SOME LADIES AND JURGEN

*by James Branch Cabell**

I

IN the old days lived a poet named Jurgen; but what his wife called him was very often much much worse than that. She was a high-spirited woman, with no especial gift for silence. Well, in the old days Jurgen was passing the Cistercian Abbey, and one of the monks had tripped over a stone in the roadway. He was cursing the devil who had placed it there.

"Fie, brother!" says Jurgen, "and have not the devils enough to bear as it is?"

"I never held with Origen," replied the monk; "and, besides, it hurt my great toe confoundedly."

"None the less," observes Jurgen, "it does not behoove God-fearing persons to speak with disrespect of the divinely appointed Prince of Darkness. Then, to your further confusion, consider this monarch's industry! Day and night you may detect him toiling at the task Heaven set him. That is a thing can be said of few communicants and of no monks. Think, too, of his fine artistry, as evinced in all the perilous and lovely snares of this world, which it is your business to combat, and mine to make verses about! Why, but for him we would both be vocationless. Then, moreover, consider his philanthropy! and deliberate how insufferable would be our case if you and I, and all of us, were today hobnobbing with all other beasts in the Garden which we pretend to desiderate on Sundays! To arise with swine and lie down with the hyena?—oh, intolerable!" So he ran on, devising reasons for not thinking too harshly of the devil. Most of it was an abridgement of his own verses.

"I consider that to be stuff and nonsense," was tne monk's glose.

"No doubt your notion is sensible," observed the poet; "but mine is the prettier. . . ."

Well, then Jurgen met a black gentleman, who saluted him and said:

"Thanks, Jurgen, for your good word."

"Who are you, and why do you thank me?" asks Jurgen.

* This is the short story out of which Cabell's famous novel *Jurgen* was evolved. It is instructive to compare this story with the form it took in the novel.

"My name is no great matter. But you have a kind heart, Jurgen. May your life be free from care!"

"Glory be to God, friend, but I am already married."

"Eh, sirs, and a fine, clever poet like you! No matter, the morning is brighter than the evening. Now I will reward you, to be sure."

So Jurgen thanked him politely. And when Jurgen reached home his wife was nowhere to be seen. He looked on all sides and questioned everyone, but to no avail. So he crossed himself, prepared his own supper, went to bed, and slept soundly.

"I have implicit confidence," says he, "in Lisa. I have particular confidence in her ability to take care of herself, in any surroundings."

That was all very well: but time passed, and presently it began to be rumored that Lisa walked on Morven. Her brother, who was a grocer and a member of the town council, went thither to see about this report. And sure enough, there was Jurgen's wife walking in the twilight and muttering incessantly.

"Fie, sister!" says the town counsellor, "this is very unseemly conduct for a married woman, and a thing likely to be talked about."

"Follow me!" replied Dame Lisa. And the town counsellor followed her a little way, in the dusk, but when she came to Amneran Heath and still went onward, he knew better than to follow.

Next evening the elder sister of Dame Lisa went to Morven. This sister had married a notary, and was a shrewd woman. In consequence she took with her this evening a long wand of peeled willow-wood. And there was Jurgen's wife walking in the twilight and muttering incessantly.

"Fie, sister!" says the notary's wife, who was a shrewd woman, "and do you not know that all this while Jurgen does his own sewing, and is once more making eyes at the Countess Varvara?"

Dame Lisa shuddered; but she only said, "Follow me!"

So the notary's wife followed her to Amneran Heath, and across Amneran Heath to where a cave was. This was a place of abominable repute. . . . A lean hound came to them there in the twilight, lolling his tongue: but the notary's wife struck twice with her wand, and the silent beast left them. And Lisa went silently into the cave, and her sister turned and went home to her children, weeping.

So the next evening Jurgen himself came to Morven, because all his wife's family assured him this was the manly thing to do. He followed his wife across Amneran Heath until they reached the cave. The

poet would willingly have been elsewhere. For the hound squatted upon his haunches, and seemed to grin at Jurgen: and there were other creatures abroad that flew low in the twilight, keeping close to the ground like owls; but they were larger than owls, and were more discomforting.

Jurgen said, a little peevishly:

"Lisa, my dear, if you go into the cave I will have to follow you, because it is the manly thing to do. And you know how easily I take cold."

The voice of Lisa was as the rustle of dead leaves.

"There is a cross about your neck. You must throw that away."

And indeed, Jurgen was wearing such a cross, through motives of sentiment, because it had once belonged to his dead mother.

But now, to pleasure his wife—"I am embarking upon an apologue," was his appraisal—he removed the trinket, and hung it on a barberry bush; and with the reflection that this was likely to prove a deplorable business, he followed Lisa into the cave.

Well, all was dark there, and Jurgen could see no one. But the cave stretched straight forward, and downward, and at the far end was a glow of light.

So Jurgen went on and on, and, after divers happenings which do not here concern us, he came to a notable place where seven cresset lights were burning. These lights were the power of Assyria, and Babylon, and Nineveh, and Egypt, and Rome, and Athens, and Byzantium: and six other cressets stood ready there, but fire had not yet been laid to these. And here was the black gentleman, in a black dressing-gown that was embroidered with all the signs of the Zodiac. He sat at a table, the top of which was curiously inlaid with thirty pieces of silver: and he was copying entries from one big book into another.

"You find me busy with my accounts," says he, "which augment daily—But what more can I do for you, Jurgen?"

"I have been thinking, Prince—" begins the poet.

"And why do you call me a prince, Jurgen?"

"I do not know, sir. But I suspect you are Koschei the Deathless."

The black gentleman nodded. "Something of the sort. Koschei, or Norka, or Chudo-Yudo—it is all one what I may be called hereabouts. My real name you never heard: no man has ever heard my name. So that matter we need hardly go into."

"Precisely, Prince. And I have been thinking that my wife's society is perhaps becoming a trifle burdensome to you."

"Eh, sirs, I cannot report that I enjoy it. But I am not unaccustomed to women. I may truthfully say that as I find them, so do I take them. And I was willing to oblige a fellow rebel."

"But I do not know, Prince, that I have ever rebelled—"

"You make verses, Jurgen. And all poetry is man's rebellion against being what the creature unluckily is."

"Well, be that as it may, Prince! But I do not know that you have obliged me."

"Why, Jurgen," says the black gentleman, in high astonishment, "do you mean to tell me that you want the plague of your life back again?"

"I do not know about that, either, sir. She was certainly very hard to live with. On the other hand, I had become used to having her about. I rather miss her."

Now the black gentleman meditated.

"Come, friend," he says, at last, "you are a poet of some merit. You display a promising talent which might be cleverly developed, in any suitable environment. The trouble is"—and he lowered his voice to a whisper that was truely diabolical—"the trouble is that your wife does not understand you. She is hindering your art. Yes, that precisely sums it up: she is interfering with your soul-development, and your instinctive need of self-expression, and all that sort of thing. You are very well rid of her. To the other side, as is with point observed somewhere or other, it is not good for man to live alone. But, friend, I have just the wife for you—"

Then Koschei waved his hand; and their, quick as winking, was the loveliest lady that Jurgen had ever imagined. Fair was she to look upon, with her shining gray eyes and small, smiling lips, a fairer woman might no man boast of having seen. And she regarded Jurgen graciously, with her cheeks red and white, very lovely to observe. She was clothed in a robe of flame-colored silk, and about her neck was a collar of red gold. When she spoke her voice was music. And she told him that she was Queen Guenevere.

"But Launcelot is turned monk, at Glastonbury; and Arthur is gone into Avalon," says she: "and I will be your wife if you will have me, Messire Jurgen."

The poet was troubled.

"For you make me think myself a god," says Jurgen. "Madame Guenevere, when man recognized himself to be Heaven's vicar upon

earth, it was to serve and to glorify and to protect you and your radiant sisterhood that man consecrated his existence. You were beautiful, and you were frail; you were half goddess and half bric-a-brac. Ohimé, I recognize the call of chivalry, and my heart-strings resound: yet, for innumerable reasons, I hesitate to take you for my wife, and to concede myself your appointed protector, responsible as such to Heaven. For one matter, I am not altogether sure that I am Heaven's vicar here upon earth. I cannot but suspect that Omniscience would have selected some more competent representative."

"It is so written, Messire Jurgen."

Jurgen shrugged. "I, too, have written much that is beautiful. Very often my verses were so beautiful that I would have given anything in the world in exchange for somewhat less sure information as to the author's veracity. Ah, no, madame, desire and knowledge are pressing me so sorely that, between them, I dare not love you, and still I cannot help it."

Then Jurgen gave a little wringing gesture with his hands. His smile was not merry.

"Madame and queen," says he, "there was once a man who worshipped all women. To him they were one and all of sacred, sweet, intimidating beauty. He shaped sonorous rhymes of this, in praise of the mystery and sanctity of women. Then several ladies made much of him, because, good lack, 'he understood women.' That was very unfortunate: for more reasons than one, all poets should be kept away from petticoats. So a little by a little he began to suspect that women, also, are akin to their parents; and are no wiser, and no more subtle, and no more immaculate, than the father who begot them. Madame and queen, it is not good for any man to suspect this."

"It is certainly not the conduct of a chivalrous person, nor of an authentic poet," says Queen Guenevere. "And yet your eyes are big with tears."

"Hah, madame," he replied, "but it amuses me to weep for a dead man with eyes that once were his."

Now said Queen Guenevere:

"Farewell to you, then, Jurgen, for it is I that am leaving you forever. I was the lovely and excellent masterwork of God: in Caerleon and Northgalis and at Joyeuse Garde might men behold me with delight, because to view me was to comprehend the power and kindliness of their Creator. Very beautiful was Iseult, and the face of Luned

sparkled like a moving gem; Morgaine and Viviane and shrewd Nimuë were lovely, too; and the comeliness of Ettarre exalted the beholder like proud music: these, going about Arthur's hall, seemed Heaven's finest craftsmanship until the Queen came to her dais, as the moon among glowing stars: men then affirmed that God in making Guenevere had used both hands. My beauty was no human white and red, said they, but a proud sign of Heaven's might. In approaching me, men thought of God, because in me, they said, His splendor was incarnate. That which I willed was neither right nor wrong: it was divine. This thing it was that the knights saw in me; this surety, as to the power and generosity of their great Father, it was of which the chevaliers of yesterday were conscious in beholding me, and of men's need to be worthy of such parentage: and it is I that am leaving you forever."

Said Jurgen:

"It is a sorrowful thing that is happening to me. I am become as a rudderless boat that goes from wave to wave: I am turned to unfertile dust that a windwhirl makes coherent and presently lets fall. And so farewell to you, Queen Guenevere, for it is a sorrowful thing that is happening to me."

Thus he cried farewell to the daughter of Gogyran. And instantly she vanished like the flame of a blownout altar-candle. . . .

II

Then came to Jurgen that Queen Anaïtis who very long ago was the bright bane of nations. Words may not describe her loveliness. And she talked of marvelous things. Of the lore of Thaïs she spoke, and of the schooling of Sappho, and of the secrets of Rhodopê, and of the mourning for Adonis.

"For we have but a little while to live, and thereafter none knows his fate. A man possesses nothing certainly save a brief loan of his own body: and yet the body of man is capable of much curious pleasure. As thus and thus," says she.

And the bright-colored woman spoke with antique directness of matters that Jurgen found rather embarrassing.

"Come, come!" thinks he, "but it will never do to seem provincial. I believe that I am actually blushing."

Aloud he said:

"Sweetheart, there was once a youth who sought quite zealously for the overmastering frenzies you prattle about. But, candidly, he

could not find the flesh whose touch would rouse insanity. The lad had opportunities, too, let me tell you! Hah, I recall with tenderness the glitter of eyes and hair, and the gay garments, and the soft voices of those fond, foolish women, even now! But he went from one pair of lips to another, with an ardor that was always half-feigned, and with protestations that were conscious echoes of some romance or other. Such escapades were pleasant enough; but they were not very serious, after all. For these things concerned his body alone: and I am more than an edifice of viands reared by my teeth. To pretend that what my body does or endures is of importance, seems rather silly nowadays. I prefer to regard it as a necessary beast of burden which I maintain, at considerable expense and trouble. So I shall make no more pother over it."

But then again Queen Anaïtis spoke of marvelous things; and he listened, fair-mindedly, for the queen spoke of that which was hers to share with him.

"In Babylon I have a temple where many women sit with cords about them and burn bran for perfume, while they await that thing which is to befall them. In Armenia I have a temple surrounded by vast gardens, where only strangers have the right to enter: they there receive a hospitality that is more than gallant. In Paphos I have a temple wherein is a little pyramid of white stones, very curious to see: but still more curious is the statue in my temple at Amathus, of a bearded woman, which displays other features that women do not possess. And in Alexandria I have a temple that is tended by thirty-six exceedingly wise and sacred persons, and wherein it is always night: and there men seek for monstrous pleasures, even at the price of instant death, and win to both of these swiftly. Everywhere my temples stand upon high places near the sea: so they are beheld from afar by those whom I hold dearest, my beautiful broad-chested, hairy mariners, who do not fear even me, but know that in my temples they will find notable employment. For I must tell you of what is to be encountered within these places that are mine, and of how pleasantly we pass our time there."

So she told him. . . .

Now he listened more attentively than before, and his eyes were narrowed, and his lips were lax and motionless and foolish-looking.

To Jurgen this queen's voice was all a horrible and strange and lovely magic.

Then Jurgen growled and shook himself, half-angrily; and he tweaked the ear of Queen Anaïtis.

"Sweetheart," says he, "you paint a glowing picture; but you are shrewd enough to borrow your pigments from the daydreams of inexperience. What you prattle about is not at all as you describe it. Also, you forget you are talking to a married man of some years' standing. Moreover, I shudder to think of what might happen if Lisa were to walk in unexpectedly. And for the rest, you come a deal too late, my lass, so that all this to-do over nameless sins and unspeakable caresses and other anonymous antics seems rather naïve. My ears are beset by eloquent gray hairs which plead at closer quarters than does that fibbing little tongue of yours. And so be off with you."

With that Queen Anaïtis smiled very cruelly and said:

"Farewell to you, then, Jurgen, for it is I that am leaving you forever. Henceforward you must fret away much sunlight by interminably shunning discomfort and by indulging tepid preferences. For I, and none but I, can waken that desire which uses all of a man, and so wastes nothing, even though it leave that favored man forever after like wan ashes in the sunlight. And with you I have no more to do. Join with your graying fellows, then! and help them to affront the clean, sane sunlight by making guilds and laws and solemn phrases wherewith to rid the world of me! I, Anaïtis, laugh, and my heart is a wave in the sunlight. For there is no power like my power, and no living thing which can withstand my power: and those who deride me, as I well know, are but the emptied dead, dry husks that a wind moves, with hissing noises, while I harvest in open sunlight. For I am the desire that uses all of a man; and it is I that am leaving you forever."

Said Jurgen:

"Again it is a sorrowful thing that is happening to me. I am become as a puzzled ghost that furtively observes the doings of loud-voiced, ruddy persons; and I am compact of weariness and apprehension, for I no longer discern what thing is I, nor what is my desire, and I fear that I am already dead. So farewell to you, Queen Anaïtis, for this, too, is a sorrowful thing that is happening to me."

Thus he cried farewell to the Sun's daughter. And all the colors of her loveliness flickered and merged into the likeness of a tall, thin flame, that aspired; and then this flame was extinguished. . . .

III

Now silently came Queen Helen. She said nothing at all, because there was no need. But, beholding her, Jurgen kneeled. He hid his face in her white robe, and stayed thus, without speaking, for a long while.

"Lady of my vision," he said, and his voice broke, "assuredly I believe that your father was that ardent bird which nestled very long ago in Leda's bosom. And now Troy's sons are all in Hades' keeping, in the world below; fire has consumed the walls of Troy, and the years have forgotten her proud conquerors: but still you are bringing woe on woe on hapless sufferers." And again his voice broke. For the world seemed cheerless, and like a house that none has lived in for many years.

Then, with queer pride, he raised his time-lined countenance, much as a man condemned might turn to the executioner.

"Lady, if you indeed be the Swan's daughter, very long ago there was a child that was ill. And his illness turned to a fever, and in his fever he arose from his bed one night, saying that he must set out for Troy, because of his love for Queen Helen. I was once that child. I remember how strange it seemed to me that I should be talking such nonsense; I remember how the warm room smelt of drugs; and I remember how I pitied the trouble in my nurse's face, drawn and old in the yellow lamplight. For she loved me, and she did not understand; and she pleaded with me to be a good boy and not to worry my sleeping parents. But I perceive now that I was not talking nonsense. Yours is the beauty which all poets know to exist, somewhere, and which life, as men have contrived it thus far, does not anywhere afford. For that beauty I have hungered always. Toward that beauty I have struggled always, but not quite whole-heartedly. That night forecast my life. I have hungered for you; and"—he laughed here—"and I have always stayed a passably good boy, lest I should beyond reason disturb my family."

And Queen Helen, the delight of gods and men, said nothing at all, because there was no need. For the man who has once glimpsed her loveliness is beyond saving, and beyond the desire of being saved.

"Tonight," says Jurgen, "through the shrewd art of Koshchei, it appears that you stand within arm's reach. Hah, lady, were that possible—and I know very well it is not possible, whatever my senses may report—I am not fit to mate with your perfection. At the bottom of my heart I no longer desire perfection. For we that are taxpayers

as well as immortal souls must live by politic evasions and formulae and catchwords that fret away our lives as moths waste a garment: we fall insensibly to common sense as to a drug; and it dulls and kills that which in us is fine and rebellious and unreasonable: so that you will find no man of my years with whom living is not a mechanism that gnaws away time unprompted. I am become the creature of use and wont; I am the lackey of prudence and half-measures; and I have put my dreams upon an allowance. Yet even now I love you more than I love costly foods and indolence and flattery. What more can an old poet say? For that reason, lady, I pray you begone, because your loveliness is a taunt that I find unendurable."

But his voice yearned, because this was Queen Helen, the delight of gods and men, who regarded him with grave, kind eyes. She seemed to view, as one appraises the pattern of an unrolled carpet, every action of Jurgen's life: and she seemed too, to wonder, without reproach or trouble, how men could be so foolish and of their own accord become so miry.

"Oh, I have failed my vision!" cries Jurgen. "I have failed, and I know very well that every man must fail; and yet my shame is no less bitter. For I am transmuted by time's handling! I shudder at the thought of living day in and day out with my vision! And so I will have none of you for my wife."

Then, trembling, Jurgen raised toward his lips the hand of her who was the world's darling.

"And so farewell to you, Queen Helen! Oh, very often in a woman's face I have found this or that feature wherein she resembled you, and for the sake of it have served that woman blindly. And all my verses, as I know now, were vain enchantments striving to evoke that hidden loveliness of which I knew by dim report alone until tonight. Oh, all my life was a foiled quest of you, Queen Helen, who came too late. Yes, certainly, it should be graved upon my tomb, *Queen Helen ruled this earth while it stayed worthy*. . . . But that was very long ago. Today I ride no more a-questing anything: instead, I potter after hearthside comforts, and play the physician with myself, and strive painstakingly to make old bones. And no man's notion anywhere seems worth a cup of mulled wine; and for the sake of no notion would I endanger the routine which so hideously bores me. For I am transmuted by time's handling; I have become the lackey of prudence and half-measures: and so, farewell to you, Queen Helen, for I have failed in the service of my vision, and I deny you utterly!"

Thus he cried farewell to the Swan's daughter: and Queen Helen vanished as a bright mist passes, not departing swiftly as had done the other two; and Jurgen was alone with the black gentleman. . . .

IV

"Come, come!" observed Koshchei the Deathless, "but you are certainly hard to please."

Well, Jurgen was already intent to shrug off his displayal of emotion.

"In selecting a wife, sir," submitted Jurgen, "there are all sorts of matters to be considered. Whatever the first impulse of the moment, it was apparent to any reflective person that in the past of each of these ladies there was much to suggest inborn inaptitude for domestic life. And I am a peace-loving fellow, sir; nor do I hold with moral laxity, except, of course, in talk when it promotes sociability, and in verse-making, wherein it is esteemed as a conventional ornament. Still, Prince, the chance I lost! I do not refer to matrimony, you conceive. But in the presence of these famous fair ones with what glowing words I ought to have spoken! upon a wondrous ladder of strophes, metaphors and recondite allusions, to what stylistic heights of Asiatic prose I ought to have ascended! And instead, I twaddled like a school-master. Decidedly, Lisa is right, and I am good-for-nothing. However," he added hopefully, "it appeared to me that this evening Lisa was somewhat less outspoken than usual."

"Eh, sir, but she was under a very potent spell. I found that necessary, in the interest of law and order hereabouts. We are not accustomed to the excesses of practical persons who are ruthlessly bent upon reforming their associates. Indeed, it is one of the advantages of my situation that such folk rarely come my way." And the black gentleman in turn shrugged. "You will pardon me, but I am positively committed to help out an archbishop with some of his churchwork this evening, and there is a rather important assassination to be instigated at Vienna. So time presses. Meanwhile, you have inspected the flower of womanhood; and I cannot soberly believe that you prefer your termagant of a wife."

"Frankly, Prince, I also am, as usual, undecided. Could you let me see her, for just a moment?"

This was no sooner asked than done: for there, sure enough, was Dame Lisa. She was no longer restricted to quiet speech by any stupendous necromancy, and seemed peevish: and uncommonly plain she looked, after the passing of those lovely ladies.

"Well, you rascal!" begins Dame Lisa, addressing Jurgen, "and so you thought to be rid of me! Oh, a precious lot you are! and a deal of thanks I get for my scrimping and slaving!" And she began scolding away. She said he was even worse than the Countess Varvara.

But rather unaccountably Jurgen fell to thinking of the years they had shared together; of the fine and merry girl that Lisa had been before she married him; and of how well she knew his tastes in cookery and all his other little preferences; and of how cleverly she humored them on those rare days when nothing had occurred to vex her: and of how much more unpleasant—everything considered—life was without her than with her. And his big, foolish heart was half yearning and half penitence.

"I think I will take her back, Prince," says he, very quietly. "For I do not know but that it is as hard on her as on me."

"My friend, do you forget the poet that you might be, even yet? No rational person would dispute that the society and amiable chat of Dame Lisa is a desideratum—"

But Dame Lisa was always resentful of long words. "Be silent, you black scoffer! and do not allude to such disgraceful things in the presence of respectable people! For I am a decent Christian woman, I would have you understand. But everybody knows your reputation! and a very fit companion you are for that scamp yonder. Jurgen, I always told you you would come to this, and now I hope you are satisfied. Jurgen, do not stand there with your mouth open, like a scared fish, when I ask you a civil question! but answer when you are spoken to! and do not say a single word to me, Jurgen, because I am disgusted with you. For, Jurgen, you heard perfectly well what your very suitable friend just said about me. No, do not ask me what he said, Jurgen! I leave that to your conscience. So, if my own husband has not the feelings of a man, and cannot protect me from insults and low company, I had best be going home and getting supper ready. I daresay the house is like a pigsty. And to think of your going about in public, even among such associates, with a button off your shirt! You are enough to drive a person mad: and I warn you that I am done with you forever."

And Dame Lisa walked with dignity toward the mouth of the cave. "So you can come with me, or not, precisely as you elect. It is all one to me, I can assure you, after the cruel things you have said. But I shall stop by for a word with that high-and-mighty Varvara on the

way home. You two need never think to hoodwink me about your goings-on."

And with that Dame Lisa went away, still talking.

V

"Phew!" said Koshchei, in the ensuing silence; "you had better stay overnight, in any event. I really think, friend, you will be more comfortable, just now at least, with me."

But Jurgen had taken up his caftan.

"No, I daresay I had better be going too," says Jurgen. "I thank you very heartily for your intended kindness, sir, still I do not know but it is better as it is. And is there anything"—he coughed delicately—"and is there anything to pay, sir?"

"Well, not, of course, for the freedom of Dame Lisa. We very rarely molest the wives of poets. It is not considered sportsmanlike. But I must tell you it is not permitted any person to leave my presence unmaimed. One must have rules, you know."

"You would chop off an arm? or a hand? or a whole finger? Come now, Prince, you must be joking!"

Koshchei the Deathless was very grave as he sat there, in meditation, drumming with his long fingers upon the table-top that was curiously inlaid with thirty pieces of silver. In the lamplight his sharp nails glittered like flame-points. "Eh, sir, the toll which I exact you have already paid, though not to me. You have retained nothing that I esteem worth taking. So you, friend, may depart unhindered whenever you will."

Jurgen meditated this clemency, and with a sick heart he understood. "Yes, that is true. For I have not retained the faith nor the desire nor the vision. Yes, that is very true, worse luck. . . . Meanwhile I can assure you I admired each of the ladies very unfeignedly, and was greatly flattered by their kind offers. More than generous, I thought them. But it really would not do for me to take up with any one of them now. For Lisa is my wife, you see. A great deal has passed between us—and I have been a great disappointment to her, in many ways—and I am used to her—" Then Jurgen considered, and regarded the black gentleman with mingled envy and commiseration. "Why, no, you probably would not understand, sir, because I suppose there is no marrying or giving in marriage here, either. But I can assure you it is always pretty much like that."

"I lack grounds to dispute your aphorism," observed Koshchei, "inasmuch as matrimony was not included in my doom. None the less, to a by-stander, the conduct of both of you appears remarkable."

"The truth of it, sir, is a great symbol," said Jurgen, with a splurge of confidence, "in that my wife is rather foolishly fond of me. Oh, I grant you, it is the fashion of women to discard civility toward those for whom they suffer most willingly: and whom a woman loveth she chasteneth, after a good precedent. . . . For, Prince, they are all poets; but the medium they work in is not always ink. So the moment that Lisa is set free from what, in a manner of speaking, sir, inconsiderate persons might, in their unthinking way, refer to as the terrors of a place that I do not for an instant doubt to be conducted after a system which furthers the true interests of everybody, and so reflects vast credit upon its officials, if you will pardon my frankness, sir"—and Jurgen smiled ingratiatingly—"why, at that moment Lisa's thoughts take form in very much the high denunciatory vein of Jeremiah and Amos, who were remarkably fine poets: and her next essay in creative composition is my supper. Tomorrow she will darn and sew me an epic. Such, sir, are Lisa's poems, all addressed to me, who came so near to gallivanting with mere queens! Oh, Prince, when I consider steadfastly the depth and the intensity of that devotion which, for so many years, has tended me, and has endured the society of that person whom I peculiarly know to be the most tedious and irritating of companions, I stand aghast, before a miracle. And I cry, *Oh, certainly a goddess!* Hah, all we poets write a deal about love: but none of us may grasp the word's full meaning until he reflects that this is a passion mighty enough to induce a woman to put up with him. And the crowning touch is that Lisa is jealous. Think upon that, now!" And Jurgen chuckled. "Yet still you probably would not understand, sir, because I suppose there is no marrying or giving in marriage, here either. No less, the truth of it is a great symbol."

Then Jurgen sighed, and shook hands with Koshchei, very circumspectly, and went home to his wife. And he found her quite unaltered. Thus it was in the old days.