ADAM AND EVE AND PINCH ME

A E COPPARD

Alfred Edgar Coppard, commonly known as A.E. Coppard, was a British writer and poet, born on January 4, 1878, in Folkestone, Kent, England. He was one of the prominent figures in the early 20th-century English short story renaissance.

Coppard began his working life as an office clerk but soon discovered his passion for literature and writing. He was largely self-taught and developed a deep love for literature, particularly poetry and short stories. His early influences included the works of Edgar Allan Poe, Thomas Hardy, and Joseph Conrad.

In 1919, A.E. Coppard published his first collection of short stories titled "Adam & Eve & Pinch Me," which was met with critical acclaim. His writing style was often characterized by its lyrical prose, vivid descriptions, and exploration of rural themes and the lives of ordinary people.

Throughout the 1920s and 1930s, Coppard continued to publish several successful collections of short stories, including "Clorinda Walks in Heaven" (1922) and "Fishmonger's Fiddle" (1925), solidifying his reputation as a master of the short story genre. His stories often depicted the struggles and joys of rural life, the beauty of nature, and the complexities of human emotions.

Apart from writing short stories, Coppard also penned a novel, "Nixey's Harlequin" (1929), and he dabbled in poetry, though his poetic output was relatively small compared to his short stories.

Despite achieving recognition and praise during his lifetime, Coppard's fame gradually diminished with the advent of World War II, and he faced financial difficulties later in life. Nevertheless, he continued to write and contribute to various publications.

A.E. Coppard passed away on January 13, 1957, leaving behind a legacy of beautifully crafted short stories that captured the essence of rural England and the human condition. His works remain an important part of early 20th-century English literature, and he is remembered as a skillful storyteller with a unique ability to evoke powerful emotions through his prose.

From original collection

Alfred Edgar Coppard did not have very much of a boyhood. At the age of nine he went to London as shop boy to a trousers-maker, and after two years returned to hts native city of Brighton as an office boy . But he was an avid reader of poetry, unu educated himself by hard study at home With it all, he was an excellent athlete and even, for a while, a professional sprinter.

He began writing at the age of forty, and hts first book—Adam and Eve and Pinch Me—was published on April Fool's Day, 1921 It was also the first book to be put out by the famous Golden Cockerel Press, and the edition of 550 copies was sold out immediately After that, Coppard wrote some excellent poetry and several more

volumes of short stories, including Fishmonger's Fiddle and The Field of Mustard. "Adam and Eve and Pinch Me" tells of a strange dual existence, lasting but a very short time It ts also a delicate and beautiful symbolization, in the person of

the still-unborn little boy, of the miracle of true poetic genius.

The narrative begins in mid-sentence in the reverie of Jaffa Codling, who walks in the English countryside and remarks on the beautiful light, which reminds him of a euphonic name. He enters his garden and sees three children playing, then goes into his house. Upstairs he hears his wife Mildred speaking affectionately to a man. When he looks into his room, he sees his wife caressing a man in a rocking chair. The artificial scene troubles Codling. Why is his wife kissing another man? Why does he himself feel so disembodied?

As the maid brings something to the couple in the room, Codling tries to communicate with her, but she stares through him. When Codling goes outside, the gardener walks through him. Gradually, he realizes that he is a spirit cut loose from his body. As a writer, he realizes he has often tried to plumb the depths of evil in his writing and has felt cut loose from his true self at these moments. Suddenly he feels happy and declares himself a new Adam in an old Eden.

At this moment his three children, Adam, Eve, and Gabriel, come into his view and pester the gardener with questions. Gabriel has a toy sword that the gardener thinks is dangerous as it can cut a lock of Eve's hair. Codling grows more confused. He throws a flowerpot at the gardener that flies right through him and breaks on the ground. As Codling watches his children play, it becomes clear that the youngest child, Gabriel, can see Codling and the spirit of a fish, which the other children cannot see. After the children run off, Codling is left alone with his dreams until Mildred comes into the garden to call him to dinner. His odd manner frightens her.

He goes into the house and picks up a book with his name, "Gilbert Cannister," in it. Suddenly Jaffa Codling and Gilbert Cannister are fused, soul and body. When Gilbert goes with Mildred to see his sleeping children, he is surprised to see only two, not three, and exclaims, "only two." Mildred then confesses that she is pregnant. Gilbert now realizes that he has met the spirit of his third child, Gabriel, in his own spirit form of Jaffa Codling and tells his wife of this unusual happenstance, declaring that the new baby will be named Gabriel.

… and in the whole of his days, vividly at the end of the afternoon—he repeated it again and again to himself—the kind country spaces had *never* absorbed *quite* so rich a glamour of light, so miraculous a bloom of clarity. He could feel streaming in his own mind, in his bones, the same crystalline brightness that lay upon the land. Thoughts and images went flowing through him as easily and amiably as fish swim in

their pools; and as idly, too, for one of his speculations took up the theme of his family name. There was such an agreeable oddness about it, just as there was about all the luminous sky today, that it touched him as just a little remarkable.
What *did* such a name connote, signify, or symbolize? It was a rann of a name, but it had euphony! Then again, like the fish, his ambulating fancy flashed into other shallows, and he giggled as he paused, peering at the buds in the brake. Turning back towards his house again he could see, beyond its roofs, the spire of the Church tinctured richly as the vane: all round him was a new grandeur upon the grass of the fields, and the spare trees had shadows below that seemed to support them in the manner of a plinth, more real than[84] themselves, and the dykes and any chance heave of the level fields were underlined, as if for special emphasis, with long shades of mysterious blackness.

With a little drift of emotion that had at other times assailed him in the wonder and ecstasy of pure light, Jaffa Codling pushed through the slit in the back hedge and stood within his own garden. The gardener was at work. He could hear the voices of the children about the lawn at the other side of the house. He was very happy, and the place was beautiful, a fine white many-windowed house rising from a lawn bowered with plots of mould, turretted with shrubs, and overset with a vast walnut tree. This house had deep clean eaves, a roof of faint coloured slates that, after rain, glowed dully, like onyx or jade, under the red chimneys, and half-way up at one end was a balcony set with black balusters. He went to a French window that stood open and stepped into the dining room. There was no-one within, and, on that lonely instant, a strange feeling of emptiness dropped upon him. The clock ticked almost as if it had been caught in some indecent act; the air was dim and troubled after that glory outside. Well, now, he would go up at once to his study and write down for his new book the ideas and images he had accumulated—beautiful rich thoughts they were—during that wonderful afternoon. He went to mount the stairs and he was passed by one of the maids; humming a silly song she brushed past him rudely, but he was an easy-going man—maids were unteachably tiresome—and reaching the landing he sauntered towards his room. The door stood slightly open[85] and he could hear voices within. He put his hand upon the door ... it would not open any further. What the devil ... he pushed—like the bear in the tale—and he pushed, and he pushed—was there something against it on the other side? He put his shoulder to it ... some wedge must be there, and *that* was extraordinary. Then his whole apprehension was swept up and whirled as by an avalanche—Mildred, his wife, was in there; he could hear her speaking to a man in fair soft tones and the rich phrases

that could be used only by a woman yielding a deep affection to him. Codling kept still. Her words burned on his mind and thrilled him as if spoken to himself. There was a movement in the room, then utter silence. He again thrust savagely at the partly open door, but he could not stir it. The silence within continued. He beat upon the door with his fists, crying; “Mildred, Mildred!” There was no response, but he could hear the rocking arm chair commence to swing to and fro. Pushing his hand round the edge of the door he tried to thrust his head between the opening. There was not space for this, but he could just peer into the corner of a mirror hung near, and this is what he saw: the chair at one end of its swing, a man sitting in it, and upon one arm of it Mildred, the beloved woman, with her lips upon the man’s face, caressing him with her hands. Codling made another effort to get into the room—as vain as it was violent. “Do you hear me, Mildred?” he shouted. Apparently neither of them heard him; they rocked to and fro while he gazed stupefied. What, in the name of God,[86] ... What this ... was she bewitched ... were there such things after all as magic, devilry!

He drew back and held himself quite steadily. The chair stopped swaying, and the room grew awfully still. The sharp ticking of the clock in the hall rose upon the house like the tongue of some perfunctory mocker. Couldn’t they hear the clock? ... Couldn’t they hear his heart? He had to put his hand upon his heart, for, surely, in that great silence inside there, they would hear its beat, growing so loud now that it seemed almost to stun him! Then in a queer way he found himself reflecting, observing, analysing his own actions and intentions. He found some of them to be just a little spurious, counterfeit. He felt it would be easy, so perfectly easy to flash in one blast of anger and annihilate the two. He would do nothing of the kind. There was no occasion for it. People didn’t really do that sort of thing, or, at least, not with a genuine passion. There was no need for anger. His curiosity was satisfied, quite satisfied, he was certain, he had not the remotest interest in the man. A welter of unexpected thoughts swept upon his mind as he stood there. As a writer of books he was often stimulated by the emotions and impulses of other people, and now his own surprise was beginning to intrigue him, leaving him, O, quite unstirred emotionally, but interesting him profoundly.

He heard the maid come stepping up the stairway again, humming her silly song. He did not want a scene, or to be caught eavesdropping, and so turned quickly to another door. It was locked. He sprang[87] to one beyond it; the handle would not turn. “Bah! what’s *up* with ’em?” But the girl was now upon him, carrying a tray of

coffee things. “O, Mary!” he exclaimed casually, “I....” To his astonishment the girl stepped past him as if she did not hear or see him, tapped upon the door of his study, entered, and closed the door behind her. Jaffa Codling then got really angry. “Hell! were the blasted servants in it!” He dashed to the door again and tore at the handle. It would not even turn, and, though he wrenched with fury at it, the room was utterly sealed against him. He went away for a chair with which to smash the effrontery of that door. No, he wasn’t angry, either with his wife or this fellow—Gilbert, she had called him—who had a strangely familiar aspect as far as he had been able to take it in; but when one’s servants ... faugh!

The door opened and Mary came forth smiling demurely. He was a few yards further along the corridor at that moment. “Mary!” he shouted, “leave the door open!” Mary carefully closed it and turned her back on him. He sprang after her with bad words bursting from him as she went towards the stairs and flitted lightly down, humming all the way as if in derision. He leaped downwards after her three steps at a time, but she trotted with amazing swiftness into the kitchen and slammed the door in his face. Codling stood, but kept his hands carefully away from the door, kept them behind him. “No, no,” he whispered cunningly, “there’s something fiendish about door handles today, I’ll go and get a bar, or a butt of timber,”[88] and, jumping out into the garden for some such thing, the miracle happened to him. For it was nothing else than a miracle, the unbelievable, the impossible, simple and laughable if you will, but having as much validity as any miracle can ever invoke. It was simple and laughable because by all the known physical laws he should have collided with his gardener, who happened to pass the window with his wheelbarrow as Codling jumped out on to the path. And it was unbelievable that they should not, and impossible that they *did* not collide; and it was miraculous, because Codling stood for a brief moment in the garden path and the wheelbarrow of Bond, its contents, and Bond himself passed apparently through the figure of Codling as if he were so much air, as if he were not a living breathing man but just a common ghost. There was no impact, just a momentary breathlessness. Codling stood and looked at the retreating figure going on utterly unaware of him. It is interesting to record that Codling’s first feelings were mirthful. He giggled. He was jocular. He ran along in front of the gardener, and let him pass through him once more; then after him again; he scrambled into the man’s barrow, and was wheeled about by this incomprehensible thick-headed gardener who was dead to all his master’s efforts to engage his attention. Presently he dropped the wheelbarrow and went away, leaving Codling to cogitate upon the occurrence. There was no room for doubt, some essential part of

him had become detached from the obviously not less vital part. He felt he was essential because he was responding to the[89] experience, he was re-acting in the normal way to normal stimuli, although he happened for the time being to be invisible to his fellows and unable to communicate with them. How had it come about—this queer thing? How could he discover what part of him had cut loose, as it were? There was no question of this being death; death wasn't funny, it wasn't a joke; he had still all his human instincts. You didn't get angry with a faithless wife or joke with a fool of a gardener if you were dead, certainly not! He had realized enough of himself to know he was the usual man of instincts, desires, and prohibitions, complex and contradictory; his family history for a million or two years would have denoted that, not explicitly—obviously impossible—but suggestively. He had found himself doing things he had no desire to do, doing things he had a desire not to do, thinking thoughts that had no contiguous meanings, no meanings that could be related to his general experience. At odd times he had been chilled—aye, and even agreeably surprised—at the immense potential evil in himself. But still, this was no mere Jekyl and Hyde affair, that a man and his own ghost should separately inhabit the same world was a horse of quite another colour. The other part of him was alive and active somewhere ... as alive ... as alive ... yes, as *he* was, but dashed if he knew where! What a lark when they got back to each other and compared notes! In his tales he had brooded over so many imagined personalities, followed in the track of so many psychological enigmas that he *had* felt at times[90] a stranger to himself. What if, after all, that brooding had given him the faculty of projecting this figment of himself into the world of men. Or was he some unrealized latent element of being without its natural integument, doomed now to drift over the ridge of the world for ever. Was it his personality, his spirit? Then how was the dashed thing working? Here was he with the most wonderful happening in human experience, and he couldn't differentiate or disinter things. He was like a new Adam flung into some old Eden.

There was Bond tinkering about with some plants a dozen yards in front of him. Suddenly his three children came round from the other side of the house, the youngest boy leading them, carrying in his hand a small sword which was made, not of steel, but of some more brightly shining material; indeed it seemed at one moment to be of gold, and then again of flame, transmuting everything in its neighbourhood into the likeness of flame, the hair of the little girl Eve, a part of Adam's tunic; and the fingers of the boy Gabriel as he held the sword were like pale tongues of fire. Gabriel, the youngest boy, went up to the gardener and gave the

sword into his hands, saying: “Bond, is this sword any good?” Codling saw the gardener take the weapon and examine it with a careful sort of smile; his great gnarled hands became immediately transparent, the blood could be seen moving diligently about the veins. Codling was so interested in the sight that he did not gather in the gardener’s reply. The little boy was dissatisfied and repeated his question, “No, but[91] Bond, *is* this sword any good?” Codling rose, and stood by invisible. The three beautiful children were grouped about the great angular figure of the gardener in his soiled clothes, looking up now into his face, and now at the sword, with anxiety in all their puckered eyes. “Well, Marse Gabriel,” Codling could hear him reply, “as far as a sword goes, it may be a good un, or it may be a bad un, but, good as it is, it can never be anything but a bad thing.” He then gave it back to them; the boy Adam held the haft of it, and the girl Eve rubbed the blade with curious fingers. The younger boy stood looking up at the gardener with unsatisfied gaze. “But, Bond, *can’t* you say if this sword’s any *good*?” Bond turned to his spade and trowels. “Mebbe the shape of it’s wrong, Marse Gabriel, though it seems a pretty handy size.” Saying this he moved off across the lawn. Gabriel turned to his brother and sister and took the sword from them; they all followed after the gardener and once more Gabriel made enquiry: “Bond, is this sword any *good*?” The gardener again took it and made a few passes in the air like a valiant soldier at exercise. Turning then, he lifted a bright curl from the head of Eve and cut it off with a sweep of the weapon. He held it up to look at it critically and then let it fall to the ground. Codling sneaked behind him and, picking it up, stood stupidly looking at it. “Mebbe, Marse Gabriel,” the gardener was saying, “it ud be better made of steel, but it has a smartish edge on it.” He went to pick up the barrow but Gabriel seized it with a spasm of anger, and cried out: “No, no, Bond, will you say, just yes or no,[92] Bond, is this sword any *good*?” The gardener stood still, and looked down at the little boy, who repeated his question—“just yes or no, Bond!” “No, Marse Gabriel!” “Thank you, Bond!” replied the child with dignity, “that’s all we wanted to know,” and, calling to his mates to follow him, he ran away to the other side of the house.

Codling stared again at the beautiful lock of hair in his hand, and felt himself grow so angry that he picked up a strange looking flower pot at his feet and hurled it at the retreating gardener. It struck Bond in the middle of the back and, passing clean through him, broke on the wheel of his barrow, but Bond seemed to be quite unaware of this catastrophe. Codling rushed after, and, taking the gardener by the throat, he yelled, “Damn you, will you tell me what all this means?” But Bond proceeded calmly about his work un-noticing, carrying his master about as if he were

a clinging vapour, or a scarf hung upon his neck. In a few moments, Codling dropped exhausted to the ground. “What.... O Hell ... what, what am I to do?” he groaned, “What has happened to me? What shall I *do*? What *can* I do?” He looked at the broken flowerpot. “Did I invent that?” He pulled out his watch. “That’s a real watch, I hear it ticking, and it’s six o’clock.” Was he dead or disembodied or mad? What was this infernal lapse of identity? And who the devil, yes, who was it upstairs with Mildred? He jumped to his feet and hurried to the window; it was shut; to the door, it was fastened; he was powerless to open either. Well![93] well! this was experimental psychology with a vengeance, and he began to chuckle again. He’d have to write to McDougall about it. Then he turned and saw Bond wheeling across the lawn towards him again. “*Why* is that fellow always shoving that infernal green barrow around?” he asked, and, the fit of fury seizing him again, he rushed towards Bond, but, before he reached him, the three children danced into the garden again, crying, with great excitement, “Bond, O, Bond!” The gardener stopped and set down the terrifying barrow; the children crowded about him, and Gabriel held out another shining thing, asking: “Bond, is this box any *good*?” The gardener took the box and at once his eyes lit up with interest and delight. “O, Marse Gabriel, where’d ye get it? Where’d ye get it?” “Bond,” said the boy impatiently, “Is the box any *good*?” “Any good?” echoed the man, “Why, Marse Gabriel, Marse Adam, Miss Eve, look yere!” Holding it down in front of them, he lifted the lid from the box and a bright coloured bird flashed out and flew round and round above their heads. “O,” screamed Gabriel with delight, “It’s a kingfisher!” “That’s what it is,” said Bond, “a kingfisher!” “Where?” asked Adam. “Where?” asked Eve. “There it flies—round the fountain—see it? see it!” “No,” said Adam. “No,” said Eve.

“O, do, do, see it,” cried Gabriel, “here it comes, it’s coming!” and, holding his hands on high, and standing on his toes, the child cried out as happy as the bird which Codling saw flying above them.

“I can’t see it,” said Adam.

[94]

“Where is it, Gaby?” asked Eve.

“O, you stupids,” cried the boy, “*There* it goes. There it goes ... there ... it’s gone!”

He stood looking brightly at Bond, who replaced the lid.

“What shall we do now?” he exclaimed eagerly. For reply, the gardener gave the box into his hand, and walked off with the barrow. Gabriel took the box over to the fountain. Codling, unseen, went after him, almost as excited as the boy; Eve and her brother followed. They sat upon the stone tank that held the falling water. It was difficult for the child to unfasten the lid; Codling attempted to help him, but he was powerless. Gabriel looked up into his father’s face and smiled. Then he stood up and said to the others:

“Now, *do* watch it this time.”

They all knelt carefully beside the water. He lifted the lid and, behold, a fish like a gold carp, but made wholly of fire, leaped from the box into the fountain. The man saw it dart down into the water, he saw the water bubble up behind it, he heard the hiss that the junction of fire and water produces, and saw a little track of steam follow the bubbles about the tank until the figure of the fish was consumed and disappeared. Gabriel, in ecstasies, turned to his sister with blazing happy eyes, exclaiming:

“There! Evey!”

“What was it?” asked Eve, nonchalantly, “I didn’t see anything.”

“More didn’t I,” said Adam.

[95]

“Didn’t you see that lovely fish?”

“No,” said Adam.

“No,” said Eve.

“O, stupids,” cried Gabriel, “it went right past the bottom of the water.”

“Let’s get a fishin’ hook,” said Adam.

“No, no, no,” said Gabriel, replacing the lid of the box. “O no.”

Jaffa Codling had remained on his knees staring at the water so long that, when he looked around him again, the children had gone away. He got up and went to the door, and that was closed; the windows, fastened. He went moodily to a garden bench and sat on it with folded arms. Dusk had begun to fall into the shrubs and trees, the grass to grow dull, the air chill, the sky to muster its gloom. Bond had

overturned his barrow, stalled his tools in the lodge, and gone to his home in the village. A curious cat came round the house and surveyed the man who sat chained to his seven-horned dilemma. It grew dark and fearfully silent. Was the world empty now? Some small thing, a snail perhaps, crept among the dead leaves in the hedge, with a sharp, irritating noise. A strange flood of mixed thoughts poured through his mind until at last one idea disentangled itself, and he began thinking with tremendous fixity of little Gabriel. He wondered if he could brood or meditate, or "will" with sufficient power to bring him into the garden again. The child had just vaguely recognized him for a moment at the waterside. He'd try that dodge, telepathy was a mild kind of a trick after so much of the miraculous.[96] If he'd lost his blessed body, at least the part that ate and smoked and talked to Mildred.... He stopped as his mind stumbled on a strange recognition.... What a joke, of course ... idiot ... not to have seen *that*. He stood up in the garden with joy ... of course, *he* was upstairs with Mildred, it was himself, the other bit of him, that Mildred had been talking to. What a howling fool he'd been.

He found himself concentrating his mind on the purpose of getting the child Gabriel into the garden once more, but it was with a curious mood that he endeavoured to establish this relationship. He could not fix his will into any calm intensity of power, or fixity of purpose, or pleasurable mental ecstasy. The utmost force seemed to come with a malicious threatening splenetic "entreaty." That damned snail in the hedge broke the thread of his meditation; a dog began to bark sturdily from a distant farm; the faculties of his mind became joggled up like a child's picture puzzle, and he brooded unintelligibly upon such things as skating and steam engines, and Elizabethan drama so lapped about with themes like jealousy and chastity. Really now, Shakespeare's Isabella was the most consummate snob in.... He looked up quickly to his wife's room and saw Gabriel step from the window to the balcony as if he were fearful of being seen. The boy lifted up his hands and placed the bright box on the rail of the balcony. He looked up at the faint stars for a moment or two, and then carefully released the lid of the box. What came out of it and rose into the air appeared to Codling to be just a piece of floating light,[97] but as it soared above the roof he saw it grow to be a little ancient ship, with its hull and fully set sails and its three masts all of faint primrose flame colour. It cleaved through the air, rolling slightly as a ship through the wave, in widening circles above the house, making a curving ascent until it lost the shape of a vessel and became only a moving light hurrying to some sidereal shrine. Codling glanced at the boy on the balcony, but in that brief instant something had happened, the ship had burst like a rocket and

released three coloured drops of fire which came falling slowly, leaving beautiful grey furrows of smoke in their track. Gabriel leaned over the rail with outstretched palms, and, catching the green star and the blue one as they drifted down to him, he ran with a rill of laughter back into the house. Codling sprang forward just in time to catch the red star; it lay vividly blasting his own palm for a monstrous second, and then, slipping through, was gone. He stared at the ground, at the balcony, the sky, and then heard an exclamation ... his wife stood at his side.

"Gilbert! How you frightened me!" she cried, "I thought you were in your room; come along in to dinner." She took his arm and they walked up the steps into the dining room together. "Just a moment," said her husband, turning to the door of the room. His hand was upon the handle, which turned easily in his grasp, and he ran upstairs to his own room. He opened the door. The light was on, the fire was burning brightly, a smell of cigarette smoke about, pen and paper upon his desk, the Japanese book-knife,[98] the gilt matchbox, everything all right, no one there. He picked up a book from his desk.... *Monna Vanna.* His bookplate was in it—*Ex Libris—Gilbert Cannister*. He put it down beside the green dish; two yellow oranges were in the green dish, and two most deliberately green Canadian apples rested by their side. He went to the door and swung it backwards and forwards quite easily. He sat on his desk trying to piece the thing together, glaring at the print and the book-knife and the smart matchbox, until his wife came up behind him exclaiming: "Come along, Gilbert!"

"Where are the kids, old man?" he asked her, and, before she replied, he had gone along to the nursery. He saw the two cots, his boy in one, his girl in the other. He turned whimsically to Mildred, saying, "There *are* only two, *are* there?" Such a question did not call for reply, but he confronted her as if expecting some assuring answer. She was staring at him with her bright beautiful eyes.

"Are there?" he repeated.

"How strange you should ask me that now!" she said.... "If you're a very good man ... perhaps...."

"Mildred!"

She nodded brightly.

He sat down in the rocking chair, but got up again saying to her gently—"We'll call him Gabriel."

“But, suppose—”

“No, no,” he said, stopping her lovely lips, “I know all about him.” And he told her a pleasant little tale.