And Lee all dressed up in his finest Spanish doublet, embroidered neat with silver, had clad himself to please her; or so at least he hoped.

All seemed quiet and familiar, and nothing different to the many times they'd ridden by before. And yet...

It was too dark, too early.

'Ride onward, Bart,' said Lee just then, applying a gentle spur. 'I know not what's afoot, but let us away from here. The crossroads is not far ahead.'

'The crossroads?' gasped poor Greene upon the instant, eyes a-bulge to show their whites, iambics all forgot. 'The crossroads are foul Hecat's realm, and in this dark, her hellhound pack... oh master, let's across the fields and avoid her howling hunt...'

'And break our horses' legs in unseen ditches? You're a blockhead, Bart, and those hell-damned playmakers have addled all your brains. 'Od's teeth, but I'm glad you cannot read; otherwise who knows what twaddle you might spout. Now let's be on, and not another word.'

By all-unspoke agreement then, they put their horses to the trot, mounting the none-too-steep incline and arriving, in the end, at the expected crossroads. Far behind them now was Royal Eltham; the ride on straight would take them down to Woolwich Dockyards, haunt of raucous porter-swilling seadogs like Master Drake and all his salt-encrusted ilk. An ilk unliked enough by Master Lee though he'd be glad enough to make his leftwards turn.

And yet, the darkness thickened.

Crossing himself like a recusant Catholic and muttering soft of Hecat's dogs that hunt down your men's souls, Bartholomew Greene pulled hard on leftward rein, and kicked his heels for Greenwich. Only, a moment later, though, to pull back on the bridle, for Master Lee no longer rode there by his side.

Greene looked back behind him then, but held his ground. For the sight before his eyes, he knew was haggard Hecat's work, and could be of no other.

Standing on the crossroads' further side, toward grim Shooters Hill, a curious carriage stood. Greene recognised it straight as one of the new-called 'coaches' (though some did call them 'chariots'), introduced of late from Europe, lighter and faster and more to the passengers' comfort than olden plodding wagons. But this...

This was all of silver sheen and glinting crystal, its seats upholstered with cloth-of-gold and smoothest satin, with peacock-feathered crests upon the brows of two fine milk-white mares that neighed and struck the stone-paved road with sparking metal shoes. Not from Europe, this, but quite from another world. And suddenly the Moon was up, and though he knew it came from hell, the coach was all aglitter.

Neither driver nor passenger was anywhere in sight. But Sir Endimion Lee, that far-too-foolish master to whose service he was sworn, alas, was dismounting from his horse, and had his hazel eyes on coach alone. Bart Greene looked once upon the long brown mane and short small beard, the lined and world-weary face, the night-dark doublet that his master wore; and wondered if he'd ever see the like again. With a discontented sigh and all the urgent speed of a pave-besliming snail, Greene then turned back to join him.

'No sign of robbers, vagabonds, or any ill,' remarked Sir Lee as Greene drew rein, a dozen paces off, his blue eyes paling grey with utmost trepidation. 'But such is hereabouts' repute...'

A long and narrow sword then slithered free, with rasping sound, from out its leathered scabbard. And glinted by that self-same Moon which silvered all the carriage.

'Get you gone to Greenwich, Bartho' Greene,' commanded Lee, a-gesture with his rapier, 'and give your master's compliments to Dudley, Earl of Leicester. Say I offer deep apologies to him, the first and then, if he'll be kind to pass them on, to our beloved Sovereign Lady, the high and royal Queen. When I've probed this mystery here, I'll follow on; but as the both will understand, I fear some lazar may be deep in need of any aid that I might offer. And now begone, and as you ride, remember this: the faster you apply the spur, the slower the devil to catch you up!'

No second bidding needed, Greene wheeled his mount about and kicked it to the gallop. And for a mile along that old straight road, he never once looked back; and so saw naught of that which fell off next.

Endimion Lee walked once about the richly-holstered carriage, seeing nothing of suspicion. No mud-pressed foot or hoof prints, no sign of swift attack nor trace of unwilling kidnap. At last, shaking his head as he sheathed his sword, he opened up the coach's door and climbed within, sat slowly down on soft seat-cushion and, looking round, once again saw naught amiss.

Now quite perplexed, he let his eyelids close, and on the instant felt the carriage lurch. Hammered iron horseshoes clacked upon the road-pave, banded wheels began to turn. As if a-drowsed with sleep he struggled hard to open up his eyes again, only now to find that all around seemed bathed in golden light. And yet, although by then his thoughts were dancing brawls and seventeens, he found he could not move.

The silvered carriage, moonbeam-lit, turned itself around unguided, and started up the hill. And willy-nilly, Sir Endimion Lee perforce went with it.

The utmost peak of wooded Shooters Hill he knew quite well, crowded all about with oak and ash and hornbeam. At least, he knew it well in other days, but on a night like this all former knowledge failed him. At the hill's tall crest the coach turned left and north, along a drive that plainly was not there.

It was not there and never had been and, indeed, he somehow knew, it never would be either.

~~Nor was the gateway that he passed through next, which opened in a marbled wall; nor the garden spread beyond, with lapping ponds and burbling streams, and marvellous statues all marmoreal, pale and whitened by the rising Moon.~~

The palace that he reached at last, where the silver carriage halted, was, quite simply, never even seen before in delirium or dream.

Nor Greenwich, no, nor Eltham; nor Hampton Court, nor Richmond; not even glorious Nonsuch that could not be believed... comparison here made all of these mere hovels. For before him rose a miracle and splendour, and wonder past all telling, enamelled, silvered and bejewelled. All arabesque it was, in gleaming argent lit by moonbeams, and cupolas interspersed with turrets first, but more with spires next, both rising to the sky. It seemed mosaiced quite in tesserae of crystal, its galleries a filigreed with gleaming gem-flecked bronze; and from within, through oriels so large, came light, and light, and light. And more, about its gateway, there was sweet Diana, imaged up in tiny stones, of opals and of turquoise, and set about with silver, with electrum, and with gold.

And Endimion Lee, who though he'd seen so many things, and thought of more besides, could only sit, and look, and weep. Weep for shame that never human hand had built the like, and weep for joy that he had seen what only dear immortal gods had otherwise beheld.

He sat there, tear-stained still, when the carriage door was opened by a lovely nymph, whose sparkling eyes could only make him think of sweethearts, daughters, sisters, and all those fairest of their sex who are the most beloved. She took his hand in hers, so small, and helped him from the coach.

All dressed in moonbeam white she was, and yet in gossamer light enough to hardly be at all. She gently laughed, now holding both his hands in hers, and tripping backwards nimbly led him on toward a much-begilded door. And Lee, with eyes for nothing but her smile (as surely was intended), thought not to linger with his gaze beguiled by silver towers a-shimmer, by star-aspiring turquoised turrets, or crystal spires that probed the deepest heavens.

The beauty of his charming guide quite silenced all the questions in his mind before they reached his lips. An eyeful of heaven, he thought her, and let her lead him (so it seemed) down deep and maze corridors lit by Moonish gems (he'd think them all carbuncles, yet they were too lunar), until they came at last to gold-leaved doors, that opened with a mere soft sigh.

Once through those doors, that sweet sprite left him then, although he hardly knew. For now he had his senses back, and she he saw ahead commanded, wordless and by look alone: *O man of Earth, bow down.*



*Saturday, 22nd September 1803*

I know it quite immodest to say as much, and yet I have to confess that I am rather pleased; the pages of *Somnium* that I wrote last night, I simply do not know quite where they came from. Perhaps they came down from the Moon; and if they did, I love the Moon for sending them. I cannot know what others might quite think of them, and yet I know I never wrote the finer. Endimion Lee, it seemed to me, already walks these pages like a real man and comrade; I cannot think at all that I have 'made him up'. Of course, it wrote itself so well I am not sure of each historic detail; but these I can correct when I am home once more, surrounded by my books; besides, of course, it is a work of fiction. And



though I did not notice at the time, I find I've used no 'thou' or 'thee', and this seems all the better; flavour of the time is what I want, and not perfected archaism. I wrote and wrote until the nearly dawn, and slept the most part of the morning through. I dreamed, and loved in dream, and made my love in some peculiar dream-place; but *who* I loved in dream I really cannot say.

I woke up all fog-brained and did not call for breakfast. My senses once recaptured, I wrote a letter to my darling Liz, to tell her how I missed her; told her she was sweet, a spring-flower blooming still among the golden autumn leaves; told her she was Queen of Hearts and fairer than her royal namesake; told her nothing, I confess, of bright-eyed Mistress Brown, but sent her all my love and kisses. Told her that it hurts me not to see her smiling in the morning; and when I do not hear her laugh, there is no music in the world. I told her, too, how carefully she must guard her health, though all the horrors of my thoughts I could not bring myself to tell her. I could not bear to see her sweet young face all pitted with the smallpox, or to watch her slowly wasting with consumption. O Gods and Goddesses dear, above, if such there be amongst our fates, then let it fall on me. And so I wrote to her. I thought of her, and writing, thinking, thought that I would cry. The further away she is, the dearer she becomes.

I confess I become bemused with Mistress Brown. After dinner (I did not know quite it was; some dish of chopped-up meat in gravy, served with hot potato pie) I enquired of that wretch, her husband, as to where I could put a letter in the post. He looked at me all surly; before he could reply, and all to think to spite him, she took my arm and led me off outside, proclaiming loudly that it would be a pleasure to walk out with a *gentleman* and show him. The emphasis she placed on 'gentleman' rather made me wince, for all its implication. And once out on the road, she could not help but be laughing. Her motives then, I did not even ask. Her husband and herself are so mismatched, it leaves me quite bewildered.

She walked me halfway down the hill toward old London town, pointing out two large establishments as we did progress. To the south side of the road, quite near the crest, stands Hazelwood House, built a quarter century gone where once there stood the former hilltop inn, The Catherine Wheel (or sometimes, so it seems, The Catherine Wheel and Star; I think I like that better for so it minds me of the sky, and not the swarming Earth). To the north, a little further down, is Broomhall, the mansion of the Lidgbirds, to whom belong the ground rents of The Bull and all its large establishments. Some strange and occult sympathy seemed to draw me to Broomhall. I thought that I would like to see inside; but Mistress Brown informed me that its inhabitants played the part of the hermit, and so were hardly seen at all, except to drive off trespassers.

Some halfway down the hill, we came to that rather inferior hostelry (or so it did appear to me, the lady of the other inn a-clinging on my arm), the Red Lion, where, it seems, the post's collected and delivered daily. She introduced me to the landlord, one Eustatius Wellbeloved, smirked and told him that he'd see me often; for like him, I was quite well-beloved besides. I looked at her askance. And when we started up the hill again, she smiling whispered then: 'Elizabeth.'

I should have been offended. I should have told her this was no one's business but my own. And yet I could not. She is too lovely. Her eyes are too much like my Lizzie's. And more, she seems to grow younger every time I see her.

I think, the night before last, that when I was too drunk, I talked to her too freely: she knew too much of Liz, and more she seemed to understand how much I love my sister. And so I worry all the more of what I may have said regarding our inheritance. If she were quite alone, I would not care; I trust her with my very soul; and yet her husband seems to me a knavish wretch.

Returning to The Bull, I do confess to being loth to lose the pleasure of her company; and so

asked her if she'd show me something of the inn. It is a building quite to match the tales she told me of the place when we were both bedrunk. And so we wandered through the supper rooms, the plastered ceilings painted up rococo-style (not well, but well enough) with naked nymphs and satyrs; the billiard room, the card-rooms and the bar; and so into the assembly room, so huge and high-ceilinged and, empty as it was, acousticked like a church. I stood there for a moment then, just imagining Handel's *Firework Music* played therein, and the majesty it would have had, its woodwinds and its brass high-echoed to the rafters.

Stables for more than 30 horses, she showed me next, with coach-houses, a smithy, granaries, dairy and an ice-house; a yard, the pleasure grounds all full of walks quite charmingly serpentine; the kitchen gardens, the orchard and the land, all cultivate or grazed by sheep. It is a palace self-contained; no, more than this, it is a self-contained estate, a palace at its centre, and so within itself a state entire: the state of Shooters Hilltop, raised up high above mere London Town, or Kent the orchard county. It speaks to me of palaces silvered up with Moonlight; and so, in turn, I am reminded much of Somnium here on Earth.

The last, she took me to the tap-house, a little public tavern on the Kentish side, where all the passing trade it drinks, and dines, and goes its way. I thought it rather quaint, though verging on the plebeian. She told me down below there was a cellar, walled up quite, that legend said contained a table; and on that table lay a horse-pistol, chased with silver. But what the story was that lay behind it, none thereabouts had ever yet discovered.

So arm in arm and full of little laughs, we made our way back to the inn; and how her husband glared to see us.

Frankly now, I am confused. Jude Brown, I'm sure, returns my hatred, and so I fled back to my room as soon as we returned. And even with my cane in hand, I would not care to face him. The tavern's other staff mean little more to me; I know that they are many, though few enough I've met. The serving maids (the two I know, there may be more) look trullish: I think their names are Daphne Squires and Jacqueline Smythe (I wonder if her name is really Smith), and it pains me to say I suspect them both of whoring on the sly. Old Marguerite the cook is all of warts and shares a room with ancient Bates the cellar-man, although they are not married. Young Tom Watkins serves as groom and general runaround; I like his ready smile, but would not leave my trunk unlocked at all when he is about. And there are surly unwashed men who watch Brown's sheep out in the fields behind the inn; the sun-browned gardeners and farmhands; those I neither know nor wish to. The staff, I think, are never arrived with gross Jude Brown, and serve the hotel ill; not long ago the clientele were earls and dukes and all their pretty ladies, the cook a match for any else in Europe... and now? Yet after all, I came to Shooters Hill to write, and hardly for the company. Some part of me it thinks the tavern could be so much better; another part it thinks of Mistress Brown, and suddenly it is. And so I came back to my room confused.

And yet, I know, the world that really is means little now to me; the world that I shall dream, and writing, draw that dream from night to daylight plain... that is the world for me.

I'll do it once again tonight, but since we did return, I've nothing done except to write this journal.

*Sunday, 23rd September 1803*

Last evening, before supper, I went outside to smoke a pipe or two and look again toward London and ugly Paul's, knowing that not too far beyond that massive pile of misdirected worship my sweet Liz would, perhaps, be playing the old family harpsichord and thinking sad-sweet thoughts of me. And, simply, to see just where she was, and to feel myself beside her; and how I wished I was.

I thought, then, of how the stinking city it had spread, far out beyond its ancient Roman walls, and somehow (~~call it vision, or a dream, or clear sight of the future~~) I had the impression that one day the city of 'London' would have grown (and groaned) and sprawled, and engulfed each single thing, both large and small, between the here and there, washing flotsam as a neap tide does upon the shores of ancient Shooters Hill; which, although my stay here has but lasted days, I've come to think of rather fondly. More than that, I seemed to see the whole hillside quite engulfed in strangely-shapen houses and I knew the hubbub, and the dirt, the flabby-bellied men who vomited in the street and all the empty-headed squalor, had extended even here. How sad I was to see it.

And yet, somehow, I knew that I was seeing this entire scene through quite another's eyes; of a man of that time, rather than my own, and yet I thought him some way quite like me; and thinking how I face such things myself, then somehow all my heart ached at the horrors of his foul existence, while at the same time I found myself upon the sudden proud of his ability to live and move and breathe and swim against the tides and terrors of his time. The best that I could think (or hope) was that he did not make things worse. I know that some may think this sounded lunatic and incomprehensible: but somehow, I felt that he, like me, was a practitioner of the writer's craft, with all the heaven and the hell that that entails; though what 'writing' then might mean escapes me. But somehow, we had the same part of us to share. And if he will exist, I wonder what he'll write? For if he is like me, I know, he will not write of his present time, but rather of the past; or of some ideal world so far removed from all the horrors of the real. And more I know (and how it joys my heart) he'll write all loving of the Moon. And mayhap all of this was fancy; and hap again it may have not been.

With much to think upon I returned within, but decided (wrongly, as I swift found out) to take a little ale in the tap-house. This I merely did for the sake of experience and exploration; only to find myself then trapped in conversation with some local ancient in a *tricorne* hat and, still, a powdered wig, who (when not crying out aloud 'By George!') wished to know my thoughts upon the war; and worse he wanted me to join him in his execrations of the French, the Turks and, I know not why at all, the heathen far Chinees. I told him that I had no thoughts at all and, more, that English, French and all others oversea were all the same to me, alike in stupidity and hypocrisy, and politicians' talk was simply excremental. And more, that income tax for fighting foreign wars was quite immoral, and William Pitt he should be hanged. The greybeard then began to splutter: demanded patriotism, talked of Nelson (pah!), king and country, empire and I know not what. I told him, most politely so it seemed to me, that while I might be forced to live in the evil 19th century, that didn't mean I had to take part in it, that too the more there was of it the less I liked it, and that all his old fool's words were unthought prejudice and downright knavery. I would have told him more besides, of how great my hatred had grown for his madly inbred 'royal' family, and how I spat upon his god as well, but Mistress Brown was passing by, and so she intervened. She took my arm and led me to her parlour and closed the door behind us; and then she could not help herself but burst out laughing.

She told me that the pious ancient I'd provoked was more than four times quite my age; a local miser who, at each New Year, would offer all the barmaids each a golden sovereign if they would but let him thrash them, for the music of their screams. I did not think to ask if he had ever spent his money. She told me he would go before nightfall, for as he often said, 'good Christian men are not out after dark.' And so for her sake I retreated up the back stairs, and took my supper in my room.

Last night the inn was crowded, both with locals and with officers of the Artillery, up from Woolwich, all come to crowd the assembly hall and hear the hired musicians playing jigs and reels, and spend their pay on dance and drink and frolics and, I fear, to pass the time in lewd and riotous behaviour. I thought to stay withdrawn inside my room, although the noise of songs and shouts was a

throughout the tavern; but Mistress Brown she simply would not let me. She insisted that I leave my writing, go downstairs and join her in the dance. More, I fear to say, she insisted that I dance with her alone; I simply cannot conjecture why. She plied me then with so much claret ('on the house', as the expression has it) and, dancing, clung so close, that I grew quite alarmed; not with the warm, sweet softness of her in my arms, but rather when glancing at her husband and his all-too thunderous brow.

But stranger still, all through the evening, brash young lieutenants or dashing captains of the Artillery Regiment would present themselves to her with all their gentlest compliments, requesting then no fairer thing than the honour of her company in the dance; and always she would absolutely refuse them. The first or two she deigned to talk to, told them tales: how I was her long lost brother, how the evening was my birthday; after that, she simply did something with her strange and loving eyes, and would not talk at all. I gaped amazed: first that she would rather dance with me, second that these muscled heroes of the nation would simply wilt and creep away before a single word was spoken. I asked her what she did; and yet she merely smiled.

We danced and danced; a moment when we paused she insisted that, thenceforth, when we were quite alone, then I should call her 'Cynthia' instead of 'Mistress Brown' (though I should always call her by the latter in company, and especially in that of her husband, whose nature, I know full well, tends toward the jealous). And, although I sought it not, when we were both too drunk for further dancing and I asked her to release me to my room, she kissed me a most fond goodnight. And I confess I did not stop her; neither the first time, nor the second. I looked back as I climbed the stairs and thought that, with the slightest invitation, she would have followed on; I had not thought that I would ever see a woman looking at me quite so sweet and tender as I took myself to bed. And such a gentle smile. Indeed, although I know that I was rather more the drunk than she, I found it hard, I must confess, to turn my back on her. Perhaps the fact that she, too, has such large and bright brown eyes reminded me of my dearest Liz, and somehow saved me from my baser instincts. Though having written that, I cannot think of why it should.

I dreamt of lovely women in a hall made quite of moonlight, dancing young and naked in my arms and laughing oh-so-sweet. And all their kisses, each and every one, were nectar and ambrosia.

This morning, being Sunday, I was suddenly awoken by the foul Jude Brown (I think with viciousness and malevolent perversity) at ten of the clock; it greatly did annoy me. One of the reasons that I chose this inn, rather than one in a village further on from London, was because there is no church to be found upon the hill. And so I was disgusted, then, to be informed by the unspeakable Brown that the assembly room (scene last night of such debauch) doubles as a chapel on Sunday mornings, and that a quite insufferable travelling preacher called Kinnock (I will not call him 'Reverend', because from me he deserves no reverence at all) holds weekly service there for staff and guests, hectoring them as to their supposed sins and moralising tediously in a way that hardly would convince a puling child. Being my first weekend upon the premises, I felt obliged to attend for the sake of appearance; though I noticed that foul Brown's fairest wife did not, and so I wondered why she did besides. I need hardly add that I spent the entire hour of Kinnock's ridiculous sermonising praying fervently to Diana, Jove and any of the other elder Gods who might be listening, that the damnable wretch might be accosted by highwaymen, or hauled off to the Clink for debt, or struck down with the French pox, or *somehow* otherwise detained before he gets the opportunity to return here and torment me with his inanities next Sunday.

And when at last I had escaped, dear Mistress Brown she looked at me and shook her head, and on her face was such a puzzled smile. I wanted then to rush to her and make some explanation; but then we both saw 'Judas' Brown nearby, a smirking sneer upon his face, and I know she understood ju

how I had been tricked.

I came back up to my room to find my copy of Mr Taylor's recent translation of *The Hymns Orpheus*; and when I had I chanted out aloud the 'Hymn to the Moon' until I felt the air was clean. I think, each night from now, I'll chant it over again at dusk, by way of invocation. This is the only book I have with me; I rather wish I'd brought my *Vathek*.

The incident did depress me. I'd thought that leaving depraved and sinful London I'd leave behind besides the vile patriotism, tricks and lies, the thievish ways, hypocrisy, cant and Christian church (for all of these to me are sin and foul corruption); and yet they're even here. I almost thought to catch the coach, and suffer back at home, where at least there is my Lizzie. Yet here there is dear Cynthia, and I can but wish away the rest...

Yet if I had but one wish, I know, it would be this: to restore somehow the pagan world, its religion and its art; and more than this, its freedoms. Mr Taylor, I know, he feels the same; yet even if he only speaks of Plato, still the poor man is abused. I feel the loss of all the Christians have destroyed; and more I feel the loss of all that could have been besides. What epics and romances might have echoed down the years, what hymns to sweetest Goddess, what poems of the Moon divine. Who knows, *Somnium*, or other things I'll write, it may be mine to write a pagan literature of the present day (not too distant past). I wish I'd been at Placentia or Nonsuch, to write the Virgin Queen in Diana's fairest form, like Lyly, Raleigh and the rest. Yet born too late, I have to write the Moon as she appeared to me; and always ere the last few days, she has been Lizzie... and now I do not know...

Dinner done, I took a nap. I know now why I call my story *Somnium*; because I am quite sure this is all a hill of dreams. I hardly stop, from candle-out to sun-up, and now I find they continue in the afternoon. I dream of Liz. I dream of Cynthia Brown. I dream of dear Diana, the sweetest Goddess of the Moon (though always in my dreams, somehow, she insists upon the Greek original of her name Selene). They kiss me in my sleep. They come to me all naked. I wake and wonder where they are; and I hate myself for waking. And now I have to find a way to write all this. Ideas I had to write before I came here, all seem nothing now. But dream and wine, they turn my mind quite upside down.

And more, I drink and then I dream, and lovely women quite apart, my dreams are full of palaces. Great spires and towers, and grandiosities the like I never thought; so 'Somnium' is now a palace of the Moon, all builded up of dream-stuff, that sprawls on ancient Shooters Hill. And I know somehow The Bull's a small part of that much-beloved and all-too-awesome structure, a gatehouse to the world of lunar dream. And Cynthia, or Liz, or Diana, I cannot tell them quite apart, especially when they're naked; they wait for me and beckon, sadly smiling, calling me home from all this weary world of dust. They are so sweetly tender; if only I knew how I could accompany them, then home with them I'd go.

But what's to do except to make this so by writing? So supper done tonight, and claret to support me, I'll dip the pen and start again. With someone rather lovely.



Whether she was merely Queen of all the World, or in everything below the Starry Sphere the Goddess, he could not tell, but thought her both and more besides. He looked the once upon her exquisite grace, and saw a vision like to break his heart. If ever there was loveliness under heaven then it was she, and never was there other.

She sat, enthroned, upon a marble dais, and all around were sylphs the equal of that lovely one who'd led him in. And as those nymphs looked down, from high above, on all the mortal women of the

world, so she who ruled here yet surpassed them still, and many times the more besides. She was, short, the perfection of all the beauty that ever ravished up man's soul, quite since the star-bespangled universe began.

He looked, he loved. What more to say?

Down on a knee he went, and bowed his head; and knew, without her licence, he'd never rise again. And hardly a breath was heard to break the silence of that silvered palace room.

'Good sir,' she said at last, and with her voice the Music of the Spheres matched absolute harmonious. 'This gallant gesture of respect does you the greatest credit, but now you must decide. If terror has unmanned you quite, then merely nod your head, and within the hour you'll awake, and think this naught but dream. If, though... and I believe it so... you have the mettle, then pray look up at me for I would rather see your eyes than look down on your pate.'

'As my lady wishes,' he began, the slightest smile upon his lips, and would have more continued. But once his eyes were to their work again, his tongue was frozen stiff.

She sat among those white-clad nymphs, alone a blaze of colour. Gold sandals clasped her small and dainty feet, and wound their gilded thongs about her graceful ankles. Belted tight around her narrow waist, a brocade skirt of cobalt blue, threaded through with beaded gold, cascaded down in broad and tumbling flounces. Above, the neckline of a clinging bodice, welkin-bright and trimmed with gold, plunged navelwards and left exposed more fairest flesh than ever he had thought to see. About her shoulders, a wide-spaced pectoral mesh of shining gold was studded all with moonstones huge, with gleamy mottled turquoise, with crystals bright a-sparkle; while necklaces of massy pearls hung down in ropes between her lovely naked breasts, so round, so soft, so sweet.

Yet marvelled as he was by all of this, it was forgot when at the last his eyes were cast up to the heaven of her face. Framed all about with tumbling chestnut tresses that spilled down to her hips, those were the dearest features he had ever seen. A fringe swept uncontrolled across her brow, despite the gleaming golden band about her forehead, surmounted with a shining lunar crescent. Above her soft pink lips a tilt-tip nose and, then, the glories of that visage most symmetrical, two enormous deep brown eyes, with black, dilated pupils, all a-glint with Moonsparks.

And little white-jade teeth, that peeped out when she smiled.

'Ah, now will you stay then nine full days?' her lilting question came. 'For we have wonders here to show, and as you know... no wonder lasts for less.'

'A true wonder lasts forever, dear lady,' he remarked, 'for if it lasts not, it is not true. And may you also live forever, lady mine, for you are wonder too.'

'Oh, I shall,' she soft and slowly said, a sweet and secret smile upon her lips. 'Sir Endimion Lee, bid you very welcome, and now come near, and kiss my hand.'

'Right gladly, highness... but will you tell me first precisely where I am, and whose the hand I shall press close to my lips?'

'It amuses me to name this palace *Somnium*,' she told him then. 'And if it amuses you, then think of me as Diana Regina, though I have many names, and use them as I will.'

'Then by your grace I'd hope to learn them all, delightful queen,' said he, advancing to the dai... 'But is there time in all the world for such a task as this?'

'No,' she told him simply.

Before her throne he knelt again, and gazed upon the pale smooth softness of her skin; breathed in the perfume of her hair, of jasmine and of eglantine; then pressed her fingers to his lip, and tasted of the Moon.

'Divine Diana,' he hardly more than whispered, 'for I know you more than queen, with this kiss'

offer up allegiance, devotion and submission, and all I am is yours, my body, heart and soul...'  
'And will you give me mind, as well?' all eagerly she asked, 'and love and hope and dream?'  
'I will,' he assured her.  
'And your sword? Is that mine too?'  
'Even this.'  
'And your honour?'  
'No, dear lady,' he looked up, and met her earnest eyes. 'My honour is my own alone, and I would no more give it up than I would have you give up yours.'  
The radiant smile that lit her face up then was full of warmth and dazzle.  
'Sweet knight,' she said, and raised him up. 'Keep your honour, and your mind and soul and hope  
And I will give you dreams.'

'And love?'  
'Yours I know I have,' she told him then, an eyebrow arched in thought, 'but mine is strange, and far more strangely given. Some desire it, but have it not at all. Some there are who bring it on themselves, but know it not. And there are others yet besides, to whom my love is but a riddle. One or two, perhaps, since this fair and Moon-becircled world began, had it both and knew it... but whether they profited them at all, well, who can say?'

'If a lover finds his love returned, then surely this is profit,' he responded.  
'My good and gallant knight,' she smiled, 'this is wondrous sweet and innocent. And for love of men and maids, enough. But do I give my love to men whose love is otherwise for maids? Or to men whose love soars upwards to the Moon? And who, in loving of the Moon, love only maids unconsummated. For those who love the Moon, you know, are lunatic, and special friends of mine.'

'But enough of this for now!' she laughed, a sound that ravished up his soul. 'By your furrowed brow I see I've caused you more confusion than intended. These nymphs of mine are special friends of mine, well, so let them lead you to your rooms. When you're bathed and freshly clad, we'll dine and talk more privy in my chamber.'

'And so, my dear Endimion Lee, most welcome guest, find ease awhile in *Somnium*. And with the hour we'll drink each other's health.'



*Monday, 24th September 1803*

Is there some strange convergence here? For like Endimion Lee, I think that I could also spend my time just drinking with a lovely lady, in a palatial building here on Shooters Hill. Oh, there is a temptation in those eyes of Mistress Cynthia Brown's. Last night I saw her looking at me after supper and I had to smile at her and quickly look away, for otherwise I knew my evening would be lost. And writing *Somnium* is so deliciously seductive. Temptation or seduction, who's to choose? Last night I chose to write.

I drank and wrote, and all of it came flooding out again. The strange part is that while I know, and fully did intend, that Endimion Lee should be my surrogate to journey through this world of fiction, he will not do quite what I want him to; he is too independent. And more, Diana Regina is not Liz, not Cynthia besides. I simply do not understand. I write, but when I do, I am not sure quite who I am; and all my characters, written, they are not quite the ones I thought they were. I wonder if, perchance, I do not write at all, but that my words are written for me by that man two centuries hence. And then I read

my lines again and think they're from some ancient book, discovered in a tomb. But most of all, I like to think, they whisper sweetly from the Moon.

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At two this morning, when the Moon declined unto the west, I looked out my front window, rather fogged with wine, and thought to see Cynthia sat upon the mounting block before the inn and gazing the sky. She wore a cloak against the night-time cold, but quite what she did out there, I really cannot think. A shooting star sparked overhead, seemed plunging from the Moon, and then she looked up at my window. The look upon her face was completely enigmatic; and if she wished upon a falling star, I cannot quite think what. And then she stood, and came back into the inn. And so I went back to my writing, and fell asleep at four.

I know it sounds incomprehensible, but I swear I walked the corridors of Somnium before the daylight dawned. It might be said that this was nothing more than any might expect: a writer dreaming of his own creation. But all this was too lucid and too lucent to match the vagaries of dream-stuff, and somehow I trod marble veined with Moonlight, heard the faintest tintinnabulation of some fair lady's distant gem-and-silver earring, scented jasmine on the warm and censored air. I briefly walked a corridor inlaid with sapphires, then stood before a niche where sat a silver statuette, of fair Selene with long hair flowing in the winds of time itself, as on she drove her swift and eager steeds, the Moon's chariot all a-race through skies of deepest night. I paused and leant closer to examine the exquisite argent Goddess, and as I did so she, in turn, raised up her lovely head and gave me *such* a glance, that jolted me awake.

I lay in bed no little time, just thinking of my 'dream'; but in the end I knew not what to make of the experience. Perhaps my head was still a little piece a-swirl with this, when down I went for breakfast; for my strange awakening was swiftly followed by a rude one.

A certain Doctor Gould, of Charlton Village, who drank and danced here on the Saturday night, was robbed of one whole guinea as he walked off home, and some smaller coin besides. I spoke of this to the bald Jude Brown this morning, my most innocent and conciliatory smile quite firmly plastered on my poor misguided face, in hope that sharing conversation might somehow reassure him that I had no designs upon his sweet and charming wife. He snarled at me so foully I was quite took aback; then he turned away and swore uncouthly, like a common drayman. I will not try to humour him again. I wish him nothing but the clap or pox, except I fear he'd give them to dear Cynthia; though as I cannot imagine her ever sleeping with so foul a brute, mayhap he'd never get the chance. Instead I wish him to roast in hell, a spit right through his bowels. No longer will I compromise with oafs, or modern fools or knaves with nothing twixt their ears; and if my spitting it could reach to Woolwich town, the arm there would have my foul contempt as well. I do not like this world at all. I'd save my Liz and Cynthia Brown; I'm sure there must be other lovely women quite as sweet; but men (apart from me, I must confess) I'd damn them all to hell. Consumption, pox and black-spot plague on all of them; especially Jude Brown. If he were dead, then who knows what? I fear I don't. And perhaps it's better that I do not think it.

I find that with each passing day I rise the later in the morning. Cynthia teases that I am too late for breakfast; I told her from tomorrow I'll begin the day with dinner. She laughed and ruffled up my hair as if I was child; I confess I looked around me then, to make quite sure her wretched husband was not watching.

The afternoons I begin to explore old Shooters Hill; and though I know that all who live here think it commonplace enough, it is all strange to me. The stag beetles in the woods are absolute profusion; I look upon their 'antlers', think of deer, and think in turn of fleet-foot Diana huntress. All about are the springs and wells of cool delightful water, and in the field behind the tavern, a dewpond; I cannot help



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