ROALD DAHL

MADAME ROSETTE

“OH Jesus, this is wonderful,” said the Stag.

He was lying back in the bath with a Scotch and soda in one hand and a cigarette in the other. The water was right up to the brim and he was keeping it warm by turning the tap with his toes.

He raised his head and took a little sip of his whisky, then he lay back and closed his eyes.

“For God’s sake, get out,” said a voice from the next room. “Come on, Stag, you’ve had over an hour.” Stuffy was sitting on the edge of the bed with no clothes on, drinking slowly and waiting his turn.

The Stag said, “All right. I’m letting the water out now,” and he stretched out a leg and flipped up the plug with his toes.

Stuffy stood up and wandered into the bathroom holding his drink in his hand. The Stag lay in the bath for a few moments more, then, balancing his glass carefully on the soap rack, he stood up and reached for a towel. His body was short and square, with strong thick legs and exaggerated calf muscles. He had coarse curly ginger hair and a thin, rather pointed face covered with freckles. There was a layer of pale ginger hair on his chest.

“Jesus,” he said, looking down into the bathtub, “I’ve brought half the desert with me.”

Stuffy said, “Wash it out and let me get in. I haven’t had a bath for five months.”

This was back in the early days when we were fighting the Italians in Libya. One flew very hard in those days because there were not many pilots. They certainly could not send any out from England because there they were fighting the Battle of Britain. So one remained for long periods out in the desert, living the strange unnatural life of the desert, living in the same dirty little tent, washing and shaving every day in a mug full of one’s own spat-out tooth water, all the time picking flies out of one’s tea and out of one’s food, having sandstorms which were as much in the tents as outside them so that placid men became bloody-minded and lost their tempers with their friends and with themselves; having dysentery and gippy tummy and mastoid and desert sores, having some bombs from the Italian S-79s, having no water and no women, having no flowers growing out of the ground; having very little except sand sand sand. One flew old

Gloster Gladiators against the Italian CR42s, and when one was not flying, it was difficult to know what to do.

Occasionally one would catch scorpions, put them in empty petrol cans and match them against each other in fierce mortal combat. Always there would be a champion scorpion in the squadron, a sort of Joe Louis who was invincible and won all his fights. He would have a name; he would become famous and his training diet would be a great secret known only to the owner. Training diet was considered very important with scorpions. Some were trained on corned beef, some on a thing called Machonachies, which is an unpleasant canned meat stew, some on live beetles and there were others who were persuaded to take a little beer just before the fight, on the premise that it made the scorpion happy and gave him confidence. These last ones always lost. But there were great battles and great champions, and in the afternoons when the flying was over, one could often see a group of pilots and airmen standing around in a circle on the sand, bending over with their hands on their knees, watching the fight, exhorting the scorpions and shouting at them as people shout at boxers or wrestlers in a ring. Then there would be a victory, and the man who owned the winner would become excited. He would dance around in the sand yelling, waving his arms in the air and extolling in a loud voice the virtues of the victorious animal. The greatest scorpion of all was owned by a sergeant called Wishful who fed him only on marmalade. The animal had an unmentionable name, but he won forty-two consecutive fights and then died quietly in training just when Wishful was considering the problem of retiring him to stud.

So you can see that because there were no great pleasures while living in the desert, the small pleasures became great pleasures and the pleasures of children became the pleasures of grown men. That was true for everyone; for the pilots, the fitters, the riggers, the corporals who cooked the food, and the men who kept the stores. It was true for the Stag and for Stuffy, so true that when the two of them wangled a fortyeight hour pass and a lift by air into Cairo, and when they got to the hotel, they were feeling about having a bath rather as you would feel on the first night of your honeymoon.

The Stag had dried himself and was lying on the bed with a towel round his waist, with his hands up behind his head, and Stuffy was in the bath, lying with his head against the back of the bath, groaning and sighing with ecstasy.

The Stag said, “Stuffy.”

“Yes.”

“What are we going to do now?”

“Women,” said Stuffy. “We must find some women to take out to supper.”

The Stag said, “Later. That can wait till later.” It was early afternoon.

“I don’t think it can wait,” said Stuffy.

“Yes,” said the Stag, “it can wait.”

The Stag was very old and wise; he never rushed any fences. He was twenty-seven, much older than anyone else in the squadron, including the GO, and his judgement was much respected by the others.

“Let’s do a little shopping first,” he said.

“Then what?” said the voice from the bathroom.

“Then we can consider the other situation.”

There was a pause.

“Stag?”

“Yes.”

“Do you know any women here?”

“I used to. I used to know a Turkish girl with very white skin called Wenka, and a Yugoslav girl who was six inches taller than I, called Kiki, and another who I think was Syrian. I can’t remember her name.”

“Ring them up,” said Stuffy.

“I’ve done t. I did it while you were getting the whisky. They’ve all gone. It isn’t any good.”

“It’s never any good,” Stuffy said.

The Stag said, “We’ll go shopping first. There is plenty of time.”

In an hour Stuffy got out of the bath. They both dressed themselves in clean khaki shorts and shirts and wandered downstairs, through the lobby of the hotel and out into the bright hot street. The Stag put on his sunglasses.

Stuffy said, “I know. I want a pair of sunglasses.”

“All right. We’ll go and buy some.”

They stopped a gharry, got in and told the driver to go to Cicurel’s. Stuffy bought his sunglasses and the Stag bought some poker dice, then they wandered out again on to the hot crowded street.

“Did you see that girl?” said Stuffy.

“The one that sold us the sunglasses?”

“Yes. That dark one.”

“Probably Turkish,” said Stag.

Stuffy said, “I don’t care what she was. She was terrific. Didn’t you think she was terrific?”

They were walking along the Sharia Kasr-elNil with their hands in their pockets, and Stuffy was wearing the sunglasses which he had just bought. It was a hot dusty afternoon, and the sidewalk was crowded with Egyptians and Arabs and small boys with bare feet. The flies followed the small boys and buzzed around their eyes, trying to get at the inflammation which was in them, which was there because their mothers had done something terrible to those eyes when the boys were young, so that they would not be eligible for military conscription when they grew older. The small boys pattered along beside the Stag and Stuffy shouting, “Baksheesh, baksheesh,” in shrill insistent voices, and the flies followed the small boys. There was the smell of Cairo, which is not like the smell of any other city. It comes not from any one thing or from any one place; it comes from everything everywhere; from the gutters and the sidewalks, from the houses and the shops and the things in the shops and the food cooking in the shops, from the horses and the dung of the horses in the streets and from the drains; it comes from the people and the way the sun bears down upon the people and the way the sun bears down upon the gutters and the drains and the horses and the food and the refuse in the streets. It is a rare, pungent smell, like something which is sweet and rotting and hot and salty and bitter all at the same time, and it is never absent, even in the cool of the early morning.

The two pilots walked along slowly among the crowd.

“Didn’t you think she was terrific?” said Stuffy. He wanted to know what the Stag thought.

“She was all right.”

“Certainly she was all right. You know what, Stag?”

“What?”

“I would like to take that girl out tonight.”

They crossed over a street and walked on a little farther.

The Stag said, “Well, why don’t you? Why don’t you ring up Rosette?”

“Who in the hell’s Rosette?”

“Madame Rosette,” said the Stag. “She is a great woman.”

They were passing a place called Tim’s Bar. It was run by an Englishman called Tim Gilfillan who had been a quartermaster sergeant in the last war and who had somehow managed to get left behind in Cairo when the army went home.

“Tim’s,” said the Stag. “Let’s go in.”

There was no one inside except for Tim, who was arranging his bottles on shelves behind the bar.

“Well, well, well,” he said, turning around, “Where you boys been all this time?”

“Hello, Tim.”

He did not remember them, but he knew by their looks that they were in from the desert.

“How’s my old friend Graziani?” he said, leaning his elbows on the counter.

“He’s bloody close,” said the Stag. “He’s outside Mersah.”

“What you flying now?”

“Gladiators.”

“Hell, they had those here eight years ago.”

“Same ones still here,” said the Stag. “They’re clapped out.” They got their whisky and carried the glasses over to a table in the corner.

Stuffy said, “Who’s this Rosette?”

The Stag took a long drink and put down the glass.

“She’s a great woman,” he said.

“Who is she?”

“She’s a filthy old Syrian Jewess.”

“All right,” said Stuffy, “all right, but what about her.”

“Well,” said Stag, “I’ll tell you. Madame Rosette runs the biggest brothel in the world. It is said that she can get you any girl that you want in the whole of Cairo.”

“Bullshit.”

“No, it’s true. You just ring her up and tell her where you saw the woman, where she was working, what shop and at which counter, together with an accurate description, and she will do the rest.”

“Don’t be such a bloody fool,” said Stuffy.

“It’s true. It’s absolutely true. Thirty-three squadron told me about her.”

“They were pulling your leg.”

“All right. You go and look her up in the phone book.”

“She wouldn’t be in the phone book under that name.”

“I’m telling you she is,” said Stag. “Go and look her up under Rosette. You’ll see I’m right.”

Stuffy did not believe him, but he went over to Tim and asked him for a telephone directory and brought it back to the table. He opened it and turned the pages until he came to R-o-s. He ran his finger down the column. Roseppi… Rosery Rosette. There it was, Rosette, Madame and the address and number, clearly printed in the book. The Stag was watching him.

“Got it?” he said.

“Yes, here it is. Madame Rosette.”

“Well, why don’t you go and ring her up?”

“What shall I say?”

The Stag looked down into his glass and poked the ice with his finger.

“Tell her you are a Colonel,” he said. “Colonel Higgins; she mistrusts pilot officers. And tell her that you have seen a beautiful dark girl selling sunglasses at Cicurel’s and that you would like, as you put it, to take her out to dinner.”

“There isn’t a telephone here.”

“Oh yes there is. There’s one over there.”

Stuffy looked around and saw the telephone on the wall at the end of the bar.

“I haven’t got a piastre piece.”

“Well, I have,” said Stag. He fished in his pocket and put a piastre on the table.

“Tim will hear everything I say.”

“What the hell does that matter? He probably rings her up himself. You’re windy,” he added.

“You’re a shit,” said Stuffy.

Stuffy was just a child. He was nineteen; seven whole years younger than the Stag. He was fairly tall and he was thin, with a lot of black hair and a handsome wide-mouthed face which was coffee brown from the sun of the desert. He was unquestionably the finest pilot in the squadron, and already in these early days, his score was fourteen Italians confirmed destroyed. On the ground he moved slowly and lazily like a tired person and he thought slowly and lazily like a sleepy child, but when he was up in the air his mind was quick and his movements were quick, so quick that they were like reflex actions. It seemed, when he was on the ground, almost as though he was resting, as though he was dozing a little in order to make sure that when he got into the cockpit he would wake up fresh and quick, ready for that two hours of high concentration. But Stuffy was away from the aerodrome now and he had something on his mind which had waked him up almost like flying. It might not last, but for the moment anyway, he was concentrating.

He looked again in the book for the number, got up and walked slowly over to the telephone. He put in the piastre, dialled the number and heard it ringing the other end. The Stag was sitting at the table looking at him and Tim was still behind the bar arranging his bottles. Tim was only about five yards away and he was obviously going to listen to everything that was said. Stuffy felt rather foolish. He leaned against the

bar and waited, hoping that no one would answer.

Then click, the receiver was lifted at the other end and he heard a woman's voice saying, "Allo."

He said, "Hello, is Madame Rosette there?" He was watching Tim. Tim went on arranging his bottles, pretending to take no notice, but Stuffy knew that he was listening.

"This ees Madame Rosette. Oo ees it?" Her voice was petulant and gritty. She sounded as if she did not want to be bothered with anyone just then.

Stuffy tried to sound casual. "This is Colonel Higgins."

"Colonel oo?"

"Colonel Higgins." He spelled it.

"Yes, Colonel. What do you want?" She sounded impatient. Obviously this was a woman who stood no nonsense. He still tried to sound casual.

"Well, Madame Rosette, I was wondering if you would help me over a little matter."

Stuffy was watching Tim. He was listening all right. You can always tell if someone is listening when he is pretending not to. He is careful not to make any noise about what he is doing and he pretends that he is concentrating very hard upon his job. Tim was like that now, moving the bottles quickly from one shelf to another, watching the bottles, making no noise, never looking around into the room. Over in the far corner the Stag was leaning forward with his elbows on the table, smoking a cigarette. He was watching Stuffy, enjoying the whole business and knowing that Stuffy was embarrassed because of Tim. Stuffy had to go on.

"I was wondering if you could help me," he said. "I was in Cicurel's today buying a pair of sunglasses and I saw a girl there whom I would very much like to take out to dinner."

"What's "er name?" The hard, rasping voice was more business-like than ever.

"I don't know," he said, sheepishly.

"What's she look like?"

"Well, she's got dark hair, and tall and, well, she's very beautiful."

“What sort of dress was she wearing?”

“Er, let me see. I think it was a kind of white dress with red flowers printed all over it.” Then, as a brilliant afterthought, he added, “She had a red belt.” He remembered that she had been wearing a shiny red belt.

There was a pause. Stuffy watched Tim who wasn’t making any noise with the bottles; he was picking them up carefully and putting them down carefully.

Then the loud gritty voice again, “It may cost you a lot.”

“That’s all right.” Suddenly he didn’t like the conversation any more. He wanted to finish it and get away.

“Might cost you six pounds, might cost you eight or ten. I don’t know till I’ve seen her. That all right?”

“Yes yes, that’s all right.”

“Where you living, Colonel?”

“Metropolitan Hotel,” he said without thinking.

“All right, I give you a ring later.” And she put down the receiver, bang.

Stuffy hung up, went slowly back to the table and sat down.

“Well,” said Stag, “that was all right, wasn’t it?”

“Yes, I suppose so.”

“What did she say?”

“She said that she would call me back at the hotel.”

“You mean she’ll call Colonel Higgins at the hotel.”

Stuffy said, “Oh Christ.”

Stag said, “It’s all right. We’ll tell the desk that the Colonel is in our room and to put his calls through to us. “What else did she say?”

“She said it may cost me a lot, six or ten pounds.”

“Rosette will take ninety per cent of it,” said Stag. “She’s a filthy old Syrian Jewess.”

“How will she work it?” Stuffy said.

He was really a gentle person and now he was feeling worried about having started something which might become complicated.

“Well,” said Stag, “she’ll dispatch one of her pimps to locate the girl and find out who she is. If she’s already on the books, then it’s easy. If she isn’t, the pimp will proposition her there and then over the counter at Cicurel’s. If the girl tells him to go to hell, he’ll up the price, and if she still tells him to go to hell, he’ll up the price still more, and in the end she’ll be tempted by the cash and probably agree. Then Rosette quotes you a price three times as high and takes the balance herself. You have to pay her, not the girl. Of course, after that the girl goes on Rosette’s books, and once she’s in her clutches she’s finished. Next time Rosette will dictate the price and the girl will not be in a position to argue.”

“Why?”

“Because if she refuses, Rosette will say, “All right, my girl, I shall see that your employers, that’s Cicurel’s, are told about what you did last time, how you’ve been working for me and using their shop as a market place. Then they’ll fire you.’ That’s what Rosette will say, and the wretched girl will be frightened and do what she’s told.”

Stuffy said, “Sounds like a nice person.”

“Who?”

“Madame Rosette.”

“Charming,” said Stag. “She’s a charming person.”

It was hot. Stuffy wiped his face with his handkerchief “More whisky,” said Stag. “Hi, Tim, two more of those.”

Tim brought the glasses over and put them on the table without saying anything. He picked up the empty glasses and went away at once. To Stuffy it seemed as though he was different from what he had been when they first came in. He wasn’t cheery any more, he was quiet and offhand. There wasn’t any more “Hi, you fellows, where you been all this time’ about him now, and when he got back behind the counter he turned his back and went on arranging the bottles.

The Stag said, “How much money you got?”

“Nine pounds, I think.”

“May not be enough. You gave her a free hand, you know. You ought to have set a limit. She’ll sting you now.”

“I know,” Stuffy said.

They went on drinking for a little while without talking. Then Stag said, “What you worrying about, Stuffy?”

“Nothing,” he answered. “Nothing at all. Let’s go back to the hotel. She may ring up.”

They paid for their drinks and said good-bye to Tim, who nodded but didn’t say anything. They went back to the Metropolitan and as they went past the desk, the Stag said to the clerk, “If a call comes in for Colonel Higgins, put it through to our room. He’ll be there.” The Egyptian said, “Yes, sir,” and made a note of it.

In the bedroom, the Stag lay down on his bed and lit a cigarette. “And what am I going to do tonight?” he said.

Stuffy had been quiet all the way back to the hotel. He hadn’t said a word. Now he sat down on the edge of the other bed with his hands still in his pockets and said, “Look, Stag, I’m not very keen on this Rosette deal any more. It may cost too much. Can’t we put it off?”

The Stag sat up. “Hell no,” he said. “You’re committed. You can’t fool about with Rosette like that. She’s probably working on it at this moment. You can’t back out now.”

“I may not be able to afford it,” Stuffy said.

“Well, wait and see.”

Stuffy got up, went over to the parachute bag and took out the bottle of whisky. He poured out two, filled the glasses with water from the tap in the bathroom, came back and gave one to the Stag.

“Stag,” he said. “Ring up Rosette and tell her that Colonel Higgins has had to leave town urgently, to rejoin his regiment in the desert. Ring her up and tell her that. Say the Colonel asked you to deliver the message because he didn’t have time.”

“Ring her up yourself”

“She’d recognize my voice. Come on, Stag, you ring her.”

“No,” he said, “I won’t.”

“Listen,” said Stuffy suddenly. It was the child Stuffy speaking. “I don’t want to go out with that woman and I don’t want to have any dealings with Madame Rosette tonight. We can think of something else.”

The Stag looked up quickly. Then he said, “All right. I’ll ring her.”

He reached for the phone book, looked up her number and spoke it into the telephone. Stuffy heard him get her on the line and he heard him giving her the message from the Colonel. There was a pause, then the Stag said, “I’m sorry Madame Rosette, but it’s nothing to do with me. I’m merely delivering a message.” Another pause; then the Stag said the same thing over again and that went on for quite a long time, until he must have got tired of it, because in the end he put down the receiver and lay back on his bed. He was roaring with laughter.

“The lousy old bitch,” he said, and he laughed some more.

Stuffy said, “Was she angry?”

“Angry,” said Stag. “Was she angry? You should have heard her. Wanted to know the Colonel’s regiment and God knows what else and said he’d have to pay. She said you boys think you can fool around with me but you can’t.”

“Hooray,” said Stuffy. “The filthy old Jewess.”

“Now what are we going to do?” said the Stag. “It’s six o’clock already.”

“Let’s go out and do a little drinking in some of those Gyppi places.”

“Fine. We’ll do a Gyppi pub crawl.”

They had one more drink, then they went out. They went to a place called the Excelsior, then they went to a place called the Sphinx, then to a small place called by an Egyptian name, and by ten o’clock they were sitting happily in a place which hadn’t got a name at all, drinking beer and watching a kind of stage show. At the Sphinx they had picked up a pilot from Thirty-three squadron, who said that his name was William. He was about the same age as Stuffy, but his face was younger, for he had not been flying so long. It was especially around his mouth that he was younger. He had a round schoolboy face and a small turned-up nose and his skin was brown from the desert.

The three of them sat happily in the place without a name drinking beer, because beer was the only thing that they served there. It was a long wooden room with an

unpolished wooden sawdust floor and wooden tables and chairs. At the far end there was a raised wooden stage where there was a show going on. The room was full of Egyptians, sitting drinking black coffee with the red tarbooshes on their heads.

There were two fat girls on the stage dressed in shiny silver pants and silver brassieres. One was waggling her bottom in time to the music. The other was waggling her bosom in time to the music. The bosom waggler was most skilful. She could waggle one bosom without waggling the other and sometimes she would waggle her bottom as well. The Egyptians were spellbound and kept giving her a big hand. The more they clapped the more she waggled and the more she waggled the faster the music played, and the faster the music played, the faster she waggled, faster and faster and faster, never losing the tempo, never losing the fixed brassy smile that was upon her face, and the Egyptians clapped more and more and louder and louder as the speed increased. Everyone was very happy.

When it was over William said, “Why do they always have those dreary fat women? Why don’t they have beautiful women?”

The Stag said, “The Gyppies like them fat. They like them like that.”

“Impossible,” said Stuffy.

“It’s true,” Stag said. “It’s an old business. It comes from the days where there used to be lots of famines here, and all the poor people were thin and all the rich people and the aristocracy were well fed and fat. If you got someone fat you couldn’t go wrong; she was bound to be high-class.”

“Bullshit,” said Stuffy.

William said, “Well, we’ll soon find out. I’m going to ask those Gyppies.” He jerked his thumb towards two middle-aged Egyptians who were sitting at the next table, only about four feet away.

“No,” said Stag. “No, William. We don’t want them over here.”

“Yes,” said Stuffy.

“Yes,” said William. “We’ve got to find out why the Gyppies like fat women.”

He was not drunk. None of them was drunk, but they were happy with a fair amount of beer and whisky, and William was the happiest. His brown schoolboy face was radiant with happiness, his turned-up nose seemed to have turned up a little more, and he was probably relaxing for the first time in many weeks. He got up, took three paces over to the table of the Egyptians and stood in front of them, smiling.

“Gentlemen,” he said, “my friends and I would be honoured if you would join us at our table.”

The Egyptians had dark greasy skins and podgy faces. They were wearing the red hats and one of them had a gold tooth. At first, when William addressed them, they looked a little alarmed. Then they caught on, looked at each other, grinned and nodded.

“Pleess,” said one.

“Pleess,” said the other, and they got up, shook hands with William and followed him over to where the Stag and Stuffy were sitting.

William said, “Meet my friends. This is the Stag. This is Stuffy. I am William.”

The Stag and Stuffy stood up, they all shook hands, the Egyptians said “Pleess” once more and then everyone sat down.

The Stag knew that their religion forbade them to drink. “Have a coffee,” he said.

The one with the gold tooth grinned broadly, raised his palms upward and hunched his shoulders a little. “For me,” he said, “I am accustomed. But for my frient,” and he spread out his hands towards the other, “for my frient-I cannot speak.”

The Stag looked at the friend. “Coffee?” he asked.

“Pleess,” he answered. “I am accustomed.”

“Good,” said Stag. “Two coffees.”

He called a waiter. “Two coffees,” he said. “And, wait a minute. Stuffy, William, more beer?”

“For me,” Stuffy said, “I am accustomed. But for my friend,” and he turned towards William, “for my friend-I cannot speak.”

William said, “Please. I am accustomed.” None of them smiled.

The Stag said, “Good. Waiter, two coffees and three beers.” The waiter fetched the order and the Stag paid. The Stag lifted his glass towards the Egyptians and said, “Bung ho.”

“Bung ho,” said Stuffy.

“Bung ho,” said William.

The Egyptians seemed to understand and they lifted their coffee cups. “Pleess,” said the one. “Thank you,” said the other. They drank.

The Stag put down his glass and said, “It is an honour to be in your country.”

“You like?”

“Yes,” said the Stag. “Very fine.”

The music had started again and the two fat women in silver tights were doing an encore. The encore was a knockout. It was surely the most remarkable exhibition of muscle control that has ever been witnessed; for although the bottomwaggler was still just waggling her bottom, the bosom-waggler was standing like an oak tree in the centre of the stage with her arms above her head. Her left bosom she was rotating in a clockwise direction and her right bosom in an anticlockwise direction. At the same time she was waggling her bottom and it was all in time to the music. Gradually the music increased its speed, and as it got faster, the rotating and the waggling got faster and some of the Egyptians were so spellbound by the contra-rotating bosoms of the woman that they were unconsciously following the movements of the bosoms with their hands, holding their hands up in front of them and describing circles in the air. Everyone stamped their feet and screamed with delight and the two women on the stage continued to smile their fixed brassy smiles.

Then it was over. The applause gradually died down.

“Remarkable,” said the Stag.

“You like?”

“Please, it was remarkable.”

“Those girls,” said the one with the gold tooth, “very special.”

William couldn’t wait any longer. He leaned across the table and said, “Might I ask you a question?”

“Pleess,” said Golden Tooth. “Pleess.”

“Well,” said William, “How do you like your women? Like this-slim?” and he demonstrated with his hands. “Or like this-fat?”

The gold tooth shone brightly behind a big grin. “For me, I like this, fat,” and a pair of

podgy hands drew a big circle in the air.

“And your friend?” said William.

“For my frient,” he answered, “I cannot speak.”

“Pleess,” said the friend. “Like this.” He grinned and drew a fat girl in the air with his hands.

Stuffy said, “Why do you like them fat?”

Golden Tooth thought for a moment, then he said, “You like them slim, eh?”

“Please,” said Stuffy. “I like them slim.”

“Why you like them slim? You tell me.”

Stuffy rubbed the back of his neck with the palm of his hand. “William,” he said, “why do we like them slim?”

“For me,” said William, “I am accustomed.”

“So am I,” Stuffy said. “But why?”

William considered. “I don’t know,” he said. “I don’t know why we like them slim.”

“Ha,” said Golden Tooth, “You don’t know.” He leaned over the table towards William and said triumphantly, “And me, I do not know either.”

But that wasn’t good enough for William. “The Stag,” he said, “says that all rich people in Egypt used to be fat and all poor people were thin.”

“No,” said Golden Tooth, “No no no. Look those girls up there. Very fat; very poor. Look queen of Egypt, Queen Farida. Very thin; very rich. Quite wrong.”

“Yes, but what about years ago?” said William.

“What is this, years ago?”

William said, “Oh all right. Let’s leave it.”

The Egyptians drank their coffee and made noises like the last bit of water running out of the bathtub. When they had finished, they got up to go.

“Going?” said the Stag.

“Pleess,” said Golden Tooth.

William said, “Thank you.” Stuffy said, “Pleess.” The other Egyptian said, “Pleess” and the Stag said, “Thank you.” They all shook hands and the Egyptians departed.

“Ropey types,” said William.

“Very,” said Stuffy. “Very ropey types.”

The three of them sat on drinking happily until midnight, when the waiter came up and told them that the place was closing and that there were no more drinks. They were still not really drunk because they had been taking it slowly, but they were feeling healthy.

“He says we’ve got to go.”

“All right. Where shall we go? Where shall we go, Stag?”

“I don’t know. Where do you want to go?”

“Let’s go to another place like this,” said William. “This is a fine place.”

There was a pause. Stuffy was stroking the back of his neck with his hand. “Stag,” he said slowly, “I know where I want to go. I want to go to Madame Rosette’s and I want to rescue all the girls there.”

“Who’s Madame Rosette?” William said.

“She’s a great woman,” said the Stag.

“She’s a filthy old Syrian Jewess,” said Stuffy.

“She’s a lousy old bitch,” said the Stag.

“All right,” said William. “Let’s go. But who is she?”

They told him who she was. They told him about their telephone calls and about Colonel Higgins, and William said, “Come on, let’s go. Let’s go and rescue all the girls.”

They got up and left. When they went outside, they remembered that they were in a rather remote part of the town.

“We’ll have to walk a bit,” said Stag. “No gharries here.”

It was a dark starry night with no moon. The street was narrow and blacked-out. It smelled strongly with the smell of Cairo. It was quiet as they walked along, and now and again they passed a man or sometimes two men standing back in the shadow of a house, leaning against the wall of the house, smoking.

“I say,” said William, “ropey, what?”

“Very,” said Stuffy. “Very bad types.”

They walked on, the three of them walking abreast; square short ginger-haired Stag, tall dark Stuffy, and tall young William who went bareheaded because he had lost his cap. They headed roughly towards the centre of the town where they knew that they would find a gharry to take them on to Rosette.

Stuffy said, “Oh, won’t the girls be pleased when we rescue them?”

“Jesus,” said the Stag, “it ought to be a party.”

“Does she actually keep them locked up?” William said.

“Well, no,” said Stag. “Not exactly. But if we rescue them now, they won’t have to work any more tonight anyway. You see, the girls she has at her place are nothing but ordinary shop girls who still work during the day in the shops. They have all of them made some mistake or other which Rosette either engineered or found out about, and now she has put the screws on them; she makes them come along in the evening, But they hate her and they do not depend on her for a living. They would kick her in the teeth if they got the chance.”

Stuffy said, “We’ll give them the chance.”

They crossed over a street. William said, “How many girls will there be there, Stag?”

“I don’t know. I suppose there might be thirty.”

“Good God,” said William. “This will be a party. Does she really treat them very badly?”

The Stag said, “Thirty-three squadron told me that she pays them nothing, about twenty akkers a night. She charges the customers a hundred or two hundred akkers each. Every girl earns for Rosette between five hundred and a thousand akkers every night.”

“Good God,” said William. “A thousand piastres a night and thirty girls. She must be a millionaire.”

“She is. Someone calculated that not even counting her outside business, she makes the equivalent of about fifteen hundred pounds a week. That’s, let me see, that’s between five and six thousand pounds a month. Sixty thousand pounds a year.”

Stuffy came out of his dream. “Jesus,” he said, “Jesus Christ. The filthy old Syrian Jewess.”

“The lousy old bitch,” said William.

They were coming into a more civilized section of the town, but still there were no gharries.

The Stag said, “Did you hear about Mary’s House?”

“What’s Mary’s House?” said William.

“It’s a place in Alexandria. Mary is the Rosette of Alex.”

“Lousy old bitch,” said William.

“No,” Stag said. “They say she’s a good woman. But anyway, Mary’s House was hit by a bomb last week. The navy was in port at the time and the place was full of sailors, nautic types.”

“Killed?”

“Lots of them killed. And d’you know what happened? They posted them as killed in action.”

“The Admiral is a gentleman,” said Stuffy.

“Magnificent,” said William.

Then they saw a gharry and hailed it.

Stuffy said, “We don’t know the address.”

“He’ll know it,” said Stag. “Madame Rosette,” he said to the driver.

The driver grinned and nodded. Then William said, “I’m going to drive. Give me the

reins, driver, and sit up here beside me and tell me where to go."

The driver protested vigorously, but when William gave him ten piastres, he gave him the reins. William sat high up on the driver's seat with the driver beside him. The Stag and Stuffy got in the back of the carriage.

"Take off," said Stuffy. William took off. The horses began to gallop.

"No good," shrieked the driver. "No good. Stop."

"Which way Rosette?" shouted William.

"Stop," shrieked the driver.

William was happy. "Rosette," he shouted. "Which way?"

The driver made a decision. He decided that the only way to stop this madman was to get him to his destination. "This way," he shrieked. "Left." William pulled hard on the left rein and the horses swerved around the corner. The gharry took it on one wheel.

"Too much bank," shouted Stuffy from the back seat.

"Which way now?" shouted William.

"Left," shrieked the driver. They took the next street to the left, then they took one to the right, two more to the left, then one to the right again and suddenly the driver yelled, "Here pleess, here Rosette. Stop."

William pulled hard on the reins and gradually the horses raised their heads with the pulling and slowed down to a trot.

"(There?" said William.

"Here," said the driver. "Pleess." He pointed to a house twenty yards ahead. William brought the horses to a stop right in front of it.

"Nice work, William," said Stuffy.

"Jesus," said the Stag. "That was quick."

"Marvellous," said William. "Wasn't it?" He was very happy.

The driver was sweating through his shirt and he was too frightened to be angry.

William said, “How much?”

“Pleess, twenty piastres.”

William gave him forty and said, “Thank you very much. Fine horses.” The little man took the money, jumped up on to the gharry, and drove off. He was in a hurry to get away.

They were in another of those narrow, dark streets, but the houses, what they could see of them, looked huge and prosperous. The one which the driver had said was Rosette’s was wide and thick and three storeys high, built of grey concrete, and it had a large thick front door which stood wide open. As they went in, the Stag said, “Now leave this to me. I’ve got a plan.”

Inside there was a cold grey dusty stone hall, lit by a bare electric light bulb in the ceiling, and there was a man standing in the hall. He was a mountain of la man, a huge Egyptian with a flat face and two cauliflower ears. In his wrestling days he had probably been billed as Abdul the Killer or The Poisonous Pasha, but now he wore a dirty white cotton suit.

The Stag said, “Good evening. Is Madame Rosette here?”

Abdul looked hard at the three pilots, hesitated, then said, “Madame Rosette top floor.”

“Thank you,” said Stag. “Thank you very much.” Stuffy noticed that the Stag was being polite. There was always trouble for somebody when he was like that. Back in the squadron, when he was leading a flight, when they sighted the enemy and when there was going to be a battle, the Stag never gave an order without saying “Please’ and he never received a message without saying “Thank you.’ He was saying “Thank you” now to Abdul.

They went up the bare stone steps which had iron railings. They went past the first landing and the second landing, and the place was as bare as a cave. At the top of the third flight of steps, there was no landing; it was walled off, and the stairs ran up to a door. The Stag pressed the bell. They waited a while, then a little panel in the door slid back and a pair of small black eyes peeked through. A woman’s voice said, “What you boys want?” Both the Stag and Stuffy recognized the voice from the telephone. The Stag said, “We would like to see Madame Rosette.” He pronounced the Madame in the French way because he was being polite.

“You officers? Only officers here,” said the voice. She had a voice like a broken board.

“Yes,” said Stag. “We are officers.”

“You don’t look like officers. What kind of officers?”

“IF.”

There was a pause. The Stag knew that she was considering. She had probably had trouble with pilots before, and he hoped only that she would not see “William and the light that was dancing in his eyes; for William was still feeling the way he had felt when he drove the gharry. Suddenly the panel closed and the door opened.

“All right, come in,” she said. She was too greedy, this woman, even to pick her customers carefully.

They went in and there she was. Short, fat, greasy, with wisps of untidy black hair straggling over her forehead; a large, mud-coloured face, a large wide nose and a small fish mouth, with just the trace of a black moustache above the mouth. She had on a loose black satin dress.

“Come into the office, boys,” she said, and started to waddle down the passage to the left. It was a long wide passage, about fifty yards long and four or five yards wide. It ran through the middle of the house, parallel with the street, and as you came in from the stairs, you had to turn left along it. All the way down there were doors, about eight or ten of them on each side. If you turned right as you came in from the stairs, you ran into the end of the passage, but there was one door there too, and as the three of them walked in, they heard a babble of female voices from behind that door. The Stag noted that it was the girls’ dressing-room.

“This way, boys,” said Rosette. She turned left and slopped down the passage, away from the door with the voices. The three followed her, Stag first, then Stuffy, then William, down the passage which had a red carpet on the floor and huge pink lampshades hanging from the ceiling. They got about halfway down the passage when there was a yell from the dressing-room behind them. Rosette stopped and looked around.

“You go on, boys,” she said, “into the office, last door on the left. I won’t be a minute.” She turned and went back towards the dressingroom door. They didn’t go on. They stood and watched her, and just as she got to the door, it opened and a girl rushed out. From where they stood, they could see that her fair hair was all over her face and that she had on an untidy-looking green evening dress. She saw Rosette in front of her and she stopped. They heard Rosette say something, something angry and quick spoken, and they heard the girl shout something back at her. They saw Rosette raise her right arm and they saw her hit the girl smack on the side of the face with the palm of her hand. They saw her draw back her hand and hit her again in the same place. She hit her hard. The girl put her hands up to her face and began to cry. Rosette opened the

door of the dressing-room and pushed her back inside.

“Jesus,” said the Stag. “She’s tough.” William said, “So am I.” Stuffy didn’t say anything.

Rosette came back to them and said, “Come along, boys. Just a bit of trouble, that’s all.” She led them to the end of the passage and in through the last door on the left. This was the office. It was a medium-sized room with two red plush sofas, two or three red plush armchairs and a thick red carpet on the floor. In one corner was a small desk, and Rosette sat herself behind it, facing the room.

“Sit down, boys,” she said.

The Stag took an armchair, Stuffy and William sat on a sofa.

“Well,” she said, and her voice became sharp and urgent. “Let’s do business.”

The Stag leaned forward in his chair. His short ginger hair looked somehow wrong against the bright red plush. “Madame Rosette,” he said, “it is a great pleasure to meet you. We have heard so much about you.” Stuffy looked at the Stag. He was being polite again. Rosette looked at him too, and her little black eyes were suspicious. “Believe me,” the Stag went on, “we’ve really been looking forward to this for quite a time now.”

His voice was so pleasant and he was so polite that Rosette took it.

“That’s nice of you boys,” she said. “You’ll always have a good time here. I see to that. Now business.”

William couldn’t wait any longer. He said slowly. “The Stag says that you’re a great woman.”

“Thanks, boys.”

Stuffy said, “The Stag says that you’re a filthy old Syrian Jewess.”

William said quickly, “The Stag says that you’re a lousy old bitch.”

“And I know what I’m talking about,” said the Stag.

Rosette jumped to her feet. “What’s this?” she shrieked, and her face was no longer the colour of mud; it was the colour of red clay. The men did not move. They did not smile or laugh; they sat quite still, leaning forward a little in their seats, watching her.

Rosette had had trouble before, plenty of it, and she knew how to deal with it. But this was different. They didn't seem drunk, it wasn't about money and it wasn't about one of her girls. It was about herself and she didn't like it.

"Get out," she yelled. "Get out unless you want trouble." But they did not move.

For a moment she paused, then she stepped quickly from behind her desk and made for the door. But the Stag was there first and when she went for him, Stuffy and William each caught one of her arms from behind.

"We'll lock her in," said the Stag. "Let's get out."

Then she really started yelling and the words which she used cannot be written down on paper, for they were terrible words. They poured out of her small fish mouth in one long unbroken high-pitched stream, and little bits of spit and saliva came out with them. Stuffy and William pulled her back by the arms towards one of the big chairs and she fought and yelled like a large fat pig being dragged to the slaughter. They got her in front of the chair and gave her a quick push so that she fell backwards into it. Stuffy nipped across to her desk, bent down quickly and jerked the telephone cord from its connection. The Stag had the door open and all three of them were out of the room before Rosette had time to get up. The Stag had taken the key from the inside of the door, and now he locked it. The three of them stood outside in the passage.

"Jesus," said the Stag. "What a woman!"

"Mad as hell," William said. "Listen to her."

They stood outside in the passage and they listened. They heard her yelling, then she began banging on the door, but she went on yelling and her voice was not the voice of a woman, it was the voice of an enraged but articulate bull.

The Stag said, "Now quick. The girls. Follow me. And from now on you've got to act serious. You've got to act serious as hell."

He ran down the passage towards the dressing room, followed by Stuffy and William. Outside the door he stopped, the other two stopped and they could still hear Rosette yelling from her office. The Stag said, "Now don't say anything. Just act serious as hell," and he opened the door and went in.

There were about a dozen girls in the room. They all looked up. They stopped talking and looked up at the Stag, who was standing in the doorway. The Stag clicked his heels and said, "This is the Military Police. Les Gendarmes Milltajres." He said it in a stern voice and with a straight face and he was standing there in the doorway at attention with his cap on his head. Stuffy and William stood behind him.

“This is the Military Police,” he said again, and he produced his identification card and held it up between two fingers.

The girls didn’t move or say anything. They stayed still in the middle of what they were doing and they were like a tableau because they stayed so still. One had been pulling on a stocking and she stayed like that, sitting on a chair with her leg out straight and the stocking up to her knee with her hands on the stocking. One had been doing her hair in front of a mirror and when she looked round she kept her hands up to her hair. One was standing up and had been applying lipstick and she raised her eyes to the Stag but still held the lipstick to her mouth. Several were just sitting around on plain wooden chairs, doing nothing, and they raised their heads and turned them to the door, but they went on sitting. Most of them were in some sort of shiny evening dress, one or two were half-clothed, but most of them were in shiny green or shiny blue or shiny red or shiny gold, and when they turned to look at the Stag, they were so still that they were like a tableau.

The Stag paused. Then he said, “I am to state on behalf of the authorities that they are sorry to disturb you. My apologies, mesd’moiselles. But it is necessary that you come with us for purposes of registration, et cetera. Afterwards you will be allowed to go. It is a mere formality. But now you must come, please. I have conversed with Madame.”

The Stag stopped speaking, but still the girls did not move.

“Please,” said the Stag, “get your coats. We are the military.” He stepped aside and held open the door. Suddenly the tableau dissolved, the girls got up, puzzled and murmuring, and two or three of them moved towards the door. The others followed. The ones that were halfclothed quickly slipped into dresses, patted their hair with their hands and came too. None of them had coats.

“Count them,” said the Stag to Stuffy as they filed out of the door. Stuffy counted them aloud and there were fourteen.

“Fourteen, sir,” said Stuffy, who was trying to talk like a sergeant-major.

The Stag said, “Correct,” and he turned to the girls who were crowded in the passage. “Now, mesd’moiselles, I have the list of your names from Madame, so please do not try to run away. And do not worry. This is merely a formality of the military.”

William was out in the passage opening the door which led to the stairs, and he went out first. The girls followed and the Stag and Stuffy brought up the rear. The girls were quiet and puzzled and worried and a little frightened and they didn’t talk, none of them talked except for a tall one with black hair who said, “Mon Dieu, a formality of the military. Mon Dieu, men Dieu, what next.” But that was all and they went on down.

In the hall they met the Egyptian who had a fiat face and two cauliflower ears. For a moment it looked as though there would be trouble. But the Stag waved his identification card in his face and said, “The Military Police,” and the man was so surprised that he did nothing and let them pass.

And so they came out into the street and the Stag said, “It is necessary to walk a little way, but only a very little way,” and they turned right and walked along the sidewalk with the Stag leading, Stuffy at the rear and William walking out on the road guarding the flank. There was some moon now. One could see quite well and William tried to keep in step with Stag and Stuffy tried to keep in step with William, and they swung their arms and held their heads up high and looked very military, and the whole thing was a sight to behold. Fourteen girls in shiny evening dresses, fourteen girls in the moonlight in shiny green, shiny blue, shiny red, shiny black and shiny gold, marching along the street with the Stag in front, William alongside and Stuffy at the rear. It was a sight to behold.

The girls had started chattering. The Stag could hear them, although he didn’t look around. He marched on at the head of the column and when they came to the crossroads he turned right. The others followed and they had walked fifty yards down the block when they came to an Egyptian cafŽ. The Stag saw it and he saw the lights burning behind the blackout curtains. He turned around and shouted “Halt!” The girls stopped, but they went on chattering and anyone could see that there was mutiny in the ranks. You can’t make fourteen girls in high heels and shiny evening dresses march all over town with you at night, not for long anyway, not for long, even if it is a formality of the military. The Stag knew it and now he was speaking.

“l’vlesd’moiselles,” he said, “listen to me.” But there was mutiny in the ranks and they went on talking and the tall one with dark hair was saying, “Mon Dieu, what is this? “What in hell’s name sort of a thing is this, oh mon Dieu?”

“Quiet,” said the Stag. “Quiet!” and the second time he shouted it as a command. The talking stopped.

“Mesd’moiselles,” he said, and now he became polite. He talked to them in his best way and when the Stag was polite there wasn’t anyone who didn’t take it. It was an extraordinary thing because he could make a kind of smile with his voice without smiling with his lips. His voice smiled while his face remained serious. It was a most forcible thing because it gave people the impression that he was being serious about being nice.

“Mesd’moiselles,” he said, and his voice was smiling. “With the military there always has to be formality. It is something unavoidable. It is something that I regret exceedingly. But there can be chivalry also. And you must know that with the RAF there is great chivalry. So now it will be a pleasure if you will all come in here and take

with us a glass of beer. It is the chivalry of the military." He stepped forward, opened the door of the cafŽ and said, "Oh for God's sake, let's have a drink. Who wants a drink?"

Suddenly the girls saw it all. They saw the whole thing as it was, all of them at once. It took them by surprise. For a second they considered. Then they looked at one another, then they looked at the Stag, then they looked around at Stuffy and at William, and when they looked at those two they caught their eyes, and the laughter that was in them. All at once the girls began to laugh and William laughed and Stuffy laughed and they moved forward and poured into the cafŽ.

The tall one with dark hair took the Stag by the arm and said, "Mon Dieu, Military Police, mon Dieu, oh mon Dieu," and she threw her head back and laughed and the Stag laughed with her. William said, "It is the chivalry of the military," and they moved into the cafŽ.

The place was rather like the one that they had been in before, wooden and sawdusty, and there were a few coffee-drinking Egyptians sitting around with the red tarbooshes on their heads. William and Stuffy pushed three round tables together and fetched chairs. The girls sat down. The Egyptians at the other tables put down their coffee cups, turned around in their chairs and gaped. They gaped like so many fat muddy fish, and some of them shifted their chairs round facing the party so that they could get a better view and they went on gaping.

A waiter came up and the Stag said, "Seventeen beers. Bring us seventeen beers." The waiter said "Pleess" and went away.

As they sat waiting for the drinks the girls looked at the three pilots and the pilots looked at the girls. William said, "It is the chivalry of the military," and the tall dark girl said, "Mon Dieu, you are crazy people, oh mon Dieu."

The waiter brought the beer. William raised his glass and said, "To the chivalry of the military." The dark girl said, "Oh mon Dieu." Stuffy didn't say anything. He was busy looking around at the girls, sizing them up, trying to decide now which one he liked best so that he could go to work at once. The Stag was smiling and the girls were sitting there in their shiny evening dresses, shiny red, shiny gold, shiny blue, shiny green, shiny black and shiny silver, and once again it was almost a tableau, certainly it was a picture, and the girls were sitting there sipping their beer, seeming quite happy, not seeming suspicious any more because to them the whole thing now appeared exactly as it was and they understood.

"Jesus," said the Stag, He put down his glass and looked around him. "Oh Jesus, there's enough here for the whole squadron. How I wish the whole squadron was here!" He took another drink, stopped in the middle of it and put down his glass

quickly. “I know what,” he said. “Waiter, oh waiter.”

“Pleess.”

“Get me a big piece of paper and a pencil.”

“Pleess.” The waiter went away and came back with a sheet of paper. He took a pencil from behind his ear and handed it to the Stag. The Stag banged the table for silence.

“Mesd’moiselles,” he said, “for the last time there is a formality. It is the last of all the formalities.”

“Of the military,” said William.

“Oh mon Dieu,” said the dark girl.

“It is nothing,” the Stag said. “You are required to write your name and your telephone number on this piece of paper. It is for my friends in the squadron. It is so that they can be as happy as I am now, but without the same trouble beforehand.” The Stag’s voice was smiling again. One could see that the girls liked his voice. “You would be very kind if you would do that,” he went on, “for they too would like to meet you. It would be a pleasure.”

“Wonderful,” said William.

“Crazy,” said the dark girl, but she wrote her name and number on the paper and passed it on. The Stag ordered another round of beer. The girls certainly looked funny sitting there in their dresses, but they were writing their names down on the paper. They looked happy and William particularly looked happy, but Stuffy looked serious because the problem of choosing was a weighty one and it was heavy on his mind. They were good-looking girls, young and goodlooking, all different, completely different from each other because they were Greek and Syrian and French and Italian and light Egyptian and Yugoslav and many other things, but they were goodlooking, all of them were good-looking and handsome.

The piece of paper had come back to the Stag now and they had all written on it; fourteen strangely written names and fourteen telephone numbers. The Stag looked at it slowly. “This will go on the squadron notice-board; he said, “and I will be regarded as a great benefactor.”

William said, “It should go to headquarters. It should be mimeographed and circulated to all squadrons. It would be good for morale.”

“Oh mon Dieu,” said the dark girl. “You are crazy.”

Slowly Stuffy got to his feet, picked up his chair, carried it round to the other side of the table and pushed it between two of the girls. All he said was “Excuse me. Do you mind if I sit here?” At last he had made up his mind, and now he turned towards the one on his right and quietly went to work. She was very pretty; very dark and very pretty and she had plenty of shape. Stuffy began to talk to her, completely oblivious to the rest of the company, turning towards her and leaning his head on his hand. Watching him, it was not so difficult to understand why he was the greatest pilot in the squadron. He was a young concentrator, this Stuffy; an intense athletic concentrator who moved towards what he wanted in a dead straight line. He took hold of winding roads and carefully he made them straight, then he moved over them with great speed and nothing stopped him. He was like that, and now he was talking to the pretty girl but no one could hear what he was saying.

Meanwhile the Stag was thinking. He was thinking about the next move, and when everyone was getting towards the end of their third beer, he banged the table again for silence.

“Mesd’moiselles,” he said. “It will be a pleasure for us to escort you home. I will take five of you,”-he had worked it all out “Stuffy will take five, and Jamface will take four. We will take three gharries and I will take five of you in mine and I will drop you home one at a time.” military.,, said, “It is the chivalry of the military.”

“Stuffy,” said the Stag. “Stuffy, is that all right? You take five. It’s up to you whom you drop off last.”

Stuffy looked around. “Yes,” he said. “Oh yes. That suits me.”

“William, you take four. Drop them home one by one; you understand.”

“Perfectly,” said William. “Oh perfectly.”

They all got up and moved towards the door. The tall one with dark hair took the Stag’s arm and said, “You take me?”

“Yes,” he answered. “I take you.”

“You drop me off last?”

“Yes. I drop you off last.”

“Oh mon Dieu,” she said. “That will be fine.”

Outside they got three gharries and they split up into parties. Stuffy was moving

quickly. He got his girls into the carriage quickly, climbed in after them and the Stag saw the gharry drive off down the street. Then he saw William's gharry move off, but it seemed to start away with a sudden jerk, with the horses breaking into a gallop at once. The Stag looked again and he saw William perched high up on the driver's seat with the reins in his hands.

The Stag said, "Let's go," and his five girls got into their gharry. It was a squash, but everyone got in. The Stag sat back in his seat and then he felt an arm pushing up and under and linking with his. It was the tall one with dark hair. He turned and looked at her.

"Hello," he said. "Hello, you."

"Ah," she whispered. "You are such goddam crazy people." And the Stag felt a warmness inside him and he began to hum a little tune as the gharry rattled on through the dark streets.