The Great Divorce

C·S· LEWIS

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I

I seemed to be standing in a busy queue by the side of a long, mean street. Evening was just closing in and it was raining. I had been wandering for hours in similar mean streets, always in the rain and always in evening twilight. Time seemed to have paused on that dismal moment when only a few shops have lit up and it is not yet dark enough for their windows to look cheering. And just as the evening never advanced to night, so my walking had never brought me to the better parts of the town. However far I went I found only dingy lodging houses, small tobacconists, hoardings from which posters hung in rags, windowless warehouses, goods stations without trains, and bookshops of the sort that sell *The Works of Aristotle.* I never met anyone. But for the little crowd at the bus stop, the whole town seemed to be empty. I think that was why I attached myself to the queue.

I had a stroke of luck right away, for just as I took my stand a little waspish woman who would have been ahead of me snapped out at a man who seemed to be with her, 'Very well, then. I won't go at all. So there,' and left the queue. 'Pray don't imagine,' said the man, in a very dignified voice, 'that I care about going in the least. I have only been trying to please *you*, for peace sake. My own feelings are of course a matter of no importance, I quite understand *that*'—and suiting the action to the word he also walked away. 'Come,' thought I, 'that's two places gained.' I was now next to a very short man with a scowl who glanced at me with an expression of extreme disfavour and observed, rather unnecessarily loudly, to the man beyond him, 'This sort of thing really makes one think twice about going at all.' 'What sort of thing?' growled the other, a big beefy person. 'Well,' said the Short Man, 'this is hardly the sort of society I'm used to as a matter of fact.' 'Huh!' said the Big Man: and then added with a glance at me, 'Don't you stand any sauce from *him*, Mister. You're not *afraid* of him, are you?' Then, seeing I made no move, he rounded suddenly on the Short Man and said, 'Not good enough for you, aren't we? Like your lip.' Next moment he had fetched the Short Man one on the side of the face that sent him sprawling into the gutter. 'Let him lay, let him lay,' said the Big Man to no one in particular. 'I'm a plain man

that's what I am and I got to have my rights same as anyone else, see?' As the Short Man showed no disposition to rejoin the queue and soon began limping away, I closed up, rather cautiously, behind the Big Man and congratulated myself on having gained yet another step. A moment later two young people in front of him also left us arm in arm. They were both so trousered, slender, giggly and falsetto that I could be sure of the sex of neither, but it was clear that each for the moment preferred the other to the chance of a place in the bus. 'We shall never all get in,' said a female voice with a whine in it from some four places ahead of me. 'Change places with you for five bob, lady,' said someone else. I heard the clink of money and then a scream in the female voice, mixed with roars of laughter from the rest of the crowd. The cheated woman leaped out of her place to fly at the man who had bilked her, but the others immediately closed up and flung her out . . . So what with one thing and another the queue had reduced itself to manageable proportions long before the bus appeared.

It was a wonderful vehicle, blazing with golden light, heraldically coloured. The Driver himself seemed full of light and he used only one hand to drive with. The other he waved before his face as if to fan away the greasy steam of the rain. A growl went up from the queue as he

came in sight. 'Looks as if he had a good time of it, eh? . . . Bloody pleased with himself, I bet . . . My dear, why can't he behave *naturally*?—Thinks himself too good to look at us . . . Who does he imagine he is? . . . All that gilding and purple, I call it a wicked waste. Why don't they spend some of the money on their house property down here?—God! I'd like to give him one in the ear-'ole.' I could see nothing in the countenance of the Driver to justify all this, unless it were that he had a look of authority and seemed intent on carrying out his job.

My fellow passengers fought like hens to get on board the bus though there was plenty of room for us all. I was the last to get in. The bus was only half full and I selected a seat at the back, well away from the others. But a tousle-haired youth at once came and sat down beside me. As he did so we moved off.

'I thought you wouldn't mind my tacking on to you,' he said, 'for I've noticed that you feel just as I do about the present company. Why on earth they insist on coming I can't imagine. They won't like it at all when we get there, and they'd really be much more comfortable at home. It's different for you and me.'

'Do they *like* this place?' I asked.

'As much as they'd like anything,' he answered.

'They've got cinemas and fish and chip shops and advertisements and all the sorts of things they want. The appalling lack of any intellectual life doesn't worry *them.* I realised as soon as I got here that there'd been some mistake. I ought to have taken the first bus but I've fooled about trying to wake people up here. I found a few fellows I'd known before and tried to form a little circle, but they all seem to have sunk to the level of their surroundings. Even before we came here I'd had some doubts about a man like Cyril Blellow. I always thought he was working in a false idiom. But he was at least intelligent: one could get some criticism worth hearing from him, even if he was a failure on the creative side. But now he seems to have nothing left but his self-conceit. The last time I tried to read him some of my own stuff . . . but wait a minute, I'd just like you to look at it.'

Realising with a shudder that what he was producing from his pocket was a thick wad of type-written paper, I muttered something about not having my spectacles and exclaimed, 'Hullo! We've left the ground.'

It was true. Several hundred feet below us, already half hidden in the rain and mist, the wet roofs of the town appeared, spreading without a break as far as the eye could reach.

2

I was not left very long at the mercy of the Tousle-Headed Poet, because another passenger interrupted our conversation: but before that happened I had learned a good deal about him. He appeared to be a singularly ill-used man. His parents had never appreciated him and none of the five schools at which he had been educated seemed to have made any provision for a talent and temperament such as his. To make matters worse he had been exactly the sort of boy in whose case the examination system works out with the maximum unfairness and absurdity. It was not until he reached the university that he began to recognise that all these injustices did not come by chance but were the inevitable results of our economic system. Capitalism did not merely enslave the workers, it also vitiated taste and vulgarised intellect: hence our educational system and hence the lack of 'Recognition' for new genius.

This discovery had made him a Communist. But when the war came along and he saw Russia in alliance with the capitalist governments, he had found himself once more isolated and had to become a conscientious objector. The indignities he suffered at this stage of his career had, he confessed, embittered him. He decided he could serve the cause best by going to America: but then America came into the war too. It was at this point that he suddenly saw Sweden as the home of a really new and radical art, but the various oppressors had given him no facilities for going to Sweden. There were money troubles. His father, who had never progressed beyond the most atrocious mental complacency and smugness of the Victorian epoch, was giving him a ludicrously inadequate allowance. And he had been very badly treated by a girl too. He had thought her a really civilised and adult personality, and then she had unexpectedly revealed that she was a mass of bourgeois prejudices and monogamic instincts. Jealousy, possessiveness, was a quality he particularly disliked. She had even shown herself, at the end, to be mean about money. That was the last straw. He had jumped under a train . . .

I gave a start, but he took no notice.

Even then, he continued, ill luck had continued to dog him. He'd been sent to the grey town. But of course it was

a mistake. I would find, he assured me, that all the other passengers would be with me on the return journey. But he would not. He was going to stay 'there'. He felt quite certain that he was going where, at last, his finely critical spirit would no longer be outraged by an uncongenial environment—where he would find 'Recognition' and 'Appreciation'. Meanwhile, since I hadn't got my glasses, he would read me the passage about which Cyril Blellow had been so insensitive . . .

It was just then that we were interrupted. One of the quarrels which were perpetually simmering in the bus had boiled over and for a moment there was a stampede. Knives were drawn: pistols were fired: but it all seemed strangely innocuous and when it was over I found myself unharmed, though in a different seat and with a new companion. He was an intelligent-looking man with a rather bulbous nose and a bowler hat. I looked out of the windows. We were now so high that all below us had become featureless. But fields, rivers, or mountains I did not see, and I got the impression that the grey town still filled the whole field of vision.

'It seems the deuce of a town,' I volunteered, 'and that's what I can't understand. The parts of it that I saw were so empty. Was there once a much larger population?'

'Not at all,' said my neighbour. 'The trouble is that they're so quarrelsome. As soon as anyone arrives he settles in some street. Before he's been there twenty-four hours he quarrels with his neighbour. Before the week is over he's quarrelled so badly that he decides to move. Very likely he finds the next street empty because all the people there have quarrelled with *their* neighbours—and moved. If so he settles in. If by any chance the street is full, he goes further. But even if he stays, it makes no odds. He's sure to have another quarrel pretty soon and then he'll move on again. Finally he'll move right out to the edge of the town and build a new house. You see, it's easy here. You've only got to *think* a house and there it is. That's how the town keeps on growing.'

'Leaving more and more empty streets?'

'That's right. And time's sort of odd here. That place where we caught the bus is thousands of miles from the Civic Centre where all the newcomers arrive from earth. All the people you've met were living near the bus stop: but they'd taken centuries—of our time—to get there, by gradual removals.'

'And what about the earlier arrivals? I mean—there must be people who came from Earth to your town even longer ago.'

'That's right. There are. They've been moving on and on. Getting further apart. They're so far off by now that they could never think of coming to the bus stop at all. Astronomical distances. There's a bit of rising ground near where I live and a chap has a telescope. You can see the lights of the inhabited houses, where those old ones live, millions of miles away. Millions of miles from us and from one another. Every now and then they move further still. That's one of the disappointments. I thought you'd meet interesting historical characters. But you don't: they're too far away.'

'Would they get to the bus stop in time, if they ever set out?'

'Well—theoretically. But it'd be a distance of light-years. And they wouldn't want to by now: not those old chaps like Tamberlaine and Genghis Khan, or Julius Caesar, or Henry the Fifth.'

'Wouldn't want to?'

'That's right. The nearest of those old ones is Napoleon. We know that because two chaps made the journey to see him. They'd started long before I came, of course, but I was there when they came back. About fifteen thousand years of our time it took them. We've picked out the house by now. Just a little pin prick of light and nothing else near it for millions of miles.'

'But they got there?'

'That's right. He'd built himself a huge house all in the Empire style—rows of windows flaming with light, though it only shows as a pin prick from where I live.'

'Did they see Napoleon?'

'That's right. They went up and looked through one of the windows. Napoleon was there all right.'

'What was he doing?'

'Walking up and down—up and down all the time—left-right, left-right—never stopping for a moment. The two chaps watched him for about a year and he never rested. And muttering to himself all the time. "It was Soult's fault. It was Ney's fault. It was Josephine's fault. It was the fault of the Russians. It was the fault of the English." Like that all the time. Never stopped for a moment. A little, fat man and he looked kind of tired. But he didn't seem able to stop it.'

From the vibrations I gathered that the bus was still moving, but there was now nothing to be seen from the windows which confirmed this—nothing but grey void above and below.

'Then the town will go on spreading indefinitely?' I said.

'That's right,' said the Intelligent Man. 'Unless someone can do something about it.'

'How do you mean?'

'Well, as a matter of fact, between you and me and the wall, that's my job at the moment. What's the trouble about this place? Not that people are quarrelsome—that's only human nature and was always the same even on Earth. The trouble is they have no Needs. You get everything you want (not very good quality, of course) by just imagining it. That's why it never costs any trouble to move to another street or build another house. In other words, there's no proper economic basis for any community life. If they needed real shops, chaps would have to stay near where the real shops were. If they needed real houses they'd have to stay near where builders were. It's scarcity that enables a society to exist. Well, that's where I come in. I'm not going on this trip for my health. As far as that goes I don't think it would suit me up there. But if I can come back with some real commodities—anything at all that you could really bite or drink or sit on—why, at once you'd get a demand down in our town. I'd start a little business. I'd have something to sell. You'd soon get people coming to live near—centralisation. Two fully-inhabited streets would accommodate the people that are now spread over a million square miles of empty streets. I'd make a nice little profit and be a public benefactor as well.'

'You mean, if they *had* to live together they'd gradually learn to quarrel less?'

'Well, I don't know about that. I daresay they could be kept a bit quieter. You'd have a chance to build up a police force. Knock some kind of discipline into them. Anyway' (here he dropped his voice) 'it'd be *better*, you know. Everyone admits that. Safety in numbers.'

'Safety from what?' I began, but my companion nudged me to be silent. I changed my question.

'But look here,' said I, 'if they can get everything just by imagining it, why would they want any *real* things, as you call them?'

'Eh? Oh well, they'd like houses that really kept out the rain.'

'Their present houses don't?'

'Well, of course not. How could they?'

'What the devil is the use of building them, then?' The Intelligent Man put his head closer to mine. 'Safety again,' he muttered. 'At least, the feeling of safety. It's all right now: but later on . . . you understand.'

'What?' said I, almost involuntarily sinking my own voice to a whisper.

He articulated noiselessly as if expecting that I under-

stood lipreading. I put my ear up close to his mouth. 'Speak up,' I said. 'It will be dark presently,' he mouthed.

'You mean the evening *is* really going to turn into a night in the end?'

He nodded.

'What's that got to do with it?' said I.

'Well . . . no one wants to be out of doors when that happens.'

'Why?'

His reply was so furtive that I had to ask him several times to repeat it. When he had done so, being a little annoyed (as one so often is with whisperers), I replied without remembering to lower my voice.

'Who are "They"?' I asked. 'And what are you afraid they'll do to you? And why should they come out when it's dark? And what protection could an imaginary house give if there was any danger?'

'Here!' shouted the Big Man. 'Who's talking all that stuff? You stop your whispering, you two, if you don't want a hiding, see? Spreading rumours, that's what I call it. You shut your face, Ikey, see?'

'Quite right. Scandalous. Ought to be prosecuted. How did they get on the bus?' growled the passengers.

A fat clean-shaven man who sat on the seat in front of me leaned back and addressed me in a cultured voice.

'Excuse me,' he said, 'but I couldn't help overhearing parts of your conversation. It is astonishing how these primitive superstitions linger on. I beg your pardon? Oh, God bless my soul, that's all it is. There is not a shred of evidence that this twilight is ever going to turn into a night. There has been a revolution of opinion on that in educated circles. I am surprised that you haven't heard of it. All the nightmare fantasies of our ancestors are being swept away. What we now see in this subdued and delicate half-light is the promise of the dawn: the slow turning of a whole nation towards the light. Slow and imperceptible, of course. "And not through Eastern windows only, When daylight comes, comes in the light." And that passion for "real" commodities which our friend speaks of is only materialism, you know. It's retrogressive. Earth-bound! A hankering for matter. But we look on this spiritual city—for with all its faults it is spiritual—as a nursery in which the creative functions of man, now freed from the clogs of matter, begin to try their wings. A sublime thought.'

Hours later there came a change. It began to grow light in the bus. The greyness outside the windows turned

from mud-colour to mother of pearl, then to faintest blue, then to a bright blueness that stung the eyes. We seemed to be floating in a pure vacancy. There were no lands, no sun, no stars in sight: only the radiant abyss. I let down the window beside me. Delicious freshness came in for a second, and then—

'What the hell are you doing?' shouted the Intelligent Man, leaning roughly across me and pulling the window sharply up. 'Want us all to catch our death of cold?'

'Hit him a biff,' said the Big Man.

I glanced round the bus. Though the windows were closed, and soon muffed, the bus was full of light. It was cruel light. I shrank from the faces and forms by which I was surrounded. They were all fixed faces, full not of possibilities but impossibilities, some gaunt, some bloated, some glaring with idiotic ferocity, some drowned beyond recovery in dreams; but all, in one way or another, distorted and faded. One had a feeling that they might fall to pieces at any moment if the light grew much stronger. Then—there was a mirror on the end wall of the bus—I caught sight of my own.

And still the light grew.

3

A cliff had loomed up ahead. It sank vertically beneath us so far that I could not see the bottom, and it was dark and smooth. We were mounting all the time. At last the top of the cliff became visible like a thin line of emerald green stretched tight as a fiddle-string. Presently we glided over that top: we were flying above a level, grassy country through which there ran a wide river. We were losing height now: some of the tallest tree tops were only twenty feet below us. Then, suddenly we were at rest. Everyone had jumped up. Curses, taunts, blows, a filth of vituperation, came to my ears as my fellow-passengers struggled to get out. A moment later, and they had all succeeded. I was alone in the bus, and through the open door there came to me in the fresh stillness the singing of a lark.

I got out. The light and coolness that drenched me were like those of summer morning, early morning a minute

or two before the sunrise, only that there was a certain difference. I had the sense of being in a larger space, perhaps even a larger *sort* of space, than I had ever known before: as if the sky were further off and the extent of the green plain wider that they could be on this little ball of earth. I had got 'out' in some sense which made the Solar System itself seem an indoor affair. It gave me a feeling of freedom, but also of exposure, possibly of danger, which continued to accompany me through all that followed. It is the impossibility of communicating that feeling, or even of inducing you to remember it as I proceed, which makes me despair of conveying the real quality of what I saw and heard.

At first, of course, my attention was caught by my fellow-passengers, who were still grouped about in the neighbourhood of the omnibus, though beginning, some of them, to walk forward into the landscape with hesitating steps. I gasped when I saw them. Now that they were in the light, they were transparent—fully transparent when they stood between me and it, smudgy and imperfectly opaque when they stood in the shadow of some tree. They were in fact ghosts: man-shaped stains on the brightness of that air. One could attend to them or ignore them at will as you do with the dirt on a window

pane. I noticed that the grass did not bend under their feet: even the dew drops were not disturbed.

Then some re-adjustment of the mind or some focussing of my eyes took place, and I saw the whole phenomenon the other way round. The men were as they had always been; as all the men I had known had been perhaps. It was the light, the grass, the trees that were different; made of some different substance, so much solider than things in our country that men were ghosts by comparison. Moved by a sudden thought, I bent down and tried to pluck a daisy which was growing at my feet. The stalk wouldn't break. I tried to twist it, but it wouldn't twist. I tugged till the sweat stood out on my forehead and I had lost most of the skin off my hands. The little flower was hard, not like wood or even like iron, but like diamond. There was a leaf—a young tender beech-leaf, lying in the grass beside it. I tried to pick the leaf up: my heart almost cracked with the effort, and I believe I did just raise it. But I had to let it go at once; it was heavier than a sack of coal. As I stood, recovering my breath with great gasps and looking down at the daisy, I noticed that I could see the grass not only between my feet but *through* them. I also was a phantom. Who will give me words to express the terror of that discovery? 'Golly!' thought I, 'I'm in for it this time.'

'I don't like it! I don't like it,' screamed a voice. 'It gives me the pip!' One of the ghosts had darted past me, back into the bus. She never came out of it again as far as I know.

The others remained, uncertain.

'Hi, Mister,' said the Big Man, addressing the Driver, 'when have we got to be back?'

'You need never come back unless you want to,' he replied. 'Stay as long as you please.' There was an awkward pause.

'This is simply ridiculous,' said a voice in my ear. One of the quieter and more respectable ghosts had sidled up to me. 'There must be some mismanagement,' he continued. 'What's the sense of allowing all that riff-raff to float about here all day? Look at them. They're not enjoying it. They'd be far happier at home. They don't even know what to do.'

'I don't know very well myself,' said I. 'What does one do?'

'Oh me? I shall be met in a moment or two. I'm expected. I'm not bothering about that. But it's rather unpleasant on one's first day to have the whole place crowded out with trippers. Damn it, one's chief object in coming here at all was to avoid them!'

He drifted away from me. And I began to look about. In spite of his reference to a 'crowd', the solitude was so vast that I could hardly notice the knot of phantoms in the foreground. Greenness and light had almost swallowed them up. But very far away I could see what might be either a great bank of cloud or a range of mountains. Sometimes I could make out in it steep forests, far-withdrawing valleys, and even mountain cities perched on inaccessible summits. At other times it became indistinct. The height was so enormous that my waking sight could not have taken in such an object at all. Light brooded on the top of it: slanting down thence it made long shadows behind every tree on the plain. There was no change and no progression as the hours passed. The promise—or the threat—of sunrise rested immovably up there.

Long after that I saw people coming to meet us. Because they were bright I saw them while they were still very distant, and at first I did not know that they were people at all. Mile after mile they drew nearer. The earth shook under their tread as their strong feet sank into the wet turf. A tiny haze and a sweet smell went up where they had crushed the grass and scattered the dew. Some were naked, some robed. But the naked ones did not seem less adorned, and the robes did not disguise in

He in his turn was followed by one of the bright people. 'Don't you know me?' he shouted to the Ghost: and I found it impossible not to turn and attend. The face of the solid spirit—he was one of those that wore a robe—made me want to dance, it was so jocund, so established in its youthfulness.

'Well, I'm damned,' said the Ghost. 'I wouldn't have believed it. It's a fair knock-out. It isn't right, Len, you know. What about poor Jack, eh? You look pretty pleased with yourself, but what I say is, What about poor Jack?'

'He is here,' said the other. 'You will meet him soon, if you stay.'

'But you murdered him.'

'Of course I did. It is all right now.'

'All right, is it? All right for you, you mean. But what about the poor chap himself, laying cold and dead?'

'But he isn't. I have told you, you will meet him soon. He sent you his love.'

'What I'd like to understand,' said the Ghost, 'is what you're here for, as pleased as Punch, you, a bloody murderer, while I've been walking the streets down there and living in a place like a pigsty all these years.'

'That is a little hard to understand at first. But it is

all over now. You will be pleased about it presently. Till then there is no need to bother about it.'

'No need to bother about it? Aren't you ashamed of yourself?'

'No. Not as you mean. I do not look at myself. I have given up myself. I had to, you know, after the murder. That was what it did for me. And that was how everything began.'

'Personally,' said the Big Ghost with an emphasis which contradicted the ordinary meaning of the word, 'Personally, I'd have thought you and I ought to be the other way round. That's my personal opinion.'

'Very likely we soon shall be,' said the other. 'If you'll stop thinking about it.'

'Look at me, now,' said the Ghost, slapping its chest (but the slap made no noise). 'I gone straight all my life. I don't say I was a religious man and I don't say I had no faults, far from it. But I done my best all my life, see? I done my best by everyone, that's the sort of chap I was. I never asked for anything that wasn't mine by rights. If I wanted a drink I paid for it and if I took my wages I done my job, see? That's the sort I was and I don't care who knows it.'

'It would be much better not to go on about that now.'

'Who's going on? I'm not arguing. I'm just telling you the sort of chap I was, see? I'm asking for nothing but my rights. You may think you can put me down because you're dressed up like that (which you weren't when you worked under me) and I'm only a poor man. But I got to have my rights same as you, see?'

'Oh no. It's not so bad as that. I haven't got my rights, or I should not be here. You will not get yours either. You'll get something far better. Never fear.'

'That's just what I say. I haven't got my rights. I always done my best and I never done nothing wrong. And what I don't see is why I should be put below a bloody murderer like you.'

'Who knows whether you will be? Only be happy and come with me.'

'What do you keep on arguing for? I'm only telling you the sort of chap I am. I only want my rights. I'm not asking for anybody's bleeding charity.'

'Then do. At once. Ask for the Bleeding Charity. Everything is here for the asking and nothing can be bought.'

'That may do very well for you, I daresay. If they choose to let in a bloody murderer all because he makes a poor mouth at the last moment, that's their look out.

But I don't see myself going in the same boat as you, see? Why should I? I don't want charity. I'm a decent man and if I had my rights I'd have been here long ago and you can tell them I said so.'

The other shook his head. 'You can never do it like that,' he said. 'Your feet will never grow hard enough to walk on our grass that way. You'd be tired out before we got to the mountains. And it isn't exactly true, you know.' Mirth danced in his eyes as he said it.

'What isn't true?' asked the Ghost sulkily.

'You weren't a decent man and you didn't do your best. We none of us were and none of us did. Lord bless you, it doesn't matter. There is no need to go into it all now.'

'You!' gasped the Ghost. '*You* have the face to tell *me* I wasn't a decent chap?'

'Of course. Must I go into all that? I will tell you one thing to begin with. Murdering old Jack wasn't the worst thing I did. That was the work of a moment and I was half mad when I did it. But I murdered you in my heart, deliberately, for years. I used to lie awake at nights thinking what I'd do to you if I ever got the chance. That is why I have been sent to you now: to ask your forgiveness and to be your servant as long as you need one, and

longer if it pleases you. I was the worst. But all the men who worked under you felt the same. You made it hard for us, you know. And you made it hard for your wife too and for your children.'

'You mind your own business, young man,' said the Ghost. 'None of your lip, see? Because I'm not taking any impudence from you about my private affairs.'

'There are no private affairs,' said the other.

'And I'll tell you another thing,' said the Ghost. 'You can clear off, see? You're not wanted. I may be only a poor man but I'm not making pals with a murderer, let alone taking lessons from him. Made it hard for you and your like, did I? If I had you back there I'd show you what work is.'

'Come and show me now,' said the other with laughter in his voice, 'It will be joy going to the mountains, but there will be plenty of work.'

'You don't suppose I'd go with you?'

'Don't refuse. You will never get there alone. And I am the one who was sent to you.'

'So that's the trick, is it?' shouted the Ghost, outwardly bitter, and yet I thought there was a kind of triumph in its voice. It had been entreated: it could make a refusal: and this seemed to it a kind of advantage. 'I thought

there'd be some damned nonsense. It's all a clique, all a bloody clique. Tell them I'm not coming, see? I'd rather be damned than go along with you. I came here to get my rights, see? Not to go snivelling along on charity tied onto your apron-strings. If they're too fine to have me without you, I'll go home.' It was almost happy now that it could, in a sense, threaten. 'That's what I'll do,' it repeated, 'I'll go home. I didn't come here to be treated like a dog. I'll go home. That's what I'll do. Damn and blast the whole pack of you . . .' In the end, still grumbling, but whimpering also a little as it picked its way over the sharp grasses, it made off.

5

For a moment there was silence under the cedar trees and then—*pad, pad, pad*—it was broken. Two velvet-footed lions came bouncing into the open space, their eyes fixed upon each other, and started playing some solemn romp. Their manes looked as if they had been just dipped in the river whose noise I could hear close at hand, though the tree hid it. Not greatly liking my company, I moved away to find that river, and after passing some thick flowering bushes, I succeeded. The bushes came almost down to the brink. It was as smooth as the Thames but flowed swiftly like a mountain stream: pale green where trees overhung it but so clear that I could count the pebbles at the bottom. Close beside me I saw another of the Bright People in conversation with a ghost. It was that fat ghost with the cultured voice who had addressed me in the bus, and it seemed to be wearing gaiters.

'My dear boy, I'm delighted to see you,' it was saying to the Spirit, who was naked and almost blindingly white. 'I was talking to your poor father the other day and wondering where you were.'

'You didn't bring him?' said the other.

'Well, no. He lives a long way from the bus, and, to be quite frank, he's been getting a little eccentric lately. A little difficult. Losing his grip. He never was prepared to make any great efforts, you know. If you remember, he used to go to sleep when you and I got talking seriously! Ah, Dick, I shall never forget some of our talks. I expect you've changed your views a bit since then. You became rather narrow-minded towards the end of your life: but no doubt you've broadened out again.'

'How do you mean?'

'Well, it's obvious by now, isn't it, that you weren't quite right. Why, my dear boy, you were coming to believe in a literal Heaven and Hell!'

'But wasn't I right?'

'Oh, in a spiritual sense, to be sure. I still believe in them in that way. I am still, my dear boy, looking for the Kingdom. But nothing superstitious or mythological . . .'

'Excuse me. Where do you imagine you've been?'

'Ah, I see. You mean that the grey town with its con-

tinual hope of morning (we must all live by hope, must we not?), with its field for indefinite progress, is, in a sense, Heaven, if only we have eyes to see it? That is a beautiful idea.'

'I didn't mean that at all. Is it possible you don't know where you've been?'

'Now that you mention it, I don't think we ever do give it a name. What do you call it?'

'We call it Hell.'

'There is no need to be profane, my dear boy. I may not be very orthodox, in your sense of that word, but I do feel that these matters ought to be discussed simply, and seriously, and reverently.'

'Discuss Hell *reverently*? I meant what I said. You have been in Hell: though if you don't go back you may call it Purgatory.'

'Go on, my dear boy, go on. That is so like you. No doubt you'll tell me why, on your view, I was sent there. I'm not angry.'

'But don't you know? You went there because you are an apostate.'

'Are you serious, Dick?'

'Perfectly.'

'This is worse than I expected. Do you really think

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