

## MEREDITH QUARTERMAIN / The Queen Dreams

### Queen Dreams

Her majesty comes to the city, gracious and noble and happy and glorious, longing to reign over us. Her ministries of consumer affairs. Sniggling in and out of pockets with the moose and bears, the beavers, loons and bluenoses. Wearing George IV roses, shamrocks, thistles or her lover's-knot tiara. The queen. Slipping in and out of wallets in Queen Mary's Girls and her wreath of flowers (Nizam of Hyderabad gave her the diamonds; the rubies came from each and every one of the Burmese people).

Lie back and think of the queen longing to reign maple leaves. Perched in white satin with a red-lipped smile, above the rolled map and the blackboard in gradually fading schoolroom paint. Blue sash across her shoulder, elbow-length white gloves, hands carefully clasped just below the belly. Is that the Russian fringe on her head, or a puffy white hat? Prince Philip's beside her, white gloves in hand, medals on his chest and hat under his arm, *his* crown jewels well tucked away.

Lick the queen. Lick the Lahore diamond and floret earrings. Lick the queen in 1959, in her blue velvet cape and Order of the Garter star. Lick the queen beside the Parliamentary library. Lick the queen for thirty-seven cents. Lick her when she's 76 in front of a maple leaf. Lick her in the legislatures. In the ministry of health, the ministry of finance, the ministry of environment, foreign affairs, defence, customs and immigration. And in the courtrooms of the city, lie back and think of the queen pursuing the accused. The queen that defends our laws and ever gives us cause.

## Scaffolding

Plato's Necessity holds a rainbow pillar buttressing the heavens. And, as the spindle turns, it spins a great whorl within which seven other whorls slowly spin the other way, each one carrying a Siren singing with the Fates: Clotho, Lachesis, and Atropos. The spinner, the giver of lots, and the shears on the thread of life—these are the daughters of Necessity.

The City Courthouse: an imaginary arena. From Roman senators meeting over a case of treason, in the torchlight of the Curia. Or the centumviri judging thieves and frauds in Basilica Julia. Vaulted ceilings with clerestory windows 100 feet above palatial chambers. In the courtrooms of modernism, the law is low, flat and rectilinear, dotted with designer trees.

The courthouse steps—they settled on the courthouse steps, built a cabin—fan out in concrete slabs up a pyramid anthill of registries and chambers, ending mid-sentence at a wall—no door, no Roman columns—just a 10-foot wall of justness—water rushing over it into a pool in the roof of a lower echelon. A pair of Canada geese look down to the pool below, emitting solitary bleats. A man, perhaps 50, with a hefty paunch, waves a spray nozzle over beds of impatiens—his barrow of rakes and hoe nearby. On the horizon are the pediment and scroll-top columns of once-courthouse-now-art-gallery for the courtiers of landscape and portraiture. The geese land in the turbulent pool and honk at the roaring water falling down.

Another waterfall surges down the glass roof from a cleaner's hose, over the hush of modern carpeting and potted plants, and blindfolded Themis, daughter of Uranus and Gaea. Tongues of water slide like cloud-bottoms down the glass on its scaffolding. French *escafe*, a shell; Latin *scapha*, a light boat, a skiff; Greek *skaphe*, a trough. Descended from Indo-European *skehb*, a scab. Anne Boleyn on the scaffold took the fatal stroke.

A woman with crutch splays out bad leg, and scoops water in paper cups from a globalized burger joint. Four cups at the pond edge plus her windshield squeegee. A teen sylph, with pink mini-top and low-slung jeans drifts up Howe Street coolly tilting her buttocks. Live to Love, says the Celine-Dior trapeze-woman swinging out from a billboard. Inside the courthouse, the buzzing of innumerable bees: If your Ladyship, Lordship would turn to page nine hundred and fifty of the transcript. My friend and I have reached an agreement, subject to your Ladyship, Lordship's approval. I'm afraid I must ask your Ladyship, Lordship for an adjournment to review the sixteen binders of new evidence. Objection, M'Lady, M'Lord, my friend has asked a leading question. A moment please, M'Lady, M'Lord. If it would please M'Lady, M'Lord to refer to exhibit A. I believe, M'Lady, M'Lord, it's under tab 100W of binder 12C. Those are all my questions, M'Lady, M'Lord.

## Her Majesty Versus Murdock

Order in Court. All stand—the lawyers in their black gowns, behind their brass bar, the Accused in his box, the jury in their box, the sheriffs of the Accused and the jury. The oak-paneled room fills with shuffles and plumps. All sit. His Lordship in red mantle and red-cuffed robes swivels his chair to address the jury in their plaid shirts, angora sweaters and track jackets: I am the judge of the law, he says, You are the judge of the facts.

Made from Latin *facere*. Facts make fashion statements. Ache about like general factotums, and quarrel in factions. Make difficulties with facility. Cook up features, defeats, fetishes. In them dwell the gods of raccoons and humans. Facts are erotic.

The standard of proof is beyond a reasonable doubt, His Lordship continues, Mr. Murdock has no obligation to prove he is innocent, and his counsel, Mr. Raddle, is under no obligation to ask questions. Be cautious in discussing the case. Later you may find it difficult to change your mind.

To doublets, doughnuts, douches or doubts. Double thinks or double flats. The facts make reason's rations and ratio's rashers. Outside the ratio, all is obiter dictum. For logic, as Nietzsche said, *rests upon presuppositions to which nothing in the real world corresponds*.

The Crown charges that Mr. Murdock robbed Mr. Mack, assaulting him with a weapon—namely a hockey stick. Mr. Radish for the Crown must prove Mr. Murdock took property from Mr. Mack intending to deprive him, and that Mr. Murdock used a weapon with force intending to hit Mr. Mack.

Through the lot lines of words, not boundaries of worlds, propriety becomes private and peculiar. But who, or what is public? *Homo laborans* slaves away, making more *homo laborans*. *Homo faber* produces more and more products, the way facts make artifacts and factories make faculties.

Only the testimony of witnesses is evidence.

## Hacky Sack

Old courthouse steps make bleachers to a stage—the deck of a ship where crowds walk back and forth from Howe Street to Hornby Street and Hornby (Rear-Admiral Phipps H) to Howe (Black Dick led the English fleet against Spain in the fight over Nootka land). Clipboard-toting women in orange vests accost people for their survey. A kid lights up a joint, filling the air with pungent fumes of BC Bud. A woman in flounced long skirt and ruffled blouse shuffles along. And guys in front centre play hacky-sack, jumping on it—flicking it up behind them from the bottoms of their shoes. A bicycle courier, one foot on his pedal, chats to a blonde; a motorcycle man hunches into his farting machine. Hacky-sackers bop it off knees, heels. Djew know what time it is (doper kid). Quarter after one. Balding man with glasses gets caught in hacky-sack game. Hey Gringo, keep your eyes open. Hacky-sack hits a suit in the head. Everyone laughs. Skate boarder and girlfriend watch. Hacky-sack flies way up the steps. Girl in work boots closes her notebook and asks if she can join in. Course you can. Man pushing a trash bin rolls from Hornby to Howe. Beige suit with briefcase can't hit sack when it comes straight at him. Steps on it, crushing its grains into the sidewalk. Orange survey-takers capture a ponytail man. Empty rubbish bin rolls back to stage right. What time you got? One thirty. Muscle car guns it off stage left. Three pigeons playing mother-may-I change their minds and head back down the steps, just as a man in faded T-shirt and jeans climbs them and picks up a tiny butt. I could give you a cigarette, man, says dooper kid. Man shrugs, puts butt in chocolate box: it's for my ant colony.