



But is no use dreaming. Is no use lying down there on your backside and watching the wallpaper, as if you expect the wall to crack open and money come pouring out, a nice woman, a house to live in, food, cigarettes, rum. And sometimes in this fantasy he used to rub the wall, remembering Aladdin and the wonderful lamp, just to see if a geni wouldn't come and ask him: 'What you want, just tell me what you want, no matter what it is, I could get it for you.'

The irony of it was that the wallpaper really had a design with lamps on it, Aladdin lamps all over the room. It may be that the company know they could only get dreamers to live in a dilapidated room like that, and they put up this wallpaper to keep the fires of hope burning.

Battersby thought maybe he wasn't rubbing the right one. Suppose, just suppose, that one day he start to rub all of them, looking for the right one. And suppose, just suppose, that say, as he reach that one up in the corner near the ceiling, he rub a geni into life for true!

'What you want, Battersby, you is my master, and anything in the world you want I could get for you.'

'I want money.'

Bam! Pound notes and fivers start to fall all about in the room, until is as if he swimming in it, and the water-mark rising higher and higher!

‘I want food.’

All about, on the chair, on the bed, on the mantlepiece, on the ground, dishes start to appear. I mean, though Battersby would of preferred a good dumpling and pigtail, this geni bring them dishes you does only read about in magazines, chicken a la this and that, T-bone and Z-bone steaks, shark fin and bird nest soup, and a little pig roast brown with a apple stick in his mouth, to mention only a few of the things the geni bring, because Battersby don’t know the names of any of them.

‘I want rum.’

Hmm. The kind of drinks what the geni bring is only for connisears. Red liquers, blue liquers, brandies of all descriptions, wines from the vines of France and Spain, rum from Haiti and Cuba, hock and ale from Cornwall, palm wines from Africa.

‘I want a nice woman—I mean, the nicest woman in the world!’

This time the geni take a little longer to produce. And when she come, is as if she float out of a pink mist. The geni say, ‘Master, it ain’t have no one woman who is the nicest, but this one could change into anything you want. All you have to do is press the right tit, and she would change into whatever you feel for in your mind. If you feel like a stalwart blond from one of the Scandinavian countries, she will turn into one. If you feel like a slim brunette, just press the right tit.’

But is no use dreaming. Battersby, lying down on the bed jam against the corner in this basement room in Brixton, turn over and close his eyes, as if, when he awake, life was a dream, and if he could go back to sleep, everything would be real in the land of nod.

Was the alarm clock what wake him. That is to say, it didn’t alarm, because he didn’t have to go to work today.

But he so accustomed to jumping up five o'clock every morning, that he could never sleep late, even on a Sunday. He push his hand under the bed and haul out cigarettes and lighter. As he light up he wonder what London was like outside. Funny thing in this country, you could never tell what sort of day waiting to pounce on you. It might be raining, sleeting, snowing, shining, bright, dull—you could never tell. With the curtains drawn, is as if another world out there. Sometimes Battersby uses to speculate, like, Sun shining today, and go and pull the curtain to see. When he first come to Londontown, he uses to listen to the weather forecast on the radio. The radio was transi, by the side of the bed, he pay four pound ten for it second hand from the market, it only picking up the Light, the Home, and Luxembourg. But it didn't take long for Bat to realise that when it come to weather forecasting, them fellars don't know their arse from their elbow. When Spring come, is all kind of wild speculation what kind of Summer we going to have. People who have rheumatism and corns on their big toe start up to forecast rain here, thunder there, lightning on the East Coast, hail in Scotland, gales in the Hybrides. I mean, you think it have a lot of obeah and black magic in the West Indies, but if you listen to some of these Nordics. They say red sky is shepherd's delight, and if the dog fall asleep that mean rain coming, and if the cat start to play frisk that mean sunshine. One test write in the newspapers that he does have a tingling in his head during the last week of Spring, and that mean a good Summer coming up. One woman say she doesn't go anywhere unless she consult Flossie. If Flossie bark and want to go out, that mean no rain going to fall. But if Flossie slinking in the corner or sit down scratching fleas, bad weather in the offing.

Some of them so bold-face they not content with a day's

forecast, but want to divine the whole Summer for you, and on top of that, dividing up the days and weeks, saying which will be the sunny ones, and to crown it all even telling you what part of the country will get the most sun. Like if is some great event, newspapers have places all over the world, and day after day they putting down how long the sunshine in Saskatchewan, and Constantinople, and the Isle of Man. Then in the next column, they totting up how much sun shine in all the days of the Summer so far, as if the place that had the most sun going to win a prize. Some of them have some kind of scientific diagrams, with lines and circles and figures, and to tell you the truth I don't know anybody who know what all them maps mean, and perhaps that is a good thing. But the greatest is that on the TV, they have this big map spread out, and a fellar come with a stick like a schoolmaster. But this man, whoever he is, must be really God, because he only picking up some clouds and putting it over London and saying, 'Rain going to fall there tomorrow.' He picking up a laughing sun and putting it on the West Coast and saying, 'Sun going to shine there tomorrow.' And he handing you some smart talk about depressions and areas of high pressure.

The first time Battersby see this fellar on TV—home by Alfonso, because he ain't have a TV himself—he say to Alfonso, 'But this man is a giant! You hear how he talking about depression and high pressure? I mean, them is things the boys know about!'

And as for the official forecasts, they always handing you some smart line, like 'Showers, mainly cloudy, sunny intervals, bright periods.' You don't know if it going to rain or shine or snow or fog. That is smartness for you, them fellars should be diplomats. But the beauty of it all is when you see they feeling cocksure, like when is August Bank Holiday. And they say, 'It going to be sunny and

warm.' Up in the atmosphere thunder roll with laughter, lightning split its sides laughing, and them clouds laugh so much they cry! And the old wind make a sally across Iceland before coming to Brit'n and bam! August Bank Holiday you get up and you don't know what to do, if to wear jeans, if to wear pullover, if to carry a mack, if to sport a broolly.

And the clamour! People writing all kinds of letters to the Press about the weather. Some blaming the atom bomb, some saying is because the world so evil these days, some suggesting to put up glass roofs on the beaches, so you won't get wet unless you go in the sea.

All them weather forecasters, official and unofficial, they should line them up and shoot them. Battersby himself reach a stage where it don't matter at all—he always expecting the worse, like the basement door can't open because snow pile up against it, or it fogging so much that he can't see to walk up the steps. It had many a time when Bat go out in shirt and trousers and had to rush back down to don pullover and sweater and pullover and merino and sweater and mack. In fact, as this is no continuous ballad, I might as well take the opportunity of telling you about the Summer day that Bat went out, in corduroy trousers and jitterbug shirt. I mean, if you can't take a chance in the Summer, when you going to take it, pray? The sun was shining, the sky was blue. He was meeting a thing by Notting Hill Gate. He was all right in the underground, but when he surfaced at the station, as if in that hour time the sun change its mind, and the sky haul out some grey blankets. By the time he and the thing reach out on the pavement, Bat shivering like an aspen leaf.

'Why didn't you put on more clothes?' the thing ask him. These Englishers don't take them dangerous chances—she herself well muffle up and have on a coat.

‘The weather was looking all right,’ Bat say. Then he say, ‘Wait here for me,’ and he dash into a second hand clothes shop. Bat emerge with a thick trousers and a coat, and he went down in the Gents and come back up, ready to face the elements.

Well, Bat went and pull the basement curtains to peep out. It look all right for the time being. He went by the gas ring near the mantelpiece and put on the kettle to make a cup of tea. He smoke another cigarette while the kettle boiling. He was thinking about ways and means of making money. This is a perpetual thought with the boys, but Bat was at a stage when things was getting desperate. Funds was running so low that he couldn’t manage. Three pound ten rent for the basement, for one thing, and he only had three pound left out of his wages. But being as it was Sunday, he felt sure that somebody bound to drop around to see him, and he would borrow a couple of quid. Funny thing, when you put it that way, it don’t sound like money at all. I mean, if you ask somebody to lend you two pounds, they might hem and haw, but if you go up to them and say, ‘Lend me a couple of quid, boy, I broken,’ then it sound as if you were only asking them to scratch your back, or to light your cigarette or something.

And Bat had a way, he used to be so cool and casual that before you know it he tap you for a quid. ‘I don’t think of money at all,’ Bat used to tell the boys. ‘I mean, what is money? It only get you in a lot of trouble—’ and right here he splice in with ‘see if you have any change in your pocket and lend me ten bob,’—and carrying on with the topic as if there wasn’t any interruption—‘yes, I know a Jamaican what was saving up money. He save about seven hundred quid, and one day he was crossing the road by Marble Arch and a car knock him down and he dead. He

dead right there, and they find this seven hundred lock up in a suitcase under the bed, and take it for Death Duty.'

Very often, Bat catch fellars like that, until one day Fitzwilliams decide to put a stop to it. As Bat start up to sing about the evils and uselessness of wealth, Fitz only nodding agreement. When Bat splice in the request for a loan in midstream, Fitz pretend he ain't hear. After a minute Bat make another splice in the conversation, and still Fitz ain't hear. Fitz in the meantime carrying on even stronger than Bat on the topic, nodding vigorously, elaborating a point, making references, drawing analogies, until suddenly Bat stop.

'How much you want?' Bat ask him.

'Ten bob,' Fitz say.

'Here,' Bat say, and give him the money.

All the same, a sucker is born every day, and though Fitz turn the tables on Battersby, it had about three hundred thousand other infants who would fall for his spiel.

Battersby open up a tin of Brunswick sardines and put them in a plate. He slice up a onion and two tomatoes, and mix it up with the sardines. He put in some olive oil and some pepper sauce, and mash up everything until it come like a paste. He sweeten his tea with condensed milk, and then sit down on the one chair by the table, and begin to eat breakfast.

He hardly put the first bite in his mouth before the basement door knock.

'Who the arse is that so early?' Bat say to himself, because it wasn't even seven o'clock yet. He went by the window and draw the curtain a little and peep out.

He see Charlie Victor stand up there. He drop the curtain and tip-toe back to the table. Charlie Victor come to collect the rent. That is the only time that Bat ever see him.