

The second cornerstone of 1952 is the work of one of the most famous contemporary authors — the Irish dramatist, poet, and short-story writer, Lord Dunsany. It is a rare pleasure to nominate as

Queen's Quorum Number 109:

Lord Dunsany's

THE LITTLE TALES OF SMETHERS

AND OTHER STORIES

London: Jarrolds, 1952

This book is a 'tec treasure-trove — no less than 26 tales of crime and detection, all illumined by Lord Dunsany's charm and wit, and his highly individualistic style. The first nine stories record the exploits of Mr. Linley, including (for the first time in one of Dunsany's own books) that undeniable classic, "The Two Bottles of Relish"; and "The Speech" is without doubt one of the finest short-shorts written in our time.

To represent Lord Dunsany in this Queen's Quorum Issue we give you his newest short story — also a prize-winner in EQMM's Tenth Annual Contest. Unfortunately, it is not a Mr. Linley adventure, but it is the next best thing — a Jorkens story . . . a Jorkens tall tale about a man in a death cell and how he planned his escape . . .

NEAR THE BACK OF BEYOND

by LORD DUNSANY

WE WERE TALKING, ONE DAY AT the Billiards Club, of various vintages; and the talk, if not interesting, was at least growing vehement, as various members of our club supported the claims of wines that had especially inspired them. Then Jorkens joined in.

"Chateau Yquem," he said. "You cannot beat that."

"Oh, I don't know," said Terbut.

The remark stung Jorkens to a vigorous defense of that lovely wine.

"I don't know any wine that you could put against it," he said.

"Well," said another of us, "there is champagne."

"It can't beat Chateau Yquem," said Jorkens.

"Oh, I don't know," said Terbut again.

Jorkens looked at him. "I'll tell you what it did," he said.

"What Chateau Yquem did?" said Terbut.

"Yes," said Jorkens, with a smile.

And then he told us this tale . . .

"I was a long way from here. It might have been under the slope of one of the Atlas Mountains, among the geraniums, with the Sahara lying all blue to the South; or it might have been in a farther part of that continent, among the little bushes of the Karoo; or again it may have been in a glade of a Mozambique forest. I am sorry I cannot tell you which. But you will understand why.

"Well, I came there one day in my travels; I came to the kind of house they have there, all alone in the loneliness, a little square whitewashed house built with bricks of dried mud — if it was in the North of Africa; or a thing with too much corrugated iron and a nice little shady stoep, if it was in the South; or a rondavo with deep thatch that had been bought from a Zulu, if it was more in the middle of Africa. But, whatever it was, I was glad to see that house, for I had not seen one for a week, and I went up to it with my little caravan and asked for a drink. By a drink, you understand, I mean whiskey.

"There was a white man, living there, several days march from the next house, with only one wife so far as I could see; a man with a gray beard, an Englishman, and he had the whiskey too, and he gave me some. And it was good whiskey, and we got talking. And the more he talked and the more whiskey I drank, the more grateful I felt to him and the more curiosity I felt as to who he was and why he had come there. For if it

wasn't the Back of Beyond, it was very near it.

"He was having a drink or two of whiskey with me and it made him talkative, as whiskey often does, and why shouldn't it? But being talkative is one thing, and being communicative is quite another. It didn't make him communicative. No. But the more I looked at him, and the more he talked, the more curious I grew as to why he was living there.

"My porters, who carried my little tent and its tentpole and pegs, and a wooden mallet to hammer the pegs in with, and a canvas bath and a camp-bed, and blankets and one thing and another, were all sitting down outside. And then an idea struck me: I had in one of those boxes two or three bottles for special occasions, when the loneliness of Africa might come down on one, as sometimes it does; and when it does, that loneliness is a mighty power, and few things can do much against it. Chateau Yquem is one that can.

"But it is not that quality I am claiming for it — not that it defeated the great loneliness of that vast land — but that it drew out of this man the story I am going to tell you. It stimulated his imagination to an incredible degree — if it did come from his imagination; and if every word of it was as true as it seemed, then that wine drew out from him what I think no man would ever have told for any other wine.

"This was the story, which he told to me after the third glass. The

whiskey may have contributed its share, but that is negligible; it was that sweet wine that drew his story from him. I had begun to tell him the story of my life, until he began to remember that he had lived too; and after the third glass of Chateau Yquem he told me his story. His African wife was mostly out of the room, and I heard her tidying things in the little house, and when she came through the door I don't think she knew what we were talking about."

"I had an old-uncle," the Englishman with the gray beard said, "a saintly old man in his exterior, which was neat dark clothes, and a smile and some pious phrases, but the rest of him was pure villain; a thing that you could not say to anyone, because of that saintly appearance, which they would have been shocked to hear you malign. He was not a very clever villain: all the money he stole he lost before the end; for he was recognized as one of themselves by all the crooks he met, and as a very inferior one, and they soon got his gains out of him.

"No, he was a poor sort of villain, but his disguise was excellent.

"Well, one day in a room of his comfortable flat in a country town I told him what a villain he really was. He had robbed me enough, and I told him so. He smiled at me and pitied me. Well, that went to my head; it was too much for me. You never saw that smile or heard those pitying words. But I did, and I couldn't stand them. I stood up then and raised my

voice. I am afraid I must have shouted, and I said a great many things to him that were true. God knows they were true, and they reached back over twenty years—a row of cunning swindles and never a year without one or more of them. I showed them to him all stripped bare of his silly suave words and his smile, and nasty objects they looked.

"He went on smiling at me, and every now and then he pitied me for my mistaken views and my uncharitable judgments and my childish lack of a proper understanding of business; and, oh, yes, ingratitude for all he had done for me. Well, he had done a lot, but nothing for me to be grateful for; and when he said that—still smiling, mind you—I could stand no more and I hit him. Not hard—in fact, it was no more than a shove with the flat of my hand. I only pushed him farther back in his chair, but I suppose the back of his head must have bumped a little against the wooden top of the chair. Nothing to hurt him. In fact, it didn't stop him talking about my ingratitude, but later they found a slight bruise there.

"I left soon after and went back to my small house in London. I knew I should never have touched him and I was ashamed of myself for having done it. I don't suppose he was ashamed of himself. I don't imagine he ever was, or he couldn't have lived as he did, cheating everyone who was foolish enough to trust him. But he knew he was completely found out now—I had told him enough for

that. And when a man like him is found out, of course there is nothing more for him. Money that men will give to a saintly old man they won't give to a crook; and he had no other way of living except by getting other people's money. So while he was smiling at me and pitying me for my childish ignorance, he had really come to the deeps of despair, and what the old villain must have done then was to go and put his head in a gas oven.

"That's where they found him—dead. And the little bruise on the back of his head they said must have been caused when I put him into the gas oven. For that's what they said I did. A policeman called at my house the next day and told me I would be sorry to hear my uncle was dead. And then he asked me if I would come to the station with him, as the inspector believed I could help him. Help him to what, I asked? Just to help him, he replied. Well, I said I was always glad to help anyone if I could, though I didn't know what help I could give him. So the policeman thanked me and we went.

"I soon found out what the inspector wanted me to help him to do. He wanted me to help him to hang me. I never got back to my home from that police station. The inspector asked me a few questions, then arrested me, and I was put in a cell.

"I did a lot of thinking then. I had nothing else to do. The arrest would mean a trial, and the trial of course would mean an acquittal, for they do not hang innocent men. Then a

policeman brought me a cup of tea, and after that I thought even harder, and it was then that the idea came to me: What if I were found guilty!

"For the first time I thought of the hangman.

"A murderer must think of the hangman sooner than that, even though he thinks he will never be found out, and I suppose a certain number of them never are hanged. But for me the thought came for the first time after I had been arrested, and I determined, whatever happened, I would not let them do that. How to escape it I did not see; I knew it would not be easy. But I determined to try, and if the verdict should go against me I determined I would not be hanged. Perhaps others have *hoped* the same, but I *determined* it. It was a great deal to determine, but you shall hear what happened. However mad my hope of escape, if convicted, it was no use even hoping if I could think of nowhere to go and had no means of getting there. Almost anywhere would do to go to, so long as it was far enough away, but the means of getting there was what really mattered. And those means were cash.

"I had a few shillings on me, which I rightly thought they would take away. But I still had my latchkey and the key of my safe at home. Those of course they would also take. But if I could secrete them and get back to my house, I should find plenty of cash there. Mind you, I had no plan whatever as yet of ever reaching my

house, but, once there, I would have the necessary money, and my dream of escape could then be called a plan. The first step, then, was to keep possession of my keys; all other steps were but strides through dreamland. . . . My cell window was closed and well barred, opening on to a weedy space where groundsel and ragwort were growing."

"A bombed site?" I said.

"I am not giving you any dates to go by," he answered. "I didn't say a bombed site. It may have been long before the war, for all you know. . . . Anyway, weeds were growing there. I tied the two keys with some threads I pulled out of my tie and knotted together; then I knocked on the door until a policeman came and I asked him if I could have a little air. He looked at the bars of the window with a sort of smile, and said, yes, I could have the window open if I wanted. And he opened it just a few inches. But it was enough.

"There was one tall ragwort growing only a few yards away, and I aimed at that when the policeman had gone. I put my hand through the window and flicked my keys out and they fell among weeds quite close to the big ragwort. I did not think anyone would find them there. Boys would probably play there, but they would be looking for bigger game than my keys: some rival gang, or whatever monsters lurk in the imagination of a boy. I felt my keys would be safe from them, and nobody else would go there.

"Then I drank some more tea and did a lot more thinking. It was good strong tea and it helped me to think. They didn't count on that when they gave it to me. They wanted to hang me, not to help me to work out any way to dodge them. I didn't get very far, and of course I was starting at the wrong end. I was thinking out how to slip into my flat one night to burgle my own money, and how to get hold of my keys so as to be able to do that; and thinking it over all day, alone in that cell, it began to look as if the hangman and I, in spite of all my plans, were certain to meet. The evidence would be all against me. That any harm should come to that saintly old man would appear shocking to the jury, and they would start prejudiced."

"But couldn't you tell them," I said, "that he was anything but saintly. Or your counsel, rather. For you must have had a counsel if it came to a trial. Surely he would have brought all that to light."

"Oh, there was a trial all right," the gray-bearded Englishman replied. "But don't you see that proving the man was a villain was only plaiting my own rope? It provided a motive. My counsel, when I was allowed to see him in the cell, pointed that out to me. I said to him, 'The man is better dead.' And he said, 'Quite so. But you see that that gives the prosecution the very point they will want to prove — a motive. You see,' he said, 'you were present at the relevant time, and you admit you raised your voice. So

you must have been heard. The only defense is that you could have had *no* reason for killing a good old man like that. Your loud voice may only have been insisting that the policy of the Government is all wrong, or that the law of gravity is overrated. Men do argue about such things, and quite heatedly. But show that he robbed you . . . ' And he did not finish his sentence. Well, I was left with no defense at all by the time our talk was over, and I had to leave it all to him."

The old man fell silent in the hut, and nothing was heard but a slow sigh of the wind and the chirrup of African insects.

"Have one more glass," I said.

"Well, I will," he answered.

He took another glass of the Chateau Yquem, and it drew the rest of the tale from him.

"There was a trial," he went on. "Perhaps you remember it."

"No," I told him, quite truthfully.

"So much the better," he said.

"I am afraid I haven't read them all," I said rather apologetically.

"Quite right," he said. "They are brutal things. Especially this one. The counsel for the prosecution was a nasty fellow. And I didn't like the judge either. And I could see that he didn't like me. Who would, after all that the counsel for the prosecution had been saying? He drew a picture of a most philanthropic old man, and read out a complete list of his benefactions. Of course those sly robbers are always philanthropic: it's the safest way. The violent ones aren't

clever enough to think of it, but it's part of the sly ones' game.

"And all the while I daren't show the other side of the game, the black side. My counsel wouldn't let me. I don't remember what his defense finally was—it seemed aimless to me, and it must have seemed just as aimless to the jury . . .

"Well, I could see they were bent on hanging me. And that's what they decided to do. There came a moment when hope utterly left me, and I despaired as I had never despaired before, and perhaps as few men have ever done. So that when the death sentence came, I had little more feeling left than a stone in a cold rain.

"They took me away to a prison in the county town in which the trial took place, the town in which the old villain had died. And then resentment flared up in me and I went back to my resolution that I would never let them hang me. I still had no plans except the ones I have told you, the ones at the far end of my escape. I was not put in the condemned cell, because my counsel appealed. He appealed against the judge's summing up. I could see nothing wrong with it. The judge had put quite clearly to the jury those points that the prosecution had made, and just as clearly the points of my counsel. Not that my counsel's were worth putting. But the appeal gained time, and time means a great deal to a man condemned to death.

"And still I had no workable plan, but simply wasted time in hoping.

And one day I was taken out for a bit of a treat — to hear three judges reject my appeal. After that, you may think that there was no hope left. But you don't know what a lot of hope goes on in a condemned cell, mixed up with a lot of despair, and I was in the condemned cell now. I hoped for a reprieve from the Home Office; for, after all, I was innocent. But I no longer hoped hard enough to interfere with my determination to do whatever I could to stop their game. My plans for finding my keys and obtaining my cash and getting away to Africa were plans like blind-fold chess, but the first step had to be taken in the very scene around me — the condemned cell: a bed, a chair, and a table clamped to the floor, and two men always watching me, night and day.

"To tell you all my thoughts, running from plan to plan and finding one after another useless, would be impossible. It would be impossible to tell you all the thoughts of any man in a condemned cell. Condemned men have nothing to do but think, and I can tell you from personal experience that those thoughts become very active, probably right up to the scaffold and even during the drop. That I can't say, for I stopped just short of that.

"To tell you the relevant things, I played a lot of draughts with one of my warders — he was used to doing that. One day, when I had got to know the two men pretty well — as well as you can know men who are

waiting to see you hanged and won't say much about it — I told them the whole story. And I swore to them very solemnly that I was innocent. They nodded and understood me. There is a sincerity in truth that at a certain intensity speaks more clearly than all other evidence; and the two men saw that sincerity now and I could see that they believed me.

"Then help me to escape,' I said. 'I have thought how you might do it. But you may be able to think of a better plan and, if so, I will leave it to you.'

"But no, they just shook their heads.

"But you wouldn't hang an innocent man!' I said.

"It's the law,' they said. 'We don't like seeing anyone hanged. But it's the law.'

"But an *innocent* man!' I said.

"That makes no difference,' said one.

"They wouldn't say any more; but they'd said enough. I began to make other plans then. I asked one of them if he cared about card tricks, and he got me a pack of cards, and I showed him a few tricks, which entailed his writing down the names of several cards on paper. Thus I got his handwriting. Not that I thought I would need it, for I was still hoping for a reprieve. But I got his handwriting and I noted his build, which was more nearly that of mine than the other man's, or of either of the two who relieved them every few hours. And still I went on hoping. I had some

nasty dreams at night. And don't think they were trifles, for you have probably never known anything like them. You have probably never awakened from a hideous dream — to find it perfectly true. I hope you never will. By day I played game after game with the same man. He wouldn't tell me his name, so I called him Jack, and he didn't seem to mind. He didn't mind anything, because to him I was clearly dead meat. The other one I called Ketch. I didn't bother to find names for the two that relieved them. Jack and Ketch were the ones I concentrated on. And still I went on hoping.

"But my own plans were getting ready too. And then one night the Governor came to my cell, shut the door, and told me he had bad news for me. It wasn't necessary to say any more. I thanked him, and he went away, and the last hope was gone. I had one day and two nights to live. Jack and Ketch were with me, and they said nothing. I gave them one more chance, but they paid no attention, and then I asked Jack to have another game of draughts. He was quite willing to play, and he never seemed to care who won. That, again, was because he looked on me as just dead meat.

"'Jack,' I said, 'I am innocent.'

"'Yes, I know,' he said, and he went on with the game.

"So I was to be hanged for murder. The State had judged me a murderer, and I was to pay the price of it in 36 hours. I still had one hope of escape.

But if I couldn't escape, I decided to have my money's worth. Wasn't that fair? I ask you, wasn't that fair?"

"I don't know," I said.

"You don't know?" he repeated. "I was to pay the price. Wasn't I at least entitled to the goods?"

"What did you do?" I asked, preferring to ask him a question, rather than engage in a discussion on ethics.

"I watched the man Ketch," he said. "Jack was occupied with the draughtsboard, and I could deal with him any time, but I waited till Ketch was not looking. I flicked a draughtsman beyond him to the far end of the cell while Jack was making a move, and Ketch heard the rattle behind him and looked round. Then I hit Jack on the jaw. I hit him hard enough to prevent him making a noise, and then I hit Ketch before he had time to. In a little cell like that we were all close together. And there they both lay, and no sound out of either of them.

"No one had heard. And then the real work began. I had to make Jack unrecognizable, and, as I told you, I had to do to both of them what I was to be hanged for. Yes, they had judged me a murderer, so they got murder. It's what you expect from a murderer, isn't it?"

"You killed them!" I said.

"I had to," he replied. "I don't know if you think a murder in self-defense is worse than hanging an innocent man in the early morning . . ."

I wouldn't argue with him.

"Well, there they lay on the floor,"

he went on, "and they were both beginning to stir. I had to do it. I had to batter their heads against the stone floor, and batter Jack's all to pulp. And I had to do it quickly. They look into prison cells through a peephole in the door. I never knew how often, because you couldn't see them from inside, but I believed they did it pretty often. And they might hear the noise of the heads on the stone floor. But they didn't.

"I had a lot to do. I had to strip Jack of his clothes and change with him, putting all mine on him, even my boots. And that wasn't the hardest work by any means. It wasn't enough to batter Jack's face. I had to batter my own too. That took some doing. It took so much doing that I doubt if anybody could do it to his own face without the stimulant I had — that drop in the chilly morning.

"Luckily Ketch had a knife in his pocket. That helped. I made an awful mess of both faces, Jack's and mine. And all the while I was dressing Jack, and battering and slashing my own face with Ketch's knife and one of Jack's boots, I was working against time. At any moment one of the men outside might peep through the hole in the door.

"The boots were the most awkward: mine were a little small for him; but I finally got them on him and laced them up. Lucky that it was not the other way about. His were a bad fit for me, but at least there was room in them. I used his boots a lot on my face before I put them on."

"It must have hurt horribly," I said.

"It was a close thing," he answered, "between that pain and my fear of the short walk to the rope in the morning; but the fear won and it kept me at it, hammering away at my face with the boot, and touching it up with Ketch's knife. I did a lot of work on my nose. In fact, it is not quite the same nose now, and never will be; and the rest of my face was a bloody mess. And all the while I was afraid of another warder at any moment looking in through the peephole.

"I had finished with my face, and just got on Jack's second boot, when I heard the door open. I threw myself on the floor, and in walked the parson. I said nothing, but only groaned, letting the scene speak for itself — the murderer dead, evidently killed by one of the warders, and one warder dead and the other warder badly knocked about. I was the other warder. The parson took it all in at a glance, looked at the two dead men with their battered skulls, then bent over me and was most sympathetic.

"So far so good. I muttered to the parson, not risking more than grunted words, for fear he might know my voice, a fear that turned out to be groundless. He soon went to get the doctor and to tell the Governor of the sad death of the man that they wanted to hang, and of the warder whom he had murdered, and to tell him of the poor brave warder who had killed the murderer while trying

to save his comrade. That was me.

"Then the doctor came hurrying in. Jack had looked a healthy fellow to me, and I banked on the doctor not knowing his voice; and knowing his face wouldn't have been any good — there weren't enough features left. Nor of mine, for that matter. The doctor took a quick look round and I saw that he got the right picture — the picture I wanted him to get. I mumbled what had happened; I mean my account of it. I had left Ketch's knife on the floor and I now pointed to it.

"Used his knife on me," I muttered.

"And as I said the word *his* I pointed to Ketch, whose name I didn't know. I didn't say much more after that, except to mumble as short answers as possible when the doctor asked me what had happened. I didn't want it to be thought that I could do much talking, in case anyone came along who knew my voice — the Governor, for instance; and he soon came to see me. But I was in the hospital by then, and too dazed to say much. The Governor understood. Well, that's not the right word for it, really. He understood what I wanted him to, which was that I was a man too sick to talk. My face was pretty well covered with plasters by then. You see, I had made the cuts in all the right places, chiefly under my eyes. My nose didn't matter: that was too much knocked about in any case, and my lips too, but my face was nicely concealed by the plasters that covered the cuts.

"A nurse looked after me, and I guessed that she wouldn't know me — I mean the warder that was now me — and I soon saw that she didn't. I told her I wanted sleep, and moaned that I must have it. I said that so that if anyone came in who knew the warder — the warder that was now me — I could shut my eyes and the nurse would tell them that I must not be disturbed. One warder did come in to see me, and that's what I did. He took a look at the plaster and bandages, and the nurse shoed him away.

"I stayed there all the next day, mumbling and pretending concussion, and the day after that — the very day they were going to hang me. I talked a lot to the doctor, quite clearly without mumbling, because he didn't know my voice. And what I said was that after the awful scene in that cell, when I fought with the murderer, and what with the pain in my head and one thing and another, I should never sleep again without nightmares; that I would go mad by day, if I couldn't get into the open air for a bit and away from the prison.

"He said, 'Oh, I'll give you a sleeping pill.'

"I said, 'No, I'll have nightmares if I sleep, and I'll go mad while I'm awake. Let me go for a walk in the open, and I think I can shake off this horrible nightmare. Come for a walk with me, sir, and you'll save my reason.'

"Well, I practically threatened to go mad there and then if I couldn't

get out of the hospital. Doctors, you know, like to make cures, and they get their patients to help all they can, and here was I promising him a cure if only he would let me take a walk; so he gave in. He said that I could go for a short walk and he would come with me. I thanked him effusively.

"For the rest of that day I closed my eyes and spoke to nobody. That was the day they had meant to close them forever, wrapped up in quicklime. And I was an innocent man.

"The walk was to be the next day, and the doctor had promised to come to me in the morning. They got 'my' clothes from 'my' room, so that I could go for a walk in plain clothes. Nobody suspected anything yet. The only risk was of someone recognizing me, and I was sure I had taken care of that. There was to be an inquest as soon as I was well enough to give evidence. But I had told the doctor I must have that walk in the open country first, to steady my nerves, or I should not feel able to talk clearly enough to give evidence. I was more afraid of my voice being recognized than my face.

"In the morning, after breakfast, I got into Jack's plain clothes. They were tight, as his uniform had been too, but I got them buttoned. I had to — my life depended on it. If they had seen I wasn't Jack, they'd have soon guessed whom I really was. I emptied out the pockets of his uniform first. And what do you think I found there? Two pounds ten. With that I could get to London.

"And then the doctor came and found me dressed. He looked a little surprised, as though he had forgotten his promise. But I kept him to it, and away we went. I walked close to him as we came to the gate and kept my hand to my face as though I were in pain, which I was. There were always two warders at the gate. My face was still bandaged, but even so I was afraid of them. They would be sure to have known Jack well.

"It was a bad moment, but we got through. Down three streets we went, I looking very ill, very nervous, and on the verge of a breakdown. Then we came to the open country and I began to improve. I had only shuffled before, but I stepped out now. I spoke more clearly and seemed less confused. I told the doctor that I felt better now that we were away from the prison, and he was obviously pleased with his cure, and told me that I would soon feel better still. So I did. We were taking a walk to his house, which was only a mile past the town.

"When we got to the doctor's house I said I felt much better and could walk back alone. The doctor offered to drive me back to the prison in his car, but I said the walk would do me good, so he let me go.

"And now I was a free man.

"It was a long way from London, that prison; but I had Jack's two pounds ten. The first thing I did was to take off my bandages, which made me too conspicuous. The cuts had stopped bleeding, so I pulled off the plaster too. Then I walked away as

fast as I could to the next railway station on the way to London, for I couldn't go back to the prison town.

"I bought a newspaper at the station and read the paper all the way to London, thinking that the less people saw of my face, the better. But I had one great advantage, which was that nobody was looking for my face. Later, when they missed Jack, they would be keeping an eye open for him, but not with the same keenness with which they would hunt for a man whom the law had convicted as a murderer. They would only be looking for a warder who had stayed away after his walk, instead of returning to the hospital.

"Well, I got to London at last, and there was risk again there. I had the wrong face for London — one that someone might possibly recognize even though it was a face no one was looking for. Just the same, I didn't like to have my meals indoors, because I wanted to keep my hat on — Jack's hat, that is — low down on my forehead. So I bought some bits of cooked meat and a loaf of bread, and ate them on a bench in a park, getting up and moving away when anybody came near. And I sat or walked about in the park for the rest of the day, till it got near closing time and was growing dark. And then I started to walk to the police station, where I had first gone to help the inspector."

"But —" I began.

"Oh, I didn't go in through the front door," he said. "That would have surprised them. No, I went to

the street at the back, and walked up and down once or twice, till there was no one at either end, and then I slipped into the weedy patch that I told you about and went to the big ragwort near which I had thrown my keys. I lay down then among the weeds in the dark and searched for my keys with my fingers, and nobody could have seen me from the street.

"Though I knew just where they were, I had a horrible fear that I might not find them, or that somebody else had. I didn't know what I would do without any money, for I hadn't much left of Jack's. I felt safe enough so far as that window was concerned, which looked out from the cell: the police weren't going to sit in the cell, and anyone else who was there would have his own troubles and not bother about me. If anyone did see me from the street I decided to rely on my battered face to explain that I had had a bit of a fight with a pal on that patch of ground and that I was all right now.

"But nobody came. And the keys were there. Now I only had to go to my house. Nobody would be watching it: there was nothing to watch for — they thought they had me safe in the quicklime.

"I walked along the streets with the brim of my hat pulled low, and my handkerchief in my hand ready to blow my nose. I came to the door of my house, walked past it, then came back again and slipped in. I went straight to my safe, where I had as much as fifty pounds, and a gold

watch. I pawned the gold watch later, out of England. It wouldn't have been safe to have pawned it there. They had taken nothing yet, and with my fifty pounds I could go where I liked. But the first place I went to was a hatters, to get a hat with a bigger brim and a better fit.

"I bought a pair of spectacles too, slightly tinted; not too dark — that might have attracted suspicion — and not too plain, because nobody buys plain glasses without a prescription. And immediately after that I went to a train and got well away from London. I came to a town by the sea and took lodgings; and one day I got a passport with a nice new name and a photograph, and I signed on as a hand in a ship and got far away from Europe. I like this continent: nobody here has ever accused me of

a murder I didn't commit, or ever driven me to commit one in self-defense. I like the sun and this old girl, and the vast leisure of Africa."

He stopped and would say no more. I tried to give him another glass of the Chateau Yquem, but it had done all it could, and he would drink no more of it.

"You want all the details," he said, "details of times and places. Well, you won't get them."

He knew what that lovely wine could do with old secrets. And he would risk it no more

"Oughtn't you to have told the police?" asked Terbut.

"Never a word," said Jorkens. "He had given me whiskey when I needed it most. I would never give away a man that did a thing like that."

