

come a smell of fried onions that made my belly cry 'please, master, please 'yes, my lad, i said to un, 'im darned if i dont humour ee; thou shant go back to wydcombe empty. so in i step, and found the tent mighty warm and well lit, with men smoking and women laughing, and a great smell of cooking. there were long tables set on trestles down the tent, and long benches beside em, and folks eating and drinking, and a counter cross the head of the room, and great tin dishes simmering a top of it trotters and sausages and tripe, bacon and beef and colliflowers, cabbage and onions, blood puddings and plum duff. it seemed like a chance to change my banknote, and see whether twere good and not elf money that folks have found turn to leaves in their pocket. so up i walks, and bids em gie me a plate of beef and jack pudding, and holds out my note fort. the maid for twas a maid behind the counter took it, and then she looks at it and then at me, for i were very wet and muddy; and then she carries it to the gaffer, and he shows it to his wife, who holds it up to the light, and then they all fall to talking, and showed it to a cise man what was there marking down the casks. the people sitting nigh saw what was up, and fell to staring at me till i felt hot enough, and lief to leave my note where twas, and get out and back to wydcombe. but the cise man must have said twere all right, for the gaffer comes back with four gold sovereigns and nineteen shillings, and makes a bow and says: 'your servant, sir; can i give you summat to drink i looked round to see what liquor there was, being main glad all the while to find the note were good; and he says: 'rum and milk is very helping, sir; try the rum and milk hot. so i took a pint of rum and milk, and sat down at the nighest table, and the people as were waiting to see unhappy condition out loud, but later, as he becomes old, he just grumbles to himself. he becomes senile, and as he has come to know even the fleas in the doorkeepers fur collar over the years that he has been studying him he even asks them to help him and change the doorkeepers mind. finally his eyes grow dim, and he no longer knows whether its really getting darker or just his eyes that are deceiving him. but he seems now to see an inextinguishable light begin to shine from the darkness behind the door. he doesnt have long to live now. just before he dies, he brings together all his experience from all this time into one question which he has still never put to the doorkeeper. he beckons to him, as hes no longer able to raise his stiff body. the doorkeeper has to bend over deeply as the difference in their sizes has changed very much to the disadvantage of the man. what is it you want to know now asks the doorkeeper, youre insatiable. everyone wants access to the law, says the man, how come, over all these years, no one but me has asked to be let in the doorkeeper can see the mans come to his end, his hearing has faded, and so, so that he can be heard, he shouts to him: nobody else could have got in this way, as this entrance was meant only for you. now ill go and close it. so the doorkeeper cheated the man, said immediately, who had been captivated by the story. dont be too quick, said the priest, dont take somebody elses opinion without checking it. i told you the story exactly as it was written. theres nothing in there about cheating. but its quite clear, said and your first interpretation of it was quite correct. the doorkeeper gave him the information that would release him only when it could be of no more use. he didnt ask him before that, said the priest, and dont paulus put his hand to his head, and sank exhausted on the bed, in a deep swoon. the sick man had followed his story with breathless interest. some time since he had risen from his bed, and, unobserved by his companion, had sunk on his knees; he now dragged himself, all hot and trembling, to the side of the senseless man, tore the sheeps fell from his breast, and with hasty movement sought the ring; he found it, and fixing on it passionate eyes, as though he would melt it with their fire, he pressed it again and again to his lips, to his heart, to his lips again; buried his face in his hands and wept bitterly. it was not till hermas returned from the oasis that stephanus thought of his exhausted and fainting friend, and with his sons assistance restored him to conscious ness. paulus did not refuse to take some food and drink, and in the cool of the evening, when he was refreshed and invigorated, he sat again by the side of stephanus, and understood from the old man that magdalen was certainly his wife. now i know, said paulus, pointing to hermas, how it is that from the first i felt such a love for