Sister Teresa eBook

Sister Teresa by George Moore (novelist)

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PREFACE

A weaver goes to the mart with a divided tapestry, and with half in either hand he walks about telling that whoever possesses one must, perforce, possess the other for the sake of the story. But allegories are out of place in popular editions; they require linen paper, large margins, uncut edges; even these would be insufficient; only illuminated vellum can justify that which is never read. So perhaps it will be better if I abandon the allegory and tell what happened: how one day after writing the history of “Evelyn Innes” for two years I found myself short of paper, and sought vainly for a sheet in every drawer of the writing-table; every one had been turned into manuscript, and “Evelyn Innes” stood nearly two feet high.

“Five hundred pages at least,” I said, “and only half of my story finished.... This is a matter, on which I need the publisher’s opinion.”

Ten minutes after I was rolling away in a hansom towards Paternoster Square, very anxious to persuade him that the way out of my difficulty would be to end the chapter I was then writing on a full close.

“That or a novel of a thousand pages,” I said.

“A novel of a thousand pages!” he answered. “Impossible! We must divide the book.” It may have been to assuage the disappointment he read on my face that he added, “You’ll double your money.”

My publisher had given way too easily, and my artistic conscience forthwith began to trouble me, and has never ceased troubling me since that fatal day. The book the publisher puts asunder the author may not bring together, and I shall write to no purpose in one preface that “Evelyn Innes” is not a prelude to “Sister Teresa” and in another that “Sister Teresa” is not a sequel to “Evelyn Innes.” Nor will any statement of mine made here or elsewhere convince the editors of newspapers and reviews to whom this book will be sent for criticism that it is not a revised edition of a book written ten years ago, but an entirely new book written within the last eighteen months; the title will deceive them, and my new book will be thrown aside or given to a critic with instructions that he may notice it in ten or a dozen lines. Nor will the fact that “Evelyn Innes” occupies a unique place in English literature cause them to order that the book shall be reread and reconsidered—a unique place I hasten to add which it may easily lose to-morrow, for the claim made for it is not one of merit, but of kind.

“Evelyn Innes” is a love story, the first written in English for three hundred years, and the only one we have in prose narrative. For this assertion not to seem ridiculous it must be remembered that a love story is not one in which love is used as an ingredient; if that

were so nearly all novels would be love stories; even Scott's historical novels could not be excluded. In the true love story love is the exclusive theme; and perhaps the

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reason why love stories are so rare in literature is because the difficulty of maintaining the interest is so great; probably those in existence were written without intention to write love stories. Mine certainly was. The manuscript of this book was among the printers before it broke on me one evening as I hung over the fire that what I had written was a true love story about a man and a woman who meet to love each other, who are separated for material or spiritual reasons, and who at the end of the story are united in death or affection, no matter which, the essential is that they should be united. My story only varies from the classical formula in this, that the passion of "the lovely twain" is differentiated.

It would be interesting to pursue this subject, and there are other points which it would be interesting to touch upon; there must be a good deal for criticism in a book which has been dreamed and re-dreamed for ten years. But, again, of what avail? The book I now offer to the public will not be read till I am dead. I have written for posterity if I have written for anybody except myself. The reflection is not altogether a pleasant one. But there it is; we follow our instinct for good or evil, but we follow it; and while the instinct of one man is to regard the most casual thing that comes from his hand as "good enough," the instinct of another man compels him to accept all risks, seeking perfection always, although his work may be lost in the pursuit.

My readers, who are all Balzacians, are already thinking of Porbus and Poussin standing before *le chef d'oeuvre Inconnu* in the studio of Mabuse's famous pupil—-Frenhofer. Nobody has seen this picture for ten years; Frenhofer has been working on it in some distant studio, and it is now all but finished. But the old man thinks that some Eastern woman might furnish him with some further hint, and is about to start on his quest when his pupil Porbus persuades him that the model he is seeking is Poussin's mistress. Frenhofer agrees to reveal his mistress (*i.e.*, his picture) on condition that Poussin persuades his mistress to sit to him for an hour, for he would compare her loveliness with his art. These conditions having been complied with, he draws aside the curtain; but the two painters see only confused colour and incoherent form, and in one corner "a delicious foot, a living foot escaped by a miracle from a slow and progressive destruction."

In the first edition of "Evelyn Innes" (I think the passage has been dropped out of the second) Ulick Dean says that one should be careful what one writes, for what one writes will happen. Well, perhaps what Balzac wrote has happened, and I may have done no more than to realise one of his most famous characters.

G.M.

SISTER TERESA

I

As soon as Mother Philippa came into the parlour Evelyn guessed there must be serious trouble in the convent.

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“But what is the matter, Mother Philippa?”

“Well, my dear, to tell you the truth, we have no money at all.”

“None at all! You must have some money.”

“As a matter of fact we have none, and Mother Prioress won’t let us order anything from the tradespeople.”

“Why not?”

“She will not run into debt; and she’s quite right; so we have to manage with what we’ve got in the convent. Of course there are some vegetables and some flour in the house; but we can’t go on like this for long. We don’t mind so much for ourselves, but we are so anxious about Mother Prioress; you know how weak her heart is, and all this anxiety may kill her. Then there are the invalid sisters, who ought to have fresh meat.”

“I suppose so,” and Evelyn thought of driving to the Wimbledon butcher and bringing back some joints.

“But, Mother, why didn’t you let me know before? Of course I’ll help you.”

“The worst of it is, Evelyn, we want a great deal of help.”

“Well, never mind; I’m ready to give you a great deal of help... as much as I can. And here is the Prioress.”

The Prioress stood resting, leaning on the door-handle, and Evelyn was by her side in an instant.

“Thank you, my child, thank you,” and she took Evelyn’s arm.

“I’ve heard of your trouble, dear Mother, and am determined to help you; so you must sit down and tell me about it.”

“Reverend Mother ought not to be about,” said Mother Philippa. “On Monday night she was so ill we had to get up to pray for her.”

“I’m better to-day. If it hadn’t been for this new trouble—” As the Prioress was about to explain she paused for breath, and Evelyn said:

“Another time. What does it matter to whom you owe the money? You owe it to somebody, and he is pressing you for it—isn’t that so? Of course it is, dear Mother. Well, I’ve come to bring you good news. You remember my promise to arrange a

concert tour as soon as I was free? Everything has been arranged; we start next Thursday, and with fair hope of success."

"How good of you!"

"You will succeed, Evelyn; and as Mother Philippa says, it is very good of you."

The Prioress spoke with hesitation, and Evelyn guessed that the nuns were thinking of their present necessities.

"I can let you have a hundred pounds easily, and I could let you have more if it were not —" The pause was sufficiently dramatic to cause the nuns to press her to go on speaking, saying that they must know they were not taking money which she needed for herself. "I wasn't thinking of myself, but of my poor people; they're so dependent upon me, and I am so dependent upon them, even more than they are upon me, for without them there would be no interest in my life, and nothing for me to do except to sit in my drawing-room and look at the wall paper and play the piano."

"We couldn't think of taking money which belongs to others. We shall put our confidence in God. No, Evelyn, pray don't say any more."

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But Evelyn insisted, saying she would manage in such a way that her poor people should lack nothing. "Of course they lack a great deal, but what I mean is, they'll lack nothing they've been in the habit of receiving from me," and, speaking of their unfailing patience in adversity, she said: "and their lives are always adversity."

"Your poor people are your occupations since you left the stage?"

"You think me frivolous, or at least changeable, Reverend Mother?"

"No, indeed; no, indeed," both nuns cried together, and Evelyn thought of what her life had been, how the new occupations which had come into it contrasted with the old—-singing practice in the morning, rehearsals, performances in the evening, intrigues, jealousies; and the change seemed so wonderful that she would like to have spoken of it to the nuns, only that could not be done without speaking of Owen Asher. But there was no reason for not speaking of her stage life, the life that had drifted by. "You see, my old friends are no longer interested in me." A look of surprise came into the nuns' faces. "Why should they be? They are only interested in me so long as I am available to fill an engagement. And the singers who were my friends—what should I speak to them about? Not of my poor people; though, indeed, many of my friends are very good: they are very kind to each other."

"But we mustn't think of taking the money from you that should go to your poor people."

"No, no; that is out of the question, dear Mother. As I have told you, I can easily let you have a hundred pounds; and as for paying off the debts of the convent—that I look upon as an obligation, as a *bonne bouche*, I might say. My heart is set on it." "We can never thank you enough."

"I don't want to be thanked; it is all pleasure to me to do this for you. Now goodbye; I'll write to you about the success of the concerts. You will pray that I may be a great success, won't you? Much more depends upon your prayers than on my voice."

Mother Philippa murmured that everything was in God's hands.

The Prioress raised her eyes and looked at Evelyn questioningly. "Mother Philippa is quite right. Our prayers will be entirely pleasing to God; He sent you to us. Without you our convent would be broken up. We shall pray for you, Evelyn."

II

The larger part of the stalls was taken up by Lady Ascott's party; she had a house-party at Thornton Grange, and had brought all her friends to Edinburgh to hear Evelyn. Added to which, she had written to all the people she knew living in Edinburgh, and

within reach of Edinburgh, asking them to come to the concert, pressing tickets upon them.

“But, my dear, is it really true that you have left the stage? One never heard of such a thing before. Now, why did you do this? You will tell me about it? You will come to Thornton Grange, won’t you, and spend a few days with us?”

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But in Thornton Grange Evelyn would meet many of her old friends, and a slight doubt came into her eyes.

“No, I won’t hear of a refusal. You are going to Glasgow; Thornton Grange is on your way there; you can easily spend three days with us. No, no, no, Evelyn, you must come; I want to hear all about your religious scruples.”

“That is the last thing I should like to speak about. Besides, religious scruples, dear Lady Ascott—”

“Well, then, you shan’t speak about them at all; nobody will ask you about them. To tell you the truth, my dear, I don’t think my friends would understand you if you did. But you will come; that is the principal thing. Now, not another word; you mustn’t tire your voice; you have to sing again.” And Lady Ascott returned to the concert-hall for the second part of the programme.

After the concert Evelyn was handed a letter, saying that she would be expected to-morrow at Thornton Grange; the trains were as follows: if she came by this train she would be in time for tea, and if she came by the other she would be just in time for dinner.

“She’s a kind soul, and after all she has done it is difficult to refuse her.” So Evelyn sent a wire accepting the invitation.... Besides, there was no reason for refusing unless—A knock! Her manager! and he had come to tell her they had taken more money that night than on any previous night. “Perhaps Lady Ascott may have some more friends in Glasgow and will write to them,” he added as he bade her good-night.

“Three hundred pounds! Only a few of the star singers would have gathered as much money into a hall,” and to the dull sound of gold pieces she fell asleep. But the sound of gold is the sweetest tribute to the actress’s vanity, and this tribute Evelyn had missed to some extent in the preceding concerts; the others were artistic successes, but money had not flowed in, and a half-empty concert-room puts an emptiness into the heart of the concert singer that nothing else can. But the Edinburgh concert had been different; people had been more appreciative, her singing had excited more enthusiasm. Lady Ascott had brought musical people to hear her, and Evelyn awoke, thinking that she would not miss seeing Lady Ascott for anything; and while looking forward to seeing her at Thornton Grange, she thought of the money she had made for the poor nuns, and then of the money awaiting her in Glasgow.... It would be nice if by any chance Lady Ascott were persuaded to come to Glasgow for the concert, bringing her party with her. Anything was possible with Lady Ascott; she would go anywhere to hear music.

“But what an evening!” and she watched the wet country. A high wind had been blowing all day, but the storm had begun in the dusk, and when she arrived at the station the coachman could hardly get his horses to face the wind and rain. In answer to her

question the footman told her Thornton Grange was about a mile from the station; and when the carriage turned into the park she peered through the wet panes, trying to see the trees which Owen had often said were the finest in Scotland; but she could only distinguish blurred masses, and the yellow panes of a parapeted house.

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“How are you, my dear Evelyn? I’m glad to see you. You’ll find some friends here.” And Lady Ascott led her through shadowy drawing-rooms curtained with red silk hangings, filled with rich pictures, china vases, books, marble consol tables on which stood lamps and tall candles. Owen came forward to meet her.

“I am so glad to meet you, Miss Innes! You didn’t expect to see me? I hope you’re not sorry.”

“No, Sir Owen, I’m not sorry; but this is a surprise, for Lady Ascott didn’t tell me. Were you at the concert?”

“No, I couldn’t go; I was too ill. It was a privation to remain at home thinking—What did you sing?”

Evelyn looked at him shrewdly, believing only a little in his illness, and nearly convinced he had not gone to the concert because he wished to keep his presence a secret from her... fearing she would not come to Thornton Grange if she knew he were there.

“He missed a great deal; I told him so when I returned,” said Lady Ascott.

“But what can one do, Miss Innes, when one is ill? The best music in the world—even your voice when one is ill—. Tell me what you sang.”

“Evelyn is going to sing at Glasgow; you will be able to go there with her.”

The servant announced another guest and Lady Ascott went forward to meet him. Guest after guest, and all were greeted with little cries of fictitious intimacy; and each in turn related his or her journey, and the narratives were chequered with the names of other friends who had been staying in the houses they had just come from. Evelyn listened, thinking of her poor people, contrasting their simplicities with the artificialities of the gang—that is how she put it to herself—which ran about from one house to another, visiting, calling itself Society, talking always, changing the conversation rapidly, never interested in any subject sufficiently to endure it for more than a minute and a half. The life of these people seemed to Evelyn artificial as that of white mice, coming in by certain doors, going out by others, climbing poles, engaged in all kinds of little tricks; yet she was delighted to find herself among them all again, for her life had been dull and tedious since she left the convent; and this sudden change, taking her back to art and to her old friends, was very welcome; and the babble of all these people about her inveigled her out of her new self; and she liked to hear about so many people, their adventures, their ideas, misfortunes, precocious caprices.

The company had broken up into groups, and one little group, of which Evelyn was part, had withdrawn into a corner to discuss its own circle of friends; and all the while Evelyn’s face smiled, her eyes and her lips and her thoughts were atingle. Nonsense!

Yes, it was nonsense! But what delicious nonsense! and she waited for somebody to speak of Canary—the “love machine,” as he was called. No sooner had the thought come into her mind than

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somebody mentioned his name, telling how Beatrice, after sending him away in the luggage-cart, had yielded and taken him back again. "He is her interest," Evelyn said to herself, and she heard that Canary still continued to cause Beatrice great unhappiness; and some interesting stories were told of her quarrels—all her quarrels were connected with Canary. One of the most serious was with Miss ——, who had gone for a walk with him in the morning; and the guests at Thornton Grange were divided regarding Miss ——'s right to ask Canary to go for a walk with her, for, of course, she had come down early for the purpose, knowing well that Beatrice never came downstairs before lunch.

"Quite so." The young man was listened to, and he continued to argue for a long while that it was not reasonable for a woman to expect a man to spend the whole morning reading the *Times*, and that apparently was what Beatrice wished poor Canary to do until she chose to come down. Nevertheless, the general opinion was in favour of Beatrice and against the girl.

"Beatrice has been so kind to her," and everybody had something to say on this point.

"But what happened?" Evelyn asked, and the leader of this conversation, a merry little face with eyes like wild flowers and a great deal of shining hair, told of Beatrice's desperate condition when the news of Miss ——'s betrayal reached her.

"I went up and found her in tears, her hair hanging down her back, saying that nobody cared for her. Although she spends three thousand a year on clothes, she sits up in that bedroom in a dressing-gown that we have known for the last five years. "Well, Beatrice," I said, "if you'll only put on a pair of stays and dress yourself and come downstairs, perhaps somebody will care for you."

A writer upon economic subjects who trailed a black lock of hair over a bald skull declared he could see the scene in Beatrice's bedroom quite clearly, and he spoke of her woolly poodle looking on, trying to understand what it was all about, and his allusion to the poodle made everybody laugh, for some reason not very apparent, and Evelyn wondered at the difference between the people she was now among and those she had left—the nuns in their convent at the edge of Wimbledon Common, and her thoughts passing back, she remembered the afternoon in the Savoy Hotel spent among her fellow-artists.

Her reverie endured, she did not know how long; only that she was awakened from it by Lady Ascott, come to tell her it was time to go upstairs to dress for dinner. Now with whom would she go down? With Owen, of course, such was the etiquette in houses like Thornton Grange. It was possible Lady Ascott might look upon them as married people and send her down with somebody else—one of those young men! No! The young men would be reserved for the girls. As she suspected, she went down with

Owen. He did not tell her where he had been since she last saw him; intimate conversation was impossible amid a glitter of silver dishes and anecdotes of people they knew; but after dinner in a quiet corner she would hear his story. And as soon as the men came up from the dining-room Owen went straight towards her, and she followed him out of hearing of the card-players.

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“At last we are alone. My gracious! how I’ve looked forward to this little talk with you, all through that long dinner, and the formal talk with the men afterwards, listening to infernal politics and still more infernal hunting. You didn’t expect to meet me, did you?”

“No; Lady Ascott said nothing about your being here when she came to the concert.”

“And perhaps you wouldn’t have come if you had known I was here?”

“Is that why you didn’t come to the concert?”

“Well, Evelyn, I suppose it was. You’ll forgive me the trickery, won’t you?” She took his hand and held it for a moment. “That touch of your hand means more to me than anything in the world.” A cloud came into her face which he saw and it pained him to see it. “Lady Ascott wrote saying she intended to ask you to Thornton Grange, so I wrote at once asking her if she could put me up; she guessed an estrangement, and being a kind woman, was anxious to put it right.”

“An estrangement, Owen? But there is no estrangement between us?”

“No estrangement?”

“Well, no, Owen, not what I should call an estrangement.”

“But you sent me away, saying I shouldn’t see you for three months. Now three months have passed—haven’t I been obedient?”

“Have three months passed?”

“Yes; It was in August you sent me away and now we are in November.”

“Three months all but a fortnight.”

“The last time I saw you was the day you went to Wimbledon to sing for the nuns. They have captured you; you are still singing for them.”

“You mustn’t say a word against the nuns,” and she told anecdotes about the convent which interested her, but which provoked him even to saying under his breath, “Miserable folk!”

“I won’t allow you to speak like that against my friends.”

Owen apologised, saying they had taken her from him. “And you can’t expect me to sympathise with people or with an idea that has done this? It wouldn’t be human, and I don’t think you would like me any better if I did—now would you, Evelyn? Can you say that you would, honestly, hand upon your heart?—if a heart is beating there still.”

“A heart is beating—”

“I mean if a human heart is beating.”

“It seems to me, Owen, I am just as human, more human than ever, only it is a different kind of humanity.”

“Pedantry doesn’t suit women, nor does cruelty; cruelty suits no one and you were very cruel when we parted.”

“Yes, I suppose I was, and it is always wrong to be cruel. But I had to send you away; if I hadn’t I should have been late for the concert. You don’t realise, Owen, you can’t realise—” And as she said those words her face seemed to freeze, and Owen thought of the idea within her turning her to ice.

“The wind! Isn’t it uncanny? You don’t know the glen? One of the most beautiful in Scotland.” And he spoke of the tall pines at the end of it, the finest he had ever seen, and hoped that not many would be blown down during the night. “Such a storm as this only happens once in ten years. Good God, listen!” Like a savage beast the wind seemed to skulk, and to crouch.... It sprang forward and seized the house and shook it. Then it died away, and there was stillness for a few minutes.

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“But it is only preparing for another attack,” Evelyn said, and they listened, hearing the wind far away gathering itself like a robber band, determined this time to take the castle by assault. Every moment it grew louder, till it fell at last with a crash upon the roof.

“But what a fool I am to talk to you about the wind, not having seen you for three months! Surely there is something else for us to talk about?”

“I would sooner you spoke about the wind, Owen.”

“It is cruel of you to say so, for there is only one subject worth talking about—yourself. How can I think of any other? When I am alone in Berkeley Square I can only think of the idea which came into your head and made a different woman of you.” Evelyn refrained from saying “And a much better woman,” and Owen went on to tell how the idea had seized her in Pisa. “Remember, Evelyn, it played you a very ugly trick then. I’m not sure if I ought to remind you.”

“You mean when you found me sitting on the wall of an olive-garth? But there was no harm in singing to the peasants.”

“And when I found you in a little chapel on the way to the pine-forest—the forest in which you met Ulick Dean. What has become of that young man?”

“I don’t know. I haven’t heard of him.”

“You once nearly went out of your mind on his account.”

“Because I thought he had killed himself.”

“Or because you thought you wouldn’t be able to resist him?”

Evelyn did not answer, and looking through the rich rooms, unconsciously admiring the gleaming of the red silk hangings in the lamplight, and the appearance of a portrait standing in the midst of its dark background and gold frame, she discovered some of the guests: two women leaning back in a deep sofa amid cushions confiding to each other the story of somebody’s lover, no doubt; and past them, to the right of a tall pillar, three players looked into the cards, one stood by, and though Owen and Evelyn were thinking of different things they could not help noticing the whiteness of the men’s shirt fronts, and the aigrette sprays in the women’s hair, and the shapely folds of the silken dresses falling across the carpet.

“Not one of these men and women here think as you do; they are satisfied to live. Why can’t you do the same?”

“I am different from them.”

“But what is there different in you?”

“You don’t think then, Owen, that every one has a destiny?”

“Evelyn, dear, how can you think these things? We are utterly unimportant; millions and billions of beings have preceded us, billions will succeed us. So why should it be so important that a woman should be true to her lover?”

“Does it really seem to you an utterly unimportant matter?”

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“Not nearly so important as losing the woman one loves.” And looking into her face as he might into a book, written in a language only a few words of which he understood, he continued: “And the idea seems to have absorbed you, to have made its own of you; it isn’t religion, I don’t think you are a religious woman. You usen’t to be like this when I took you away to Paris. You were in love with me, but not half so much in love with me as you are now with this idea, not so subjugated. Evelyn, that is what it is, you are subjugated, enslaved, and you can think of nothing else.”

“Well, if that is so, Owen—and I won’t say you are utterly wrong— why can’t you accept things as they are?”

“But it isn’t true, Evelyn? You will outlive this idea. You will be cured.”

“I hope not.”

“You hope not? Well, if you don’t wish to be cured it will be difficult to cure you. But now, here in this house, where everything is different, do you not feel the love of life coming back upon you? And can you accept negation willingly as your fate?”

Evelyn asked Owen what he meant and he said:

“Well, your creed is a negative one—that no man shall ever take you in his arms again, saying, ‘Darling, I am so fond of you!’ You would have me believe that you will be true to this creed? But don’t I know how dear that moment is to you? No, you will not always think as you do now; you will wake up as from a nightmare, you will wake up.”

“Do you think I shall?” Soon after their talk drifted to Lady Ascott and to her guests, and Owen narrated the latest intrigues and the mistake Lady Ascott had been guilty of by putting So-and-so and So-and-so to sleep in the same corridor, not knowing that their *liaison* had been broken off at least three months before.

“Jim is now in love with Constance.”

“How very horrible!”

“Horrible? It is that fellow Mostyn who has put these ideas into your head!”

“He has put nothing into my head, Owen.”

“Upon my word I believe you’re right. It is none of his doing. But he has got the harvesting; ah, yes, and the nuns, too. You never loved me as you love this idea, Evelyn?”

“Do you think not?”

“When you were studying music in Paris you were quite willing I should go away for a year.”

“But I repaid you for it afterwards; you can’t say I didn’t. There were ten years in which I loved you. How is it you have never reproached me before?”

“Why should I? But now I’ve come to the end of the street; there is a blank wall in front of me.”

“You make me very miserable by talking like this.”

They sat without speaking, and Lady Ascott’s interruption was welcome.

“Now, my dear Sir Owen, will you forgive me if I ask Evelyn to sing for us? You’d like to hear her sing—wouldn’t you?”

Owen sprang to his feet.

“Of course, of course. Come, Miss Innes, you will sing for us. I have been boring you long enough, haven’t I? And you’ll be glad to get to the piano. Who will accompany you?”

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“You, Sir Owen, if you will be kind enough.”

The card-players were glad to lay down their cards and the women to cease talking of their friends’ love affairs. All the world over it is the same, a soprano voice subjugating all other interests; soprano or tenor, baritone much less, contralto still less. Many came forward to thank her, and, a little intoxicated with her success, she began to talk to some of her women friends, thinking it unwise to go back into a shadowy corner with Owen, making herself the subject of remark; for though her love story with Owen Asher had long ceased to be talked about, a new interest in it had suddenly sprung up, owing to the fact that she had sent Owen away, and was thinking of becoming a nun—even to such an extent her visit to the convent had been exaggerated; and as the women lagging round her had begun to try to draw from her an account of the motives which had induced her to leave the stage, and the moment not seeming opportune, even if it were not ridiculous at any moment to discuss spiritual endeavour with these women, she determined to draw a red herring across the trail. She told them that the public were wearying of Wagner’s operas, taste was changing, light opera was coming into fashion.

“And in light opera I should have no success whatever, so I was obliged to turn from the stage to the concert-room.”

“We thought it was the religious element in Wagner.”

A card party had come from a distant drawing-room and joined in the discussion regarding the decline of art, and it was agreed that motor-cars had done a great deal to contribute—perhaps they had nothing to do with the decline of Wagner—but they had contributed to the decline of interest in things artistic. This was the opinion of two or three agreeable, good-looking young men; and Evelyn forgot the women whom she had previously been talking to; and turning to the men, she engaged in conversation and talked on and on until the clock struck eleven. Then the disposition of every one was for bed. Whispers went round, and Lady Ascott trotted upstairs with Evelyn, hoping she would find her room comfortable.

It was indeed a pleasant room, wearing an air of youthfulness, thanks to its chintz curtains. The sofa was winning and the armchairs desirable, and there were books and a reading-lamp if Evelyn should feel disposed to draw the armchair by the fire and read for an hour before going to bed. The writing-table itself, with its pens and its blotting-book, and notepaper so prettily stamped, seemed intended to inveigle the occupant of the room into correspondence with every friend she had in the world; and Evelyn began to wonder to whom she might write a letter as soon as Lady Ascott left the room.

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The burning wood shed a pleasant odour which mingled pleasantly with that of the dressing-table; and she wandered about the room, her mind filled with vague meditations, studying the old engravings, principally pictures of dogs and horses, hounds and men, going out to shoot in bygone costumes, with long-eared spaniels to find the game for them. There was a multitude of these pictures on the walls, and Evelyn wondered who was her next-door neighbour. Was it Owen? Or was he down at the end of the passage? In a house like Thornton Grange the name of every one was put on his or her door, so that visitors should not wander into the wrong room by accident, creating dismay and provoking scandal. Owen, where was he? A prayer was offered up that he might be at the other end of the house. It would not be right if Lady Ascott had placed him in the adjoining room, it really would not be right, and she regretted her visit. What evil thing had tempted her into this house, where everything was an appeal to the senses, everything she had seen since she had entered the house—food, wine, gowns? There was, however, a bolt to her door, and she drew it, forgetful that sin visits us in solitude, and more insidiously than when we are in the midst of crowds; and as she dozed in the scented room, amid the fine linen, silk, and laces, the sins which for generations had been committed in this house seemed to gather substance, and even shape; a strange phantasmata trooped past her, some seeming to bewail their sins, while others indulged themselves with each other, or turned to her, inciting her to sin with them, until one of them whispered in her ear that Owen was coming to her room, and then she knew that at his knock her strength would fail her, and she would let him in.

Her temptations disappeared and then returned to her; at last she saw Owen coming towards her. He leaned over the bed, and she saw his lips, and his voice sounded in her ears. It told her that he had been waiting for her; why hadn't she come to his room? And why had he found her door bolted? Then like one bereft of reason, she slipped out of bed and went towards the door, seeing him in the lucidity of her dream clearly at the end of the passage; it was not until her hand rested on the handle of his door that a singing began in the night. The first voice was joined by another, and then by another, and she recognised the hymn, for it was one, the *Veni Creator*, and the singers were nuns. The singing grew more distinct, the singers were approaching her, and she retreated before them to her room; the room filled with plain chant, and then the voices seemed to die or to be borne away on the wind which moaned about the eaves and aloft in the chimneys. Turning in her bed, she saw the dying embers. She was in her room—only a dream, no more. Was that all? she asked as she lay in her bed singing herself to sleep, into a sleep so deep that she did not wake from it until her maid came to ask her if she would have breakfast in her room or if she were going down to breakfast.

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“I will get up at once, Merat, and do you look out a train, or ask the butler to look out one for you; we are going to Glasgow by the first quick train.”

“But I thought Mademoiselle was going to stay here till Monday.”

“Yes, Merat, I know, so did I; but I have changed my mind. You had better begin to pack at once, for there is certain to be a train about twelve.”

Evelyn saw that the devoted Merat was annoyed; as well she might be, for Thornton Grange was a pleasant house for valets and lady’s maids. “Some new valet,” Evelyn thought, and she was sorry to drag Merat away from him, for Merat’s sins were her own —no one was answerable for another; there was always that in her mind; and what applied to her did not apply to anybody else.

“Dear Lady Ascott, you’ll forgive me?” she said during breakfast, “but I have to go to Glasgow this afternoon. I am obliged to leave by an early train.”

“Sir Owen, will you try to persuade her? Get her some omelette, and I will pour out some coffee. Which will you have, dear? Tea or coffee? Everybody will be so disappointed; we have all been looking forward to some singing to-night.”

Expostulations and suggestions went round the table, and Evelyn was glad when breakfast was over; and to escape from all this company, she accepted Owen’s proposal to go for a walk.

“You haven’t seen my garden, or the cliffs? Sir Owen, I count upon you to persuade her to stay until to-morrow, and you will show her the glen, won’t you? And you’ll tell me how many trees we have lost in last night’s storm.”

Owen and Evelyn left the other guests talking of how they had lain awake last night listening to the wind.

“Shall we go this way, round by the lake, towards the glen? Lady Ascott is very disappointed; she said so to me just now.”

“You mean about my leaving?”

“Yes, of course, after all she had done for you, the trouble she had taken about the Edinburgh concert. Of course they all like to hear you sing; they may not understand very well, still they like it, everybody likes to hear a soprano. You might stay.”

“I’m very sorry, Owen, I’m sorry to disappoint Lady Ascott, who is a kindly soul, but—-well, it raises the whole question up again. When one has made up one’s mind to live a certain kind of life—”

“But, Evelyn, who is preventing you from living up to your ideal? The people here don’t interfere with you? Nobody came knocking at your door last night?”

“No.”

“I didn’t come, and I was next door to you. Didn’t it seem strange to you, Evelyn, that I should sleep so near and not come to say good-night? But I knew you wouldn’t like it, so I resisted the temptation.”

“Was that the only reason?”

“What do you mean?”

“Of course, I know you wouldn’t do anything that would displease me; you’ve been very kind, more kind than I deserve, but—”

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“But what?”

“Well, it’s hard to express it. Nothing happened to prevent you?”

“Prevent me?”

“I don’t mean that you were actually prevented, but was there another reason?”

“You mean a sudden scruple of conscience? My conscience is quite healthy.”

“Then what stayed you was no more than a fear of displeasing me? And you wanted to come to see me, didn’t you?”

“Of course I did. Well, perhaps there was another reason... only... no, there was no other reason.”

“But there was; you have admitted that there was. Do tell me.”

And Owen told her that something seemed to have held him back when the thought came of going to her room. “It was really very strange. The thought was put into my mind suddenly that it would be better for me not to go to your room.”

“No more than a sudden thought? But the thought was very clear and distinct?”

“Yes; but between waking and sleeping thoughts are unusually distinct.”

“You don’t believe in miracles, Owen?” And she told him of her dream and her sudden awaking, and the voices heard in her ears at first, then in the room, and then about the house. “So you see the nuns kept us apart.”

“And you believe in these things?”

“How can I do otherwise?”

Owen sighed, and they walked on a few paces. The last leaves were dancing; the woods were cold and wet, the heavy branches of the fir-trees dripping with cold rain, and in the walks a litter of chestnut-leaves.

“Not a space of blue in the sky, only grey. It will be drearier still in Glasgow; you had better stay here,” he said, as they walked round the little lake, watching the water-fowl moving in and out of the reeds, and they talked for some time of Riversdale, of the lake there, and the ducks which rose in great numbers and flew round and round the park, dropping one by one into the water. “You will never see Riversdale again, perhaps?”

“Perhaps not,” she answered; and hearing her say it, his future life seemed to him as forlorn as the landscape.

“What will you do? What will become of you? What strange transformation has taken place in you?”

“If—But what is the use of going over it again?”

“If what?”

“What would you have me do? Marriage would only ruin you, Owen, make you very unhappy. Why do you want me to enter on a life which I feel isn’t mine, and which could only end in disaster for both of us.” He asked her why it would end in disaster, and she answered, “It is impossible to lay bare one’s whole heart. When one changes one’s ideas one changes one’s friends.”

“Because one’s friends are only the embodiment of one’s ideas. But I cannot admit that you would be unhappy as my wife.”

“Everybody is unhappy when they are not doing what Nature intended them to do.”

“And what did Nature intend you to do? Only to sing operas?”

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“I should be sorry to think Nature intended me for nothing else. Would you have me go on singing operas? I don’t want to appear unreasonable, but how could I go on singing even if I wished to go on? The taste has changed; you will admit that light opera is the fashion, and I shouldn’t succeed in light opera. Whatever I do you praise, but you know in the bottom of your heart there are only a few parts which I play well. You may deceive yourself, you do so because you wish to do so, but I have no wish to deceive myself and I know that I was never a great singer; a good singer, an interesting singer in certain parts if you like, but no more. You will admit that?”

“No, I don’t admit anything of the kind. If you leave the stage what will you do with your time? Your art, your friends—”

“No one can figure anybody else’s life: everybody has interests and occupations, not things that interest one’s neighbour, but things that interest herself.”

“So it is because light opera has come into fashion again that you are going to give up singing? Such a thing never happened before: a woman who succeeded on the stage, who has not yet failed, whose voice is still fresh, who is in full possession of her art, to say suddenly, ’Money and applause are nothing to me, I prefer a few simple nuns to art and society.’ Nothing seems to happen in life, life is always the same; *rien ne change mais pourtant tout arrive*, even the rare event of a successful actress relinquishing the stage.”

“It is odd,” she said as they followed the path through the wintry wood, startled now and again by a rabbit at the end of the alley, by a cock pheasant rising up suddenly out of the yew hedges, and, beguiled by the beauty of the trees, they passed on slowly, pausing to think what a splendid sight a certain wild cherry must be in the spring-time. At the end of the wood Owen returned to the subject of their conversation.

“Yes, it is strange that an actress should give up her art.”

“But, Owen, it isn’t so strange in my case as in any other; for you know I was always a hothouse flower. You took me away to Paris and had me trained regardless of expense, and with your money it was easy to get an engagement.”

“My money had nothing to do with your engagements.”

“Perhaps not; but I only sang when it pleased me; I could always say, ’Well, my good man, go to So-and-so, she will sing for you any parts you please’; but I can only sing the parts I like.”

“You think, then, that if you had lived the life of a real actress, working your way up from the bottom, what has happened wouldn’t have happened; is that what you mean?”

“It is impossible for me to answer you. One would have to live one’s life over again.”

“I suppose no one will ever know how much depends upon the gift we bring into the world with us, and how much upon circumstances,” and Owen compared the gift to the father’s seed and circumstances to the mother’s womb.

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“So you are quite determined?” And they philosophised as they went, on life and its meaning, on death and love, admiring the temples which an eighteenth-century generation had built on the hillsides. “Here are eight pillars on either side and four at either end, serving no purpose whatever, not even shelter from the rain. Never again in this world will people build things for mere beauty,” Owen said, and they passed into the depths of the wood, discovering another temple, and in it a lad and lass.

“You see these temples do serve for something. Why are we not lovers?” And they passed on again, Owen’s heart filled with his sorrow and Evelyn’s with her determination.

She was leaving by the one train, and when they got back to the house the carriage was waiting for her.

“Good-bye, Owen.”

“Am I not to see you again?”

“Yes, you will see me one of these days.”

“And that was all the promise she could make me,” he said, rushing into Lady Ascott’s boudoir, disturbing her in the midst of her letters. “So ends a *liaison* which has lasted for more than ten years. Good God, had I known that she would have spoken to me like this when I saw her in Dulwich!”

Even so he felt he would have acted just as he had acted, and he went to his room thinking that the rest of his life would be recollection. “She is still in the train, going away from me, intent on her project, absorbed in her desire of a new life ... this haunting which has come upon her.”

III

And so it was. Evelyn lay back in the corner of the railway carriage thinking about the poor people, and about the nuns, about herself, about the new life which she was entering upon, and which was dearer to her than anything else. She grew a little frightened at the hardness of her heart. “It certainly does harden one’s heart,” she said; “my heart is as hard as a diamond. But is my heart as hard as a diamond?” The thought awoke a little alarm, and she sat looking into the receding landscape. “Even so I cannot help it.” And she wondered how it was that only one thing in the world seemed to matter—to extricate the nuns from their difficulties, that was all. Her poor people, of course she liked them; her voice, she liked it too, without, however, being able to feel certain that it interested her as much as it used to, or that she was not prepared to sacrifice it if her purpose demanded the sacrifice. But there was no question of such sacrifice: it was given to her as the means whereby she might effect her purpose. If the

Glasgow concert were as successful as the Edinburgh, she would be able to bring back some hundreds of pounds to the nuns, perhaps a thousand. And what a pleasure that would be to her!

But the Glasgow concert was not nearly so successful: her manager attributed the failure to a great strike which had just ended; there was talk of another strike; moreover her week in Glasgow was a wet one, and her manager said that people did not care to leave their houses when it was raining.

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“Or is it,” she asked, “because the taste has moved from dramatic singing to *il bel canto?* In a few years nobody will want to hear me, so I must make hay while the sun shines.”

Her next concert succeeded hardly better than the Glasgow concert; Hull, Leeds, Birmingham were tried, but only with moderate success, and Evelyn returned to London with very little money for the convent, and still less for her poor people.

“It is a disappointment to me, dear Mother?”

“My dear child, you’ve brought us a great deal of money, much more than we expected.”

“But, Mother, I thought I should be able to bring you three thousand pounds, and pay off a great part of your mortgage.”

“God, my child, seems to have thought differently.”

The door opened.

“Now who is this? Ah! Sister Mary John.”

“May I come in, dear Mother?”

“Certainly.”

“You see, I was so anxious to see Miss Innes, to hear about the concert tour—”

“Which wasn’t a success at all, Sister Mary John. Oh, not at all a success.”

“Not a success?”

“Well, from an artistic point of view it was; I brought you some of the notices,” and Evelyn took out of her pocket some hundreds of cuttings from newspapers. It had not occurred to her before, but now the thought passed through her mind, formulating itself in this way: “After all, the mummeress isn’t dead in me yet; bringing my notices to nuns! Dear me! how like me!” And she sat watching the nuns, a little amused, when the Prioress asked Sister Mary John to read some passages to her.

“Now I can’t sit here and hear you read out my praises. You can read them when I am gone. A little more money and a little less praise would have suited me better, Sister Mary John.”

“Would you care to come into the garden?” the nun asked. “I was just going out to feed the birds. Poor things! they come in from the common; our garden is full of them. But

what about singing at Benediction to-day? Would you like to try some music over with me and forget the birds?"

"There will be plenty of time to try over music."

The door opened again. It was the porteress come to say that Monsignor had just arrived and would like to speak with the Prioress.

"But ask him to come in.... Here is a friend of yours, Monsignor. She has just returned from—"

"From a disastrous concert tour, having only made four hundred pounds with six concerts. My career as a prima donna is at an end. The public is tired of me."

"The artistic public isn't tired of you," said Sister Mary John. "Read, Monsignor; she has brought us all her notices."

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“Oh, do take them away, Sister Mary John; you make me ashamed before Monsignor. Such vanity! What will he think of my bringing my notices to read to you? But you mustn’t think I am so vain as that, Monsignor; it was really because I thought the nuns would be interested to hear of the music—and to excuse myself. But you know, Mother, once I take a project in hand I don’t give it up easily. I have made up my mind to redeem this convent from debt, and it shall be done. My concert tour was a failure, but I have another idea in my head; and I came here to tell it to you. I don’t know what Monsignor will think of it. I have been offered a good deal of money to go to America to sing my own parts, for Wagner is not yet dead in America.”

“But, Miss Innes, I thought you intended to leave the stage?”

“I have left the stage, but I intend to go back to it. That is a point on which I will have to talk to Monsignor.” Evelyn waited for the prelate to speak.

“Such determination is very unusual, and if the cause be a good one I congratulate you, Mother Prioress, on your champion who, to defend you, will start for the New World.”

“Well, Monsignor, unless you repudiate the motives of those who went to Palestine to fight for the Holy Sepulchre, why should you repudiate mine?”

“But I haven’t said a word; indeed—”

“But you will talk to me about it, won’t you? For I must have your opinion before I go, Monsignor.”

“Well, now I think I shall disappear,” said Sister Mary John. “I’m going to feed the birds.”

“But you asked me to go with you.”

“That was before Monsignor came. But perhaps he would like to come with us. The garden is beautiful and white, and all the birds are waiting for me, poor darlings!”

The nuns, Evelyn and Monsignor went down the steps.

“There is a great deal of snow in the sky yet,” said Sister Mary John, pointing to the yellow horizon. “To-night or to-morrow it will fall, and the birds will die, if we don’t feed them.”

A flock of speckled starlings flew into a tree, not recognising Evelyn and Monsignor, but the blackbirds and thrushes were tamer and ran in front, watching the visitors with round, thoughtful eyes, the beautiful shape of the blackbird showing against the white background, and everybody admiring his golden bill and legs. The sparrows flew about Sister Mary John in a little cloud, until they were driven away by three great gulls come up from the Thames, driven inland by hard weather. A battle began, the gulls pecking at

each other, wasting time in fighting instead of sharing the bread, only stopping now and then to chase away the arrogant sparrows. The robin, the wisest bird, came to Sister Mary John's hand for his food, preferring the buttered bread to the dry. There were rooks in the grey sky, and very soon two hovered over the garden, eventually descending into the garden with wings slanted, and then the seagulls

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had to leave off fighting or go without food altogether. A great strange bird rose out of the bushes, and flew away in slow, heavy flight. Monsignor thought it was a woodcock; and there were birds whose names no one knew, migrating birds come from thousands of miles, from regions where the snow lies for months upon the ground; and Evelyn and the prelate and the nuns watched them all until the frosty air reminded the prelate that loitering was dangerous. Sister Mary John walked on ahead, feeding the birds, forgetful of Monsignor and Evelyn; a nun saying her rosary stopped to speak to the Prioress; Evelyn and Monsignor went on alone, and when they came towards St. Peter's Walk no one was there, and the moment had come, Evelyn felt, to speak of her project to return to the stage in order to redeem the convent from debt.

"You didn't answer me, Monsignor, when I said that I would have to consult you regarding my return to the stage."

"Well, my dear child, the question whether you should go back to the stage couldn't be discussed in the presence of the nuns. Your motives I appreciate; I need hardly say that. But for your own personal safety I am concerned. I won't attempt to hide my anxiety from you."

"But it is possible to remain on the stage and lead a virtuous life."

"You have told me yourself that such a thing isn't possible; from your own mouth I have it."

Evelyn did not answer, but stood looking at the prelate, biting her lips, annoyed, finding herself in a dilemma.

"The motive is everything, Monsignor. I was speaking then of the stage as a vanity, as a glorification of self."

"The motive is different, but the temptations remain the same."

"I'm afraid I can't agree with you. The temptation is in oneself, not in the stage, and when oneself has changed... and then many things have happened."

"You are reconciled to the Church, it is true, and have received the Sacraments—"

"More than that, Monsignor, more than that." But it was a long time before he could persuade her to tell him. "You don't believe in miracles?"

"My dear child, my dear child!"

After that it was impossible to keep herself from speaking, and she told how, at Thornton Grange, in the middle of the night, she had heard the nuns singing the *Veni Creator*.

“The nuns told me, Monsignor, their prayers would save me, and they were right.”

“But you aren’t sure whether you were dreaming or waking.”

“But my experience was shared by Sir Owen Asher, who told me next morning that he had thought of coming to my room and was restrained.”

“Did he say that he, too, heard voices?”

She had to admit that Owen had not said that he had heard voices, only that a restraint had been put upon him.

“The restraint need not have been a miraculous one.”

“You think he didn’t want to come to see me? I beg your pardon, Monsignor.”

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“There is nothing to beg my pardon for. I am your confessor, your spiritual adviser, and you must tell everything to me; and it is my duty to tell you that you place too much reliance upon miracles. This is not the first time you have spoken to me about miraculous interposition.”

“But if God is in heaven and His Church upon earth, why shouldn’t there be miracles? Moreover, nearly all the saints are credited with having performed miracles. Their lives are little more than records of miracles they have performed.”

“I cannot agree with you in that. Their lives are records of their love of God, and the prayers they have offered up that God’s wrath may be averted from a sinful world, and the prayers they have offered up for their souls.”

“What would the Bible be without its miracles? Miracles are recorded in the Old and in the New Testaments. Surely miracles cannot have ceased with the nineteenth century? Miracles must be inherent in religion. To talk of miracles going out of fashion —”

“But, Miss Innes, I never spoke of miracles going out of fashion. You misunderstand me entirely. If God wills it, a miracle may happen to-morrow, in this garden, at any moment. Nobody questions the power of God to perform a miracle, only we mustn’t be too credulous, accepting every strange event as a miracle; and you, who seemed so difficult to convince on some points, are ready enough to believe—”

“You mean, Monsignor, because I experienced much difficulty in believing that the sins I committed with Owen Asher were equal to those I committed with Ulick Dean.”

“Yes, that was in my mind; and I doubt very much that you are not of the same opinion still.”

“Monsignor, I have accepted your opinion that the sin was the same in either case, and you have told me yourself that to acquiesce is sufficient. You don’t mind my arguing with you a little, because in doing so I become clear to myself?”

“On the contrary, I like you to argue with me; only in that way can you confide all your difficulties to me. I regret that, notwithstanding my opinion, you still believe you are not putting yourself in the way of temptation by returning to the stage.”

“I know myself. If I didn’t feel sure of myself, Monsignor, I wouldn’t go to America. Obedience is so pleasant, and your ruling is so sweet—”

“Nevertheless, you must go your own way; you must relieve this convent from debt. That is what is in your mind.”

“I am sorry, Monsignor, for I should have liked to have had your approval.”

“It was not, then, to profit by my advice that you consulted me?”

Evelyn did not answer, and the singer and the prelate walked on in silence, seeing Sister Mary John among her blackbirds and thrushes, sparrows and starlings, accepting her crumbs without fear, no stranger being by. The starlings, however, again flew into a tree when they saw Evelyn and Monsignor, and some of the other birds followed them.

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“The robin follows her like a dog; and what a saucy little bird he is! Look at him, Monsignor! isn’t he pretty, with his red breast and black, beady eyes?”

“Last winter, Monsignor, he spent on the kitchen clock. He knows our kitchen well enough, and will go back there if a thaw does not begin very quickly. But look,” continued Sister Mary John, “I have two bullfinches following me. Aren’t they provoking birds? They don’t build in our garden, where their nests would be safe, stupid birds! but away in the common. I’d like to have a young bird and teach him to whistle.”

Evelyn and Monsignor stayed a moment watching the birds, thinking of other things, and then turned into St. Peter’s Walk to continue their talk.

“The afternoon is turning cold, and we can’t stop out talking in this garden any longer; but before we go in I beg of you—”

“To agree that you should return to the stage?”

“For a few months, Monsignor. I don’t want to go to America feeling that you think I have acted wrongly by going. The nuns will pray for me, and I believe in their prayers; and I believe in yours, Monsignor, and in your advice. Do say something kind.”

“You are determined upon this American tour?”

“I cannot do otherwise. There is nothing else in my head.”

“And you must do something? Well, Miss Innes, let us consider it from a practical point of view. The nuns want money, it is true; but they want it at once. Five thousand pounds at the end of next year will be very little use to them.”

“No, Monsignor, the Prioress tells me—”

“You are free to dispose of your money in your own way—in the way that gives you most pleasure.”

“Oh, don’t say that, Monsignor. I have had enough pleasure in my life.” And they turned out of St. Peter’s Walk, feeling it was really too cold to remain any longer in the garden.

“Well, Miss Innes, you are doing this entirely against my advice.”

“I’m sorry, but I cannot help myself; I want to help the nuns. Everybody wants to do something; and to see one’s life slipping away—”

“But you’ve done a great deal.”

“It doesn’t seem to me I have done anything. Now that I have become a Catholic, I want to do something from the Catholic point of view, or from the religious point of view, if you like. Will you recommend to me some man of business who will carry out the sale of my house for me, and settle everything?”

“So that you may hand over to the nuns the money that the sale of your pictures and furniture procures at Christie’s?”

“Yes; leaving me just sufficient to go to America. I know I must appear to you very wilful, but there are certain things one can only settle for oneself.”

“I can give you the address of my solicitor, a very capable and trustworthy man, who will carry out your instructions.”

“Thank you, Monsignor; and be sure nothing will happen to me in America. In six months I shall be back.”

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Evelyn went away to Mr. Enterwick, the solicitor Monsignor recommended, and the following month she sailed for America.

IV

Her pictures and furniture were on view at Christie's in the early spring, and all Owen's friends met each other in the rooms and on the staircase.

The pictures were to be sold on Saturday, the furniture, china, and enamels on the following Monday.

"The pictures don't matter so much, although her own portrait is going to be sold. But the furniture! Dear God, look at that brute trying the springs of the sofa where I have sat so often with her. And there is the chair on which I used to sit listening to her when she sang. And her piano—why, my God, she is selling her piano!— What is to become of that woman? A singer who sells her piano!"

"My dear friend, I suppose she had to sell everything or nothing?"

"But she'll have to buy another piano, and she might have kept the one I gave her. It is extraordinary how religion hardens the heart, Harding. Do you see that fellow, a great nose, lumpy shoulders, trousers too short for him, a Hebrew barrel of grease—-Rosental. You know him; I bought that clock from him. He's looking into it to see if anything has been broken, if it is in as good condition as when he sold it. The brutes have all joined the 'knock-out,' and there—"

As he said these words young Mr. Rowe, who believed himself to be connected with society, and who dealt largely in pictures, without, however, descending to the vulgarity of shop-keeping (he would resent being called a picture-dealer), approached and insisted on Sir Owen listening to the story of his difficulties with some county councillors who could not find the money to build an art gallery.

"But I object to your immortality being put on the rates."

"You write books, Mr. Harding; I can't."

As soon as he left them, Harding, who knew the dealer kind, the original stock and the hybrid, told an amusing story of Mr. Rowe's beginnings; and Owen forgot his sentimental trouble; but the story was interrupted by Lady Ascott coming down the room followed by her attendants, her literary and musical critics.

"Every one of them most interesting, I assure you, Sir Owen. Mr. Homer has just returned from Italy—"

“But I know Mr. Homer; we met long ago at Innes’ concerts. If I am not mistaken you were writing a book then about Bellini.”

“Yes, ‘His Life and Works.’ I’ve just returned from Italy after two years’ reading in the public libraries.”

Lady Ascott’s musical critic was known to Owen by a small book he had written entitled “A Guide to the Ring.” Before he was a Wagnerian he was the curator of a museum, and Owen remembered how desirous he was to learn the difference between Dresden and Chelsea china. He had dabbled in politics and in journalism; he had collected hymns, ancient and modern, and Owen was not in the least surprised to hear that he had become the director of a shop for the sale of religious prints and statues, or that he had joined the Roman Church, and the group watched him slinking round on the arm of a young man, one who sang forty-nine songs by all the composers in Europe in exactly the same manner.

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“He is teaching Botticelli in his three manners,” said Lady Ascott, “and Cyril is thinking of going over to Rome.”

“Asher, let us get away from this culture,” Harding whispered.

“Yes, let’s get away from it; I want to show you a table, the one on which Evelyn used to write her letters. We bought it together at the Salle Druot.”

“Yes, Asher, yes; but would you mind coming this way, for I see Ringwood. He goes by in his drooping mantle, looking more like an umbrella than usual. Lady Ascott has engaged him for the season, and he goes out with her to talk literature—plush stockings, cockade. Literature in livery! Ringwood introducing Art!”

Owen laughed, and begged Harding to send his joke to the comic papers.

“An excellent subject for a cartoon.”

“He has stopped again. Now I’m sure he’s talking of Sophocles. He walks on.... I’m mistaken; he is talking about Moliere.”

“An excellent idea of yours—’Literature in livery!’”

“His prose is always so finely spoken, so pompous, that I cannot help smiling. You know what I mean.”

“I’ve told you it ought to be sent to the papers. I wish he would leave that writing-table; and Lady Ascott might at least ask him to brush his coat.”

“It seems to me so strange that she should find pleasure in such company.”

“Men who will not cut their hair. How is it?”

“I suppose attention to externals checks or limits the current of feeling... or they think so.”

“I am feeling enough, God knows, but my suffering does not prevent me from selecting my waistcoat and tying my tie.”

Harding’s eyes implied acquiescence in the folding of the scarf (it certainly was admirably done) and glanced along the sleeves of the coat—a rough material chosen in a moment of sudden inspiration; and they did not miss the embroidered waistcoat, nor the daring brown trousers (in admirable keeping withal), turned up at the ends, of course, otherwise Owen would not have felt dressed; and, still a little conscious of the assistance his valet had been to him, he walked with a long, swinging stride which he thought suited him, stopping now and again to criticise a friend or a picture.

“There’s Merrington. How absurdly he dresses! One would think he was an actor; yet no man rides better to hounds. Lady Southwick! I must have a word with her.”

Before leaving Harding he mentioned that she attributed her lapses from virtue, not to passionate temperament, but to charitable impulses. “She wouldn’t kiss—” and Owen whispered the man’s name, “until he promised to give two thousand pounds to a Home for Girl Mothers.”

“Now, my dear Lady Southwick, I’m so delighted to see you here. But how very sad! The greatest singer of our time.”

“She was exceedingly good in two or three parts.”

A dispute arose, in which Owen lost his temper; but, recovering it suddenly, he went down the room with Lady Southwick to show her a Wedgewood dessert service which he had bought some years ago for Evelyn, pressing it upon her, urging that he would like her to have it.

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“Every time you see it you will think of us,” and he turned on his heel suddenly, fearing to lose Harding, whom he found shaking hands with one of the dealers, a man of huge girth—“like a waggoner,” Owen said, checking a reproof, but he could not help wishing that Harding would not shake hands with such people, at all events when he was with him.

“These are the Chadwells, whom—” (Harding whispered a celebrated name) “used to call the most gentlemanly picture-dealers in Bond-street.” Harding spoke to them, Owen standing apart absorbed in His grief, until the word “Asher” caught his ear.

“Of whom are you speaking?”

“Of you, of Sir Owen Asher.” And Harding followed Owen, intensely annoyed.

“Not even to a gentlemanly picture-dealer should you—”

“You are entirely wrong; I said ‘Sir Owen Asher.’”

“Very strange you should say ‘Sir Owen Asher’; why didn’t you say Sir Owen?”

Harding did not answer, being uncertain if it would not be better to drop Asher’s acquaintance. But they had known each other always. It would be difficult.

“The sale is about to begin,” Asher said, and Harding sat down angry with Asher and interested in the auctioneer’s face, created, Harding thought, for the job... “looking exactly like a Roman bust. Lofty brow, tight lips, vigilant eyes, voice like a bell.... That damned fellow Asher! What the hell did he mean—”

The auctioneer sat at a high desk, high as any pulpit, and in the benches the congregation crowded—every shade of nondescript, the waste ground one meets in a city: poor Jews and dealers from the outlying streets, with here and there a possible artist or journalist. As the pictures were sold the prices they fetched were marked in the catalogues, and Harding wondered why.

Around the room were men and women of all classes; a good many of Sir Owen’s “set” had come—“Society being well represented that day,” as the newspapers would put it. All the same, the pictures were not selling well, not nearly so well as Owen and Harding anticipated. Harding was glad of this, for his heart was set on a certain drawing by Boucher.

“I would sooner you had it, Harding, than anybody else. It would be unendurable if one of those picture-dealers should get it; they’d come round to my house trying to sell it to me again, whereas in your rooms—”

“Yes,” said Harding, “it will be an excuse to come to see me. Well, if I can possibly afford it—”

“Of course you can afford it; I paid eighty-seven pounds for it years ago; it won’t go to more than a hundred. I’d really like you to have it.”

“Well, for goodness’ sake don’t talk so loud, somebody will hear you.”

The pictures went by—portraits of fair ladies and ancient admirals, landscapes, underwoods and deserts, flower and battle pieces, pathetic scenes and gallantries. There was a time when every one of these pictures was the hope and delight of a human being, now they went by interesting nobody....

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At last the first of Evelyn's pictures was hoisted on the easel.

"Good God!" isn't it a miserable sight seeing her pictures going to whomsoever cares to bid a few pounds. But if I were to buy the whole collection—"

"I quite understand, and every one is a piece of your life."

The pictures continued to go by.

"I can't stand this much longer."

"Hush!"

The Boucher drawing went up. It was turned to the right and to the left: a beautiful girl lying on her belly, her legs parted slightly. Therefore the bidding began briskly, but for some unaccountable reason it died away. "Somebody must have declared it to be a forgery," Owen whispered to Harding, and a moment after it became Harding's property for eighty-seven pounds—"The exact sum I paid for it years ago. How very extraordinary!"

"A portrait by Manet—a hundred pounds offered, one hundred," and two grey eyes in a face of stone searched the room for bidders. "One hundred pounds offered, five, thirty, thirty-five, forty, fifty," and so on to two hundred.

"Her portrait will cost me a thousand," Owen whispered to Harding, and, catching the auctioneer's eyes, he nodded again. Seven hundred. "Will they never stop bidding? That fellow yonder is determined to run up the picture." Eight hundred and fifty! The auctioneer raised his hammer, and the watchful eyes went round the room in search of some one who would pay another ten pounds for Evelyn's portrait by Manet. Eight hundred and fifty—eight hundred and fifty. Down came the hammer. The auctioneer whispered "Sir Owen Asher" to his clerk.

"It's a mercy I got it for that; I was afraid it would go over the thousand. Now, come, we have got our two pictures. I'm sick of the place."

Harding had thought of staying on, just to see the end of the sale, but it was easier to yield to Owen than to argue with him; besides, he was anxious to see how the drawing would look on his wall. Of course it was a Boucher. Stupid remarks were always floating about Christie's. But he would know for certain as soon as he saw the drawing in a new light.

He was muttering "It is genuine enough," when his servant opened the door—"Sir Owen Asher."

“I see you have hung up the drawing. It looks very well, doesn’t it. You’ll never regret having taken my advice.”

“Taken your advice!” Harding was about to answer. “But what is the use in irritating the poor man? He is so much in love he hardly knows what he is saying. Owen Asher advising me as to what I should buy!”

Owen went over and looked into Harding’s Ingres.

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“Every time one sees it one likes it better.” And they talked about Ingres for some time, until Owen’s thoughts went back to Evelyn, and looking from the portrait by Ingres to the drawing by Boucher he seemed suddenly to lose control; tears rose to his eyes, and Harding watched him, wondering whither Owen’s imagination carried him. “Is he far away in Paris, hearing her sing for the first time to Madame Savelli? Or is he standing with her looking over the bulwarks of the *Medusa*, seeing the shape of some Greek island dying in the twilight?” And Harding did not speak, feeling the lover’s meditation to be sacred. Owen flung himself into an arm-chair, and without withdrawing his eyes from the picture, said, relying on Harding’s friendship:

“It is very like her, it is really very like her. I am much obliged to you, Harding, for having bought it. I shall come here to see it occasionally.”

“And I’ll present you with a key, so that when I am away you can spend your leisure in front of the picture.... Do you know whom I shall feel like? Like the friend of King Condules.”

“But she’ll not ask you to conspire to assassinate me. My murder would profit you nothing. All the same, Harding, now I come to think of it, there’s a good deal of that queen in Evelyn, or did she merely desire to take advantage of the excuse to get rid of her husband?”

“Ancient myths are never very explicit; one reads whatever psychology one likes into them. Perhaps that is why they never grow old.”

The door opened... Harding’s servant brought in a parcel of proofs.

“My dear Asher, the proof of an article has just come, and the editor tells me he’ll be much obliged if I look through it at once.”

“Shall I wait?”

“Well, I’d sooner you didn’t. Correcting a proof with me means a rewriting, and—”

“You can’t concentrate your thoughts while I am roving about the room. I understand. Are you dining anywhere?”

“I’m not engaged.”

The thought crossed Harding’s mind when Owen left the room that it would be better perhaps to write saying that the proofs detained him, for to spend the evening with Owen would prove wearisome. “No matter what the subject of conversation may be his mind will go back to her very soon.... But to leave him alone all the evening would be selfish, and if I don’t dine with him I shall have to dine alone....” Harding turned to his

writing-table, worked on his proof for a couple of hours, and then went to meet Owen, whom he found waiting for him at his club.

“My dear friend, I quite agree with you,” he said, sitting down to the table; “what you want is change.”

“Do you think, Harding, I shall find any interest again in anything?”

“Of course you will, my dear friend, of course you will.” And he spoke to his friend of ruined palaces and bas-reliefs; Owen listened vaguely, begging of him at last to come with him.

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“It will give you ideas, Harding; you will write better.”

Harding shook his head, for it did not seem to him to be his destiny to relieve the tedium of a yachting excursion in the Mediterranean.

V

“One cannot yacht in the Baltic or in the Gulf of Mexico,” Owen said, and he went to the Mediterranean again to sail about the *AEgean* Islands, wondering if he should land, changing his mind, deciding suddenly that the celebrated site he was going to see would not interest him. He would stand watching the rocky height dying down, his eyes fixed on the blue horizon, thinking of some Emperor’s palace amid the Illyrian hills, till, acting on a sudden impulse, he would call an order to the skipper, an order which he would countermand next day. A few days after the yacht would sail towards the Acropolis as though Owen had intended to drop anchor in the Piraeeus. But he was too immersed in his grief, he thought, to be able to give his attention to ruins, whether Roman or Greek. All the same, he would have to decide if he would return to the islands. He did not know them all; he had never been to Samos, famous for its wine and its women.... The wine cloyed the palate and no woman charmed him in the dance; and he sailed away wondering how he might relieve the tedium of life, until one day, after long voyaging, sufficiently recovered from his grief and himself, he leaned over the taffrail, this time lost in admiration of the rocks and summits above Syracuse, the Sicilian coasts carrying his thoughts out of the present into the past, to those valleys where Theocritus watched his “visionary flocks.”

“‘His visionary flocks,’” he repeated, wondering if the beautiful phrase had floated accidentally into his mind, hoping that it was his own, and then abandoning hope, for he had nearly succeeded in tracing the author of the phrase; but there was a vision in it more intense than Tennyson’s. “Visionary flocks!” For while the shepherds watched Theocritus dreamed the immortal sheep and goats which tempt us for an instant to become shepherds; but Owen knew that the real flocks would seem unreal to him who knew the visionary ones, so he turned away from the coasts without a desire in his heart to trouble the shepherds in the valley with an offer of his services, and walked up and down the deck thinking how he might obtain a translation of the idyls.

“Sicily, Sicily!”

It was unendurable that his skipper should come at such a moment to ask him if he would like to land at Palermo; for why should he land in Sicily unless to meet the goatherd who in order to beguile Thyrsis to sing the song of Daphnis told him that “his song was sweeter than the music of yonder water that is poured from the high face of the rock”? It was in Sicily that rugged Polyphemus, peering over some cliffs, sought to discern Galatea in the foam; but before Owen had time to recall the myth an indenture

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in the coast line, revealing a field, reminded him how Proserpine, while gathering flowers on the plains of Enna with her maidens, had been raped into the shadows by the dark god. And looking on these waves, he remembered that it was over them that Jupiter in the form of a bull, a garlanded bull with crested horns, had sped, bearing Europa away for his pleasure. Venus had been washed up by these waves! Poseidon! Sirens and Tritons had disported themselves in this sea, the bluest and the beautifullest, the one sea that mattered, more important than all the oceans; the oceans might dry up to-morrow for all he cared so long as this sea remained; and with the story of Theseus and "lonely Ariadne on the wharf at Naxos" ringing in his ears he looked to the north-east, whither lay the Cyclades and Propontis. Medea, too, had been deserted—"Medea deadlier than the sea." Helen! All the stories of the "Iliad" and the "Odyssey" had been lived about these seas, from the coasts of Sicily to those of Asia Minor, whence AEneas had made his way to Carthage. Dido, she, too, had been deserted. All the great love stories of the world had been lived about these shores and islands; his own story! And he mused for a long time on the accident—if it were an accident—which had led him back to this sea. Or had he returned to these shores and islands merely because there was no other sea in which one could yacht? Hardly, and he remembered with pleasure that his story differed from the ancient stories only in this, that Evelyn had fled from him, not be from her. And for such a woeful reason! That she might repent her sins in a convent on the edge of Wimbledon Common, whereas Dido was deserted for—

Again his infernal skipper hanging about. This time he had come with news that the *Medusa* was running short of provisions. Would Sir Owen prefer that they should put in at Palermo or Tunis?

"Tunis, Tunis."

The steerman put down the helm, and the fore and aft sails went over. Three days later the *Medusa* dropped her anchor in the Bay of Tunis, and his skipper was again asking Owen for orders.

"Just take her round to Alexandria and wait for me there," he answered, feeling he would not be free from England till she was gone. It was his wish to get away from civilisation for a while, to hear Arabic, to learn it if he could, to wear a bournous, to ride Arab horses, live in a tent, to disappear in the desert, yes, and to be remembered as the last lover of the Mediterranean—that would be *une belle fin de vie, apres tout*.

Then he laughed at his dreams, but they amused him; he liked to look upon his story as one of the love stories of the world. Rome had robbed Dido of her lover and him of his mistress. So far as he could see, the better story was the last, and his thoughts turned willingly to the Virgil who would arise centuries hence to tell it. One thing, however, puzzled him. Would the subject-matter

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he was creating for the future poet be spoilt if he were to fall in love with an Arab maiden, some little statuette carved in yellow ivory? Or would it be enhanced? Would the future Virgil regard her as an assuagement, a balm? Owen laughed at himself and his dream. But his mood drifted into sadness; and he asked if Evelyn should be punished. If so, what punishment would the poet devise for her? In Theocritus somebody had been punished: a cruel one, who had refused to relieve the burden of desire even with a kiss, had been killed by a seemingly miraculous interposition of Love, who, angered at the sight of the unhappy lover hanging from the neck by the lintel of the doorpost, fell from his pedestal upon the beloved, while he stood heart-set watching the bathers in the beautiful bathing-places.

But Owen could not bring himself to wish for Evelyn's death by the falling of a statue of Our Lady or St. Joseph; such a death would be a contemptible one, and he could not wish that anything contemptible should happen to her, however cruelly she had made him suffer. No, he did not wish that any punishment should befall her; the fault was not hers. And he returned in thought to the end which he had devised for himself—a passing into the desert, leaving no trace but the single fact that on a certain day he had joined a caravan. Going whither? Timbuctoo? To be slain there—an English traveller seeking forgetfulness of a cruel mistress—would be a romantic end for him! But if his end were captivity, slavery? His thoughts turned from Timbuctoo to one of the many oases between Tunis and the Soudan. In one of these it would be possible to make friends with an Arab chieftain and to live. But would she, whose body was the colour of amber, or the desert, or any other invention his fancy might devise, relieve him from the soul-sickness from which he suffered? It seemed to him that nothing would. All the same, he would have to try to forget her, "Evelyn, Evelyn."

The bournous which his Arab servant brought in at that moment might help him. A change of language would be a help, and he might become a Moslem—for he believed in Mohammedanism as much as in Christianity; and an acceptance of the Koran would facilitate travelling in the desert. That and a little Arabic, a few mouthfuls, and no Mahdi would dare to enslave him.... But if he were only sure that none would!

Outside horses were stamping, his escort, seven Arab horses with seven Arabs from the desert, or thereabout, in high-pummelled saddles, wearing white bournous, their brown, lean hands grasping long-barrelled guns with small carven stocks. The white Arab which Owen had purchased yesterday waited, the saddle empty; and, looking at him before mounting, Owen thought the horse the most beautiful thing he had ever seen, more like an ornament than a live thing, an object of luxury rather than of utility. Was he really going to ride this horse for many hours? To do

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so seemed like making a drudge of some beautiful woman. The horse's quarters curved like a woman's, a woman's skin was hardly finer, nor were a woman's wrists and hands, though she cared for them ever so much, shaping them with files, and polishing them with powders, more delicate than the fetlock and hoof of this wonderful horse. Nor was any woman's eye more beautiful, nor any woman's ears more finely shaped; and the horse's muzzle came to such a little point that one would have been inclined to bring him water in a tumbler. The accoutrements were all Arab; and Owen admired the heavy bits, furnished with many rings and chains, severe curbs, demanding the lightest handling, without being able to guess their use. But in the desert one rides like the Arab, and it would be ridiculous to go away to the Sahara hanging on to a snaffle like an Irishman out hunting.

So he mounted, and the cavalcade started amid much noise and dust, which followed it until it turned from the road into the scrub. A heavy dew had fallen during the night, and it glittered like silver rain, producing a slight mirage, which deceived nobody, but which prevented Owen from seeing what the country was like, until the sun shone out. Then he saw that they were crossing an uncultivated rather than a sterile plain, and the word "wilderness" came up in his mind, for the only trees and plants he saw were wildings, wild artichokes, tall stems, of no definite colour, with hairy fruits; rosemary, lavender and yellow broom, and half-naked bushes stripped of their foliage by the summer heat, covered with dust; nowhere a blade of grass—an indurated plain, chapped, rotted by stagnant waters, burnt again by the sun. And they rode over this plain for hours, the horses avoiding the baked earth, choosing the softer places where there was a litter of leaves or moss. Sometimes the cavalcade divided into twos and threes, sometimes it formed into a little group riding to the right or left, with Owen and his dragoman in front, Owen trying to learn Arabic from the dragoman, the lesson interrupted continually by some new sight: by a cloud of thistledown hovering over a great purple field, rising and falling, for there was not wind enough to carry the seed away; by some white vapour on the horizon, which his dragoman told him was the smoke of Arabs clearing the scrub.

"A primitive method, and an easy one, saving the labour of billhook and axe." About nine o'clock he saw some woods lying to the north-west. But the horses' heads were turned eastward to avoid an arm of a great marsh, extending northward to the horizon. It was then that, wearying of trying to get his tongue round certain Arabic words, he rode away from his dragoman, and tried to define the landscape as a painter would; but it was all too vast, and all detail was lost in the vastness, and all was alike. So, abandoning the pictorial, he philosophised, discovering the fallacy of the old saying that we owe everything to the earth, the mother of

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all. “We owe her very little. The debt is on her side,” he muttered. “It is we who make her so beautiful, finding in the wilderness a garden and a statue in a marble block. Man is everything.” And the words put the thought into his mind that although they had been travelling for many hours they had not yet seen a human being, nor yet an animal. Whither the Arabs had gone the dragoman could not tell him; he could only say they came to this plain for the spring pasture; their summer pastures were elsewhere, and he pointed to an old olive, brown and bent by the wind, telling Owen it was deemed a sacred tree, to which sterile women came to hang votive offerings. Owen reined up his horse in front of it, and they resumed their journey, meeting with nothing they had not met with before, unless, perhaps, a singular group of date-palms gathered together at one spot, forerunners of the desert, keeping each other company, struggling for life in a climate which was not theirs.

At eleven o’clock a halt was made in the bed of a great river enclosed within steep mudbanks, now nearly as dry as the river they had crossed in the morning; only a few inches of turbid water, at which a long herd of cattle was drinking when they arrived; the banks planted with great trees, olives, tamarisks, and masticks. At three o’clock they were again in the saddle, and they rode on, leaving to the left an encampment (the dragoman told Owen the name of the tribe), some wandering horses, and some camels. The camels, who appeared to have lost themselves, did not gallop away like the horses, but came forward and peaceably watched the cavalcade passing, absent-minded, bored ruminants, with something always on their minds. The sobriety of these animals astonished him. “They’re not greedy, and they are never thirsty. Of what do they remind me?” And Owen thought for a while, till catching sight of their long fleecy necks, bending like the necks of birds, and ending in long flexible lips (it was the lips that gave him the clue he was seeking), he said, “The Nonconformists of the four-footed world,” and he told his joke to his dragoman, without, however, being able to make him understand.

“These Arabs have no sense of humour,” he muttered, as he rode away.

The only human beings he saw on that long day’s journey were three shepherds—two youths and an old man; the elder youth, standing on a low wall, which might be Roman or Carthaginian, Turkish or Arabian (an antiquarian would doubtless have evolved the history of four great nations from it), watched a flock of large-tailed sheep and black goats, and blew into his flageolet, drawing from it, not music, only sounds without measure or rhythm, which the wind carried down the valley, causing the sheep-dog to rise up from the rock on which he was lying and to howl dismally. Near by the old man walked, leaning on the arm of the younger brother, a boy of sixteen. Both wore shepherd’s garb—tunics fitting tight to the waist, large plaited hats, and sandals cut from sheep-skin. The old man’s eyes were weak and red, and he blinked them so constantly

that Owen thought he must be blind; and the boy was so beautiful that one of the Arabs cried out to him, in the noble form of Arab salutation:

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“Hail to thee, Jacob, son of Isaac; and hail to thy father.”

Owen repeated the names “Jacob!” “Isaac!” a light came into his face, and he drew himself up in his saddle, understanding suddenly that he had fallen out of the “Odyssey,” landing in the very midst of the Bible; for there it was, walking about him: Abraham and Isaac, the old man willing to sacrifice his son to please some implacable God hidden behind a cloud; Jacob selling his birthright to Esau, the birthright of camels, sheep, and goats. And down his mind floated the story of Joseph sold by his brethren, and that of Ruth and Boaz: “Thy people shall be my people, thy God shall be my God,” a story of corn rather than of flocks and herds. For the sake of Boaz she would accept Yahveh. But would he accept such a God for Evelyn’s sake, and such a brute?—always telling his people if they continued to adore him they would be given not only strength to overcome their enemies, but even the pleasure of dashing out the brains of their enemies’ children against the stones; and thinking of the many apocalyptic inventions, the many-headed beasts of Isaiah, the Cherubim and Seraphim, who were not stalwart and beautiful angels, but many-headed beasts from Babylonia, Owen remembered that these revolting monsters had been made beautiful in the AEgean: sullen Astaarte, desiring sacrifice and immolation, had risen from the waters, a ravishing goddess with winged Loves marvelling about her, Loves with conches to their lips, blowing the glad news to the world.

“How the thought wanders!” he said, “A moment ago I was among the abominations of Isaiah. Now I am back, if not with the Greek Venus, ‘whom men no longer call the Erecine,’ at all events with an enchanting Parisian, nearly as beautiful, and more delightful—a voluptuous goddess, laughing amid her hair, drawn less austerely than Ingres, but much more firmly than Boucher or Fragonard... a fragrant goddess.”

And meditating with half his mind, he admired the endurance of his horse with the other, who, though he could neither trot, nor gallop, nor walk, could amble deliciously.

“If not a meditative animal himself, his gait conduces to meditation,” Owen said, and he continued to dream that art could only be said to have flourished among Mediterranean peoples, until he was roused from his reverie by his horse, who suddenly pricked up his ears and broke into a canter. He had been travelling since six in the morning, and it was now evening; but he was fresh enough to prick up his ears, scenting, no doubt, an encampment, the ashes of former fires, the litter left by some wayfarers, desert wanderers, bedouins, Hebrews.

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Owen began his dream again, and he could do so without danger, for his horse hardly required the direction of the bridle even in the thick wood; and while admiring his horse's sagacity in avoiding the trees he pursued his theological fancies, an admirable stillness gathering the while, shadows descending, unaccompanied by the slightest wind, and no sound. Yes, a faint sound! And reigning in his horse, he listened, and all the Arabs about him listened, to the babble coming up through the evening—a soft liquid talking like the splashing of water, or the sound of wings, or the mingling of both, some language more liquid than Italian. What language was being spoken over yonder? One of the Arabs answered, "It is the voice of the lake."

As the cavalcade rode out of the wood the lake lay a glittering mirror before Owen, about a mile wide; he could not determine its length, for the lake disappeared into a distant horizon, into a semblance of low shores, still as stagnant water, reflecting the golden purple of the sunset, and covered with millions of waterfowl. The multitude swimming together formed an indecisive pattern, like a vague, weedy scum collected on the surface of a marsh. Ducks, teal, widgeon, coots, and divers were recognisable, despite the distance, by their prow-like heads, their balance on the water, and their motion through it, "like little galleys," Owen said. Nearer, in the reeds agitated with millions of unseen inhabitants, snipe came and went in wisps, uttering an abrupt cry, going away in a short, crooked flight and falling abruptly. In the distance he saw grey herons and ibises from Egypt. The sky darkened, and through the dusk, from over the hills, thousands of birds continued to arrive, creating a wind in the poplars. Like an army marching past, battalion succeeded battalion at intervals of a few seconds; and the mass, unwinding like a great ribbon, stretched across the lake. Then the mist gathered, blotting out everything, all noise ceased, and the lake itself disappeared in the mist.

Turning in the saddle, Owen saw a hillock and five olive-trees. A fire was burning. This was the encampment.

VI

He had undertaken this long journey in the wilderness for the sake of a few days' falconry, and dreaded a disappointment, for all his life long, intermittently of course, he had been interested in hawks. As a boy he had dreamed of training hawks, and remembered one taken by him from the nest, or maybe a gamekeeper had brought it to him, it was long ago; but the bird itself was remembered very well, a large, grey hawk—-a goshawk he believed it to be, though the bird is rare in England. As he lay, seeking sleep, he could see himself a boy again, going into a certain room to feed his hawk. It was getting very tame, coming to his wrist, taking food from his fingers, and, not noticing the open window, he had taken the hawk out of its cage. Was the hawk kept in a cage or chained

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to the perch? He could not remember, but what he did remember, and very well, was the moment when the bird fluttered towards the window; he could see it resting on the sill, hesitating a moment, doubting its power of flight. But it had ventured out in the air and had reached a birch, on which it alighted. There had been a rush downstairs and out of the house, but the hawk was no longer in the birch, and was never seen by him again, yet it persisted in his memory.

The sport of hawking is not quite extinct in England, and at various times he had caused inquiries to be made, and had arranged once to go to the New Forest and on another occasion to Wiltshire. But something had happened to prevent him going, and he had continued to dream of hawking, of the mystery whereby the hawk could be called out of the sky by the lure—some rags and worsted-work in the shape of a bird whirled in the air at the end of a string. Why should the hawk leave its prey for such a mock? Yet it did; and he had always read everything that came under his hand about hawking with a peculiar interest, and in exhibitions of pictures had always stood a long time before pictures of hawking, however bad they might be.

But Evelyn had turned his thoughts from sport to music, and gradually he had become reconciled to the idea that his destiny was never to see a hawk strike down a bird. But the occasion long looked for had come at last, to-morrow morning the mystery of hawking would cease to be a mystery for him any longer; and as he lay in his tent, trying to get a few hours' sleep before dawn, he asked himself if the realisation of his dream would profit him much, only the certain knowledge that hawks stooped at their prey and returned to the lure; another mystery would have been unravelled, and there were few left; he doubted if there was another; all the sights and shows with which life entices us were known to him, all but one, and the last would go the way the others had gone. Or perhaps it were wiser to leave the last mystery unravelled.

Wrapping himself closer in his blanket he sought sleep again, striving to quiet his thoughts; but they would not be quieted. All kinds of vain questions ran on, questions to which the wisest have never been able to find answers: if it were good or ill-fortune to have been called out of the great void into life, if the gift of life were one worth accepting, and if it had come to him in an acceptable form. That night in his tent it seemed clear that it would be better to range for ever, from oasis to oasis with the bedouins, who were on their way to meet him, than to return to civilisation. Of civilisation it seemed to him that he had had enough, and he wondered if it were as valuable as many people thought; he had found more pleasure in speaking with his dragoman, learning Arabic from him, than in talking to educated men from the universities and such like. Riches dry up the soul and are an obstacle to the development

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of self. If he had not inherited Riversdale and its many occupations and duties, he would be to-day an instinctive human being instead of a scrapbook of culture. For a rich man there is no escape from amusements which do not amuse; Riversdale had robbed him of himself, of manhood; what he understood by manhood was not brawn, but instincts, the calm of instincts in contradiction to the agitation of nerves. It would have been better to have known only the simple life, the life of these Arabs! Now they were singing about the camp fires. Queer were the intervals, impossible of notation, but the rhythms might be gathered... a symphony, a defined scheme.... The monotony of the chant hushed his thoughts, and the sleep into which he fell must have been a deep one.

A long time seemed to have passed between sleeping and waking....

Throwing his blanket aside, he seized his revolvers. The night was filled with cries as if the camp had been attacked. But the disturbances was caused by the stampeding of the horses; three had broken their tethers and had gone away, after first tumbling into the reeds, over the hills, neighing frantically. As his horse was not one of the three it did not matter; the Arabs would catch their horses or would fail to catch them, and indifferent he stood watching the moon hanging low over the landscape, a badly drawn circle, but admirably soft to look upon, casting a gentle, mysterious light down the lake. The silence was filled with the lake's warble, and the ducks kept awake by the moon chattered as they dozed, a soft cooing chatter like women gossiping; an Arab came from the wood with dry branches; the flames leaped up, showing through the grey woof of the tent; and, listening to the crackling, Owen muttered "Resinous wood... tamarisk and mastic." He fell asleep soon after, and this time his sleep was longer, though not so deep... He was watching hawks flying in pursuit of a heron when a measured tramp of hooves awoke him, and hard, guttural voices.

"The Arabs have arrived," he said, and drawing aside the curtain of his tent, he saw at least twenty coming through the blue dusk, white bournous, scimitars, and long-barrelled guns! "Saharians from the desert, the true bedouin."

"The bedouin but not the true Saharian," his dragoman informed him. And Owen retreated into his tent, thinking of the hawks which the Arabs carried on their wrists, and how hawking had been declining in Europe since the sixteenth century. But it still flourished in Africa, where to-day is the same as yesterday.

And while thinking of the hawks he heard the voices of the Arabs growing angrier. Some four or five spurred their horses and were about to ride away; but the dragoman called after them, and Owen cried out, "As if it matters to me which hawk is flown first." The quarrel waxed louder, and then suddenly ceased, and when Owen came out of his tent he saw an Arab take the latchet of a bird's hood in his teeth and pull the other end with his right hand. "A noble and melancholy bird," he said, and he stood a long while

admiring the narrow, flattened head, the curved beak, so well designed to rend a prey, and the round, clear eye, which appeared to see through him and beyond him, and which in a few minutes would search the blue air mile after mile.

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The hawk sprang from the wrist, and he watched the bird flying away, like a wild bird, down the morning sky, which had begun in orange, and was turning to crimson. “Never will they get that bird back! You have lost your hawk,” Owen said to the Arab.

The Arab smiled, and taking a live pigeon out of his bournous, he allowed it to flutter in the air for a moment, at the end of a string. A moment was sufficient; the clear round eye had caught sight of the flutter of wings, and soon came back, sailing past, high up in the air.

“A fine flight,” the Arab said, “the bird is at pitch; now is the time to flush the covey.” A dog was sent forward, and a dozen partridges got up. And they flew, the terrible hawk in pursuit, fearing their natural enemy above them more than any rain of lead. Owen pressed his horse into a gallop, and he saw the hawk drop out of the sky. The partridge shrieked, and a few seconds afterwards some feathers floated down the wind.

Well, he had seen a falcon kill a partridge, but would the falconer be able to lure back his hawk? That was what he wanted to see, and, curious and interested as a boy in his first rat hunt, he galloped forward until stopped by the falconer, who explained that the moment was always an anxious one, for were the hawk approached from behind, or approached suddenly, it “might carry”—that is to say, might bear away its prey for a hundred yards, and when it had done this once it would be likely to do so again, giving a good deal of trouble. The falconer approached the hawk very gently, the bird raised its head to look at the falconer, and immediately after dipped its beak again into the partridge’s breast.

Owen expected the bird to fly away, but, continuing to approach, the falconer stooped and reaching out his hand, drew the partridge towards him, knowing the hawk would not leave it; and when he had hold of the jesses, the head was cut from the partridge and opened, for it is the brain the hawk loves; and the ferocity with which this one picked out the eye and gobbled it awoke Owen’s admiration again.

“Verily, a thing beyond good and evil, a Nietzschean bird.”

He had seen a hawk flown and return to the lure, he had seen a hawk stoop at its prey, and had seen a hawk recaptured; so the mystery of hawking was at an end for him, the mystery had been unravelled, and now there was nothing for him to do but to watch other birds and to learn the art of hawking, for every flight would be different.

The sun had risen, filling the air with a calm, reposeful glow; the woods were silent, the boughs hung lifeless and melancholy, every leaf distinct at the end of its stem, weary of its life, “unable to take any further interest in anything” Owen said, and the cavalcade rode on in silence.

“A little too warm the day is, without sufficient zest in it,” one of the falconers remarked, for his hawk was flying lazily, only a few yards above the ground, too idle to mount the sky, to get at pitch; and as the bird passed him, Owen admired the thin body, and the javelin-like head, and the soft silken wings, the feathered thighs, and the talons so strong and fierce.

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“He will lose his bird if he doesn’t get at pitch,” the falconer muttered, and he seemed ashamed of his hawk when it alighted in the branches, and stood there preening itself in the vague sunlight. But suddenly it woke up to its duty, and going in pursuit of a partridge, stooped and brought it to earth.

“A fine kill; we shall have some better sport with the ducks.”

Owen asked the dragoman to translate what the falconer said.

“He said it was a fine kill. He is proud of his bird.”

Some Arabs rode away, and Owen heard that a boat would be required to put up the ducks; and he was told the duck is the swiftest bird in the air once it gets into flight, but if the peregrine is at pitch it will stoop, and bring the duck to earth, though the duck is by five times the heavier bird. The teal is a bird which is even more difficult for the hawk to overtake, for it rises easier than the duck; but if the hawk be at pitch it will strike down the quick teal. One of the Arabs reined in his horse, and following the line of the outstretched finger Owen saw far away in a small pool or plash of water three teal swimming. As soon as the hawk swooped the teal dived, but not the least disconcerted, the hawk, as if understanding that the birds were going to be put up, rose to pitch and waited, “quite professional like,” Owen said. The beautiful little drake was picked out of a tuft of alfa-grass. But perhaps it was the snipe that afforded the best sport.

At mid-day the falconers halted for rest and a meal, and Owen passed all the hawks in review, learning that the male, the tercel, is not so much prized in falconry as the female, which is larger and fiercer. There was not one Barbary falcon, for on making inquiry Owen was told that the bird he was looking at was a goshawk, a much more beautiful hawk it seemed to him than the peregrine, especially in colour; the wings were not so dark, inclining to slate, and under the wings the breast was white, beautifully barred. It stood much higher than the other hawks; and Owen admired the bird’s tail, so long, and he understood how it governed the bird’s flight, even before he was told that if a hawk lost one of its tail feathers it would not be able to fly again that season unless the feather was replaced; and the falconer showed Owen a supply of feathers, all numbered, for it would not do to supply a missing third feather with a fourth; and the splice was a needle inserted into the ends of the feathers and bound fast with fine thread. The bird’s beauty had not escaped Owen’s notice, but he had been so busy with the peregrines all the morning that he had not had time to ask why this bird wore no hood, and why it had not been flown. Now he learnt that the gosshawk is a short-winged hawk, which does not go up in the air, and get at pitch, and stoop at its prey like the peregrine, but flies directly after it, capturing by speed of wing, and is used principally for ground game, rabbits,

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and hares. He was told that it seized the hare or the rabbit by the hind quarters and moved up, finding the heart and lungs with its talons. So he waited eagerly for a hare to steal out of the cover; but none appeared, much to the bird's disappointment—a female, and a very fine specimen, singularly tame and intelligent. The hawk seemed to understand quite well what was happening, and watched for an opportunity of distinguishing herself, looking round eagerly; and so eager was she that sometimes she fell from the falconer's wrist, who took no notice, but let her hang until she fluttered up again; and when Owen reproved his cruelty, he answered:

"She is a very intelligent bird and will not hang by her legs longer than she wants to."

It was in the afternoon that her chance came, and a rare one it was. Two bustards rose out of a clump of cacti growing about a deserted hermitage. The meeting of the birds must have been a chance one, for they went in different directions, and flying swiftly, soon would have put the desert between themselves, and the falconers, and each other, if the bird going eastward had not been frightened by the Arabs coming up from the lake, and, losing its head, it turned back, and flying heavily over the hawking party, gave the goshawk her single chance, a chance which was nearly being missed, the hawk not making up her mind at once to go in pursuit; she had been used for hunting ground game; and for some little while it was not certain that the bustard would not get away; this would have been a pity, for, as Owen learned afterwards, the bird is of great rarity, almost unknown.

"She will get him, she will get him!" the falconer cried, seeing his hawk now flying with determination, and a moment after the bustard was struck down.

As far as sport was concerned the flight was not very interesting, but the bustard is so rarely seen and so wary a bird that even the Arabs, who are not sportsmen, will talk with interest about it, and Owen rode up curious to see this almost fabulous bird, known in the country as the habara, a bird which some ornithologists deny to be the real bustard. Bustard or no bustard, the bird was very beautiful, six or seven pounds in weight, the size of a small turkey, and covered with the most beautiful feathers, pale yellow speckled with brown, a long neck and a short, strong beak, long black legs with three toes, the fourth, the spur, missing. That a hawk should knock over a bustard had not happened often, and he regretted that he knew not how to save the bird's skin, for though stuffed birds are an abomination, one need not always be artistic. And there were plenty at Riversdale. His grandfather had filled many cases, and this rare bird merited the honour of stuffing. All the same, it would have to be eaten, and with the trophy hanging on his saddle bow Owen rode back to the encampment, little thinking he was riding to see the flight which he had been longing to see all his life.

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One of the falconers had sent up a cast of hawks, and an Arab had ridden forward in the hope of driving some ducks out of the reeds; but instead a heron rose and, flopping his great wings, went away, stately and decorative, into the western sky. The hawks were far away down on the horizon, and there was a chance that they might miss him; but the falconer waved his lure, and presently the hawks came back; it was then only that the heron divined his danger, and instead of trying to outdistance his pursuers as the other birds had done, and at the cost of their lives, he flopped his wings more vigorously, ringing his way up the sky, knowing, whether by past experience or by instinct, that the hawks must get above him. And the hawks went up, the birds getting above the heron. Soon the attack would begin, and Owen remembered that the heron is armed with a beak on which a hawk might be speared, for is it not recorded that to defend himself the heron has raised his head and spitted the descending hawk, the force of the blow breaking the heron's neck and both birds coming down dead together.

"Now will this happen?" he asked himself as he watched the birds now well above the heron. "That one," Owen cried, "is about to stoop."

And down came the hawk upon the heron, but the heron swerved cleverly. Owen followed the beautiful shape of the bird's long neck and beak, and the trailing legs. The second hawk stooped. "Ah! now he is doomed," Owen cried. But again the heron dodged the hawk cleverly, and the peregrine fell past him, and Owen saw the tail go out, stopping the descent.

Heron and hawks went away towards the desert, Owen galloping after them, watching the aerial battle from his saddle, riding with loose rein, holding the rein lightly between finger and thumb, leaving his horse to pick his way. Again a hawk had reached a sufficient height and stooped; again the heron dodged, and so the battle continued, the hawks stooping again and again, but always missing the heron, until at last, no doubt tired out, the heron failed to turn in time: heron and hawk came toppling out of the sky together; but not too quickly for the second hawk, which stooped and grappled the prey in mid-air.

Owen touched his horse with the spur; and, his eyes fixed on the spot where he had seen the heron and hawks falling, he galloped, regardless of every obstacle, forgetful that a trip would cost him a broken bone, and that he was a long way from a surgeon.

But Owen's horse picked his way very cleverly through the numerous rubble-heaps, avoiding the great stones protruding from the sand.... These seemed to be becoming more numerous; and Owen reined in his horse.... He was amid the ruins of a once considerable city, of which nothing remained but the outlying streets, some doorways, and many tombs, open every one of them, as if the dead had already been resurrected. Before him lay the broken lid of a sarcophagus and the sarcophagus empty, a little sand from the desert replacing the ashes of the dead man. Owen's horse approached it, mistaking it for a drinking trough; "and it will serve for one," he said, "in a little while after

the next rainfall. Some broken capitals, fragments of columns, a wall built of narrow bricks, a few inscriptions... all that remains of Rome, dust and forgetfulness."

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About him the Arabs were seeking a heron and hawks; a falconer galloped across the plain, waving a lure, in pursuit of another hawk, so Owen was informed by his dragoman —as if falcon or heron could interest him at that moment—and he continued to peer into the inscription, leaving the Arabs to find the birds. And they were discovered presently among some marbles, the heron's wings outstretched in death, the great red wound in its breast making it seem still more beautiful.

VII

The lake water was salt, but there was a spring among the hills, and when the hawks were resting (they rested every second day) Owen liked to go there and lie under the tamarisks, dreaming of Sicily, of "the visionary flocks" and their shepherds no less visionary, comparing the ideal with the real, for before him flocks grazed up the hillside and his eyes followed the goats straying in quest of branches, their horns tipped with the wonderful light which threw everything into relief—the bournous of the passing bedouin, the woman's veil, whether blue or grey, the queer architecture of the camels and dromedaries coming up through a fold in the hills from the lake, following the track of the caravans, their long, bird-like necks swinging, looking, Owen thought, like a great flock of migrating ostriches.

It was pleasant to lie and dream this pastoral country and its people, seen through a haze of fine weather which looked as if it would never end. The swallows had just come over and were tired; Owen was provoking enough to drive them out of the tamarisks just to see how tired they were, and was sorry for one poor bird which could hardly keep out of his way. Whence had they come? he asked, returning to a couch of moss. Had any of them come from Riversdale? Perhaps some had been hatched under his own eaves? (Any mention of Riversdale was sufficient to soften Owen's heart.) And now under the tamarisks his thoughts floated about that bleak house and its colonnade, thinking of a white swallow which had appeared in the park one year; friends were staying with him, every one had wanted to shoot it, but leave had not been granted; and his natural kindness of heart interested him as he lay in the shade of the tamarisks, asking himself if the white swallow would appear, thinking that the bird ought to nod to him as it passed, smiling at the thought, and the smile dying as his dragoman approached; for he was coming to teach him Arabic. Owen liked to exercise his intelligence idly; a number of little phrases had already been picked up, and his learning he tried on the bedouins as they came up the hill from the lake, preferring speech with them rather than with his own people, for his own people might affect to understand him, his dragoman might have prompted them, whereas the new arrivals afforded a more certain examination, and Owen was pleased when the bedouin understood him.

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Next day he was hawking, and the day after he was again under the tamarisks learning Arabic, and so the days went by between sport and study without his perceiving them until one morning Owen found the spring in possession of a considerable caravan, some five and twenty or thirty camel-drivers and horsemen; and anxious to practise the last phrases he had acquired, he went forward to meet the Saharians, for they were easily recognisable as such by the blacker skin and a pungent blackness in the eyes. The one addressed by Owen delighted him by answering without hesitation:

“From Laghouat.”

The hard, guttural sound he gave to the syllables threw the word into wonderful picturesqueness, enchanting Owen. It was the first time he had heard an Arab pronounce this word, so characteristically African; and he asked him to say it again for the pleasure of hearing it, liking the way the Saharian spoke it, with an accent at once tender and proud, that of a native speaking of his country to one who has never seen it.

“How far away is—?”

Owen tried to imitate the guttural.

“Fifteen days’ journey.”

“And what is the road like?”

With the superlative gesture of an Arab the man showed the smooth road passing by the encampment, moving his arms slowly from east to west to indicate the circuit of the horizon.

“That is the Sahara,” he added, and Owen could see that for the bedouin there was nothing in the world more beautiful than empty space and low horizons. It was his intention to ask what were the pleasures of the Sahara, but he had come to the end of his Arabic and turned to his dragoman reluctantly. Dragoman and Saharian engaged in conversation, and presently Owen learned that the birds in the desert were sand grouse and blue pigeons, and when the Saharian gathered that these did not afford sufficient sport he added, not wishing a stranger should think his country wanting in anything:

“There are gazelles.”

“But one cannot catch gazelles with hawks.”

“No,” the Saharian answered, “but one can catch them with eagles.”

“Eagles!” Owen repeated. “Eagles flying after gazelles!” And he looked into the Arab’s face, lost in wonderment, seeing a picturesque cavalcade going forth, all the horses beautiful, champing at their bits.

“But the Arab is too picturesque,” he thought; for Owen, always captious, was at that moment uncertain whether he should admire or criticise; and the Arabs sat grandly upright in their high-pummelled saddles of red leather or blue velvet their slippered feet thrust into great stirrups. He liked the high-pummelled saddles; they were comfortable to ride long distances in, and it was doubtless on these high pummels that the Arabs carried the eagles (it would be impossible to carry so large a bird on a gloved hand); and criticism melted into admiration. He could see them riding out with the eagles tied to the pummels of their saddles, looking into the yellow desert; the adjective seemed to him vulgar—afterwards he discovered the desert to be tawny. “It must be a wonderful sight... the gazelle pursued by the eagle!” So he spoke at once to his dragoman, telling him that he must prepare for a long march to the desert.

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“To the desert!” the dragoman repeated.

“Yes, I want to see gazelles hunted by eagles,” and the grave Arab looked into Owen’s blonde face, evidently thinking him a petulant child.

“But your Excellency—” He began to talk to Owen of the length of the journey—twenty days at least; they would require seven, eight, or ten camels; and Owen pointed to the camels of the bedouins from the Sahara. The dragoman felt sure that his Excellency had not examined the animals carefully; if his Excellency was as good a judge of camels as he was of horses, he would see that these poor beasts required rest; nor were they the kind suited to his Excellency. So did he talk, making it plain that he did not wish to travel so far, and when Owen admitted that he had not fixed a time to return to Tunis the dragoman appeared more unwilling than ever.

“Well, I must look out for another dragoman”; and remembering that one of his escort spoke French, and that himself had learned a little Arabic, he told the dragoman he might return to Tunis.

“Well, my good man, what do you want me to do?” And seeing that the matter would be arranged with or without him, the Arab offered his assistance, which was accepted by Owen, and it now remained for the new dragoman to pay commission to the last, and for both to arrange with the Saharians for the purchase of their camels and their guidance. Laghouat was Owen’s destination; from thence he could proceed farther into the desert and wander among the different archipelagoes until the summer drove him northward.

The sale of the camels—if not their sale, their hire—for so many months was the subject of a long dispute in which Owen was advised not to interfere. It would be beneath his dignity to offer any opinion, so under the tamarisks he sat smoking, watching the Arabs taking each other by the shoulders and talking with an extraordinary volubility. It amused him to watch two who appeared to have come to an understanding. “They’re saying, ’Was there ever any one so unreasonable? So-and-so, did you hear what he said?’” Drawing long pipes from their girdles, these two would sit and smoke in silence till from the seething crowd a word would reach them, and both would rush back and engage in the discussion as violently as before.

Sometimes everything seemed to have been arranged and the dragoman approached Owen with a proposal, but before the proposal could be put into words the discussion was renewed.

“In England such a matter as the sale of a few camels would not occupy more than half a dozen minutes.”

“All countries have their manners and all have their faults,” the dragoman answered, an answer which irritated Owen; but he had to conceal his irritation, for to show it would only delay his departure, and he was tired of hawking, tired of the lake and anxious to see the great desert and its oases. And he felt it to be shameful to curse the camels. Poor animals! they had come a long way and required a few days’ rest before beginning their journey homewards.

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Three days after they were judged to be sufficiently rested; this did not seem to be their opinion, for they bleated piteously when they were called upon to kneel down, so that their packs might be put upon them, and upon inquiring as to the meaning of their bleats Owen was told they were asking for a cushion—“Put a cushion on my back to save me from being skinned.”

“Hail to all!”

And the different caravans turned north and south, Owen riding at the head of his so that he might think undisturbed, for now that everything had been decided, he was uncertain if the pleasure he would get from seeing gazelles torn by eagles, would recompense him for the trouble, expense, and fatigue of this long journey. He turned his horse to the right, and moved round in his saddle, so that he might observe the humps and the long, bird-like necks and the shuffling gait of the camels. They never seemed to become ordinary to him, and he liked them for their picturesqueness, deciding that the word “picturesque” was as applicable to them as the word “beautiful” is applicable to the horse. He liked to see these Arab horses champing at their cruel bits, arching their crests; he liked their shining quarters, his own horse a most beautiful, courageous, and faithful animal, who would wait for him for hours, standing like a wooden horse; Owen might let him wander at will: for he would answer his whistle like a dog and present the left side for him to mount, from long habit no doubt. And the moment Owen was in the saddle his horse would draw up his neck and shake all the jingling accoutrements with which he was covered, arch his neck, and spring forward; and when he did this Owen always felt like an equestrian statue. And he admired the camel-drivers, gaunt men so supple at the knee that they could walk for miles, and when the camel broke into a trot the camel-driver would trot with him. And the temperance of these men was equal to that of their beasts, at least on the march; a handful of flour which the camel-driver would work into a sort of paste, and a drink from a skin was sufficient for a meal. Running by the side of their beasts, they urged them forward with strange cries; and they beguiled the march with songs. His musical instincts were often awakened by these and by the chants which reached him through the woof of his tent at night. He fell to dreaming of what a musician might do with these rhythms until his thoughts faded into a faint sleep, from which he was awakened suddenly by the neighing of a horse: one had suddenly taken fire at the scent of a mare which a breeze had carried through the darkness.

The first bivouacs were the pleasantest part of his journey, despite the fact that he could find no answer to the question why. he had undertaken it, or why he was learning Arabic; all the same, these days would never be forgotten; and he looked round... especially these nights, every one distinct in his mind, the place where yesterday’s tent had been pitched, and the place where he had laid his head a week ago, the stones which three nights ago had prevented him from sleeping.

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“These experiences will form part of my life, a background, an escapement from civilisation when I return to it. We must think a little of the future—lay by a store like the bees”; and next morning he looked round, his eyes delighting in the beauty of the light. Truly a light sent from beyond skies in which during the course of the day every shade of blue could be distinguished. A thin, white cloud would appear towards evening, stretch like a skein of white silk across the sky, to gather as the day declined into one white cloud, which would disappear, little by little, into the sunset. As Owen rode at the head of his cavalcade he watched this cloud, growing smaller, and its diminishing often inspired the thought of a ship entering into a harbour, sail dropping over sail.

The pale autumn weather continued day after day; everything in the landscape seemed fixed; and it seemed impossible to believe that very soon dark clouds would roll overhead, and wind tear the trees, and floods dangerous to man and horse rush down the peaceful river beds, now nearly dry, only a trickle of water, losing itself among sandy reaches.

During the long march of twenty days the caravan passed through almost every kind of scenery—long plains in which there was nothing but reeds and tussocked grass, and these plains were succeeded by stony hills covered with scrub. Again they caught sight of Arab fires in the morning like a mist, at night lighting up the horizon; and a few days afterwards they were riding through an oak forest whose interspaces were surprisingly like the tapestries at Riversdale, only no archer came forward to shoot the stag; and he listened vainly, for the sounds of hunting horns.

On debouching from the forest they passed through pleasantly watered valleys, the hillsides of which were cultivated. It was pleasant to see fields again, though they were but meagre Arab fields. All the same Owen was glad to see the blue shadows of the woods marking the edge of these fields, for they carried his thoughts back to England, to his own fields, and in his mood of mind every remembrance of England was agreeable. He was beginning to weary of wild nature, so it was pleasant to see an Arab shepherd emerge from the scrub and come forward to watch for a moment and then go away to the edge of a ravine where his goats were browsing, and sit upon a rock, followed by a yellow dog with a pointed face like a fox. It was pleasant, too, to discover the tents of the tribe at a little distance, and the next day to catch sight of a town, climbing a hill so steep that it was matter for wonderment how camels could be driven through the streets.

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The same beautiful weather continued—blue skies in which every shade of blue could be studied; skies filled with larks, the true English variety, the lark which goes about in couples, mounting the blue air, singing, as they mounted, a passionate medley of notes, interrupted by a still more passionate cry of two notes repeated three or four times, followed again by the same disordered cadenzas. The robin sings in autumn, and it seemed strange to Owen to hear this bird singing a solitary little tune just as he sings it in England—a melancholy little tune, quite different from the lark's passionate outpouring, just its own quaint little avowal, somewhat autobiographical, a human little admission that life, after all, is a very sad thing even to the robin? Why shouldn't it be? for he is a domestic bird of sedentary habits, and not at all suited to this African landscape. All the same, it was nice to meet him there. A blackbird started out of the scrub, chattered, and dived into a thicket, just as he would in Riversdale.

"The same things," Owen said, "all the world over." On passing through a ravine an eagle rose from a jutting scarp; and looking up the rocks, two or three hundred feet in height, Owen wondered if it was among these cliffs the bird built its eerie, and how the young birds were taken by the Arabs. Crows followed the caravan in great numbers, and these reminded Owen of his gamekeeper, a solid man, six feet high, with reddish whiskers, the most opaque Englishman Owen had ever seen. "'We must get rid of some of them,'" Owen muttered, quoting Burton. "'Terrible destructive, them birds,'"

Among these remembrances of England, a jackal running across the path, just as a fox would in England, reminded Owen that he was in Africa; and though occasionally one meets an adder in England, one meets them much more frequently in the North of Africa. It was impossible to say how many Owen had not seen lying in front of his horse like dead sticks. As the cavalcade passed they would twist themselves down a hole. As for rats, they seemed to be everywhere, and at home everywhere, with the adders and with the rabbits; any hole was good enough for the rat. The lizards were larger and uglier than the English variety, and Owen never could bring himself to look upon them with anything but disgust—their blunt head, the viscous jaws exuding some sort of scum; and he left them to continue their eternal siesta in the warm sand.

That evening, after passing through a succession of hills and narrow valleys, the caravan entered the southern plain, an immense perspective of twenty or thirty miles; and Owen reined up his horse and sat at gaze, watching the dim greenness of the alfa-grass striped with long rays of pale light and grey shadows. But the extent of the plain could not be properly measured, for the sky was darkening above the horizon.

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“The rainy season is at hand,” Owen said; and he watched the clouds gathering rapidly into storm in the middle of the sky. Now and again, when the clouds divided, a glimpse was gotten of a range of mountains, seven crests—“seven heads,” the dragoman called them, and he told Owen the name in Arabic. These mountains were reached the following day, and, after passing through numberless defiles, the caravan debouched on a plain covered with stones, bright as if they had been polished by hand—a naked country torn by the sun, in which nothing grew, not even a thistle. In the distance were hills whose outline zigzagged, now into points like a saw, and now into long sweeping curves like a scythe; and these hills were full of narrow valleys, bare as threshing-floors. The heat hung in these valleys, and Owen rode through them, choking, for the space of a long windless day, in which nothing was heard except the sound of the horses’ hooves and the caw of a crow flying through the vague immensity.

But the ugliness of these valleys was exceeded by the ugliness of the marsh at whose edge they encamped next day—a black, evil-smelling marsh full of reeds and nothing more. The question arose whether potable water would be found, and they all went out, Owen included, to search for a spring.

After searching for some time one was found in possession of a number of grey vultures and enormous crows, ranged in a line along the edges, and in the distance these seemed like men stooping in a hurry to drink. It was necessary to fire a gun to disperse these sinister pilgrims. But in the Sahara a spring is always welcome, even when it carries a taste of magnesia; and there was one in the water they had discovered, not sufficient to discourage the camels, who drank freely enough, but enough to cause Owen to make a wry face after drinking. All the same, it was better than the water they carried in the skins. The silence was extraordinary, and, hearing the teeth of the camels shearing the low bushes of their leaves, Owen looked round, surprised by the strange resonance of the air and the peculiar tone of blue in the sky, trivial signs in themselves, but recognisable after the long drought. He remembered how he had experienced for the last few days a presentiment that rain was not far off, a presentiment which he could not attribute to his imagination, and which was now about to be verified. A large cloud was coming up, a few heavy drops fell, and during the night the rain pattered on the canvas; and he fell asleep, hoping that the morning would be fine, though he had been told the rain would not cease for days; and they were still several days’ journey from Laghouat, where they would get certain news of eagles and gazelles, for the Arab who had first told Owen about the gazelle-hunters admitted (Owen cursed him for not having admitted it before) that the gazelles did not come down from the hills until after the rains and the new grass began to spring up.

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All the next day the rain continued. Owen watched it falling into the yellow sand blown into endless hillocks; “Very drie, very drie,” he said, recalling a phrase of his own north country. Overhead a low grey sky stooped, with hardly any movement in it, the grey moving slowly as the caravan struggled on through grey and yellow colour— the colour of emptiness, of the very void. It seemed to him that he could not get any wetter; but there is no end to the amount of moisture clothes can absorb, a bournous especially, and soon the rain was pouring down Owen’s neck; but he would not be better off if he ordered the caravan to stop and his servants to pitch his tent under a sand-dune. Besides, it would be dangerous to do this, for the wind was rising, and their hope was to reach a caravansary before nightfall.

“And it is not yet mid-day,” Owen said to himself, thinking of the endless hours that lay before him, and of his wonderful horse, so courageous and so patient in adversity, never complaining, though he sank at every step to over his fetlocks in the sand. Owen wondered what the animal was thinking about, for he seemed quite cheerful, neighing when Owen leaned forward and petted him. To lean forward and stroke his horse’s neck, and speak a few words of encouragement to one who needed no encouragement, was all there was for him to do during that long day’s march.

“If he could only speak to me,” Owen said, feeling he needed encouragement; and he tried to take refuge in the past, trying to memorise his life, what it had been from the beginning, just as if he were going to write a book. When his memory failed him he called his dragoman and began an Arabic lesson. It is hard to learn Arabic at any time, and impossible to learn it in the rain; and after acquiring a few words he would ride up and down, trying the new phrases upon the camel-drivers, admirable men who never complained, running alongside of their animals, urging them forward with strange cries. Owen admired their patience; but their cries in the end jarred his highly-strong nerves, and he asked himself if it were not possible for them to drive camels without uttering such horrible sounds, and appealed to the dragoman, who advised him to allow the drivers to do their business as they were in the habit of doing it, for it was imperative they should reach the caravansary that night. The wind was rising, and storms in the desert are not only unpleasant, but dangerous. Owen tried to fall asleep in the saddle, and he almost succeeded in dozing; anyhow, he seemed to wake from some sort of stupor at the end of the day, just before nightfall, for he started, and nearly fell, when his dragoman called to him, telling him they were about to enter the ravine on the borders of which the caravansary was situated.

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The first thing he saw were three palm-trees, yellow trees torn and broken, and there were two more a little farther on; and there was a great noise in their crowns when the caravan drew up before the walls of the caravansary—five palms, the wind turning their crowns inside out like umbrellas, horrible and black, standing out in livid lines upon a sky that was altogether black; four; great walls, and on two sides of the square an open gallery, a shelter for horses; in the corner rooms without windows, and open doorways. Owen chose one, and the dragoman spoke of scorpions and vipers; and well he might do so, for Owen drove a hissing serpent out of his room immediately afterwards, killing it in the corridor. And then the question was, could the doorway be barricaded in such a way as to prevent the intrusion of further visitors?

The wind continued to rise, and he lay rolled in his blanket, uncomfortable, frightened, listening to the wind raging among the rocks and palms, and, between his short, starting sleeps, wondering if it would not have been better to lie in the ravine, in some crevice, rather than in this verminous and viperous place.

Next day he had an opportunity of contrasting the discomfort of the caravansary with a bivouac under a rainy sky; for at nightfall, within two days' journey of Laghouat, the caravan halted in a desolate valley, shut in between two lines of reddish hills seemingly as barren as the valley itself. After long searching in the ravines a little brushwood was collected, and an attempt was made to light a fire, which was unsuccessful. The only food they had that night was a few dates and biscuits, and these were eaten under their blankets in the rain, Owen having discovered that it was wetter in his tent than without. This discomfort was the most serious he had experienced, yet he felt it hardly at all, thinking that perhaps it would have been very little use coming to the desert in a railway train or in a mail coach. Only by such adventures is travel made rememberable, and, looking out of his blankets, he was rewarded by a sight which he felt would not be easily forgotten—the camels on their knees about the drivers, who were feeding them from their hands, the poor beasts leaning out their long necks to take what was given to them —a wretched repast, yet their grunts were full of satisfaction.

In the morning, however, they were irritable, and bleated angrily when asked to kneel down so that their packs might be put upon them; but in the end they submitted, and Owen noticed a certain strain of cheerfulness in their demeanour all that day. Perhaps they scented their destination. Owen's horse certainly scented a stable within a day's journey of Laghouat, for he pricked up his ears, and there was nothing else but the instinct of a stable that could have induced him to do so, for on their left was a sinister mountain—sinister always, Owen thought, even in the sunlight, but more sinister

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than ever in the rainy season, wrapped in a cloud, showing here and there a peak when the clouds lifted. And no mountain seemed harder to leave behind than this one. Owen, who knew that Laghouat was not many miles distant, rode on in front, impatient to see the oasis rise out of the desert. The wind still raged, driving the sand; and before him stretched endless hillocks of yellow sand; and he wandered among these, uncertain whither lay the road, until he happened upon a little convoy bringing grain to the town. The convoy turned to the left.... His mistake was that he had been looking to the right.

Laghouat, built among rocks, some of which were white, showed up high above the plain; and, notwithstanding his desire for food and shelter, he sat on his horse at gaze, interested in the ramparts of this black town, defended by towers, outlined upon a grey sky.

VIII

"When a woman has seen the guest she no longer cares for the master." An old hunter had told him this proverb, a lame, one-eyed man, an outcast from his tribe, or very nearly, whose wife was so old that Owen's presence afforded him no cause for jealousy, a friend of the hunter who owned the eagles, so Owen discovered, but not until the end of a week's acquaintance, which was strange, for he had seen a great deal of this man in the last few days. The explanation he gave one night in the cafe where Owen went to talk and drink with the Spahis; coming in suddenly, and taking Owen away into a corner, he explained that he had not told him before that his friend Tahar, he who owned the eagles, had gone away to live in another oasis, because it had not occurred to him that Owen was seeking Tahar, fancying somehow that it was another—as if there were hundreds of people in the Sahara who hunted gazelles with eagles!

"*Grand Dieu*!" and Owen turned to his own dragoman, who happened to be present. "*A-t-on jamais!... Ici depuis trois semaines!*"

The dragoman, who expected an outburst, reminded Owen of the progress he had made in Arabic, and of the storms of the last three weeks, the rain and wind which had made travelling in the desert impossible, and when Owen spoke of starting on the morrow the dragoman shook his head, and the wind in the street convinced Owen that he must remain where he was.

"*Mais si j'avais su—*"

The dragoman pointed out to him the terrible weather they had experienced, and how glad he had been to find shelter in Laghouat.

“*Oui, Sidna, vous etes maintenant au comble de regrets, mats pour rien au monde vous n’auriez fait ces etapes vers le sud*.”

Owen felt that the man was right, though he would not admit it; the camels themselves could hardly have been persuaded to undertake another day’s march; his horse—well, the vultures might have been tearing him if he had persevered, so instead of going off in one of his squibby little rages, which would have made him ridiculous, Owen suddenly grew sad and invited the hunter to drink with him, and it was arranged that as soon as the wind dropped the quest for Tahar should be pursued.

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He would be found in an oasis not more than two days' journey from Laghouat, so the hunter said, but the dragoman's opinion was that the old hunter was not very sure; Tahar would be found there, and if he were not there he was for certain in another oasis three or four days still farther south.

"But I cannot travel all over the Sahara in search of eagles."

"If *Sidna* would like to return to Tunis?"

But to return to Tunis would mean returning to England, and Owen felt that his business in the desert was not yet completed; as well travel from one oasis to another in quest of eagles as anything else, and three days afterwards he rode at the head of his caravan, anxious to reach Ain Mahdy, trying to believe he had grown interested in the Arab, and would like to see him living under the rule of his own chief, even though the chief was, to a certain extent, responsible to the French Government; still, to all intents and purposes he would be a free Arab. Yes, and Owen thought he would like to see a Kaid; and wondering what his reception would be like, he rode through the desert thinking of the Kaid, his eyes fixed on the great horizons which had re-appeared, having been lost for many days in mist and rain.

An exquisite silence vibrated through the great spaces, music for harps rather than for violins, and Owen rode on, reaching the oasis, as he had been told he would, at the end of the second day's journey. When he arrived the Kaid was engaged in administering justice, and Owen was forced *de faire un peu l'anti-chambre*; but this was not disagreeable to him. The Arab court-house seemed to him an excellent place for a lesson in the language; and the case the Kaid was deciding was to his taste. A man was suing for divorce, and for reasons which would have astonished Englishmen, and cause the plaintiff to be hurled out of civilised society; but in the Sahara the case did not strike anybody as unnatural; and Owen listened to the woman telling her misfortunes under a veil. But though deeply interested he was forced to leave the building; the flies plagued him unendurably, and presently he found the flies had odious auxiliaries in the carpet, and after explaining his torture to the dragoman, who was not suffering at all, he left the building and walked in the street.

Half an hour after the Kaid came forward to meet him with a little black sheep in his arms, struggling, frightened at finding itself captured, bleating painfully. The wool was separated, and Owen was invited to feel this living flesh, which in a few hours he would be eating; it would have been impolite to the Kaid to refuse to feel the sheep's ribs, so Owen complied, though he knew that doing so would prevent him from enjoying his dinner, and he was very hungry at the time. The sheep's eyes haunted him all through the meal, and his pleasure was still further discounted by the news that though the eagles were at Ain Mahdy, the owner having left them—

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“Having left them,” Owen repeated. “Good God! I was told he was here.”

“He left here three days ago.”

Owen cursed his friend in Laghouat. If he had only told him in the beginning of the week! The dragoman answered:

“*Sidna, vous vous en souvenez*”

“Speak to me in Arabic, damn you! There is nothing to do here but to learn Arabic.”

“Quite true, *Sidna*, we shall not be able to start to-morrow; the rains are beginning again.”

“Was there ever such luck as mine, to come to the desert, where it never rains, and to find nothing but rain?”—rain which Owen had never seen equalled except once in Connemara, where he had gone to fish, and it annoyed him to hear that these torrential rains only happened once every three or four years in the Sahara. He was too annoyed to answer his dragoman.... *Enfin*, Tahar had left his eagles at Ain Mahdy, and Owen fed them morning and evening, gorging them with food, not knowing that one of the great difficulties is to procure in the trained eagle sufficient hunger to induce him to pursue the quarry. It was an accident that some friend of Tahar’s surprised Owen feeding the eagles and warned him.

“These eagles will not be able to hunt for weeks now.”

Owen cursed himself and the universe, Allah and the God of Israel, Christ and the prophets.

“But, *Sidna*, their hunger can be excited by a drug, and this drug is Tahar’s secret.”

“Then to-morrow we start, though there be sand storms or rain storms, whatever the weather may be.”

The dragoman condoned Owen’s mistake in feeding the eagles.

“The gazelles come down from the mountains after the rains; we shall catch sight of some on our way.”

A few hours after he rode up to Owen and said, “Gazelles!”

When he looked to the right of the sunset Owen could see yellow, spotted with black; something was moving over yonder among the patches of rosemary and lavender.

The gazelles were far away when the caravan reached the rosemary, but their smell remained, overpowering that of the rosemary and lavender; it seemed as if the earth itself breathed nothing but musk, and Owen's surprise increased when he saw the Arabs collecting the droppings, and on asking what use could be made of these he was told that when they were dried they were burnt as pastilles; when the animal had been feeding upon rosemary and lavender they gave out a delicious odour.

Then the dragoman told Owen to prepare for sand grouse; and a short while afterwards one of the Arabs cried, "Grouse! Grouse!" and a pack of thirty or forty flew away, two falling into the sand.

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They came upon a river in flood, and while the Arabs sought a ford Owen went in search of blue pigeons, and succeeded in shooting several; and these were plucked and eaten by the camp fire that night, the coldest he had known in the Sahara. When the fire burnt down a little he awoke shivering. And he awoke shivering again at daybreak; and the cavalcade continued its march across a plain, flat and empty, through which the river's banks wound like a green ribbon.... Some stunted vegetation rose in sight about midday, and Owen thought that they were near the oasis towards which they were journeying; but on approaching he saw that what he had mistaken for an oasis was but the ruins of one that had perished last year owing to a great drought, only a few dying palms remaining. Oases die, but do new ones rise from the desert? he wondered. A ragged chain of mountains, delightfully blue in the new spring weather, entertained him all the way across an immense tract of barren country; and at the end of it his searching eyes were rewarded by a sight of his destination—some palms showing above the horizon on the evening sky.

IX

As the caravan approached the beach he caught sight of an Arab, or one whom he thought was an Arab, and riding straight up to him, Owen asked:

"Do you know Tahar?"

"The hunter?"

"Yes," and breathing a sigh, he said he had travelled hundreds of miles in search of him —"and his eagles."

"He left here two or three days ago for Ain Mahdy."

"Left here! Good God!" and Owen threw up his arms. "Left two days ago, and I have come from Ain Mahdy, nearly from Tunis, in search of him! We have passed each other in the desert," he said, looking round the great plain, made of space, solitude, and sun. It had become odious to him suddenly, and he seemed to forget everything.

As if taking pity on him, Monsieur Beclere asked him to stay with him until Tahar returned.

"We will hunt the gazelles together."

"That is very kind of you."

And Owen looked into the face of the man to whom he had introduced himself so hurriedly. He had been so interested in Tahar, and so overcame by the news of his absence, that he had not had time to give a thought to the fact that the conversation

was being carried on in French. Now the thought suddenly came into his mind that the man he was speaking to was not an Arab but a Frenchman. “He must certainly be a Frenchman, no one but a Frenchman could express himself so well in French.”

“You are very kind,” he said, and they strolled up the oasis together, Owen telling Monsieur Beclere that at first he had mistaken him for an Arab. “Only your shoulders are broader, and you are not so tall; you walk like an Arab, not quite so loosely, not quite the Arab shuffle, but still—”

“A cross between the European spring and the loose Arab stride?”

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“Do you always dress as an Arab?”

“Yes, I have been here for thirty-one years, ever since I was fourteen.” Owen looked at him.

“Here, in an oasis?”

“Yes, in an oasis, a great deal of which I have created for myself. The discovery of a Roman well enabled me to add many hundred *hectares* to my property.

“The rediscovery of a Roman well!”

“Yes. If the Sahara is barren, it is because there is no water.” Owen seemed to be on the verge of hearing the most interesting things about underground lakes only twenty or thirty feet from the surface. “But I will tell you more about them another time.”

Owen looked at Beclere again, thinking that he liked the broad, flat strip of forehead between the dark eyebrows, and the dark hair, streaked with grey, the eyes deep in the head, and of an acrid blackness like an Arab’s; the long, thin nose like an Arab’s—a face which could have had little difficulty in acquiring the Arab cast of feature; and there had been time enough to acquire it, though Beclere was not more than forty-five.

“No doubt you speak Arabic like French.”

“Yes, I speak modern Arabic as easily as French. The language of the Koran is different.” And Beclere explained that there was no writing done in the dialects. When an Arab wrote to another, he wrote in the ancient language, which was understood everywhere.

“You have learned a little Arabic, I see,” Beclere said, and Owen foresaw endless dialogues between himself and Monsieur Beclere, who would instruct him on all the points which he was interested in. The orchards they were passing through (apricot, apple, and pear-trees) were coming into blossom.

“I had expected oranges and lemons.”

“They don’t grow well here, but we have nearly all our own vegetables—haricot-beans, potatoes, artichokes, peas.”

“Of course there are no strawberries?”

“No, we don’t get any strawberries. There is my house.” And within a grove of beautiful trees, under which one could sit, Owen caught sight of a house, half Oriental, half European. He admired the flat roofs and the domes, which he felt sure rose above

darkened rooms, where Beclere and those who lived with him slept in the afternoons. “You must be tired after your long ride, and would like to have a bath.”

Owen followed Beclere through a courtyard, where a fountain sang in dreamy heat and shade, bringing a little sensation of coolness into the closed room, which did not strike him as being particularly Moorish, notwithstanding the engraved brass lamps hanging from the ceiling, and the Oriental carpet on the floor, and the screen inlaid with mother-of-pearl. Owen did not know whether linen sheets were a European convention, and could be admitted into an Eastern dwelling-house, but he was not one of those who thought everything should be in keeping. He liked incongruities, being an inveterate romancist and only a bedouin by

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caprice. One appreciates sheets after months of pilgrimage, and one appreciates a good meal after having eaten nothing for a long while better than sand-goose roasted at the camp fire. More than the pleasure of the table was the pleasure of conversation with one speaking in his native language. Beclere's mind interested him; it was so steady, it looked towards one point always. That was his impression when he left his host after a talk lasting till midnight; and, thinking of Beclere and his long journey to him, he sat by his window watching stars of extraordinary brilliancy, and breathing a fragrance rising from the tropical garden beneath him—a fragrance which he recognised as that of roses; and this set him thinking that it was the East that first cultivated roses; and amid many memories of Persia and her poets, he threw himself into bed, longing for sleep, for a darkness which, in a few hours, would pass into a delicious consciousness of a garden under exquisite skies.

His awakening was even more delightful than he anticipated. The fragrance that filled his room had a magic in it which he had never known before, and there was a murmur of doves in the palms and in the dovecot hanging above the dog-kennel. As he lay between sleeping and waking, a pair of pigeons flew past his window, their shadows falling across his bed. An Arab came to conduct him to his bath; and after bathing he returned to his room, glad to get into its sunlight again, and to loiter in his dressing, standing by the window, admiring the garden below, full of faint perfume. The roses were already in blossom, and through an opening in the ilex-trees he caught sight of a meadow overflowing with shadow, the shadow of trees and clouds, and of goats too, for there was a herd feeding and trying to escape from the shepherd (a young man wearing a white bournous and a red felt cap) towards the garden, where there were bushes. On the left, amid a group of palms, were the stables, and Owen thought of his horse feeding and resting after his long journey. And there were Beclere's horses too. Owen had not seen them yet; nor had he seen the dog, nor the pigeons. This oasis was full of pleasant things to see and investigate, and he hurried through his meal, longing to get into the open air and to gather some roses. All about him sounds were hushing, and lights breaking, and shadows floating, and every breeze was scented. As he followed the finely-sanded walks, he was startled by a new scent, and with dilating nostrils tried to catch it, tried to remember if it were mastick or some resinous fir; and, walking on like one in a trance, he admired Beclere's taste in the planting of this garden.

"A strange man, so refined and intelligent—why does he live here?... Why not?"

Returning suddenly to the ilex-trees, which he liked better than the masticks, or the tamarisks, or any fir, he sat down to watch the meadow, thinking there was nothing in the world more beautiful than the moving of shadows of trees and clouds over young grass, and nothing more beautiful than a young shepherd playing a flute: only one thing more beautiful—a young girl carrying an amphora I She passed out of the shadows, wearing a scarlet haik and on her arms and neck a great deal of rough jewellery.

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“She is going to the well,” he said. The shepherd stopped playing and advanced to meet her. Boy and girl stood talking for a little while. He heard laughter and speech... saw her coming towards him. “She will follow this path to the house, and I shall see her better.” A little in front of the ilex-trees she stopped to look back upon the shepherd, leaning the amphora upon her naked hip. The movement lasted only a moment, but how beautiful it was! On catching sight of Owen, she passed rapidly up the path, meeting Beclere on his way.

“Speaking to him in Arabic,” Owen said, as he continued to admire the beautiful face he had just seen—a pointed oval, dark eyes, a small, fine nose, red lips, and a skin the colour of yellow ivory. “Still a child and already a woman, not more than twelve or thirteen at the very most; the sun ripens them quickly.” This child recalled a dream which he had let drop in Tunis—a dream that he might go into the desert and find an Arab maiden the colour of yellow ivory, and live with her in an oasis, forgetful.... Only by a woman’s help could he ever forget Evelyn. The old bitterness welled up bitter as ever. “And I thought she was beginning to be forgotten.”

In his youth he had wearied of women as a child wearies of toys. Few women had outlasted the pleasure of a night, all becoming equally insipid and tedious; but since he had met Evelyn he had loved no other. Why did he love her? How was it he could not put her out of his mind? Why couldn’t he accept an Arab girl—Beclere’s girl? She was younger and more beautiful. If she did not belong to Beclere— Owen looked up and watched them, and seeing Beclere glance in the direction of the shepherd, he added, “Or to the shepherd.”

The girl went into the house, and Beclere came down to meet his guest, apologising for having left him so long alone.... He talked to him about the beauty of the morning. The rains were over, or nearly, but very often they began again.

“*Cella se pent qu’elle ne soit qu’une courte embellie, mais profitons en*,” and they turned to admire the roses.

“A beautiful girl, the one you were just speaking to.”

“Yes... yes; she is the handsomest in the oasis, and there are many handsome girls here. The Arab race is beautiful, male and female. Her brother, for instance, the shepherd—”

“Her brother,” Owen thought. “Ah!” They stopped to watch the shepherd, a boy of sixteen. “About two years older than his sister,” Owen remarked, and Beclere acquiesced. The boy had begun to play his flute again. He played at first listlessly, then with all his soul, and then with extraordinary passion. Owen watched the balance of his body and arms, and the movement, extraordinarily voluptuous, of his neck and head.

He played on, his breath coming at times so feebly that there was hardly any sound at all, at other times awaking music loud and imperative; and the two men stood listening,

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for how many minutes they did not know, but for what seemed to them a long while. Their reverie stopped when the music ceased. It was then that a dun-coloured dove with a lilac neck flew through the garden and took refuge in a palm, seen for a moment as she alighted on the flexible djerrid on a background of blue air. She disappeared into the heart of the tree; the leaves were again stirred. She cooed once or twice, and then there was a hush and a stillness in every leaf.

“You would like to see my property?”

Owen said he would like to see all the oasis, or as much as they could see of it in one day without fatiguing themselves.

“You can see it all in a day, for it is but a small island, about a thousand Arabs in the villages.”

“So many as that?”

“Well, there has to be, in order to save ourselves from the predatory bands which still exist, for, as I daresay you have already learned, the Arabs are divided into two classes —the agricultural and the nomadic. We have to be in sufficient numbers to save ourselves from the nomads, otherwise we should be pillaged and harried from year’s end to year’s end—all our crops and camels taken.”

“Border warfare—the same as existed in England in the Middle Ages.”

Beclere agreed that the unsettled vagrant civilisation which existed in the North of Africa up to 1830—which in 1860 was beginning to pass away, and the traces of which still survived in the nineties— resembled very much the border forays for which Northumberland is still famous; and, walking through the palm-groves towards the Arab village, they talked of the Arab race, listening all the while to the singing of doves and of streams, Owen listless and happy.

“But I shall remember her again presently, and the stab will be as bitter as ever!”

Beclere did not believe that the Arab race was ever as great a race as we were inclined to give it credit for being.

“All the same, if it hadn’t been for your ancestors, we might have all been Moslems now,” Owen said, stopping to admire what remained of the race which had conquered Spain and nearly conquered France. “Now they are outcasts of our civilisation—but what noble outcasts! That fellow, he is old, and without a corner, perhaps, where to lay his head, but he walks magnificently in his ragged bournous. He is poor, but he isn’t a beggar; his life is sordid, but it isn’t trivial; he retains his grand walk and his solemn

salute; and if he has never created an art, himself is proof that he isn't without the artistic sentiment."

Beclere looked at Owen in surprise, and Owen, thinking to astonish him, added:

"His poverty and his filth are sublime; he is a Jew from Amsterdam painted by Rembrandt, or a Jew from Palestine described by the authors of the Pentateuch."

"The Jew is a tougher fellow to deal with; he cannot be eradicated, but the Arab was very nearly passing away. If he had insisted on remaining the noble outcast which you admire, he would not have survived the Red Indian many hundreds of years. I don't contest whether to lose him would be a profit or a loss, but when civilisation comes the native race must accept it or extinction."

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“I suppose you’re right,” Owen answered, “I suppose you’re right.”

And they stopped to look at an Arab town; some of it was in the plain below, some of it ran up the steep hillside, on the summit of which was a ruined mosque.

“Why did they choose to build up such a steep hillside?”

“The oasis is limited, and the plain is devoted to orchards. Look at the village! If you were to visit their town, you would not find a street in which a camel could turn round, hardly any windows, and the doors always half closed. They are still suspicious of us and anxious to avoid our inquisition. Yes, that is the characteristic of the Arab, to conceal himself; and his wife, and his business from us.”

“One can sympathise with the desire to avoid inquisition, and notwithstanding the genius of your race—no one is more sympathetic to you than I am—yet it is impossible not to see that your fault is red tapeism, and that is what the Arab hates. You see I understand.”

“I don’t think I am unsympathetic, and the Arabs don’t think it. Perhaps there is no man in Africa who can travel as securely as I can—even in the Soudan I should be well received—and what other European could say as much? There must be something of the Arab in me, otherwise I shouldn’t have lived amongst them so long, nor should I speak Arabic as easily as I do, nor should I look—remember, you thought I was an Arab.”

“Yes, at first sight.”

The admission was given somewhat unwillingly, not because Owen saw Beclere differently, he still saw an Arab exterior, but he had begun to recognise him as a Frenchman. Race characteristics are generally imaginary; there are, shall we say, twenty millions of Frenchmen in France, and every one is different; how therefore is it possible to speak of race characteristics? Still, if one may differentiate at all between the French and English races (but is there a French and English race?) we know there is a negro race because it is black— however, if there be any difference between England and France, the difference is that France is more inclined to pedantry than England. If one admits any race difference, one may admit this one; and, with such thoughts in his mind, Owen began to perceive Beclere as the typical French pedagogue, a clever man, one who if he had remained in Paris would have become *un membre de l’Institut*.

Beclere, *un membre de l’Institut*, talking to the beautiful girl whom Owen had seen that morning! Owen smiled a little under his moustache, and, as there was plenty of time for meditation while waiting for Tahar to return from Ain Mahdy, he spent a great deal of time wondering if any sensual relations existed between Beclere and this girl. Beclere

as a lover appeared to him anomalous and disparate—that is how Beclere would word it himself, but these pedants were very often serious sensualists. We easily associate conventional morality with red-tapeism, for it seems impossible to believe that the stodgy girl who spends her morning in the British Museum working at the higher mathematics or Sanscrit is likely to spend her afternoon in bed, yet this is what happens frequently; the real sensualist is the pedant; “and, if one wants love, the real genuine article,” whispered a thought, “one must seek it among clergymen’s daughters.”

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That girl Beclere's mistress! Why not? The thought pleased and amused him, reconciled him to Beclere, whom he never should have thought capable of such fine discrimination. But it did not follow that because Beclere had chosen a beautiful girl to love he was susceptible to artistic influences, sculpture excepted. Of the other arts Owen felt instinctively that Beclere knew nothing; indeed, yester evening, when he, Owen, had spoken of "The Ring," Beclere had answered that his business in life had not allowed him to cultivate musical tastes. He had once liked music, but now it interested him no longer.

"Tastes atrophy."

"Of course they do," Owen had answered, and Beclere's knowledge of himself propitiated Owen, who recognised a clever man in the remark, a man of many sympathies, though the exterior was prosaic. All the same Owen would have wished for some music in the evening, and for some musical assistance, for while waiting for the eagles to arrive he spent his time thinking how he might write the songs he heard every morning among the palm-trees; written down they did not seem nearly as original as they did on the lips, and Owen suspected his notation to be deficient. A more skilful musician would be able to get more of these rhythms on paper than he had been able to do, and he regretted his failures, for it would be interesting to bring home some copies of these songs just to show...

But he would never see her again, so what was the good of writing down these songs? What was the good of anything? A strange thing life is, and he paused to consider how the slightest event, the fact that he was unable to give complete expression on paper to an Arab rhythm, brought the old pain back again, and every pang of it. Even the society of Beclere was answerable for his suffering, and he thought how he must go away and travel again; only open solitude and wandering with rough men could still his pain; primitive Nature was the one balm.... That fellow Tahar—why did he delay? Owen thought of the eagles, the awful bird pursuing the fleeting deer, and himself riding in pursuit. This was the life that would cure him— how soon? In three months? in six? in ten years? It would be strange if he were to become a bedouin for love of her, and he walked on thinking how they had lain together one night listening to the silence, hearing nothing but an acacia moving outside their window. Beclere was coming towards him and the vision vanished.

"No news of Tahar yet?"

"No; you are forgetting that we are living in an oasis, where letters are not delivered, and where we bring news of ourselves, and where no news is understood to mean that the spring we were hastening towards was dry, or that a sand-storm—"

"Sand-storms are rare at this season of the year."

“An old bedouin like Tahar is safe enough. To-morrow or the day after... but I see you are impatient, you are growing tired of my company.”

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Owen assured Beclere he was mistaken, only a sedentary life was impossible to him, and he was anxious to be off again.

“So there is something of the wanderer in you, for no business calls you.”

“No, my agent manages everything for me; it is, I suppose, mere restlessness.” And Owen spoke of going in quest of Tahar.

“To pass him again in the desert,” and they went towards the point where they might watch for Tahar, Beclere knowing by the sun the direction in which to look. There was no route, nothing in the empty space extending from their feet to the horizon—a line inscribed across the empty sky—nothing to be seen although the sun hung in the middle of the sky, the rays falling everywhere; it would have seemed that the smallest object should be visible, but this was not so—there was nothing. Even when he strained his eyes Owen could not distinguish which was sand, which was earth, which was stone, even the colour of the emptiness was undecided. Was it dun? Was it tawny? Striving to express himself, Owen could find nothing more explicit to say than that the colour of the desert was the colour of emptiness, and they sat down trying to talk of falconry. But it was impossible to talk in front of this trackless plain, *cela coupe la parole*, flowing away to the south, to the west, to the east, ending— it was impossible to imagine it ending anywhere, no more than we can imagine the ends of the sky; and the desert conveyed the same impression of loneliness—in a small way, of course—as the great darkness of the sky; “for the sky,” Owen said, half to himself, half to his companion, “is dark and cold the moment one gets beyond the atmosphere of the earth.”

“The desert is, at all events, warm,” Beclere interjected.

Hot, trackless spaces, burning solitudes through which nobody ever went or came. It was the silence that frightened Owen; not even in the forest, in the dark solitudes avoided by the birds, is there silence. There is a wind among the tree-tops, and when the wind is still the branches sway a little; there is nearly always a swaying among the branches, and even when there is none, the falling of some giant too old to subsist longer breaks the silence, frightens the wild beast, who retires growling. The sea conveys the same sense of primal solitude as the forest, but it is less silent; the sea tears among the rocks as if it would destroy the land, but when its rage is over the sea laughs, and leaps, and caresses, and the day after fawns upon the land, drawing itself up like a woman to her lover, as voluptuously. Nowhere on earth only in the desert, is there silence; even in the tomb there are worms, but in some parts of the desert there are not even worms, the body dries into dust without decaying. Owen imagined the resignation of the wanderer who finds no water at the spring, and lies down to die amid the mighty indifference of sterile Nature; and breaking the silence, somewhat

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against his will, he communicated his thoughts to Beclere, that an unhappy man who dare not take his life could not do better than to lose himself in the desert. Death would come easily, for seeing nothing in front of him but an empty horizon, nothing above him but a blank sky, and for a little shelter a sand dune, which the wind created yesterday and will uncreate to-morrow he would come to understand all that he need know regarding his transitory and unimportant life. Does Nature care whether we live or die? We have heard often that she cares not a jot for the individual.... But does she care for the race—for mankind more than for beastkind? His intelligence she smiles at, concerned with the lizard as much as with the author of "The Ring." Does she care for either? After all, what is Nature? We use words, but words mean so little. What do we mean when we speak of Nature? Where does Nature begin? Where does she end? And God? We talk of God, and we do not know whether he sleeps, or drinks, or eats, whether he wears clothes or goes naked; Moses saw his hinder parts, and he used to be jealous and revengeful; but as man grows merciful God grows merciful with him, we make him to our own likeness, and spend a great deal of money on the making.

"Yes, God is a great expense, but government would be impossible without him."

Beclere's answer jarred Owen's mood a little, without breaking it, however, and he continued to talk of how words like "Nature," and "God," and "Liberty" are on every lip, yet none is able to define their meaning. Liberty he instanced as a word around which poems have been written, "yet no poet could tell what he was writing about; at best we can only say of liberty that we must surrender something to gain something; in other words, liberty is a compromise, for no one can be free to obey every impulse the moment one enters into his being.

"Good God, Beclere! it is terrible to think one knows nothing, and life, like the desert, is full of solitude."

Beclere did not answer, and, forgetful that it was impossible to answer a cry of anguish, Owen began to suspect Beclere of thoughts regarding the perfectibility of mankind, of thinking that with patience and more perfect administration, &c. But Beclere was thinking nothing of the kind; he was wondering what sort of reason could have sent Owen out of England. Some desperate love affair perhaps, his wife may have run away from him. But he did not try to draw Owen into confidence, speaking instead of falconry and Tahar's arrival, which could not be much longer delayed.

"After all, if you had not missed him in the desert we never should have known each other."

“So much was gained, and if you ever come to England—” Beclere smiled. “So you think we shall never meet again, and that we are talking out our last talk on the edge of this gulf of sand?”

“We shall meet again if you come to the desert to hunt with eagles.”

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“But you will not come to England?” Beclere did not think it necessary to answer. “But in France? You will return to France some day?”

“Why should I? Whom do I know in France? *Je ne suis plus un des votres. Qu’irais-je y faire?* But we are not talking for the last time, Tahar has yet to arrive, he will be here to-morrow and we’ll go hunting; and after our hunting I hope to induce you to stop some while longer. You see, you haven’t seen the desert; the desert isn’t the desert in spring. To see the desert you will have to stop till July. This sea of sand will then be a ring of fire, and that sky, now so mild, will be dark blue and the sun will hang like a furnace in the midst of it. Stay here even till May and you will see the summer, *chez lui*.”

X

At the beginning of July Owen appeared on the frontiers of Egypt shrieking for a drink of clean water, and saying that the desire to drink clean water out of a glass represented everything he had to say for the moment about the desert; all the same, he continued to tell of fetid, stale, putrid wells, and of the haunting terror with which the Saharian starts in the morning lest he should find no water at the nearest watering-place, only a green scum fouled by the staling of horses and mules I Owen was as plain-spoken as Shakespeare, so Harding said once, defending his friend’s use of the word “sweat” instead of “perspiration.” There was no doubt the language was deteriorating, becoming euphonistic; everybody was a euphonist except Owen, who talked of his belly openly, blurting out that he had vomited when he should have said he had been sick. There were occasions when Harding did not spare Owen and laughed at his peculiarities; but there was always a certain friendliness in his malice, and Owen admired Harding’s intelligence and looked forward to a long evening with him almost as much as he had looked forward to a drink of clean water. “It will be delightful to talk again to somebody who has seen a picture and read a book,” he said, leaning over the taff-rail of the steamer. But this dinner did not happen the day he arrived in London—-Harding was out of town! And Owen cursed his luck as he walked out of the doorway in Victoria Street. “Staying with friends in the country!” he muttered. “Good God! will he never weary of those country houses, tedious beyond measure—with or without adultery,” he chuckled as he walked back to his club thinking out a full-length portrait of his friend—a small man with high shoulders, a large overhanging forehead, walking on thin legs like one on stilts. But Harding’s looks mattered little; what people sought Harding for was not for his personal appearance, nor even for his writings, though they were excellent, but for his culture. A curious, clandestine little man with a warm heart despite the exterior. Owen had seen Harding’s eyes nil with tears and his voice tremble when he recited a beautiful passage

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of English poetry; a passionate nature, too, for Harding would fight fiercely for his ideas, and his life had been lived in accordance with his beliefs. As the years advanced his imaginative writing had become perhaps a little didactic; his culture had become more noticeable—Owen laughed: it pleased him to caricature his friends—and he thought of the stream of culture which every hostess could turn on when Harding was her guest. The phrase pleased him: a stream of culture flowing down the white napery of every country house in England, for Harding travelled from one to another. Owen had seen him laying his plans at Nice, beginning his year as an old woman begins a stocking (setting up the stitches) by writing to Lady So-and-so, saying he was coming back to England at a certain time. Of course Lady So-and-so would ask him to stay with her. Then Harding would write to the nearest neighbour, saying, "I am staying with So-and-so for a week and shall be going on to the north the week after next—now would it be putting you to too much trouble if I were to spend the interval with you?" News of these visits would soon get about, and would suggest to another neighbour that she might ask him for a week. Harding would perhaps answer her that he could not come for a week, but if she would allow him to come for a fortnight he would be very glad because then he would be able to get on to Mrs.——. In a very short time January, February, March, and April would be allotted; and Owen imagined Harding walking under immemorial elms gladdened by great expanses of park and pleased in the contemplation of swards which had been rolled for at least a thousand years. "A castellated wall, a rampart, the remains of a moat, a turreted chamber must stir him as the heart of the war horse is said to be stirred by a trumpet. He demands a spire at least of his hostess; and names with a Saxon ring in them, names recalling deeds of Norman chivalry awaken remote sympathies, inherited perhaps; sonorous titles, though they be new ones, are better than plain Mr. and Mrs.; 'ladyship' and 'lordship' are always pleasing in his ears, and an elaborate escutcheon more beautiful than a rose. After all, why not admire the things of a thousand years ago as well as those of yesterday?" Owen continued to think of Harding's admiration of the past. "It has nothing in common with the vulgar tuft-hunter, deeply interested in the peerage, anxious to get on. Harding's admiration of the aristocracy is part of himself; it proceeds from hierarchical instinct and love of order. He sees life flowing down the ages, each class separate, each class dependent upon the other, a homogeneous whole, beautiful on account of the harmony of the different parts, each melody going different ways but contributing to the general harmony. He sees life as classes; tradition is the breath of his nostrils, symbol the delight of his eyes." Owen's thoughts divagated suddenly, and he thought of the pain Harding would experience were he suddenly flung into Bohemian society. He might find great talents there—but even genius would not compensate him for disorder and licence. The dinner might be excellent, but he would find no pleasure in it if the host wore a painting jacket; a spot of ink on the shirt cuff would extinguish his appetite, and a parlourmaid distress him, three footmen induce pleasant ease of thought.

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“A man born out of his time, in whom the disintegration of custom, the fusing of the classes, produces an inner torment.” And wondering how he bore it, Owen began to think of an end for Harding, deciding that sullen despair would take possession of him if the House of Lords were seriously threatened. He would leave some seat of ancient story, and proceed towards the midlands, seeking some blast furnace wherein to throw himself. “A sort of modern Empedocles.” And Owen laughed aloud, for he was very much amused at his interpretation of his friend’s character. It was one which he did not think even his friend would resent. “On the contrary, it would amuse him.” And he picked up a newspaper from the club table.

The first words he saw were “Evelyn Innes in America.” “So she has gone back to the stage, and without writing to me....” He sank back in his armchair lost in a great bitterness but without resentment. Next day, acting on a sudden resolve, he started for New York. But he did not remain there very long, only a few days, returning to England, exasperated, maddened against himself, unable to explain the cause of his misfortune to Harding.

“I suppose you’ll use it in a novel some day. I don’t care if you do, but you will never be able to explain how it happened.” Harding followed his friend into the study, thinking of the excellent cigar which would be given to him more perhaps than of the story—a man who suddenly finds his will paralysed. “It was just that, paralysis of will, for after dinner when the time came to go to her I sat thinking of her, unable to get out of my chair, saying to myself, ’In five minutes, in five minutes,’ and as the minutes went by I looked at the clock, saying to myself, ‘If I don’t go now I shall be late.’ I can’t explain, but it was almost a relief when I found it was too late.”

“What I don’t understand is why you didn’t go next day?”

“Nor do I; for naturally I wanted to see her, only I couldn’t go, something held me back, and in despair I returned to England, unable to endure the strain. There you have it, Harding; don’t ask me any more for I can’t tell you any more. During the voyage I was near out of my mind, and could have thrown myself overboard, yet I couldn’t go to see her, though she is the only person I really care to see. Of course friends are different,” he added apologetically.

“And you could not forget her in the desert?” “No, it only made me worse. Amid the sands her image would appear more distinct than ever. Now why is it that one loves one woman more than another, and what is there in this woman that enchants me, and from whom I cannot escape in thought?... Yet I didn’t go to see her in New York.”

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“But would you go if she wrote to you?” “Oh, if she wrote—that would be different, but she never will. There is no doubt, Harding, love is a sort of madness, and it takes every man; none can look into his life without finding that at some time or another he was mad; the only thing is that it has taken me rather badly, and cure seems farther off than ever. Why is it, Harding, that a man should love one woman so much more than another? It certainly isn’t because she has got a prettier face, or a more perfect figure, or a more sensual temperament; for there is no end to pretty faces, perfect figures, and sensual temperaments. Evelyn was pretty well furnished with these things. I am prepared to admit that she was, but of course there are more beautiful women and more sensual women, more charming women, cleverer women—I suppose there are—yet no one ever charmed me, enchanted me—that is the word—like this woman, and I can find no reason for the enchantment in her or in myself, only this, that she represents more of the divine essence out of which all things have come than any other woman.”

“The divine essence?”

“Well, one has to use these words in order to be understood; but you know what I mean, Harding, the mystery lying behind all phenomena, the Breath, esoteric philosophers would say, out of which all things came, which drew the stars in the beginning out of chaos, creating myriads of things or the appearance of different things, for there is only one thing. That is how the mystics talk—isn’t it? You know more about them than I do. If to every man some woman represented more of this impulse than any other woman, he would be unable to separate himself from her; she would always be a light in his life which he would follow, a light in the mind—that is what Evelyn is to me; I never understood it before, it is only lately—”

“The desert has turned you into a poet, I see, into a mystic.”

“Hardly that; but in the desert there are long hours and nothing— only thought; one has to think, if one isn’t a bedouin, just to save oneself from going mad: the empty spaces, the solitude, the sun! One of these days when you have finished your books, I should like to write one with you; my impressions of the desert as I rode from oasis to oasis, seeking Tahar—”

“Who was he?”

“He was the man who had the eagles. Haven’t I told you already how—?”

“Yes, yes, Asher, but tell me did you meet Tahar, and did you see gazelles hunted?”

“Yes, and larger deer. My first idea was hawking and we went to a lake. One of these days I must tell you about that lake, about its wild fowl, about the buried city and the heron which was killed. We found it among Roman inscriptions. But to tell of these things—my goodness, Harding, it would take hours!”

“Don’t try, Asher. Tell me about the gazelles.”

“How we went from oasis to oasis in quest of this man who always eluded us, meeting him at last in Beclere’s oasis. But you haven’t heard about Beclere’s, the proprietor, you might say, of one oasis; he discovered a Roman well, and added thousands of acres; but if I began to tell about Beclere’s we should be here till midnight.”

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“I should like to hear about the gazelles first.”

“I never knew you cared so much for sport, Harding; I thought you would be more interested in the desert itself, and in Beclere’s. It spoils a story to cut it down to a mere sporting episode. There doesn’t seem to be anything to tell now except I tell it at length: those great birds, nearly three feet high, with long heads like javelins, and round, clear eyes, and lank bodies, feathered thighs, and talons that find out instinctively the vital parts, the heart and the liver; the bird moves up seeking these. And that is what is so terrible, the cruel instinct which makes every life conditional on another’s death. We live upon dead things, cooked or uncooked.”

“But how are these birds carried?”

“That is what I asked myself all the way across the desert. The hawks are carried on the wrist, but a bird three feet high cannot be carried on the wrist. The eagle is carried on the pummel of the saddle.”

“And how are the gazelles taken and the eagles recaptured?”

“They answer to the lure just like a hawk. The gazelles come down into the desert after the rains to feed among the low bushes, rosemary and lavender. In the plain, of course, they have no chance, the bird overtakes them at once; fleet as they are, wings are fleeter, and they are over-taken with incredible ease, the bird just flutters after them. But the hunt is more interesting when there are large rocks between which the gazelles can take cover; then the bird will alight on the rock and wait for the deer to be driven out, and the deer dreads the eagle so much that sometimes they won’t leave the rocks, and we pick them up in our hands. The instinct of the eagle is extraordinary, as you will see; the first gazelle was a doe, and the eagle swept on in front, and, turning rapidly, flew straight into the hind’s face, the talons gathered up ready to strangle her. But the buck will sometimes show fight, and, not caring to face the horns, the eagle will avoid a frontal attack and sweep round in the rear, attacking the buck in the quarters and riding him to death, just as a goshawk rides a rabbit, seeking out all the while the vital parts.”

“But gazelles are such small deer; now it would be more interesting with larger deer.”

“We killed some larger deer and some sheep, wild sheep I mean, or goats, it is hard to say which they are; the courage of the birds is extraordinary, they will attack almost anything, driving the sheep headlong over the precipices. We caught many a fox. The eagle strikes the fox with one talon, reserving the other to clutch the fox’s throat when he turns round to bite. Eagles will attack wolves; wolves are hunted in Mongolia with eagles, the fight must be extraordinary. One of these days I must go there.”

“If Evelyn Innes doesn’t return to you.”

“One must do something,” Owen answered.

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“Life would be too tedious if one were not doing something. Have another cigarette, Harding.” And he went to the table and took one out of a silver box. “Do have one; it comes out of her box, she gave me this box. You haven’t seen the inscription, have you?” And Harding had to get up and read it; he did this with a lack of enthusiasm and interest which annoyed Owen, but which did not prevent him from going to the escritoire and saying, “And in this pigeon-hole I keep her letters, eight hundred and fifty-three, extending over a period of ten years. How many letters would that be a year, Harding?”

“My dear Asher, I never could calculate anything.” “Well, let us see.” Owen took a pencil and did the sum, irritating Harding, who under his moustache wondered how anybody could be so self-centred, so blind to the picture he presented. “Eighty-five letters a year, Harding, more than one a week; that is a pretty good average, for when I saw her every day I didn’t write to her.”

“I should have thought you would write sometimes.”

“Yes, sometimes we used to send each other notes.”

“Will he never cease talking of her?” Harding said to himself; and, tempted by curiosity, he got up, lighted another cigarette, and sat down, determined to wait and see. Owen continued talking for the next half-hour. “True, he hasn’t had an opportunity of speaking to anybody about her for the last year, and is letting it all off upon me.”

“There is her portrait, Harding; you like it, don’t you?”

Harding breathed again under his moustache. The portrait brought a new interest into the conversation, for it was a beautiful picture. A bright face which seemed to have been breathed into a grey background—a grey so beautiful, Harding had once written, that every ray of sunlight that came into the room awoke a melody and a harmony in it, and held the eye subjugated and enchanted. Out of a grey and a rose tint a permanent music had been made... and, being much less complete than an old master, it never satisfied. In this picture there were not one but a hundred pictures. To hang it in a different place in the room was to recreate it; it never was the same, whereas the complete portraits of the old masters have this fault—that they never rise above themselves. But a ray of light set Evelyn’s portrait singing like a skylark—background, face, hair, dress—cadenza upon cadenza. When the blinds were let down, the music became graver, and the strain almost a religious one. And these changes in the portrait were like Evelyn herself, for she varied a good deal, as Owen had often remarked to Harding; for one reason or for some other—no matter the reason: suffice it to say that the picture would be like her when the gold had faded from her hair and no pair of stays would discover her hips. And now, sitting looking at it, Owen remembered the seeming accident which had inspired him to bring Evelyn to see the great painter whose genius it had been to

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Owen's credit to recognise always. One morning in the studio Evelyn had happened to sit on the edge of a chair; the painter had once seen her in the same attitude by the side of her accompanist, and he had told her not to move, and had gone for her grey shawl and placed it upon her shoulders. A friend of Owen's declared the portrait to be that of a housekeeper on account of the shawl—a strange article of dress, difficult to associate with a romantic singer. All the same, Evelyn was very probable in this picture; her past and her future were in this disconcerting compound of the commonplace and the rare; and the confusion which this picture created in the minds of Owen's friends was aggravated by the strange elliptical execution. Owen admitted the drawing to be not altogether grammatical; one eye was a little lower than the other, but the eyes were beautifully drawn—the right eye, for instance, and without the help of any shadow.

"Look at the face," he said to Harding, "achieved with shadow and light, the light faintly graduated with a delicate shade of rose."

He compared the face to a jewel the most beautiful in the world, and the background to eighteenth-century watered silk.

"The painter conjures," Harding said, "and she rises out of that grey background."

"Quite so, Harding."

Owen sat, his eyes fixed on the picture, his thoughts far away, thinking that it would be better, perhaps, if he never saw her again. Not to see her again! The words sounded very gloomy; for he was thinking of his ancestors at Riversdale, in their tomb, and himself going down to join them.

"I think, Asher, it is getting late; I must go now."

The friends bade each other good-night among the footmen who closed the front door.

In his great, lonely bedroom, full of tall mahogany furniture, Owen lay down; and he asked himself how it was that he had left America without seeing her. His journey to America was one of the uncanniest things that had ever happened in his life. Something seemed to have kept him from her, and it was impossible for him to determine what that thing was, whether some sudden weakening of the will in himself or some spiritual agency. But to believe in the transference of human thought, and that the nuns could influence his action at three thousand miles distance, seemed as if he were dropping into some base superstition. Between sleeping and waking a thought emerged which kept him awake till morning: "Why had Evelyn returned to the stage?" When he saw her last at Thornton Grange her retirement seemed to be definitely fixed. Nothing he could say had been able to move her. She was going to retire from the

stage.... But she had not done so. Now, who had persuaded her? Was it Ulick Dean? Were these two in America together? The thought of Evelyn in New York with Ulick Dean, going to the theatre with her, Ulick sitting in the stalls, listening, just as he, Owen, had listened to her, became unendurable; he must have news of her; only from her father could he get reliable news. So he went to Dulwich, uncertain if he should send in his card begging for an interview, or if he should just push past the servant into the music-room, always supposing Innes were at home.

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“Mr. Innes is at home,” the servant-girl answered.

“Is he in the music-room?”

“Yes, sir. What name?”

“No name is necessary. I will announce myself,” and he pushed past the girl.... “Excuse me, Mr. Innes, for coming into your house so abruptly, but I was afraid you mightn’t see me if I sent in my name, and it would be impossible for me to go back to London without seeing you. You don’t know me.”

“I do. You are Sir Owen Asher.”

“Yes, and have come because I can’t live any longer without having some news of Evelyn. You know my story—how she sent me away. There is nothing to tell you; she has been here, I know, and has told you everything. But perhaps you don’t know I have just come from the desert, having gone there hoping to forget her, and have come out of the desert uncured. You will tell me where she is, won’t you?”

Innes did not answer for some while.

“My daughter went to America.”

“Yes, I know that. I have just come from there, but I could not see her. The last time we met was at Thornton Grange, and she told me she had decided definitely to leave the stage. Now, why should she have gone back to the stage? That is what I have come to ask you.”

This tall, thin, elderly man, impulsive as a child, wearing his heart on his sleeve, crying before him like a little child, moved Innes’s contempt as much as it did his pity. “All the same he is suffering, and it is clear that he loves her very deeply.” So perforce he had to answer that Evelyn had gone to America against the advice of her confessor because the Wimbledon nuns wanted money.

“Gone to sing for those nuns!” Owen shrieked. And for three minutes he blasphemed in the silence of the old music-room, Innes watching him, amazed that any man should so completely forget himself. How could she have loved him?

“She is returning next week; that is all I know of her movements... Sir Owen Asher.”

“Returning next week! But what does it matter to me whether she returns or not? She won’t see me. Do you think she will, Mr. Innes?”

“I cannot discuss these matters with you, Sir Owen,” and Innes took up his pen as if anxious for Sir Owen to leave the room so that he might go on copying. Owen noticed

this, but it was impossible for him to leave the room. For the last twelve years he had been thinking about Innes, and wanted to tell him how Evelyn had been loved, and he wanted to air his hatred of religious orders and religion in general.

“I am afraid I am disturbing you, but I can’t help; it,” and he dropped into a chair. “You have no idea, Mr. Innes, how I loved your daughter.”

“She always speaks of you very well, never laying any blame upon you—I will say that.”

“She is a truthful woman. That is the one thing that can be said.”

Innes nodded a sort of acquiescence to this appreciation of his daughter’s character; and Owen could not resist the temptation to try to take Evelyn’s father into his confidence, he had been so long anxious for this talk.

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“We have all been in love, you see; your love story is a little farther back than mine. We all know the bitterness of it—don’t we?”

Innes admitted that to know the bitterness of love and its sweetness is the common lot of all men. The conversation dropped again, and Owen felt there was to be no unbosoming of himself that afternoon.

“The room has not changed. Twelve years ago I saw those old instruments for the first time. Not one, I think, has disappeared. It was here that I first heard Ferrabosco’s pavane.”

Innes remembered the pavane quite well, but refused to allow the conversation to digress into a description of Evelyn’s playing of the *viola da gamba*. But if they were not to talk about Evelyn there was no use tarrying any longer in Dulwich; he had learned all the old man knew about his daughter. He got up.... At that moment the door opened and the servant announced Mr. Ulick Dean.

“How do you do, Mr. Innes?” Ulick said, glancing at Owen; and a suspicion crossed his mind that the tall man with small, inquisitive eyes who stood watching him must be Owen Asher, hoping that it was not so, and, at the same time, curious to make his predecessor’s acquaintance; he admitted his curiosity as soon as Innes introduced him.

“The moment I saw you, Sir Owen, I guessed that it must be you. I had heard so much about you, you see, and your appearance is so distinctive.”

These last words dissipated the gloom upon Owen’s face—it is always pleasing to think that one is distinctive. And turning from Sir Owen to Innes, Ulick told him how, finding himself in London, he had availed himself of the opportunity to run down to see him. Owen sat criticising, watching him rather cynically, interested in his youth and in his thick, rebellious hair, flowing upwards from a white forehead. The full-fleshed face, lit with nervous, grey eyes, reminded Owen of a Roman bust. “A young Roman emperor,” he said to himself, and he seemed to understand Evelyn’s love of Ulick. Would that she had continued to love this young pagan! Far better than to have been duped by that grey, skinny Christian. And he listened to Ulick, admiring his independent thought, his flashes of wit.

Ulick was telling stories of an opera company to which it was likely he would be appointed secretary. A very unlikely thing indeed to happen, Owen thought, if the company were assembled outside the windows, within hearing of the stories which Ulick was telling about them. Very amusing were the young man’s anecdotes and comments, but it seemed to Owen as if he would never cease talking; and Innes, though seeming to enjoy the young man’s wit, seemed to feel with Owen that something must be done to bring it to an end.

“We shall be here all the afternoon listening to you, Ulick. I don’t know if Sir Owen has anything else to do, but I have some parts to copy; there is a rehearsal to-night.”

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Ulick's manner at once grew so serious and formal that Innes feared he had offended him, and then Owen suddenly realised that they were both being sent away. In the street they must part, that was Owen's intention, but before he could utter it Ulick begged of him to wait a second, for he had forgotten his gloves. Without waiting for an answer he ran back to the house, leaving Uwen standing on the pavement, asking himself if he should wait for this impertinent young man, who took it for granted that he would.

"You have got your gloves," he said, looking disapprovingly at the tight kid gloves which Ulick was forcing over his fingers. "Do you remember the way? As well as I remember, one turns to the right."

"Yes, to the right." And talking of the old music, of harpsichords and viols, they walked on together till they heard the whistle of the train.

"We have just missed our train."

There was no use running, and there was no other train for half an hour.

"The waiting here will be intolerable," Owen said. "If you would care for a walk, we might go as far as Peckham. To walk to London would be too far, though, indeed, it would do both of us good."

"Yes, the evening is fine—why not walk to London? We can inquire out the way as we go."

XI

"A Curious accident our meeting at Innes's."

"A lucky one for me. Far more pleasant living in this house than in that horrible hotel."

Owen was lying back in an armchair, indulging in sentimental and fatalistic dreams, and did not like this materialistic interpretation of his invitation to Ulick to come to stay with him at Berkeley Square. He wished to see the hand of Providence in everything that concerned himself and Evelyn, and the meeting with this young man seemed to point to something more than the young man's comfort.

"Looked at from another side, our meeting was unlucky. If you hadn't come in, Innes would have told me more about Evelyn. She must have an address in London, and he must know it."

"That doesn't seem so sure. She may intend to live in Dulwich when she returns from America."

“I can’t see her living with her father; even the nuns seem more probable. I wonder how it was that all this time you and she never ran across each other. Did you never write to her?”

“No; I was abroad a great deal. And, besides, I knew she didn’t want to see me, so what was the good in forcing myself upon her?”

It was difficult for Owen to reprove Ulick for having left Evelyn to her own devices. Had he not done so himself? Still, he felt that if he had remained in England, he would not have been so indifferent; and he followed his guest across the great tessellated hall towards the dining-room in front of a splendid servitude.

The footmen drew back their chairs so that they might sit down with the least inconvenience possible; and dinner at Berkeley Square reminded Ulick of some mysterious religious ceremony; he ate, overawed by the great butler—there was something colossal, Egyptian, hierarchic about him, and Ulick could not understand how it was that Sir Owen was not more impressed.

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“Habit,” he said to himself.

At one end of the room there was a great gold screen, and “in a dim, religious light” the impression deepened; passing from ancient Thebes to modern France, Ulick thought of a great cathedral. The celebrant, the deacon and the subdeacon were represented by first and second footmen, the third footman, who never left the sideboard, he compared to the acolyte, the voice of the great butler proposing different wines had a ritualistic ring in it; and, amused by his conception of dinner in Berkeley Square, Ulick admired Owen’s dress. He wore a black velvet coat, trousers, and slippers. His white frilled shirt and his pearl studs reminded Ulick of his own plain shirt with only one stud, and he suspected vulgarity in a single stud, for it was convenient, and would therefore appeal to waiters and the middle classes. He must do something on the morrow to redeem his appearance, and he noticed Owen’s cuffs and sleeve-links, which were superior to his own; and Owen’s hands, they, too, were superior—well-shaped, bony hands, with reddish hair growing about the knuckles. Owen’s nails were beautifully trimmed, and Ulick determined to go to a manicurist on the morrow. A delicious perfume emerged when Owen drew his handkerchief from his coat pocket; and all this personal care reminded Ulick of that time long ago when Owen was Evelyn’s lover and travelled with her from capital to capital, hearing her sing everywhere. “Now he will never see her again,” he thought, as he followed Owen back to his study, hoping to persuade him into telling the story of how he had gone down to Dulwich to write a criticism of Innes’s concert, and how he had at once recognised that Evelyn had a beautiful voice, and would certainly win a high position on the lyric stage if she studied for it.

It was a solace to Owen’s burdened heart to find somebody who would listen to him, and he talked on and on, telling of the day he and Evelyn had gone to Madame Savelli, and how he had had to leave Paris soon after, for his presence distracted Evelyn’s attention from her singing-lessons. “In a year,” Madame Savelli had said, “I will make something wonderful of her, Sir Owen, if you will only go away, and not come back for six months.”

“He lives in recollection of that time,” Ulick said to himself, “that is his life; the ten years he spent with her are his life, the rest counts for nothing.” A moment after Owen was comparing himself to a man wandering in the twilight who suddenly finds a lamp: “A lamp that will never burn out,” Ulick said to himself. “He will take that lamp into the tomb with him.”

“But I must read you the notices.” And going to an escritoire covered with ormolu—one of those pieces of French furniture which cost hundreds of pounds—he took out a bundle of Evelyn’s notices. “The most interesting,” he said, “were the first notices—-before the critics had made up their mind about her.”

He stopped in his untying of the parcel to tell Ulick about his journey to Brussels to hear her sing.

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“You see, I had broken my leg out hunting, and there was a question whether I should be able to get there in time. Imagine my annoyance on being told I must not speak to her.”

“Who told you that?”

“Madame Savelli.”

“Oh, I understand I You arrived the very day of her first appearance?”

Owen threw up his head and began reading the notices.

“They are all the same,” he said, after reading half a dozen, and Ulick felt relieved. “But stay, this one is different,” and the long slip dismayed Ulick, who could not feel much interest in the impression that Evelyn had created as Elsa—he did not know how many years ago.

“’Miss Innes is a tall, graceful woman, who crosses the stage with slow, harmonious movements—any slight quickening of her step awakening a sense of foreboding in the spectator. Her eyes, too, are of great avail, and the moment she comes on the stage one is attracted by their strangeness—grave, mysterious, earnest eyes, which smile rarely; but when they do smile happiness seems to mount up from within, illuminating her life from end to end. She will never be unhappy again, one thinks. It is with her smile she recompenses her champion knight when he lays low Telramund, and it is with her smile she wins his love—and ours. We regret, for her sake, there are so few smiles in Wagner: very few indeed—not one in ‘Senta’ nor in ‘Elizabeth.’” The newspaper cutting slipped from Owen’s hand, and he talked for a long time about her walk and her smile, and then about her “Iphigenia,” which he declared to be one of the most beautiful performances ever seen, her personality lending itself to the incarnation of this Greek idea of fate and self-sacrifice. But Gluck’s music was, in Owen’s opinion, old-fashioned even at the time it was written—containing beautiful things, of course, but somewhat stiff in the joints, lacking the clear insight and direct expression of Beethoven’s. “One man used to write about her very well, and seemed to understand her better than any other. And writing about this performance he says—Now, if I could find you his article.” The search proved a long one, but as it was about to be abandoned Owen turned up the cutting he was in search of.

“’Her nature intended her for the representation of ideal heroines whose love is pure, and it does not allow her to depict the violence of physical passion and the delirium of the senses. She is an artist of the peaks, whose feet may not descend into the plain and follow its ignominious route,’ And then here: ’He who has seen her as the spotless spouse of the son of Parsifal, standing by the window, has assisted at the mystery of the chaste soul awaiting the coming of her predestined lover,’ And ’He who has seen her as Elizabeth, ascending the hillside, has felt the nostalgia of the skies awaken in his heart,’

Then he goes on to say that her special genius and her antecedents led her to ‘Fidelio,’ and designed her as the perfect embodiment of Leonore’s soul—that pure, beautiful soul made wholly of sacrifice and love,’ But you never saw her as Leonore so you can form no idea of what she really was,”

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“I will read you what she wrote when she was studying ‘Fidelio’: ’Beethoven’s music has nothing in common with the passion of the flesh; it lives in the realms of noble affections, pity, tenderness, love, spiritual yearnings for the life beyond the world, and its joy in the external world is as innocent as a happy child’s. It is in this sense classical—it lives and loves and breathes in spheres of feeling and thought removed from the ordinary life of men. Wagner’s later work, if we except some scenes from “The Ring”—-notably the scenes between Wotan and Brunnhilde—is nearer to the life of the senses; its humanity is fresh in us, deep as Brunnhilde’s; but essential man lives in the spirit. The desire of the flesh is more necessary to the life of the world than the aspirations of the soul, yet the aspirations of the soul are more human. The root is more necessary to the plant than its flower, but it is by the flower and not by the root that we know it.”

“Is it not amazing that a woman who could think like that should be capable of flinging up her art—the art which I gave her—on account of the preaching of that wooden-headed Mostyn?” Sitting down suddenly he opened a drawer, and, taking out her photograph, he said: “Here she is as Leonore, but you should have seen her in the part. The photograph gives no idea whatever; you haven’t seen her picture. Come, let me show you her picture: one of the most beautiful pictures that —— ever painted; the most beautiful in the room, and there are many beautiful things in this room. Isn’t it extraordinary that a woman so beautiful, so gifted, so enchanting, so intended by life for life should be taken with the religious idea suddenly? She has gone mad without doubt. A woman who could do the things that she could do to pass over to religion, to scapulars, rosaries, indulgencies! My God! my God!” and he fell back in his armchair, and did not speak again for a long time. Getting up suddenly, he said, “If you want to smoke any more there are cigars on the table; I am going to bed.”

“Well, it is hard upon him,” Ulick said as he took a cigar; and lighting his candle, he wandered up the great green staircase by himself, seeking the room he had been given at the end of one of the long corridors.

XII

“Did it ever occur to you,” Owen said one evening, as the men sat smoking after dinner, after the servant had brought in the whisky and seltzer, between eleven and twelve, in that happy hour when the spirit descends and men and women sitting together are taken with a desire to communicate the incommunicable part of themselves—“did it ever occur to you,” Owen said, blowing the smoke and sipping his whisky and seltzer from time to time, “that man is the most ridiculous animal on the face of this earth?”

“You include women?” Ulick asked.

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“No, certainly not; women are not nearly so ridiculous, because they are more instinctive, more like the animals which we call the lower animals in our absurd self-conceit. As I have often said, women have never invented a religion; they are untainted with that madness, and they are not moralists. They accept the religions men invent, and sometimes they become saints, and they accept our moralities—what can they do, poor darlings, but accept? But they are not interested in moralities, or in religions. How can they be? They are the substance out of which life comes, whereas we are but the spirit, the crazy spirit—the lunatic crying for the moon. Spirit and substance being dependent one on the other, concessions have to be made; the substance in want of the spirit acquiesces, says, ’Very well, I will be religious and moral too.’ Then the spirit and the substance are married. The substance has been infected—”

“What makes you say all this, Asher?”

“Well, because I have just been thinking that perhaps my misfortunes can be traced back to myself. Perhaps it was I who infected Evelyn.”

“You?”

“Yes, I may have brought about a natural reaction. For years I was speaking against religion to her, trying to persuade her; whereas if I had let the matter alone it would have died of inanition, for she was not really a religious woman.”

“I see, I see,” Ulick answered thoughtfully.

“Had she met you in the beginning,” Owen continued, “she might have remained herself to the end; for you would have let her alone. Religion provokes me... I blaspheme; but you are indifferent, you are not interested. You are splendid, Ulick.”

A smile crossed Ulick’s lips, and Owen wondered what the cause of the smile might be, and would have asked, only he was too interested in his own thoughts; and the words, “I wonder you trouble about people’s beliefs” turned him back upon himself, and he continued:

“I have often wondered. Perhaps something happens to one early in life, and the mind takes a bias. My animosity to religion may have worn away some edge off her mind, don’t you see? The moral idea that one lover is all right, whereas any transgression means ruin to a woman, was never invented by her. It came from me; it is impossible she could have developed that moral idea from within—she was infected with it.”

“You think so?” Ulick replied thoughtfully, and took another cigar.

“Yes, if she had met you,” Owen continued, returning to his idea.

“But if she had met me in the beginning you wouldn’t have known her; and you wouldn’t consent to that so that she might be saved from Monsignor?”

“I’d make many sacrifices to save her from that nightmare of a man; but the surrender of one’s past is unthinkable. The future? Yes. But there is nothing to be done. We don’t know where she is. Her father said she would be in London at the end of the week; therefore she is in London now.” “If she didn’t change her mind.” “No, she never changes her mind about such things; any change of plans always annoyed her. So she is in London, and we do not know her address. Isn’t it strange? And yet we are more interested in her than in any other human being.”

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“It would be easy to get her address; I suppose Innes would tell us. I shouldn’t mind going down to Dulwich if I were not so busy with this opera company. The number of people I have to see, five-and-twenty, thirty letters every day to be written—really I haven’t a minute. But you, Asher, don’t you think you might run down to Dulwich and interview the old gentleman? After all, you are the proper person. I am nobody in her life, only a friend of a few months, whereas she owes everything to you. It was you who discovered her—you who taught her, you whom she loved.”

“Yes, there is a great deal in what you say, Ulick, a great deal in what you say. I hadn’t thought of it in that light before. I suppose the lot does fall to me by right to go to the old gentleman and ask him. Before you came we were getting on very well, and he quite understood my position.”

Several days passed and no step was taken to find Evelyn’s address in London.

“If I were you, Asher, I would go down to-morrow, for I have been thinking over this matter, and the company of which I am the secretary of course cannot pay her what she used to get ten years ago, but I think my directors would be prepared to make her a very fair offer, and, after all, the great point would be to get her back to the stage.”

“I quite agree, Ulick, I quite agree.” “Very well, if you think so go to Dulwich.” “Yes, yes, I’ll go.” And Owen came back that evening, not with Evelyn’s address, but with the news that she was in London, living in a flat in Bayswater. “Think of that,” Owen said, “a flat in Bayswater after the house I gave her in Park Lane. Think of that! Devoted to poor people, arranging school treats, and making clothes.”

“So he wouldn’t give you her address?”

“When I asked him, he said, and not unreasonably, ’If she wanted to see you she would write.’ What could I answer? And to leave a letter with him for her would serve no purpose; my letter would not interest her; it might remain unanswered. No, no, mine is the past; there is no future for me in her life. If anybody could do anything it is you. She likes you.”

“But, my good friend, I don’t know where she is, and you won’t find out.”

“Haven’t I been to see her father?”

“Oh, her father! A detective agency would give us her address within the next twenty-four hours, and the engagement must be filled up within a few weeks.”

“I can’t go to a detective agency and pay a man to track her out—no, not for anything.”

“Not even to save her from Monsignor?”

“Not even that. There are certain things that cannot be done. Let us say no more.”

A fortnight later Owen was reading in the corner by the window about five o’clock, waiting for Ulick to come home—he generally came in for a cup of tea—and hearing a latchkey in the door, he put down his book.

“Is Sir Owen in?”

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“Sir Owen is in the study, sir.”

And Ulick came in somewhat hurriedly. There was a light in his eyes which told Owen that something had happened, something that would interest him, and nothing could interest him unless news of Evelyn.

“Have you seen her?” and Owen took off his spectacles.

“Yes,” Ulick answered, “I have seen her.”

“You met her?”

“Yes.”

“By accident?”

“Yes.”

“Tell me about it.”

Ulick was too excited to sit down; he walked about the hearthrug in order to give more emphasis to his story.

“My hansom turned suddenly out of a large thoroughfare into some mean streets, and the neighbourhood seemed so sordid that I was just going to tell the driver to avoid such short cuts for the future when I caught sight of a tall figure in brown holland. To meet Evelyn in such a neighbourhood seemed very unlikely, but as the cab drew nearer I could not doubt that it was she. I put up my stick, but at that moment Evelyn turned into a doorway.”

“You knocked?”

Ulick nodded.

“What sort of place was it?”

“All noise and dirt; a lot of boys.”

“A school?”

“It seemed more like a factory. Evelyn came forward and said, ’I will see you in half an hour, if you will wait for me at my flat,’ ’But I don’t know the address,’ I said. She gave me the address, Ayrdale Mansions, and I went away in the cab; and after a good deal of driving we discovered Ayrdale Mansions, a huge block, all red brick and iron, a sort of model dwelling-houses, rather better.”

“Good Lord!”

“I went up a stone staircase.”

“No carpet?”

“No. Merat opened the door to me. I told her I had met Miss Innes in a slum; she followed me into the drawing-room, saying, ’One of these days Mademoiselle will bring back some horrid things with her.’”

“Good Lord! Tell me what her rooms were like?”

“The flat is better than you would expect to find in such a building. It is the staircase that makes the place look like a model dwelling-house. There is a drawing-room and a dining-room.”

“What kind of furniture has she in the drawing-room?”

“An oak settle in the middle of the room and—”

“That doesn’t sound very luxurious.”

“But there are photographs of pictures on the walls, Italian saints, the Renaissance, you know, Botticelli and Luini; her writing-table is near the window, and covered with papers; she evidently writes a great deal. Merat tells me she spends her evenings writing there quite contented.”

“That will do about the room; now tell me about herself.”

“She came in looking very like herself.”

“Glad to see you?”

“I think she was. She didn’t seem to have any scruples about seeing me. Our meeting was pure accident, so she was not responsible.”

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“Tell me, what did she look like?”

“Well, you know her appearance? She hasn’t grown stouter her hair hasn’t turned grey.”

“Yet she has changed?”

“Yes, she has changed; but—I don’t know exactly how to word it—an extraordinary goodness seems to have come into her face. It always seemed to me that a great deal of her charm was in the kindness which seemed to float about her and to look out of her eyes, and that look which you know, or which you don’t know—”

“I know it very well.”

“Well, that look is more apparent than ever. I noticed it especially as she leaned over the table looking at me.”

“I know, those quiet, kindly eyes, steady as marble. A woman’s eyes are more beautiful than a man’s because they are steadier. Yes, it is impossible to look into her eyes and not to love her; her thick hair drawn back loosely over the ears. There never was anybody so winsome as she. You know what I mean?”

“How he loves her!” Ulick said to himself; “how he loves her! All his life is reflected in his love of her.”

“Are you going to see her again?” Owen asked suddenly.

“Well, yes.”

“Did she raise no difficulties?”

“No.”

“You didn’t speak to her about your plans to induce her to accept the engagement?”

“Not yet.”

“Shall you?”

“I suppose so, but I cannot somehow imagine that she will ever go back to the stage. She said, having made money enough for the nuns, she had finished with the stage for ever, and was glad of it.”

“Once an idea gets into our minds we become the slaves of it, and her mind was always more like a man’s than a woman’s mind.”

This point was discussed, Ulick pretending not to understand Owen's meaning in order to draw him into confidences.

"She has asked you to go to see her, so I suppose she likes you. I wish you well. *Anything* rather than Monsignor should get her. You have my best wishes."

"What does he mean by saying I have his best wishes? Does he mean that he would prefer me to be her lover, if that would save her from religion? Would he use me as the cat uses the monkey to pull the chestnuts out of the fire, and then take them from me." But he did not question Owen as to his meaning, and showed no surprise when a few days afterwards Owen came into the drawing-room, interrupting him in his work, saying:

"Have you forgotten?"

"Forgotten what?"

"Why, that you have an appointment with Evelyn."

"So I have, so I have!" he said, laying down his pen. "And if I don't hasten, I shall miss it."

Owen took his hat, saying, "Your hat wants brushing; you mustn't go to her with an unbrushed hat."

Ulick ran away north, casting one glance back. Owen—would he sit in his study thinking of his lost happiness or would he try to forget it in some picture-dealer's shop?

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XIII

“Has Mr. Dean come in?”

“No, Sir Owen.”

“What time is it?”

“Eight o’clock.”

“Dinner is quite ready?”

“Quite ready, Sir Owen.”

“I don’t think there is any good in waiting. Something must have detained Mr. Dean.”

“Very well, Sir Owen.”

The butler left the room surprised, for if there was one thing that Sir Owen hated it was to dine by himself, yet Owen had not screamed out a single blasphemy, or even muttered a curse, and wondering at his master’s strange resignation, the butler crossed the hall, hoping Sir Owen’s health was not run down. He put the evening paper by Sir Owen, for there had been some important racing that day, and sometimes Sir Owen would talk quite affably. There were other times when he would not say a word, and this was one of them. He pushed the paper away, and went on eating, irritated by the sound of his knife and fork on his plate, the only sound in the dining-room, for the footmen went silently over the thick pile carpet, receiving their directions by a gesture from the great butler.

After dinner Owen had recourse to the evening paper, and he read it, and every other paper in his room, advertisements and all, asking himself what the devil had happened to Ulick. Some of his operatic friends must have asked him to dinner. A moment after it seemed to him that Ulick was treating his house like a hotel. “Damn him! he might have easily sent me a telegram.” At half-past ten the footman brought in the whisky, and Owen sat sipping his drink, smoking cigars, and wondering why Ulick had net come home for dinner; and the clock had struck half-past eleven before Ulick’s latchkey was heard in the door.

“I hope you didn’t wait dinner for me?”

“We waited a little while. Where have you been?”

“She asked me to stay to dinner.”

“Oh, she asked you to stay to dinner!” Such a simple explanation of Ulick’s absence Owen hadn’t thought of, and, reading his face, Ulick hastened to tell him that after dinner they had gone to a concert.

“Well, I suppose you were right to go with her; the concert must have been a great break in her life.... Sitting there all the evening, writing letters, trying to get situations for drunken men, girl mothers, philanthropy of every kind. How she must have enjoyed the concert! Tell me about it; and tell me how she was dressed.”

Ulick had not remarked Evelyn’s dress very particularly, and Owen was angry with him for only being able to tell him that she wore a pale silk of a faint greenish colour.

“And her cloak?”

“Oh, her cloak was all right; it seemed warm enough.”

Owen wanted to know what jewellery she wore, and complained that she had sold all the jewellery he had given her for the nuns. Ulick was really sorry for him. Now, what did she think of the singing? To please him Ulick attributed all his criticism of the singers to Evelyn, and Owen said:

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“Extraordinary, isn’t it? Did she say that she regretted leaving the stage? And what did she say about me?”

Ulick had been expecting this question.

“She hoped you were very well, and that you did not speak unkindly of her.”

“Speak unkindly of her!” and Owen’s thoughts seemed to fade away.

Cigar after cigar, drink after drink, until sleep settled in their eyes, and both went to bed too weary to think of her any more.

But next day Owen remembered that Ulick had not told him if he had driven Evelyn home after the concert, and the fact that he had not mentioned how they had parted was in itself suspicious; and he determined to question Ulick. But Ulick was seldom in Berkeley Square; he pleaded as his excuse business appointments; he had business appointments all over London; Owen listened to his explanations, and then they talked of other things. In this way Owen never learnt on what terms Evelyn and Ulick were: whether she wrote to him, whether they saw each other daily or occasionally. It was not natural to think that after a dinner and a concert their intimacy should cease as suddenly as it had begun. No doubt they dined together in restaurants, and they went to concerts. Every hour which he spent away from Berkeley Square he spent with her ... possibly. To find out if this were true he would have to follow Ulick, and that he couldn’t do. He might question him? No, he couldn’t do that. And, sitting alone in his study in the evening, for Ulick had gone out after dinner, he asked himself if he could believe that Ulick was with the directors of the opera company. It was much more likely that he was in the Bayswater flat, trying to persuade Evelyn to return to the stage. So far he was doing good work, but the only means he had of persuading her was through her senses, by making love to her. Her senses had kindled for him once, why shouldn’t they kindle again? It would be a hard struggle between the flesh and the idea, the idea which urged her in one direction, and the flesh which drew her in another. Which would prevail? Ulick was young, and Owen knew how her senses flared up, how certain music set her senses on fire and certain literature. “All alone in that flat,” and the vision becoming suddenly intense he saw Ulick leading her to the piano, and heard the music, and saw her eyes lifted as she had lifted them many times to him—grey marble eyes, which would never soften for him again.

He had known her for so many years, and thought of her so intensely that every feature of her face could be recalled in its minutest line and expression; not only the general colour of her face, but the whiteness of the forehead, and where the white skin freckled. How strange it was that freckles should suit her, though they suited no other woman! And the blue tints under the eyes, he remembered them, and how the blue purpled, the rose red in the cheeks, and the various changes—the greys in the chin, the blue

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veins reticulating in the round white neck, and the pink shapes of the ear showing through the shadow. Her hair was visible to him, its colour in the light and in the shadow; and her long thin hands, the laces she wore at the wrists, her rings, the lines of the shoulders, and of the arms, the breasts—their size, their shape, and their very weight— every attitude that her body fell into naturally. From long knowledge and intense thinking he could see her at will; and there she was at the end of the sofa crossing and uncrossing her lovely legs, so long from the knees, showing through the thin evening gown; he thought of their sweetness and the seduction of the foot advancing, showing an inch or two beyond the skirt of her dress. And then she drew her rings from her fingers, dropping them into her lap, and unconsciously placed them again over the knuckles.

A great deal he would give—everything—for Ulick's youth, so that he might charm her again. But of what avail to begin again? Had he not charmed her before? and had not her love flowed past him like water, leaving nothing but a memory of it; yet it was all he had—all that life had given him. And it was so little, because she had never loved him. Every other quality Nature had bestowed upon her, but not the capacity for loving. For the first time it seemed to him he had begun to understand that she was incapable of love—in other words, of giving herself wholly to anybody. A strange mystery it was that one who could give her body so unreservedly should be so parsimonious about her soul. To give her body and retain herself was her gift, above all other women, thereby remaining always new, always unexpected, and always desirable. In the few visits to Paris which had been allowed to him by her, and by Madame Savelli, she had repaid him for the long abstinences by an extraordinary exaltation and rapture of body and of intellect, but he had always experienced a strange alienation, even when he held her in his arms—perhaps then more than ever did he feel that she never was, and never could be, his. The thought had always been at the back of his mind: "Tomorrow I shall be far from her, and she will be interested in other things. All she can give me is her body—a delicious possession it is—and a sweet friendliness, a kindliness which sometimes seems like love, but which is not." Some men would regard her as a cold sensualist; maybe so, though indeed he did not think that it was so, for her kindliness precluded such a criticism. But even if it were so, such superficial thinking about her mattered little to him who knew her as none other could ever know her, having lived with her since she was two or three and twenty till five and thirty—thinking of her always, noting every faintest shade of difference, comparing one mood with another, learning her as other men learn a difficult text from some ancient parchment, some obscure palimpsest—that is what she was, something written over. There was another text which he had never been able to master; and he sat in his chair conscious of nothing but some vague pain which—becoming more and more definite—awoke him at last. Though he had studied her so closely perhaps he knew as little of her as any one else, as little as she knew of herself. Of only one thing was there any surety, and that was she could only be saved by an appeal to the senses.

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So he had done right in encouraging her friendship with Ulick, sending Ulick to her, putting his natural jealousy aside—preferring to suffer rather than that she should be lost. God only knew how he was suffering day by day, hour by hour; but it were better that he should suffer than that she should be abandoned to the spiritual constriction of the old Roman python. It was horrible to think, but the powerful coils would break and crush to pulp; then the beast would lubricate and swallow. Anything were better than this; Ulick's kisses would never be more to Evelyn than the passing trance of the senses; she never would love him as other women loved, giving their souls: she had never given her soul, why should she give it now? But, good God! if after some new adventure she should return to the python?

His heart failed him; but only for a moment. Ulick might prove to her the futility of her endeavour to lead a chaste life; and once that was established she would become the beautiful, enchanting being that he had known; but she would never return to him. If she only returned to herself! The spirit of sacrifice tempted him, despite the suffering he was enduring—a suffering which he compared to sudden scaldings: he was being scalded to death by degrees, covered from head to foot with blisters. A telegram in the hall for Ulick, a hesitation in Ulick's voice, a sudden shifting of the eyes—anything sufficed—and therewith he was burnt to the bone, far beyond the bone, into the very vitals. Even now in his study, he waited another scalding. At any moment Ulick might come in, and though he never betrayed himself by any word or look, still his presence would suggest that he had just come from Evelyn. Perhaps he had been walking with her in the park? But why wait in Berkeley Square? If a martyrdom of jealousy he must endure, let it be at Riversdale. Out of sight would not mean out of mind; but he would not be constantly reminded of his torment; there would be business to attend to which would distract his mind, and when he returned in a few days to Berkeley Square merciful Fate would have settled everything: she would be gone away with Ulick to be cured, or would remain behind, a living food for the serpent.

The valet was told that he must be ready to catch the half-past four train; and Ulick, when he returned from a long walk with Evelyn at half-past six, learnt that Sir Owen had gone to Riversdale.

"Sir Owen says, sir, he hopes to see you when he returns."

But what business had taken Sir Owen out of London, and so suddenly? The placid domestic could only tell him that Sir Owen often went to Riversdale on business connected with the estate. "Sir Owen often gets a wire from his agent." But this sudden call to see his agent did not strike Ulick as very likely; far more likely that Asher had gone out of town because he suspected—

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“Poor chap! it must be dreadful seeing me come in and out of the house, suspecting every time I am going to or coming from her. But it was his own will that I should try to get her back to the stage and away from Monsignor. All the same, it must have been devilishly unpleasant.” Ulick was very sorry for Owen, and hoped that if he did succeed in tempting Evelyn away from Monsignor Owen would not hate him for having done so. Nothing is more common than to hate one’s collaborator. Ulick laughed and suddenly grew serious. “His years are against him. Old age, always a terror, becomes in an affair of this kind a special terror, for there is no hope; she will never go back to him, so I might as well get her. If I don’t, Monsignor will”; and a smile appeared again on his face, for he had begun to feel that he would succeed in persuading Evelyn to accept the engagement, and to do that would mean taking him on as a lover.

When he lighted a cigar the conviction was borne in upon him, as the phrase goes, that to travel in an opera company without a mistress would be unendurable.... Where could he get one equal to Evelyn? Nowhere. No one in the company was comparable to her; and of course he loved her, and she loved him: differently, in some strange way he feared, but still she loved him, or was attracted to him—it did not matter which so long as he could succeed in persuading her to accept the engagement which his directors were most anxious to conclude. As they walked through Kensington Gardens that afternoon he had noticed how she had begun to talk suddenly on the question whether it would be permissible for a woman in certain circumstances to take a second lover, if her life with her first were entirely broken, and so on. He had answered perfunctorily, and as soon as possible turned the conversation upon other things. But it had come back—led back by her unconsciously to the moral question. So it would seem that she was coming round. But there was something hysterical, something so outside of herself—something so irresponsible in her yielding to him, that he did not altogether like the adventure which he had undertaken, and asked himself if he loved her sufficiently, finding without difficulty many reasons for loving her. Nowhere could he find anybody whom he admired more, or who interested him more. He had loved her, and they had spent a pleasant time together in that cottage on the river. A memory of it lit up his sensual imagination, and he determined to continue the experience just as any other young man would. Evelyn had denied herself to him in Italy for some strange reason; whatever that reason was it had been overcome, and once she yielded herself she was glorious. What happened before would happen again, and if things did not turn out as pleasantly as he hoped they would—that is to say, if she would not remain in the opera company, well, the fault would not be with him. She sang very well, though not as well as Owen thought; and he went upstairs to dress for dinner, thinking how pleasant it was to live in Berkeley Square.

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They were dining together in a restaurant, and as she came forward to meet him he said to himself, “She looks like accepting the engagement.” And when he spoke about it to her he only reminded her that by returning to the stage she would be able to make more money for her poor people, for he felt it were better not to argue. To take her hand and tell her that it was beautiful was much more in his line, to put his arm about her when they drove back together in the hansom, and speak to her of the cottage at Reading—this he could do very well; and he continued to inflame her senses until she withdrew herself from his arm, and he feared that he was compromising his chance of seeing her on the morrow.

“But you will come to the park, won’t you? Remember, it is our last day together.”

“Not the last,” she said, “the last but one. Yes, I will see you to-morrow. Now goodbye.”

“May I not go upstairs with you?”

“No, Ulick, I cannot bring you up to my flat; it is too late.”

“Then walk a little way.”

“But if I were to accept that engagement do you think I could remain a Catholic?”

Ulick could see no difficulty, and begged of her to explain.

His question was not answered until they had passed many lamp-posts, and then as they retraced their steps she said:

“Travelling about with an opera company do you think I could go to Mass, above all to Communion?”

“But you’ll be on tour; nobody will know.”

“What shall I do when I return to London?”

“Why look so far ahead?”

“All my friends know that I go to Mass.”

“But you can go to Mass all the same and communicate.”

“But if you were my lover?”

“Would that make any difference?”

“Of course it would make a difference if I were to continue to go to Mass and communicate; I should be committing a sacrilege. You cannot ask me to do that.”

Ulick did not like the earnestness with which she spoke these words. That she was yielding, however, there could be little doubt, and whatever doubt remained in his mind was removed on the following day in the park under the lime-trees, where they had been sitting for some time, talking indolently—at least, Ulick had been talking indolently of the various singers who had been engaged. He had done most of the talking, watching the trees and the spire showing between them, enjoying the air, and the colour of the day, a little heedless of his companion, until looking up, startled by some break in her voice, he saw that she was crying.

“Evelyn, what is the matter? You are crying. I never saw you cry before.”

She laughed a little, but there was a good deal of grief in her laughter, and confessed herself to be very unhappy. Life was proving too much for her, and when he questioned her as to her meaning, she admitted in broken answers that his departure with the company was more than she could bear.

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“Why, then, not come with us? You’ll sign the agreement?”

And they walked towards Bayswater together, talking from time to time, Ulick trying not to say anything which would disturb her resolution, though he had heard Owen say that once she had made a promise she never went back upon it.

There was all next day to be disposed of, but he would be very busy, and she would be busy too; she would have to make arrangements, so perhaps it would be better they should not meet.

“Then, at the railway station the day after to-morrow,” and he bade her goodbye at her door.

Owen was in his study writing.

“I didn’t know you had returned, Asher.”

“I came back this afternoon,” and he was on the point of adding, “and saw you with Evelyn as I drove through the park.” But the admission was so painful a one to make that it died upon his lips, finding expression only in a look of suffering—a sort of scared look, which told Ulick that something had happened. Could it be that Owen had seen them in the park sitting under the limes? That long letter on the writing-table, which Owen put away so mysteriously—could it be to Evelyn? Ulick had guessed rightly. Owen had seen them in the park, and he was writing to Evelyn telling her that he could bear a great deal, but it was cruel and heartless for her to sit with Ulick under the same trees. He had stopped in the middle of the letter remembering that it might prevent her from going away with Ulick, and so throw her back into the power of Monsignor. Even so, he must write his letter; one has oneself to consider, and he could bear it no longer.

“I see you are writing, and I have many letters to write. You will excuse me?” And Ulick went to his room. After writing his letters, he sent word to Owen that he was dining out. “He will think I am dining with her, but no matter; anything is better than that we two should sit looking at each other all through the evening, thinking of one thing and unable to speak about it.”

Next day he was out all day transacting business, thinking in the intervals, “To-morrow morning she will be in the station,” sometimes asking himself if Owen had written to her.

But the letter he had caught sight of on Owen’s table had not been posted. “After all, what is the good in writing a disagreeable letter to her? If she is going away with Ulick what does it matter under what trees they sat?” Yet everything else seemed to him nothing compared with the fact that she and Ulick had pursued their courtship under the limes facing the Serpentine; and Owen wondered at himself. “We are ruled by trifles,” he said; all the same he did not send the letter.

And that night Owen and Ulick bade each other goodbye for the last time.

“Perhaps I shall see you later on in the year; in about six months’ time we shall be back in London.”

Owen could not bring himself to ask if Evelyn had accepted the engagement—what was the good? To ask would be a humiliation, and he would know to-morrow; the porter at her flat would tell him whether she was in London.

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XIV

“Mr. Dean left this morning, Sir Owen.”

The butler was about to add, “He left about an hour ago, in plenty of time to catch his train,” but guessing Sir Owen’s humour from his silence, he said nothing, and left the footman to attend on him.

“So he has persuaded her to go away with him. ... I wonder—” And Owen began to think if he should go to Ayrdale Mansions himself to find out. But if she had not gone away with Ulick, and if he should meet her in the street, how embarrassing it would be! Of what should he speak to her? Of the intrigue she had been carrying on with Ulick Dean? Should he pretend that he knew nothing of it? She would be ashamed of this renewal of her affection for Ulick, though she had not gone away with him; and if she had not gone, it would be only on account of Monsignor. He sat irresolute, his thoughts dropping away into remembrances of the day before—the two sitting together under the lime-trees. That was the unendurable bitterness; it was easy to forgive her Ulick, he was nothing compared to this deliberate soiling of the past. If she could not have avoided the park, she might have avoided certain corners sacred to the memory of their love-story—the groves of limes facing the Serpentine being especially sacred to his memory.

“But only man remembers; woman is the grosser animal.” And in his armchair Owen meditated on the coarseness of the female mind, always careless of detail, even seeming to take pleasure in overlaying the past with the present. “A mistake,” he thought. “We should look upon every episode as a picture, and each should hang in a place so carefully appointed that none should do injury to another. But few of us pay any regard to the hanging of our lives—women none at all. The canvases are hooked anywhere, any place will suffice, no matter whether they are hung straight or crooked; and a great many are left on the floor, their faces turned to the wall; and some are hidden away in cellars, where no memory ever reaches them. Poor canvases!” And then, his thoughts reverting suddenly to his proposed visit to Ayrdale Mansions, he asked himself what answer he could give if he were asked to explain Ulick’s presence at Berkeley Square—proofs of his approval of Ulick’s courtship; his motives would be misunderstood. Never again would his love of her be believed in.

“I have been a fool—one always is a fool, and acts wrongly, when one acts unselfishly. Self is our one guide—when we abandon self, we abandon the rudder.”

He would have just been content to keep Evelyn as his friend, and she would have been willing to remain friends with him if he did not talk against religion, or annoy her by making love to her. “There is a time for everything,” and he thought of his age. Passionate love should melt into friendship, and her friendship he might have had if he

had thought only of himself; it would have been a worthy crown for the love he had borne for her during so many years. Now there was nothing left for him but a nasty sour rind of life to chew to the end—it was under his teeth, and it was sour enough, and it never would grow less sour. His sadness grew so deep that he forgot himself in it, and was awakened by the sound of wheels.

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“Somebody coming to call. I won’t see anybody,” and he rang the bell. “I am not at home to anybody.”

“But, Sir Owen, Mr. Dean—”

“Mr. Dean!” And Owen stood aghast, wondering what could have brought Ulick back again.

“Are you at home to Mr. Dean, sir?”

“Yes, yes,” and at the same moment he caught sight of Ulick coming across the hall. “What has happened?” he said as soon as the door was closed.

“She tried to poison herself last night.”

“Tried to poison herself! But she is not dead?”

“No, she’s not dead, and will recover.”

“Tried to poison herself!”

“Yes, that is what I came back to tell you. We were to have met at the station, but she didn’t turn up; and, after waiting for a quarter of an hour, I felt something must have happened, and drove to Ayrdale Mansions.”

“Tried to kill herself!”

“I’m afraid I have no time to tell you the story. Merat will be able to tell it to you better than I. I must get away by the next train. There is no danger; she will recover.”

“You say she will recover?” and Owen drew his hands across his eyes. “I’m afraid I can hardly understand.”

“But if you will just take a cab and go up to Ayrdale Mansions, you will find Merat, who will tell you everything.”

“Yes, yes. You are sure she will recover?”

“Quite.”

“But you—you are going away?”

“I have to, unless I give up my appointment. Of course, I should like to stay behind; but there is no danger, absolutely none, only an overdose of chloral.”

“She suffered a great deal from sleeplessness. Perhaps it was an accident.”

Ulick did not answer, and the elder man drove in one direction and the younger in another.

“Merat, this is terrible!”

“Won’t you come into the drawing-room, Sir Owen?”

“She is in no danger?”

“No, Sir Owen.”

“Can I see her?”

“Yes, of course, Sir Owen; but she is still asleep, and the doctor says she will not be able to understand or recognise anybody for some hours. You will see her if you call later.”

“Yes, I’ll call later; but first of all, tell me, Merat, when was the discovery made?”

“She left a letter for me to say she was not to be called, and knowing she had gone out for many hours, and finding her clothes and her boots wet through, I thought it better not to disturb her. Of course, I never suspected anything until Mr. Dean came.”

“Yes, she was to meet him at the station.” And as he said these words he remembered that Merat must know of Evelyn’s intimacy with Ulick. She must have been watching it for the last month, and no doubt already connected Evelyn’s attempted suicide in some way with Mr. Dean, but the fact that they had arranged to meet at the railway station did not point to a betrayal.

“There was no quarrel between them, then, Sir Owen?”

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“None; oh, none, Merat.”

“It is very strange.”

“Yes, it is very strange, Merat; we might talk of it for hours without getting nearer to the truth. So Mr. Dean came here?”

“Yes. When I opened the door he said, ‘Where is mademoiselle?’ and I said, ‘Asleep; she left a note that she was not to be called.’ ’Then, Merat, something must have happened, for she was to meet me at the railway station. We must see to this at once.’ Her door was locked, but Mr. Dean put his shoulder against it. In spite of the noise, she did not awake—a very few more grains would have killed her.”

“Grains of what?”

“Chloral, Sir Owen. We thought she was dead. Mr. Dean went for the doctor. He looked very grave when he saw her; I could see he thought she was dead; but after examining her he said, ’She has a young heart, and will get over it.’”

“So that is your story, Merat?”

“Yes, Sir Owen, that is the story. There is no doubt about it she tried to kill herself, the doctor says.”

“So, Merat, you think it was for Mr. Dean. Don’t you know mademoiselle has taken a religious turn?”

“I know it, Sir Owen.”

And he attributed the present misfortune to Monsignor, who had destroyed Evelyn’s mind with ceremonies and sacraments.

“Good God! these people should be prosecuted.” And he railed against the prelate and against religion, stopping only now and again when Merat went to her mistress’s door, thinking she heard her call. “You say it was between eleven and twelve she came back?”

“It was after twelve, Sir Owen.”

“Now where could she have been all that time, and in the rain, thinking how she might kill herself?”

“It couldn’t have been anything else, Sir Owen. Her boots were soaked through as if she had been in the water, not caring where she went.”

Owen wondered if it were possible she had ventured into the Serpentine.

“The park closes at nine, doesn’t it, Sir Owen?” They talked of the possibility of hiding in the park and the keepers not discovering Evelyn in their rounds; it was quite possible for her to have escaped their notice if she hid in the bushes about the Long Water.

“You think, Sir Owen, that she intended to drown herself?”

“I don’t know. You say her boots were wet through. Perhaps she went out to buy the chloral—perhaps she hadn’t enough.”

“Well, Sir Owen, she must have been doubtful if she had enough chloral to kill herself, for this is what I found.” And the maid took out of her pocket several pairs of garters tied together.

“You think she tied these together so that she might hang herself?”

“There is no place she could hang herself except over the banisters. I thought that perhaps she feared the garters were not strong enough and she might fall and break her legs.”

“Poor woman! Poor woman!” So if the garters had proved stronger, she would have strangled there minute by minute. Nothing but religious mania—that is what drove her to it.”

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“I am inclined to think, Sir Owen, it must have been something of that kind, for of course there were no money difficulties.”

“The agony of mind she must have suffered! The agony of the suicide! And her agony, the worst of all, for she is a religious woman.” Owen talked of how strange and mysterious are the motives which determine the lives of human beings. “You see, all her life was in disorder— leaving the stage and giving me up. Merat, there is no use in disguising it from you. You know all about it. Do you remember when we met for the first time?”

“Yes, Sir Owen; indeed I do.” And the two stood looking at each other, thinking of the changes that time had made in themselves. Sir Owen’s figure was thinner, if anything, than before; his face seemed shrunken, but there were only a few grey hairs, and the maid thought him still a very distinguished-looking man—old, of course; but still, nobody would think of him as an old man. Merat’s shoulders seemed to be higher than they were when he last saw her; she had developed a bust, and her black dress showed off her hips. Her hair seemed a little thinner, so she was still typically French; France looked out of her eyes. “Isn’t it strange? The day we first met we little thought that we would come to know each other so well; and you have known her always, travelled all over Europe with her. How I have loved that woman, Merat! And here you are together, come from Park Lane to this poor little flat in Bayswater. It is wonderful, Merat, after all these years, to be sitting here, talking together about her whom we both love, you have been very good to her, and have looked after her well; I shall never forget it to you.”

“I have done my best, Sir Owen; and you know mademoiselle is one of those whom one cannot help liking.”

“But living in this flat with her, Merat, you must feel lonely. Do you never wish for your own country?”

“But I am with mademoiselle, Sir Owen; and if I were to leave her, no one else could look after her—at least, not as I can. You see, we know each other so well, and everything belonging to her interests me. Perhaps you would like to see her, Sir Owen?”

“I’d like to see her, but what good would it do me or her? I’ll see her in the evening, when I can speak to her. To see her lying there unconscious, Merat—no, it would only put thoughts of death into my mind; and she will have to die, though she didn’t die last night, just as we all shall have to die—you and I, in a few years we shall be dead.”

“Your thoughts are very gloomy, Sir Owen.”

“You don’t expect me to have gay thoughts to-day, do you, Merat? So here is where you live, you and she; and that is her writing-table?”

“Yes; she sits there in the evening, quite contented, writing letters.”

“To whom?” Owen asked. “To no one but priests and nuns?”

“Yes, she is very interested in her poor people, and she has to write a great many letters on their behalf.”

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“I know—to get them work.” And they walked round the room. “Well, Merat, this isn’t what we are accustomed to—this isn’t like Park Lane.”

“Mademoiselle only cares for plain things now; if she had the money she would spend it all upon her poor people. It was a long time before I could persuade her to buy the sofa you have been sitting on just now; she has not had it above two months.”

“And all these clothes, Merat—what are they?”

“Oh, I have forgotten to take them away.” And Merat told him that these were clothes that Evelyn was making for her poor people—for little boys who were going upon a school-treat, mostly poor Irish; and Owen picked up a cap from the floor, and a little crooked smile came into his face when he heard it was intended for Paddy Sullivan.

“All the same, it is better she should think about poor people than about religion.”

“Far better, Sir Owen, far better. Sometimes I’m afraid she will bring back things upon her. She comes back tired and sleeps; but when she spends her time in churches thinking of her sins, or what she imagines to be sins, Sir Owen, I hear her walking about her room at night, and in the morning she tells me she hasn’t slept at all.”

“What you tell me is very serious, Merat. All the same, all the same— jackets and coats for Paddy Sullivan’s children. Well, it is very touching. There never was anybody quite so good, do you think there was, Merat?”

“That is the reason why we all love her; and you do, too, Sir Owen, though you pretend to hate goodness and to despise—”

“No, Merat, no. Tell mademoiselle, if she wakes, that I am coming back to see her this evening late—the later the better, I suppose, for she is not likely to fall asleep again once she awakes.”

Merat mentioned between nine and ten o’clock, and, to distract his thoughts, Owen went to the theatre that evening, and was glad to leave it at ten, before the play was over.

“Is she awake?”

“She has been awake some time. I think you will be able to have a little talk with her.” And Owen stole into the room with so little noise that Evelyn did not hear him, and all the room was seen and understood before she turned: the crucifix above the bedstead, the pious prints, engravings which they had bought in Italy—Botticelli and Filippo Lippi. She lay in a narrow iron bed, and all the form that he knew so well covered in a plain nightgown such as he had never seen before, but in keeping, he thought, with the rest of the room, and in conformity—such was his impression, there was no time for thinking

—with her present opinions. The smallness of the chest of drawers surprised him. Where did she keep her clothes? It might be doubted if she possessed more than two or three gowns. Where were they hanging? The few chairs and the dressing-table, on which he caught sight of some ivory brushes he had given her, seemed the only furniture in the room.

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“Evelyn!”

“Oh, it is you, Owen. So you have come to see me. You are always kind.”

“My dear Evelyn, there never can be any question of kindness between you and me. You will always be Evelyn, and I am only thinking now of how glad I am to have found you again.”

“Found me again!” And her thoughts seemed to float away, her mind not being strong enough yet to think connectedly. “How did you hear about me?” Before he could answer she said, “I suppose Ulick—” And then, with an effort to remember, she added, “Yes, Merat told me he had come here,” and the effort seemed to fatigue her.

“Perhaps it would be better if you didn’t talk.”

“Oh, no,” she said, taking his hand, detaining it for a moment and then losing it; “tell me.”

And he told her, speaking very gently so that his voice might not tire her, that Ulick had called at Berkeley Square.

“He told me you weren’t going away with him.”

A slight shudder passed through Evelyn’s face, and she asked, “Where is Ulick?”

“He has gone away. If he had stayed he would have lost his post as secretary to the opera company.”

Evelyn did not appear to hear the explanation, and it was some time before she said:

“He has gone away. I don’t think we shall see much of him again, either you or I, Owen.”

Owen did not resist asking if she regretted this, and she answered that she did not regret it at all. “And now you understand, Owen, what kind of woman I am; how hopeless everything is.” In spite of herself, a little trace of her old wit returning to her, she added, “You see what an unfortunate man you are in your choice of a mistress.”

Owen could not answer; and a moment after he remembered that it is only those who feel as deeply as Evelyn who can speak as lightly, otherwise they would not be able to resist the strain; and the strain was a very terrible one, he could see that, for she turned over in bed, and a little later he perceived that she had been crying. Turning suddenly, she exclaimed:

“Owen, Owen, I am very frightened!”

“Frightened of what, dear one?”

“I don’t know, Owen, I can’t tell you; but I am very frightened, for he seems not to be very far away and may come again.”

“And who is ’he’?”

“It is impossible to tell you—a darkness, a shadow that seems always by me, and who was very near me last night. A little more chloral and I should not be here talking to you!”

“It is terrible, Evelyn, terrible! And how should I have lived?”

“You lived before me and you will live after me. Suicide is a mortal sin, so Monsignor would tell me. We are forbidden to kill ourselves even to escape sin, and that seems strange; for how shall I ever believe that God would not have forgiven me, that he would not have preferred me to kill myself than to have—?” And her voice died away, Owen wondered whether for lack of strength or unwillingness to express herself in words.

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“My dear Evelyn! my dear Evelyn!”

“You don’t understand, Owen; I am so different from what I was once. I know it, I feel it, the difference, and it can’t be helped.”

“But it can be helped, Evelyn. You’ve been living by yourself, spending whole days and nights alone, and you’ve been suffering from want of sleep—something had to happen; but now that it has happened you will get quite well, and if you had only done what I asked you before—if we had been married—I”

“Don’t let us talk about it, Owen; you don’t understand how different I am, how impossible—I—don’t want to be unkind, you have been very good to me always; and, understanding you as I seem to understand you now, I am sorry you should have made such a bad choice, and that I was not more satisfactory.”

“But you are perfectly satisfactory, Evelyn. If I am satisfied, who should have the right to grumble? The pain of losing you is better than the pleasure of winning anybody else.... So you think, Evelyn, you will never return to the stage?”

She did not answer, and, with dilated eyes, she looked through the room till Owen turned, wondering if he should see anything; and he was about to ask her if she saw the shadow again which she had spoken of a while ago, but refrained from speaking, seeing that the time was not one for questions.

“Evelyn,” he said, “I will come to see you to-morrow. You are tired to-night.”

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“She will fall asleep again, and to-morrow will be quite well. But what a near escape!” And he lingered with Merat, feeling it were better she should know everything, yet loth to tell her that he had known all the while that Ulick was trying to persuade Evelyn to go away with him. But Merat must know that Ulick had been staying at Berkeley Square.

“I suppose Monsignor comes here to see her?”

“He has been here, Sir Owen.”

Owen would have liked to question her, but it did not seem honourable to do so, and after a little talk about the danger of yielding to religious impulses, he noticed that Merat was drifting from him, evidently thinking such discussions useless.

On the landing he told her that Ulick had gone away with the opera company, and that it was not likely that he and mademoiselle would see each other again.

“But when Mr. Dean comes back to London?” Merat answered.

“Well, hardly even then; after a crisis like this she will not be anxious to see him. You know, Merat, he was staying with me at Berkeley Square; and I knew of his visits here, only it seemed to me the only way to save her from religion was by getting her to go back to the stage.”

Owen took breath; he had told his story, or as much as was necessary, omitting the fact that he was an accomplice in the love-making which had led to attempted suicide.

“You don’t think I was right?”

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“Well, Sir Owen, you see, I don’t think mademoiselle will ever go back to the stage.”

“You think that, Merat? Well, then, the only thing to save her from religion is marriage. I don’t mind telling you, nor is there any need to tell you—you must know—that I have always wanted her to be my wife, only she would not marry me, and for some reason impossible to get at.”

“Mademoiselle is like nobody else; *elle avait toujours son idee*.”

“*Parfaitement, comme disent les paysannes de chez vous, d’une bete qui ne ressemble pas au troupeau et qui allait toujours.*”

“*Oui, mademoiselle a eu toujours son idee*. So Sir Owen thinks it was fear of going back to the stage that persuaded mademoiselle to—”

“Something like that, Merat. She liked Mr. Dean.”

“But you are first in her thoughts, Sir Owen.”

“That isn’t astonishing. We have known each other so long. Now, after what has happened, perhaps she will think differently about marriage, do you understand, Merat. She may think differently to-morrow, for instance, and it would be better for all of us—for you, for myself, for her. Don’t you agree?”

“Well, Sir Owen, there is nothing I should like more than to see mademoiselle married, only—”

“Only you don’t think she’ll marry me?”

“*Comme monsieur a dit, elle a eu toujours son idee.*”

“But after the great shock surely she will see that marriage is the only way.” Owen continued to talk of marriage a little while longer, and all the way home his thoughts ran on his chance of persuading Evelyn to marry him. It did not seem possible that she could refuse after the shock. The chances were all with him: he would catch her in a moment when her faith in religion would be weakened, for she must see that it had not saved her from attempted suicide; all the chances were in his favour, and he hardly doubted at all he would be able to persuade her to marry him. Once she agreed she would carry it out; nothing she hated as much as any alteration of plan.

His mind wandered back into the past years, and he recalled little facts significant of her character. However loud the storm she would cross the Channel, though there was no reason for it—merely, as she said, because it had been arranged to cross that day. He could remember the dress she wore on that occasion, and the expression of her face. Other instances equally trivial floated into his mind, every one strangely vivid, delighting

him because they were characteristic of her. If he could only get her to say she would marry him. It would be unnecessary to explain why he had sent Ulick to her. Or he might explain. It didn't matter. Ulick would pass out of their lives, and all this miserable business would be forgotten.

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The quickest way of being married was in a registry office, but would Evelyn look upon a civil marriage as sufficient? Once the civil marriage was an accomplished fact, she could be married afterwards in Church, even in a Catholic church; he would go there if it pleased her to go. Besides, Evelyn really looked upon marriage more as a civil than as a religious obligation. His thoughts continued to chatter, keeping him up late, till long after midnight, and awaking him early. And the sun seemed to him to have dawned on his wedding day. But even if they were to be married in a registry office a best man would be required. So his thoughts went to Harding, whom he knew to be in London. But Harding would be busy with his writing until the afternoon, and Owen strode about Bond Street, visiting the shops of various picture dealers, welcoming any acquaintance whom he happened to meet, walking to the end of the street with him, and spending the last hour—from three to four—in the National Gallery, whither he had gone to see some new acquisitions. But the new pictures did not interest him. "My thoughts are elsewhere."

And turning from the new Titian, it seemed to him that he might drive to Victoria Street; Harding's work must be over for the day.

"My dear Harding, you don't mind my interrupting you?" And he envied his friend's interest in his manuscripts when the writer put them away.

"You are not disturbing me; my secretary didn't come to-day, and everything is habit. I can no longer write except by dictation."

"If I had known that I would have called in the morning."

"Again some drama in which Evelyn Innes is concerned," Harding said to himself.

"Harding, I have come to ask your advice; you'll give me the very best. But you will have to hear the whole story."

"Well, I am a story-teller, and like to hear stories."

Owen told him how he had met Ulick Dean at Innes', and had invited him to stop at Berkeley Square, and how gradually the idea that he could make use of Ulick in order to tempt Evelyn back to the stage had come into his mind. Anything to save her from religion, from Monsignor.

Owen caught Harding looking at him from under his shaggy eyebrows, and anger had begun to colour his cheeks when Harding said:

"Don't you remember, Asher, coming here a couple of years ago, and—"

"Yes, I know. You predicted that Ulick Dean and I would become friends, and you are right; we did."

“And you preferred that Evelyn should be his mistress rather than that she shall go over to Monsignor?”

“I am not ashamed to confess I did; anything seemed better—but there is no use arguing the point. What I have come to tell you is that rather than go away with him she tried to kill herself.” And he told Harding the story.

“What an extraordinary story! But nothing is extraordinary in human nature. What we consider the normal never happens. Nature’s course is always zigzag, and no one can predict a human action.”

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“Well, then, my good friend, when you have done philosophising—I don’t mean to be rude, but you see my nerves have been at strain for the last four-and-twenty hours; you will excuse me. My notion now is that everything has happened for the best.” And he confided to Harding his hopes of being able to persuade Evelyn to marry him. “Only by marriage can she be saved, and I think I can persuade her.” And he babbled about her appearance last night after her long sleep, comparing her with the portrait in his room. The painter had omitted nothing of her character; all that had happened he read into the picture—the restless spiritual eyes, and the large voluptuous mouth, and the small high temples which Leonardo would like to draw. The painting of this picture was as illusive as Evelyn herself, the treatment of the reddish hair and the grey background.

And Harding listened, saying, “So this is the end.”

“You think she will marry me?”

“Everything in nature is unexpected, that is all I can tell you. Art is logic, Nature incoherency.”

“Well, let us hope that Nature will be a little more coherent to-morrow than she was last night, and that Evelyn will do the right thing. Women generally marry when it is pressed upon them sufficiently, don’t you think so, Harding?”

“I hope it will be so, since you desire it.”

“And you will be my best man, won’t you?”

“I shall be only too pleased. Now, if you wait for me while I change my boots we’ll go out together.” And the two men crossed the Green Park talking of the great moral laxity of the time they lived in; whereas in the eighteenth century men were even accused of boasting of their successes, now the conditions were reversed, men never admitting themselves to be anything else but virtuous; women, on the contrary, publishing their *liaisons*, and taking little pleasure in them until they were known to everybody.

“*Liaisons* have become as official as marriages. Who doesn’t know—” And Harding mentioned a number of celebrated ‘affairs’ which had been going on for ten, some twenty years. “The real love affair of her ladyship now is probably some little tenor or drawing-master, and Cecil’s a little milliner; but her ladyship and Cecil are forced to keep up appearances, for if they didn’t who would talk about them any more?”

“You should write that as a short story,” Owen suggested. And the two friends began to argue as to the number of lovers which fell to the lot of fashionable women, from the age of twenty-three to fifty. Two or three ladies were mentioned whose *liaisons* reached a couple of hundred, and there was another about whom they were not agreed, for

some of her *liaisons* had lasted so long that Owen did not believe she had had more than fifty lovers.

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“It is impossible to imagine any time for a young man more propitious than the present, or any society more agreeable than London. Morals, as the newspapers would say, are in abeyance, conscience is looked upon as pedantic, especially in women, and unbecoming.” As the two walked up St. James’ Street together, Harding noticed that Owen, notwithstanding his chatter about morals, was thinking of Evelyn, and took very little interest in the display of the season—in the slim nobility of England, fresh from Oxford, all in frock coats for the first time, delighting in canes, and deerskin gloves, in collars and ties, the newest fashion, going down the street in pairs, turning into their clubs, lifting their hats to the women who drove past in victorias and electric broughams.

“Never were women more charming than they are now,” Owen said, in order not to appear too much immersed in his own thoughts, and he picked a woman out, pretending to be interested in her. “That one leaning a little to the left, her white dog sitting beside her.”

“Like a rose in Maytime.”

“Rather an orchid in a crystal glass.”

Harding accepted the correction.

“Do you know who she is, Harding?”

The question was a thoughtless one, for no one knows the whole of the peerage, not even Harding, and it was painful for him to admit that he did not know the lady, who happened to be an earl’s daughter— somebody he really should have known. Not having been born a peer himself, he had, as a friend once said, resolved to make amends for the mistake in his birth by never knowing anybody who hadn’t a title. But this criticism was not a just one; Harding was not a snob. It has already been explained that love of order and tradition were part of his nature; the reader remembers, no doubt, Harding’s idiosyncrasies, and how little interested he was in writers, and painters, avoiding always the society of such people. But his face brightened presently, for a very distinguished woman bowed to him, and he was glad to tell Owen he was going to stay with her in the autumn. The Duchess had just returned from Palestine, and it was beginning to be whispered she had gone there with a young man. The talk turned again on the morality of London, and exciting stories were told of a fracas which had occurred between two well-known men. So their desks had been broken open, and packets of love letters abstracted. New scandals were about to break to blossom, other scandals had been nipped in the bud.

Harding said nothing wittier had been said for many generations than the *mot* credited to a young girl, who had described a ball given that season by the women of forty as “The Hags’ Hop.” Somebody else had called it “The Roaring Forties.” Which was the

better description of the two? “The Roaring Forties” seemed a little pretentious, and preference was given to the more natural epigram, “The Hags’ Hop.”

“We were all virtuous in the fifties, now licence has reached its prime, and we shall fall back soon into decadence.”

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Harding, who was something of an historian, was able to illustrate this prophecy by reference to antiquity. When the life of the senses and understanding reached its height, as it did in the last stages of the Roman Empire, a reaction came. St. Francis of Assisi was succeeded by Alexander VI.; Luther soon followed after. "And in twenty years hence we shall all become moral again. Good heavens! the first sign of it has appeared—Evelyn."

Piccadilly flowed past, the stream of the season, men typical of England in their age as in their youth, typical of their castles, their swards, and lofty woods, of their sports and traditions, hunting, shooting, racing, polo playing; the women, too, typical of English houses and English parks, but not so typical; only recognisable by a certain reflected light; an Englishman makes woman according to his own image and likeness, taking clay often from America. The narrow pavements of Bond Street were thronged, women getting out of their carriages, intent on their shopping, bowing to the men as they ran into the shops, making amends for the sombre black of the men's coats by a delirium of feathers, skirts, and pink ankles. And nodding to their friends, bowing to the ladies in the carriages, Harding and Owen edged their way through the crowd.

"The street at this hour is like a ballroom, isn't it?" Owen said. "I want to get some cigars." And they turned into a celebrated store, where half a dozen assistants were busily engaged in tying up parcels of five hundred or a thousand cigars, or displaying neatly-made paper boxes containing a hundred cigarettes.

"When will men give up smoking pipes, I should like to know?"

"I thought you were a pipe smoker?"

"So I was, but I can t bear the smell any longer."

"Yet you smoke cigars?"

"Cigars are different."

"How was it the change came?"

"I don't know." Owen ordered a thousand cigars to be sent to Berkeley Square.

It was late for tea, and still too early for dinner.

"I am sorry to ask you to dine at such an early hour, but I daresay we shan't have dinner till half-past seven."

But Harding remembered his tailor: some trousers. And he led Owen towards Hanover Square, wondering if Owen would approve of his choice?

“It was like you to choose that grey.”

Now what was there to find fault with in the grey he had chosen? They turned over the tailor’s pattern sheet. Daring, in the art of dressing, is the prescriptive right of the professional just as it is in writing. Owen was a professional dresser, whereas he, Harding, was but an amateur; and that was why he had chosen a timid, insignificant grey. At once Owen discovered a much more effective cloth; and he chose a coat for Harding, who wanted one—the same rough material which Harding had often admired on Owen’s shoulders. But would such a dashing coat suit him as well as it did its originator, and dare he wear the fancy waistcoats Owen was pressing upon him?

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“They suit you, Asher, but you still go in at the waist, and brown trousers look well on legs as straight as billiard cues.”

“Is there nothing we can do for you, Sir Owen?”

Owen spoke about sending back a coat which he was not altogether satisfied with.

“Every suit of clothes I have, Harding, costs me fifty pounds.”

Harding raised his thick eyebrows, and Owen explained that only one suit in six was worth wearing.

“There is more truth in what you say than appears. I once wore a suit of clothes for six years! And they were as good as new when—”

But Owen refused to be interested in Harding’s old clothes. “If I’m not married to-morrow I shall never marry. You don’t believe me, Harding? Now, of what are you thinking? Of that suit of clothes which you have had for six years or of my marriage—-which?”

At the moment that Owen interrupted him Harding was thinking that perhaps a woman who had attempted suicide to escape from another man would not drift as easily into marriage as Owen thought; but, of course, he did not dare to confess such an opinion.

“You don’t mind dining at half-past seven?”

“Not in the least, my good friend, not in the least.” Going towards Berkeley Square they continued to speak about Evelyn.... She would have to refuse Owen to-night or accept him: so he would know his fate to-night.

“Just fancy,” he said, “to-morrow I am either going to be married or—” And he stared into the depths of a picture about which he thought he would like to have Harding’s opinion, but it did not matter what anybody thought of pictures until he knew what Evelyn was going to do. None had any interest for him; but they could not talk of Evelyn during dinner, the room being full of servants, and he was forced to listen to Harding, who was rather tiresome on the subject of how a collection of pictures had better be formed, and the proposal to go to France to seek for an Ingres did not appeal to him.

“I hope you don’t mind my smoking a pipe,” Harding said as they rose from table.

“No,” he said, “smoke what you like, I don’t care; smoke in my study, only raise the window. But you’ll excuse me, Harding. My appointment is for eight.”

As he was about to leave the room a footman came in, saying that Miss Innes’ maid would like to see him, and, guessing that something had happened, Owen said:

“It is to tell me I’m not to go to see her; something disagreeable always—” And he left the room abruptly.

“I have shown the maid into the morning-room, Sir Owen.”

“Now, what is the matter, Merat?”

“Perhaps you had better read the letter first, Sir Owen, and then we can talk.”

“I can’t read without my glasses; do you read it, Merat.” Without waiting for her to answer he returned to the dining-room. “I have forgotten my glasses, Harding, that is all; you will wait for me.” His hand trembled as he tried to fix the glasses on his nose.

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“MY DEAR OWEN,—I am afraid you will be disappointed, and I am disappointed too, for I should like to see you; but I think it would be better, and Monsignor, who was here to-day, thinks it would be better, that we should not see each other... for the present. I have recovered a good deal, but am still far from well; my nerves are shattered. You know I have been through a great deal; and though I am sure you would have refrained from all allusions to unpleasant topics, still your presence would remind me too much of what I don’t want to think about. It is impossible for me to explain better. This letter will seem unkind to you, who do not like unkind letters; but you will try to understand, and to see things from my point of view, and not to rave when I tell you that I am going to a convent—not to be a nun; that, of course, is out of the question; but for rest, and only among those good women can I find the necessary rest.

“My first thought was to go to Dulwich to my father, but—well, here is a piece of news that will interest you—he has been appointed *capelmeister* to the Papal choir, the ambition of his life is fulfilled, and he started at once for Rome. It is possible that three or four months hence, when he is settled, he will write to ask me to go out to join him there, and Monsignor would like me to do this, for, of course, my duty is by my father, who is no longer as young as he used to be. I don’t like to leave him, but the matter has been carefully considered; he has been here with Monsignor, and the conclusion arrived at is, that it is better for me to go to the convent for a long rest. Afterwards ... one never knows; there is no use making plans. “EVELYN.”

“No use making plans; I should think not, indeed,” Owen cried. “Never will she come out of that convent, Merat, never! They have got her, they have got her! You remember the first day we met, you and I, in the Rue Balzac, and you have been with her ever since; you were with us in Brussels when she sang ‘Elizabeth,’ and in Germany—do you remember the night she sang ‘Isolde’? So it has come to this, so it has come to this; and in spite of all we could do. Do you remember Italy, Merat? Good God! Good God!” And he fell into a chair and did not speak again for some time. “It would have been better if Ulick Dean had persuaded her to go away with him. It was I who told him to go to see her and kept him in my house because I knew that this damned priest would get her in the end.”

“But, Sir Owen, for mademoiselle to be a nun is out of the question... if you knew what convents were.”

“Oh, Merat, don’t talk to me, don’t talk to me; they have got her!”

Then a sudden idea seized him.

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“Come into the dining-room,” he said. “You know Mr. Harding? He is there.” He passed out of the room, leaving the door open for Merat to follow through. “Harding, read this letter.” He stood watching Harding while he read; but before Harding was half-way down the page he said: “You see, she is going into a convent. They have got her, they have got her! But they shan’t get her as long as I have a shoulder with which to force in a door. The doors of those mansions where she has gone to live are not very strong, are they, Merat? She shall see me; she shall not go to that convent. That blasted priest shall not get her. Those ghouls of nuns!” And he was about to break from the room when Merat threw herself in front of him.

“Remember, Sir Owen, she has been very ill; remember what has happened, and if you prevent her from going to the convent—”

“So, Merat, you’re against me too? You want to drive her into a convent, do you?”

“Sir Owen, you hardly know what you are saying. I am thinking of what might happen if you went to Ayrdale Mansions and forced in the door. Sir Owen, I beg of you.”

“Then if you oppose me you are responsible. They will get her, I tell you; those blasted ghouls, haunters of graveyards, diggers of graves, faint creatures who steal out of the light, mumblers of prayers! You know, Harding, what I say is true. God!” He raised his fist in the air and fell back into an armchair, screaming oaths and blasphemies without sense. It was on Harding’s lips to say, “Asher, you are making a show of yourself.” “*Vous vous donnez en spectacle*” were the words that crossed Merat’s mind. But there was something noble in this crisis, and Harding admired Owen—here was one who was not afraid to shriek out and to rage. And what nobler cause for a man’s rage?

“The woman he loves is about to be taken out of the sunlight into the grey shadow of the cloister. Why shouldn’t he rage?”

“To sing of death, not of life, and where the intelligence wilts and bleaches!” he shrieked. “What an awful end! don’t you understand? Devils! devils!” and he slipped from his chair suddenly on to the hearthrug, and lay there tearing at it with his fingers. The elegant fribble of St. James’ Street had passed back to the primeval savage robbed of his mate.

“You give way to your feelings, Asher.”

At these words Asher sprang to his feet, yelling:

“Why shouldn’t I give way to my feelings? You haven’t lost the most precious thing on God’s earth. You never cared for a woman as I do; perhaps you never cared for one at all. You don’t look as if you did.” Owen’s face wrinkled; he jibbered at one moment like

a demented baboon, at the next he was transfigured, and looked like some Titan as he strode about the room, swearing that they should not get her.

“But it all depends upon herself, Owen; you can do nothing,” Harding said, fearing a tragedy. But Owen did not seem to hear him, he could only hear his own anger thundering in his heart. At last the storm seemed to abate a little, and he said that he knew Harding would forgive him for having spoken discourteously; he was afraid he had done so just now.

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“But, you know, Harding, I have suspected this abomination; the taint was in her blood. You know those Papists, Harding, how they cringe, how shamefaced they are, how low in intelligence. I have heard you say yourself they have not written a book for the last four hundred years. Now, why do you defend them?”

“Defend them, Asher? I am not defending them.”

“Paralysed brains, arrested intelligences.” He stopped, choked, unable to articulate for his haste. “That brute, Monsignor Mostyn— at all events I can see him, and kick the vile brute.” And taken in another gust of passion, Owen went towards the door. “Yes, I can have it out with him.”

“But, Asher, he is an old man; to lay hands upon him would be ruin.”

“What do I care about ruin? I am ruined. They have got her, and her mind will be poisoned. She will get the abominable ascetic mind. The pleasure of the flesh transferred! What is legitimate and beautiful in the body put into the mind, the mind sullied by passions that do not belong to the mind. That is what papistry is! They will poison that pure, beautiful woman’s mind. That priest has put them up to it, and he shall pay for it if I can get at him to-night!” Owen broke away suddenly, leaving Harding and Merat in the dining-room, Harding regretting that he had accepted Owen’s invitation to dinner... If Asher and Monsignor were to meet that night? Good Lord! ... Owen would strike him for sure, and a blow would kill the old man.

“Merat, this is very unfortunate.... Not to be able to control one’s temper. You have known him a long time.... I hope nothing will happen. Perhaps you had better wait.”

“No, Mr. Harding, I can’t wait; I must go back to mademoiselle.” And the two went out together, Harding turning to the right, jumping into a cab as soon as he could hail one, and Merat getting into another in order to be in time to save her mistress from her madman lover.

XVI

Three hours after Harding and Merat had left Berkeley Square, Owen let himself in with his latch-key. He was very pale and very weary, and his boots and trousers were covered with mud, for he had been splashing through wet streets, caring very little where he went. At first he had gone in the direction of the river, thinking to rouse up Monsignor, and to tell him what he thought of him, perhaps to give him a good thrashing; but the madness of his anger began to die long before reaching the river. In the middle of St. James’s Park the hopelessness of any effort on his part to restrain Evelyn became clear to him suddenly, and he uttered a cry, walking on again, and on

again, not caring whither he walked, splashing on through the wet, knowing well that nothing could be done, that the inevitable had happened.

“It would have been better if she had died,” he often said; “it would have been much better if she had died, for then I should be free, and she would be free. Now neither is free.”

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There were times when he did not think at all, when his mind was away; and, after a long absence of thought, the memory of how he had lost her for ever would strike him, and then it seemed as if he could walk no longer, but would like to lie down and die. All the same, he had to get home, and the sooner he got home the better, for there was whisky on the table, and that would dull his memory; and, tottering along the area railings, he thought of the whisky, understanding the drunkard for the first time and his temptations. "Anything to forget the agony of living!"

Three or four days afterwards he wrote to her from Riversdale. Something had to be written, though it was not very clear that anything could be gained by writing, only he felt he must write just to wish her goodbye, to show that he was not angry, for he would like her to know that he loved her always; so he wrote:

"For the last four days I have been hoping to get a letter from you saying you had changed your mind, and that what was required to restore you to health was not a long residence in a convent, but the marriage ceremony. This morning, when my valet told me there were no letters, I turned aside in bed to weep, and I think I must have lain crying for hours, thinking how I had lost my friend, the girl whom I met in Dulwich, whom I took to Paris, the singer whose art I had watched over. It was a long time before I could get out of bed and dress myself, and during breakfast tears came into my eyes; it was provoking, for my servant was looking at me. You know how long he has been with me, so, yielding to the temptation to tell somebody, I told him; I had to speak to somebody, and I think he was sorry for me, and for you. But he is a well-bred servant, and said very little, thinking it better to leave the room on the first opportunity.

"Merat, who brought your letter, told me you said I would understand why it was necessary for you to go to a convent for rest. Well, in a way, I do understand, and, in a way, I am glad you are going, for at all events your decision puts an end to the strife that has been going on between us now for the last three years. It was first difficult for me to believe, but I have become reconciled to the belief that you will never be happy except in a chaste life. I daresay it would be easy for me, for Ulick, or for some other man whom you might take a fancy to, to cause you to put your idea behind you for a time. Your senses are strong, and they overpower you. You were, on more than one occasion, nearly yielding to me, but if you had yielded it would have only resulted in another crisis, so I am glad you did not. It is no pleasure to make love to a woman who thinks it wrong to allow you to make love to her, and, could I get you as a mistress, strange as it will seem to you, upon my word, Evelyn, I don't think I would accept you. I have been through too much. Of course, if I could get back the old Evelyn, that would be different, but I am very

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much afraid she is dead or overpowered; another Evelyn has been born in you, and it overpowers the old. An idea has come into your mind, you must obey it, or your life would be misery. Yes, I understand, and I am glad you are going to the convent, for I would not see you wretched. When I say I understand, I only mean that I acquiesce—I shall never cease to wonder how such a strange idea has come into your mind; but there is no use arguing that point, we have argued it often enough, God knows! I cannot go to London to bid you goodbye. Goodbyes are hateful to me. I never go to trains to see people off, nor down to piers to wave handkerchiefs, nor do I go to funerals. Those who indulge their grief do so because their grief is not very deep. I cannot go to London to bid you goodbye unless you promise to see me in the convent. Worse than a death-bed goodbye would be the goodbye I should bid you, and it, too, would be for eternity. But say I can go to see you in the convent, and I will come to London to see you.

"Yours,

"OWEN."

* * * * *

"MY DEAR OWEN,—You have written me a beautiful letter. Not one word of it would I have unwritten, and it is a very great grief to me that I cannot write you a letter which would please you as much as your letter pleases me. No woman, since the world began, has had such a lover as I have had, and yet I am putting him aside. What a strange fatality! Yet I cannot do otherwise. But there is consolation for me in the thought that you understand; had it been otherwise, it would have been difficult for me to bear it. You know I am not acting selfishly, but because I cannot do otherwise. I have been through a great deal, Owen, more, perhaps, even than you can imagine. That night! But we must not speak of it, we must not speak of it! Rest is required, avoidance of all agitation—that is what the doctor says, and it agitates me to write this letter. But it must be done. To see you, to say goodbye to you, would be an agitation which neither of us could bear, we should both burst into tears; and for you to come to see me in the convent would be another agitation which must be avoided. The Prioress would not allow me to see you alone, if she allowed me to see you at all. No, Owen, don't come to see me either in London or in the convent. Leave me to work out my destiny as best I can. In three or four months perhaps I shall have recovered. Until then,

"Yours ever,

"EVELYN."

XVII

In a letter to Monsignor, Evelyn wrote:

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“I have just sent a letter to my father, in which I tell him, amid many hopes of a safe arrival in Rome, not unduly tired, and with all the dear instruments intact, unharmed by rough hands of porters and Custom House officers, that, one of these days, in three or four months, when I am well, I look forward to contributing the *viola da gamba* part of a sonata to the concert of the old instrumental music which he will give when he has put his choir in order: you know I used to play that instrument in my young days. A more innocent wish never entered into the heart of a human being, you will say, yet this letter causes me many qualms, for I cannot help thinking that I have been untruthful; I have —lied is, perhaps, too strong a word— but I have certainly equivocated to the Prioress, and deceived her, I think, though it is possible, wishing to be deceived, she lent herself to the deception. Now I am preferring an accusation against the dear Prioress! My goodness, Monsignor, what a strange and difficult thing life is, and how impossible to tell the exact truth! If one tries to be exact one ends by entangling the thread, and getting it into very ugly knots indeed. In trying to tell the truth, I have been guilty of a calumny against the Prioress, nothing short of that, Monsignor, nothing short of that—against the dear Prioress, who deserves better of me, for her kindness towards me since I have been to the convent has never ceased for a single instant!

“One of her many kindnesses is the subject of this letter. When I arrived here the nuns were not decided, and I was not decided, whether I should live in the convent as I did before, as a guest, or whether, in view of the length of my probable residence in the convent, I should be given the postulant’s cap and gown. Mother Mary Hilda thought it would be dangerous to open the doors of the novitiate to one who admitted she was entering the religious life only as an experiment, especially to one like myself, an opera singer, who, however zealously she might conform to the rule, would bring a certain atmosphere with her into the novitiate, one which could not fail to affect a number of young and innocent girls, and perhaps deleteriously. I think I agree with Mother Mary Hilda. All this I heard afterwards from Mother Philippa, who, in her homely way, let out the secret of these secret deliberations to me—how the Prioress, who desired the investiture, said that every postulant entered the novitiate as an experiment. ‘But believing,’ Mother Mary Hilda interrupted, ’that the experiment will succeed, whereas, in her case, the postulant does not believe at all.’

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“As it was impossible for the Mothers to decide I was sent for, and asked whether I thought the experiment would succeed or fail.’ But what experiment?—I had to ask. And the Prioress and Mother Hilda were not agreed, their points of view were not the same; mine was, again, a different point of view, mine being, as you know, a determination to conquer a certain thing in my nature which had nearly brought about my ruin, and which, if left unchecked, would bring it about. Room for doubt there was none, and, after such an escape as mine, one does not hesitate about having recourse to strong remedies. My remedy was the convent, and, my resolve being to stay in the convent till I had conquered myself, it did not at the time seem to me a falsehood to say that I put myself in the hands of God, and hoped the experiment would succeed. Mother Mary Hilda, who is very persistent, asked me what I meant by conquering myself, and I answered, a subjugation of that part of me which was repellent to God. At these words the Prioress’s face lit up, and she said, ’Well, Mother Hilda, I suppose you are satisfied?’ Mother Hilda did not answer, but I could see that she was not satisfied; and I am not satisfied either, for I feel that I am deceiving the nuns.

“But, Monsignor, if a different answer had been given, if I had said that I looked upon the convent as a refuge where a difficult time might be passed, two or three months, it does not seem to me that I would have answered the nuns more truthfully. The Prioress seems to think with me in this, going so far as to suggest that there are occasions when we do well not to try to say everything, for the very simple reason that we do not know everything—even about ourselves; and she seemed glad that I had not said more, and took me there and then to her room, and, in the presence of Mother Philippa and Mother Mary Hilda, said, ’Now, we must hide all this fair hair under a little cap.’ I knelt in front of the Prioress, and she put a white cap on my head, and pinned a black veil over it; and when she had done this she drew me to her and kissed me, saying, ’Now you look like my own child, with all your worldly vanities hidden away. I believe Monsignor Mostyn would hardly know his penitent in her new dress.’

“I think I can see you smile as you read this, and I think I can hear you thinking, ‘Once an actress always an actress.’ But there is not sufficient truth in this criticism to justify it, and if such a thought does cross your mind, I feel you will suppress it quickly in justice to me, knowing, as you must know, that a badge gives courage to the wearer, putting a conviction into the heart that one is not alone, but a soldier in a great army walking in step towards a definite end. This sounds somewhat grandiloquent, but it seems to me somewhat like the truth. Trying to get into step is interesting and instructive, and the novitiate, though hardly bearable at times, is better than sitting

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in the lonely guest-room. Mother Hilda's instruction in the novitiate seems childish, yet why is it more childish than a hundred other things? Only because one is not accustomed to look at life from the point of view of the convent. As a guest, I felt it to be impossible to remain in the convent for three months, and it pleased me, I admit it, and interested me, I admit it, to try to become part of this conventual life, so different, so strangely different, from the life of the world, so remote from common sympathies. In speaking of this life, one hardly knows what words to employ, so inadequate are words to express one's meaning, or shall I say one's feeling? 'Actress again,' I hear your thoughts, Monsignor; 'a woman desirous of a new experience, of new sensations.' No, no, Monsignor, no; but I confess that the pure atmosphere of the convent is easier and more agreeable to breathe than the atmosphere of the world and its delight. To her whose quest is chastity, it is infinitely agreeable to feel that she is living among chaste women, the chastity of the nuns seems to penetrate and enfold me. To the hunted animal a sense of safety is perhaps a greater pleasure than any other, and one is never really unhappy, however uncomfortable one's circumstances may be, if one is doing what one wants to do.... But I am becoming sententious."

In another letter to Monsignor she said:

"This morning I received a long and delightful letter from my father telling me about the progress he is making, or I should say the progress that the choir is making under his direction, and how convinced he found everybody of the necessity of a musical reformation of some kind, and how gratifying it was to find them ready to accept his reading of the old music as the one they had been waiting for all this time. But, Monsignor, does my father exaggerate? For all this sounds too delightful to be true. Is it possible that his ideas meet with no opposition? Or is it that an opposition is preparing behind an ambuscade of goodwill? Father is such an optimist that any enthusiasm for his ideas convinces him that stupidity has ended in the world at last. But you will not be duped, Monsignor, for Rome is your native city, and his appointment of *capelmeister* is owing to you, and the kindly reception of my father's ideas—if they have been received as he thinks—is also owing to you. You will not be deceived, as he would easily be, by specious appearance, and will support him in the struggle that may be preparing under cover. I know you will. "His letter is entirely concerned with music; he does not tell me about his daily life, and, knowing how neglectful he is of material things, thinking only of his ideas, I am not a little anxious about him: how he is lodged, and if there is anybody by him who will see that he has regular meals. He will neglect his meals if he is allowed to neglect them, so, in the interests of the musical reformation, somebody should

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be charged to look after him, and he should not be allowed to overwork himself; but it will be difficult to prevent this. The most we can hope for is that he shall get his meals regularly, and that the food be of good quality and properly cooked. The food here is not very good, nor very plentiful; to feel always a little hungry is certainly trying, and the doctor has spoken to the Prioress on the subject, insisting that nourishing food is necessary to those suffering from nervous breakdown, and healthy exercise; of healthy exercise there is plenty, for the nuns dig their own garden; so I am a reformer in a small way, and I can assure you my reformation is appreciated by the nuns, who thank me for it; my singing at Benediction is better appreciated on a full than on an empty stomach, especially when it is the song that fills the stomach. And it is my singing that enables Mother Philippa, who looks after the catering, to spend more money at the baker's and the butcher's. There has been an improvement, too, in the cooking; a better watch is kept in the kitchen, and not only my health but the health of the entire community is improved.

"We are a little more joyous now than we were, and every day I seem to be better able to appreciate the happiness of living among people who share one's ideas. One cannot love those whose ideas are different, at least I cannot; a mental atmosphere suitable to our minds is as necessary as fresh air is to our lungs. And I feel it a great privilege to be allowed to live among chaste women, no longer to feel sure of my own unworthiness, no longer; it is terrible to live always at war with oneself. The eyes of the nuns and their voices exhale an atmosphere in which it seems to me my soul can rise, and very often as I walk in the garden with them I feel as if I were walking upon air. Owen Asher used to think that intellectual conversation kindled the soul; so it does in a way; and great works of art enkindle the soul and exalt it; but there is another exaltation of soul which is not discoverable in the intellect, and I am not sure that it is not the greater: the exaltation of which I speak is found in obedience, in submission, yes, and in ignorance, in trying—I will not say to lower oneself—but in trying to bring oneself within the range of the humble intelligence and to understand it. And there is plenty of opportunity for this in the convent. To explain what I mean, and perhaps to pass away the tedium of an afternoon which seems long drawn out, I will put down here for you, Monsignor, the conversation, as much as I can remember of it, which introduced me to the inhabitants of the novitiate.

"When Mother Hilda recited the Litany of Our Lady, and we had risen to our feet, she said:

"'Now, Evelyn, you must be introduced to your sisters—Sister Barbara I think you have met, as she sings in the choir. This is Sister Angela; this tall maypole is Sister Winifred, and this little being here is Sister Jerome, who was the youngest till you came. Aren't you pleased, Jerome, to have one younger than yourself?' The novices said, 'How do

you do?’ and looked shy and awkward for a minute, and then they forgot me in their anxiety to know whether recreation was to be spent indoors or out.

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“’Mother, we may go out, mayn’t we? Oh, thank you so much, it is such a lovely evening. We need not wear cloaks, need we? Oh, that is all right, just our garden shoes.’ And there was a general scurry to the cells for shoes, whilst Mother Hilda and I made our way downstairs, and by another door, into the still summer evening.

“’How lovely it is!’ I said, feeling that if Mother Hilda and I could have spent the recreation hour together my first convent evening would have been happy. But the chattering novices soon caught us up, and when we were sitting all a-row on a bench, or grouped on a variety of little wooden stools, they asked me questions as to my sensations in the refectory, and I could not help feeling a little jarred by their familiarity.

“’Were you not frightened when you felt yourself at the head of the procession? I was,’ said Winifred.

“’But you didn’t get through nearly so well as Sister Evelyn; you turned the wrong way at the end of the passage and Mother had to go after you,’ said Sister Angela. ’We all thought you were going to run away.’ And they went into the details as to how they had felt on their arrival, and various little incidents were recalled, illustrating the experience of previous postulants, and these were productive of much hilarity.

“’What did you all think of the cake?’ said Sister Barbara suddenly.

“’Was it Angela’s cake?’ asked Mother Hilda. ’Angela, I really must congratulate you; you will be quite a distinguished *chef* in time.’

“Sister Angela blushed with delight, saying, ’Yes, I made it yesterday, Mother; but, of course, Sister Rufina stood over me to see that I didn’t forget anything.’

“’Ah, well, I don’t think I cared very much for the flavouring,’ said Sister Barbara in pondering tones.

“’You seemed to me to be enjoying it very much at the time,’ I said, joining the conversation for the first time; and when I added that Sister Barbara had eaten four slices of bread and butter the laugh turned against Barbara, and every one was hilarious. It is evident that Sister Barbara’s appetite is considered an excellent joke in the novitiate.

“Of course I marvelled that grown-up women should be so easily amused, and then remembered a party at the Savoy Hotel (on leaving it I went to the presbytery to confess to you, Monsignor). I had to admit to myself that the talk at Louise Helbrun’s party did not move on a higher level; our conversation did not show us to be wiser than the novices, and our behaviour was certainly less exemplary. Everything is attitude of mind, and the convent attitude towards life is curiously sympathetic to me... at present. My doubts lest it should not always be so is caused by the fury of my dislike to my former

attitude of mind; something tells me that such fury as mine cannot be maintained, and will be followed by a certain reaction. I don't mean that I shall ever again return to a life of sin, that life is done with for ever. Even if I should fall again—the thought is most painful to me—but even if that should happen it would be a passing accident, I never could again continue in sin, for the memory of the suffering sin has caused me would be sure to bring me back again and force me to take shelter and to repent.

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“I know too much belief in one’s own power of resistance is not a good thing, but I can hardly bear to think of the suffering I endured during those weeks with Ulick Dean, walking in Hyde Park, round that Long Water, talking of sin and its pleasures, feeling every day that I was being drawn a little nearer to the precipice, that I was losing every day some power of resistance. It is terrifying to lose sense of the reality of things, to lose one’s own will, to feel that one is merely a stone that has been set rolling. To feel like this is to experience the obtuse and intense sensations of nightmare, and this I know well. Have I not told you, Monsignor, of the dreams from which I suffered, which brought me to you, and which forced me to confession, those terrific dreams which used to drive me dazed from my bed, flying through the door of my room into the passage to wake up before the window, saying to myself:

“’Oh, my God! it is a dream, it is a dream, thank God, it is only a dream!’

“But I must not allow myself to dwell on that time, to do so throws me back again, and I have almost escaped those fits of brooding in which I see my soul lost for ever. Sooner than go back to that time I would become a nun, and remain here until the end of my life, eating the poorest food, feeling hungry all day; anything were better than to go back to that time!”

In another letter she said:

“I am afraid I shall always continue to be looked upon as an actress by the Prioress, and St. Teresa’s ecstasies and ravishments, with added miracles and prophecies, would not avail to blot out the motley which continues in her eyes, though it dropped from me three years ago.

“’My dear Evelyn, you have hardly any perception of what our life is,’ she said to me yesterday. ’You know it only from the outside, you are still an actress, you are acting on a different stage, that is all.’ And it seemed to me that the Prioress thought she was speaking very wisely, that she flattered herself on her wisdom, and rejoiced not a little in my discomfiture, visible on my face, for one cannot control the change of expression, ‘which gives one away,’ as the phrase goes. She laughed, and we walked on together, I genuinely perplexed and pathetically anxious to discover if she had spoken the truth, fearing lest I might be adapting myself to a new part, not quite sure, hoping, however, that something new had come into my life. On such occasions one peers into one’s heart, but however closely I peer it is impossible for me to say that the Prioress is right or that she was wrong. Everybody will say she is right, of course, for it is so obvious that a prima donna who retires to a convent must think of the parts she has played, of her music, and the applause at the end of every evening, applause without which she could not live. To say that no thought of my stage life ever crosses my mind would be to tell a lie that no one would believe; all thoughts

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cross one's mind, especially in a convent of a contemplative Order where the centre of one's life is, as Mother Mary Hilda would say, the perpetual adoration of the Blessed Sacrament exposed upon the altar; where, as she teaches, next to receiving Holy Communion, this hour of prayer and meditation in the presence of our Lord is the central feature of our spiritual life, the axis on which our spiritual progress revolves.

"This was the subject of yesterday's lesson; nevertheless, during the meditation thoughts came and went, and I found much difficulty in trying to fix my mind. Perhaps I shall never learn how to meditate on—shall I say the Cross?—I shall never be able to fix my attention. Thoughts of the heroes and heroines of legends come and go in my mind, mixing with thoughts of Christ and His apostles; yet there is little of me in these flitting remembrances. My stage life does not interest me any longer, but the Prioress does not see it as I do, far away, a tiny speck. My art was once very real to me, and I am surprised, and a little disappointed sometimes, that it should seem so little now. But what I would not have, if I could change it, is the persistency with which I remember my lovers; not that I desire them, oh, no; but in the midst of a meditation on the Cross a remembrance catches one about the heart, and, closing the eyes, one tries to forget; and, Monsignor, what is worse than memory is our powerlessness to regret our sins. We may not wish to sin again, but we cannot regret that we have sinned. How is one to regret that one is oneself? For one's past is as much oneself as one's present. Has any saint attained to such a degree of perfection as to wish his past had never existed?

"Another part of my life which I remember very well—much better than my stage life—is the time I spent working among the poor under your direction. My poor people are very vivid in my memory; I remember their kindness to each other, their simplicities, and their patience. The patience of the poor is divine! But the poor people who looked to me for help had to be put aside, and that was the hardest part of my regeneration. Of course I know that I should have perished utterly if I had not put them aside, but even the thought of my great escape does not altogether satisfy me, and I would that I might have escaped without leaving them, the four poor women whom I took under my special protection, and who came to see me the day before I came to the convent to ask me not to leave them. Four poor women, poor beyond poverty, came to ask me not to go into the convent. 'The convent will be always able to get on without you, miss.' Such poverty as theirs is silent, they only asked me not to leave them, not to go to the convent. Among them was poor Lena, a hunchback seamstress, who has never been able to do more than keep herself from starving. It is hard that cripples should have to support themselves. She has, I think, always lived in fear lest she should not be able to

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pay for her room at the end of the week, and her food was never certain. How little it was, yet to get it caused her hours and hours of weary labour. Three and sixpence a week was all she could earn. Poor Lena, what has become of her? So little of the money which my singing brings to the convent would secure her against starvation, yet I cannot send her a penny. Doesn't it seem hard, Monsignor? And if she were to die in my absence would not the memory of my desertion haunt me for ever? Should I be able to forgive myself? You will answer that to save one's soul is everybody's first concern, but to sacrifice one's own soul for the poor may not be theological, but it would be sublime. You who are so kind, Monsignor, will not reprove me for writing in this strain, writing heresy to you from a convent devoted to the Perpetual Adoration of the Sacrament, but you will understand, and will write something that will hearten me, for I am a little disheartened to-day. You will write, perhaps, to the Reverend Mother, asking her if I may send Lena some money; that would be a great boon if she would allow it. In my anxiety to escape from the consequences of my own sins I had almost forgotten this poor girl, but yesterday she came into my mind. It was the lay sisters who reminded me of the poor people I left; the lay sisters are what is most beautiful in the convent.

"Yesterday, when the grass was soaked with dew and the crisp leaves hung in a death-like silence, one of them, Sister Bridget, came down the path carrying a pail of water, 'going,' she said, answering me, 'to scrub the tiles which covered the late Reverend Mother's grave. Ah, well, Mother's room must have its weekly turn out.' How beautiful is the use of the word 'room' in the phrase, and when I pointed out to her that the tiles were still clean her answer was that she regarded the task of attending the grave not as a duty but as a privilege. Dear Sister Bridget, withered and ruddy like an apple, has worked in the community for nearly thirty years. She has been through all the early years of struggle: a struggle which has begun again—a struggle the details of which were not even told her, and which she has no curiosity to hear. She is content to work on to the end, believing that it was God's will for her to do so. The lay sisters can aspire to none of the convent offices; they have none of the smaller distractions of receiving guests, and instructing converts and so forth, and not to have as much time for prayer as they desire is their penance. They are humble folk, who strive in a humble way to separate themselves from the animal, and they see heaven from the wash-tub plainly. In the eyes of the world they are ignorant and simple hearts. They are ignorant, but of what are they ignorant? Only of the passing show, which every moment crumbles and perishes. I see them as I write—their ready smiles and their touching humility. They are humble workers in a humble vineyard, and they are content that it should be so."

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XVIII

“You see, Evelyn,” the Prioress said, “it is contrary to the whole spirit of the religious life to treat the lay sisters as servants, and though I am sure you don’t intend any unkindness, they have complained to me once or twice that you order them about.”

“But, my dear Mother, it seems to me that we are all inferior to the lay sisters. To slight them—” “I am sure you did not do so intentionally.”

“I said, ‘Do hurry up,’ but I only meant I was in a hurry. I don’t think anything you could have said could have pained me more than that you should think I lacked respect for the lay sisters.”

Seeing that Evelyn was hurt the Prioress said:

“The sisters have no doubt forgotten all about it by now.”

But Evelyn wanted to know which of the sisters had complained, so that she might beg her pardon.

“She doesn’t want you to beg her pardon.”

“I beg you to allow me, it will be better that I should. The benefit will be mine.”

The Prioress shook her head, and listened willingly to Evelyn, who told her of her letter to Monsignor. “Now, wasn’t it extraordinary, Mother, that I should have written like that about Sister Bridget, and to-day you should tell me that the lay sisters complained about me? If the complaint had been that I was inclined to put the active above the contemplative orders and was dissatisfied with our life here—”

“Dissatisfied!” the Prioress said.

“Only this, Mother: I have been reading the story of the Order of the Little Sisters of the Poor, and it seems to me so wonderful that everything else, for the moment, seems insignificant.”

The Reverend Mother smiled.

“Your enthusiasms, my dear Evelyn, are delightful. The last book you read, the last person you meet—”

“Do you think I am so frivolous, so changeable as that, dear Mother?”

“Not changeable, Evelyn, but spontaneous.”

“It would seem to me that everything in me is of slow growth—but why talk of me when there is Jeanne to talk about; marvellous, extraordinary, unique—” Evelyn was nearly saying “divine Jeanne,” but she stopped herself in time and substituted the word “saintly.” “No one seems to me more real than this woman, no one in literature; not Hamlet, nor Don Quixote, not Dante himself starts out into clearer outline than this poor servant-girl—a goatherd in her childhood.” And to the Prioress, who did not know the story of this poor woman, Evelyn told it, laying stress—as she naturally would— on Jeanne’s refusal to marry a young sailor, whom she had been willing to marry at first, but whom she refused to marry on his returning after a long voyage. When he asked her for whom she had refused him, she answered for nobody, only she did not wish to marry, though she knew of no reason why she should not. It was not caprice but an instinct which caused Jeanne to leave her sweetheart,

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and to go on working in humble service attending on a priest until he died, then going to live with his sister, remaining with her until she died, and saving during all these long twenty years only four-and-twenty pounds—all the money she had when she returned to the little seaport town whence she had come: a little seaport town where the aged poor starved in the streets, or in garrets in filth and vermin, without hope of relief from any one.

It was to this cruel little village, of which there are many along the French coast, and along every coast in the world, that Jeanne returned to rent a garret with an old and bedridden woman, unable to help herself. Without the poor to help the poor the poor would not be able to live, and this old woman lived by the work of Jeanne's hands for many a year, Jeanne going every morning to the market-place to find some humble employment, finding it sometimes, returning at other times desperate, but concealing her despair from her bedridden companion, telling her as gaily as might be that they would have to do without any dinner that day. So did they live until two little seamstresses—women inspired by the same pity for the poor as Jeanne herself—heard of her, and asked the *cure*, in whom this cruel little village had inspired an equal pity, to send for Jeanne. She was asked to give her help to those in greater need than she—-the blind beggars and such like who prowled about the walls of the churches.

On leaving the priest it is related that she said: "I don't understand, but I never heard any one speak so beautifully." But next day when she went to see the priest she understood everything, sufficient at all events for the day which was to take to her garret a blind woman whom the seamstresses had discovered in the last stages of neglect and age. There was the bedridden woman whom Jeanne supported, and who feared to share Jeanne's charity with another, and resented the intrusion; she had to be pacified and cajoled with some little present of food, for the aged and hungry are like animals—food appeases them, silences many a growl; and the blind woman was given a corner in the garret. "But how is she to be fed?" was the question put to Jeanne next morning, and from that question the whole Order of the Little Sisters of the Poor started. Jeanne, inspired suddenly, said, "I will beg for them," and seizing a basket she went out to beg for broken victuals.

"There is a genius for many things besides the singing of operas, painting pictures, and writing books," Evelyn said, "and Jeanne's genius was for begging for her poor people. And there is nothing more touching in the world's history than her journey in the milk-cart to the regatta. You see, dear Mother, she was accustomed to beg from door to door among squalid streets, stopping a passer-by, stooping under low doorways, intruding everywhere, daring everything among her own people, but frightened by the fashionable folk *en grande toilette*

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bent on amusement. It seems that her courage almost failed her, but grasping the cross which hung round her neck, she entered a crowd of pleasure-seekers, saying, 'Won't you give me something for my poor people?' Now, Mother, isn't the story a wonderful one? for there was genius in this woman, though it was only for begging: a tall, thin, curious, fantastic figure, considered simple by some, but gifted for her task which had been revealed to her in middle age."

"But why, Evelyn, does that seem to you so strange that her task should have been revealed to her in middle age?"

Evelyn looked at the Reverend Mother for a while unable to answer, then went on suddenly with her tale, telling how that day, at that very regatta, a man had slapped Jeanne in the face, and she had answered, "You are perfectly right, a box on the ears is just what is suited to me; but now tell me what you are going to give me for my poor people." At another part of the ground somebody had begun to tease her—some young man, no doubt, in a long fashionable grey frock-coat with race-glasses hung round his neck, had ventured to tease this noble woman, to twit her, to jeer and jibe at her uncouthness, for she was uncouth, and she stood bearing with these jeers until they apologised to her. "Never mind the apology," she had answered; "you have had your fun out of me, now give me something for my poor people." They gave her five francs, and she said, "At that price you may tease me as much as you please."

Evelyn asked if it were not extraordinary how an ignorant and uncouth woman, a goatherd during her childhood, a priest's servant till she was well on in middle age, should have been able to invent a system of charity which had penetrated all over Europe. Every moment Evelyn expected the Prioress to check her, for she was conscious that she was placing the active orders above the contemplative, Jeanne above St. Teresa, and, determined to see how far she could go in this direction without being reproved, she began to speak of how Jeanne, after having made the beds and cleaned the garret in the morning, took down a big basket and stood receiving patiently the remonstrances addressed to her, the blind woman saying, "I am certain and sure you will forget to ask for the halfpenny a week which I used to get from the grocery store, you very nearly forgot it last week, and had to go back for it." "But I'll not make a mistake this time," Jeanne would answer. Her bed-ridden friend would reprove her, "But you did forget to ask for my soup." To bear patiently with all such unjust remonstrances was part of Jeanne's genius, and Evelyn asked the Reverend Mother if it were not strange that a woman like Jeanne had never inspired some great literary work.

"I spoke just now of Hamlet, Don Quixote, but Falstaff himself is not more real than Jeanne, and her words are always so wonderful, wonderful as Joan of Arc's. When the old woman used to hide their food under the bed-clothes and sell it for food for the pigs, leaving the Little Sisters almost starving, Jeanne used to say, 'So-and-so has not been

as nice as usual this afternoon.’ How is it, Mother, that no great writer has ever given us a portrait of Jeanne?”

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“Well, Jeanne, my dear Evelyn, has given us her own portrait. What can a writer add to what Nature has given? No one has ever yet given a portrait of a great saint, of St. Teresa—what can any one tell us that we do not already know?”

“St. Teresa’s life passed in thought, whereas Jeanne’s passed in action.”

“Don’t be afraid, Evelyn,” the Prioress said, “to say what you mean, that perhaps the way of the Little Sisters of the Poor is a better way than ours.”

“It seems so, Mother, doesn’t it?”

“It is permissible to have doubts on such a subject—which is the better course, mercy or prayer? We have all had our doubts on this subject, and it is the weakness of our intelligences that causes these doubts to arise.”

“How is that, Mother?”

“It is easy to realise the beauty of the relief of material suffering. The flesh is always with us, and we realise so easily that it suffers that there are times when relief of suffering seems to us the only good. But in truth bread and prayer are as necessary to man, one as the other. You have never heard the story of the foundation of our Order? It will not appeal to the animal sympathies as readily as the foundation of the Sisters of the Poor, but I don’t think it is less human.” And the Reverend Mother told how in Lyons a sudden craving for God had occurred in a time of extraordinary prosperity. Three young women had suddenly wearied of the pleasure that wealth brought them, and had without intercommunication decided that the value of life was in foregoing it, that is to say, foregoing what they had always been taught to consider as life; and this story reaching as it did to the core of Evelyn’s own story, was listened to by her with great interest, and she heard in the quiet of the Reverend Mother’s large room, in which the silence when the canaries were not shrilling was intense, how a sign had been vouchsafed to these three young women, daughters of two bankers and a silk merchant, and how all three had accepted the signs vouchsafed to them and become nuns.

“I am not depreciating the active Orders when I say they are more easily understood by the average man than—shall I say the Carmelite or any contemplative Order, our own for example. To relieve suffering makes a ready appeal to his sympathies, but he is incapable of realising what the world would be were it not for our prayers. It would be a desert. In truth the active and the contemplative Orders are identical, when we look below the surface.”

“How are they identical, Mother?”

“In this way: the object of the active Orders is to relieve suffering, but the good they do is not a direct good. There will always be suffering in the world, the little they relieve is only like a drop taken out of the ocean. It might even be argued that if you eliminate on one side the growth is greater on the other; by preserving the lives of old people one makes the struggle harder for others. There is as much suffering in the world now as there was before the Little Sisters began their work—that is what I mean.”

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“Then, dear Mother, the Order does not fulfil its purpose.”

“On the contrary, Evelyn, it fulfils its purpose, but its purpose is not what the world thinks it is; it is by the noble example they set that the Little Sisters of the Poor achieve their purpose. It is by forsaking the world that they achieve their purpose, by their manifestation that the things of this world are not worth considering. The Little Sisters pray in outward acts, whereas the contemplative Orders pray only in thought. The purpose, as I have said, is identical; the creation of an atmosphere of goodness, without which the world could not exist. There are two atmospheres, the atmosphere of good and the atmosphere of evil, and both are created by thought, whether thought in the concrete form of an act or thought in its purest form—an aspiration. Therefore all those who devote themselves to prayer, whether their prayers take the form of good works or whether their prayer passes in thought, collaborate in the production of a moral atmosphere, and it is the moral atmosphere which enables man to continue his earthly life. Yourself is an instance of what I mean. You were inspired to leave the stage, but whence did that inspiration come? Are you sure that our prayers had nothing to do with it? And the acts of the Little Sisters of the Poor all over the world—are you sure they did not influence you?”

Evelyn thought of Owen’s letter, the last he had written to her, for in it he reminded her that she had nearly yielded to him. But was it she who had resisted? She attributed her escape rather to a sudden realisation on his part that she would be unhappy if he persisted. Now, what was the cause of this sudden realisation, this sudden scruple? For one seemed to have come into Owen’s mind. How wonderful it would be if it could be attributed to the prayers of the nuns, for they had promised to pray for her, and, as the Prioress said, everything in the world is thought: all begins in thought, all returns to thought, the world is but our thought.

While she pondered, unable to believe that the nuns’ prayers had saved her, unwilling to discard the idea, the Prioress told of the three nuns who came to England about thirty years ago to make the English foundation. But of this part of the story Evelyn lost a great deal; her interest was not caught again until the Prioress began to tell how a young girl in society, rich and beautiful, whose hand was sought by many, came to the rescue of these three nuns with all her fortune and a determination to dedicate her life to God. Her story did not altogether catch Evelyn’s sympathies, and the Prioress agreed with Evelyn that her conduct in leaving her aged parents was open to criticism. We owe something to others, and it appears that an idea had come into her mind when she was twelve years old that she would like to be a nun, and though she appeared to like admiration and to encourage one young man, yet she never really swerved from her idea, she always told him she would enter a convent.

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Evelyn did not answer, for she was thinking of the strange threads one finds in the weft of human life. Every one follows a thread, but whither do the threads lead? Into what design? And while Evelyn was thinking the Prioress told how the house in which they were now living had been bought with five thousand out of the thirty thousand pounds which this girl had brought to the convent. The late Prioress was blamed for this outlay. Blame often falls on innocent shoulders, for how could she have foreseen the increased taxation? how could she have foreseen that no more rich postulants would come to the convent, only penniless converts turned out by their relations, and aged governesses? A great deal of the money had been lost in a railway, and it was lost at a most unfortunate time, only a few days before the lawyer had written to say that the Australian mine in which most of their money was invested had become bankrupt.

“There was nothing for us to do,” the Prioress said, “but to mortgage the property, and this mortgage is our real difficulty, and its solution seems as far off as ever. There seems to be no solution. We are paying penal interest on the money, and we have no security that the mortgagee will not sell the property. He has been complaining that he can do better with his money, though we are paying him five and six per cent.

“And if he were to sell the property, Mother, you would all have to go back to your relations?”

“All of us have not relations, and few have relations who would take us in. The lay sisters—what is to become of them?—some of them old women who have given up their lives. Frankly, Evelyn, I am at my wits’ end.”

“But, Mother, have I not offered to lend you the money? It will be a great pleasure to me to do it, and in some way I feel that I owe the money.”

“Owe the money, Evelyn?”

The women sat looking at each other, and at the end of a long silence the Prioress said:

“It is impossible for us to take your money, my child?”

“But something must be done, Mother.”

“If you were staying with us a little longer—”

“I have made no plans to leave you.” And to turn the conversation from herself Evelyn spoke of the crowds that came to Benediction.

“To hear you, dear, and when you leave us our congregation will be the same as it was before, a few pious old Catholic ladies living on small incomes who can hardly afford to put a shilling into the plate.” Evelyn spoke of the improvement of the choir, and the

Prioress interrupted her, saying, “Don’t think for a moment that any reformation in the singing of the plain chant is likely to bring people to our church; the Benedictine gradual *versus* the Ratisbon.” And the Prioress shrugged her shoulders contemptuously. “What has brought us a congregation is you, my dear—your voice and your story which is being talked about. The story is going the rounds that you are going to become a nun, and that interests everybody. An opera singer entering a convent! Such a thing was never heard of before, and they come to hear you.”

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“But, Mother, I never said I was going to join the Order. I only came here in the hope—”

“And I accepted you as a postulant in the hope that you would persevere. All this seems very selfish, Evelyn. It looks as if we were only thinking! of your money; but you know it isn’t so.”

“Indeed, I do, Mother. I know it isn’t so.”

“When are you going to leave us?”

“Well, nothing is decided. Every day I expect to hear from my father, and if he wishes —”

“But if he doesn’t require you? By remaining with us you may find you have a vocation. Other women have persevered and discovered in the end—” The Prioress’s face changed expression, and Evelyn began to think that perhaps the Prioress had discovered a vocation in herself, after long waiting, and though she had become Prioress discovered too late that perhaps she had been mistaken. “You have no intention of joining the Order?”

“You mean to become a novice and then to become a nun and live here with you?”

“You need say no more.”

“But you don’t think I have deceived you, Mother?”

“No, I don’t blame anybody, only a hope has gone. Besides, I at least, Evelyn, shall be very sorry to part with you, sorry for many reasons which I may not tell you... in the convent we don’t talk of our past life.” And Evelyn wondered what the Prioress alluded to. “Has she a past like mine? What is her story?”

The canaries began singing, and they sang so loudly the women could hardly hear themselves speak. Evelyn got up and waved her handkerchief at the birds, silencing them.

* * * * *

Late that night a telegram came telling Evelyn that her father was dangerously ill, and she was to start at once for Rome.

XIX

The wind had gathered the snow into the bushes and all the corners of the common, and the whole earth seemed but a little brown patch, with a dead grey sky sweeping by.

For many weeks the sky had been grey, and heavy clouds had passed slowly, like a funeral, above the low horizon. The wind had torn the convent garden until nothing but a few twigs remained; even the laurels seemed about to lose their leaves. The nuns had retreated with blown skirts; Sister Mary John had had to relinquish her digging, and her jackdaw had sought shelter in the hen-house.

One night, when the nuns assembled for evening prayer, the north wind seemed to lift the roof as with hands; the windows were shaken; the nuns divined the wrath of God in the wind, and Miss Dingle, who had learned through pious incantation that the Evil One would attempt a descent into the convent, ran to warn the porteress of the danger. At that moment the wind was so loud that the portress listened, perforce, to the imaginings of Miss Dingle's weak brain, thinking, in spite of herself, that some communication had been vouchsafed to her. "Who knows," her thoughts said, "who can say? The ways of Providence are inscrutable." And she looked at the little daft woman as if she were a messenger.

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As they stood calculating the strength of the lock and hinges the door-bell suddenly began to jingle.

“He wouldn’t ring the bell; he would come down the chimney,” said Miss Dingle.

“But who can it be?” said the portress, “and at this hour.”

“This will save you.” Miss Dingle thrust a rosary into the nun’s hand and fled down the passage. “Be sure to throw it over his neck.”

The nun tried to collect her scattered thoughts and her courage. Again the bell jingled; this time the peal seemed crazier than the first, and, rousing herself into action, she asked through the grating who it might be.

“It is I, Sister Evelyn; open the door quickly, Sister Agnes.”

The nun held the door open, thanking God it was not the devil, and Evelyn dragged her trunk through the door, letting it drop upon the mat abruptly.

“Tell dear Mother I want to speak to her—say that I must see her—be sure to say that, and I will wait for her in the parlour.”

“There is no light there; I will fetch one.”

“Never mind, don’t trouble; I don’t want a light. But go to the Reverend Mother and tell her I must see her before any one else.”

“Of course, Sister Evelyn, of course.” And the portress hurried away, feeling that things had happened in a life which was beyond her life, beyond its scope. Perhaps Sister Evelyn had come to tell the Prioress the Pope himself was dead, or had gone mad; something certainly had happened into which it was no business of hers to inquire. And this vague feeling sent her running down the passage and up the stairs, and returning breathless to Evelyn, whom she found in a chair nearly unconscious, for when she called to her Evelyn awoke as from sleep, asking where she was.

“Sister Evelyn, why do you ask? You are in Wimbledon Convent, with Sister Agnes; what is the matter?”

“Matter? Nothing and everything.” She seemed to recover herself a little. “I had forgotten, Sister Agnes, I had forgotten. But the Prioress, where is she?”

“In her room, and she will see you. But you asked me to go to the Prioress saying she must see you—have you forgotten, Sister Evelyn? You know the way to her room?”

Evelyn did not answer; and feeling perhaps that she might lose her way in the convent, Sister Agnes said she would conduct her to the Prioress, and opened the door for her, saying, “Reverend Mother, Sister Evelyn.”

There was a large fire burning in the room, and Evelyn was conscious of the warmth, of bodily comfort, and was glad to sit down.

“You are very cold, my child, you are very cold. Don’t trouble to speak, take your time and get warm first.” And Evelyn sat looking into the fire for a long time. At last she said:

“It is warm here, Mother, I am so glad to be here. But perhaps you will turn me away and won’t have me. I know you won’t, I know you won’t, so why did I come all this long way?”

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“My dear child, why shouldn’t we be glad to have you back? We were sorry to part with you.”

“That was different, that was different.”

These answers, and the manner in which they were spoken even more than the answers themselves, frightened the Prioress; but unable to think of what might have happened, she sat wondering, waiting for Evelyn to reveal herself. The hour was late, and Evelyn showed no signs of speaking. Perhaps it would be better to ring for one of the lay sisters, and ask her to show Evelyn to her room.

“You will stay here to-night?”

“Yes, if you will allow me.”

“Allow you, my dear child! Why speak in this way?”

“Oh, Mother, I am done for, I am done for!”

“You haven’t told me yet what has happened.”

Evelyn did not answer; she seemed to have forgotten everything, or to be thinking of one thing, and unable to detach her thoughts from it sufficiently to answer the Prioress’s question.

“Your father—”

“My father is dead,” she answered. And the Prioress, imagining her father’s death to be the cause of this mental breakdown, spoke of the consolations of religion, which no doubt Mr. Innes had received, and which would enable Mr. Innes’s soul to appear before a merciful God for judgment.

“There is little in this life, my dear; we should not be sorry for those who leave it—that is, if they leave it in a proper disposition of soul.”

“My father died after having received the Sacraments of the Church. Oh, his death!” And thinking it well to encourage her to speak, the Prioress said:

“Tell me, my dear, tell me; I can understand your grief and sympathise with you; tell me everything.”

And like one awakening Evelyn told how for days he had fluctuated between life and death, sometimes waking to consciousness, then falling back into a trance. In spite of the hopes the doctors had held out to him he had insisted he was dying.

"'I am worn to a thread,' he said, 'I shall flicker like that candle when it reaches the socket, and then I shall go out. But I am not afraid of death: death is a great experience, and we are all better for every experience. There is only one thing—'

"He was thinking of his work, he was sorry he was called away before his work was done; and then he seemed to forget it, to be absorbed in things of greater importance."

Sometimes the wind interrupted the Prioress's attention, and she thought of the safety of her roofs; Evelyn noticed the wind, and her notice of it served to accentuate her terror. "It is terror," the Prioress said to herself, "rather than grief."

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“I waited by his bedside seeing the soul prepare for departure. The soul begins to leave the body several days before it goes; it flies round and round like a bird that is going to some distant country. I must tell you all about it, Mother. He lay for hours and hours looking into a corner of the room. I am sure he saw something there; and one night I heard him call me. I went to him and asked him what he wanted; but he lay quiet, looking into the corner of the room, and then he said, ‘The wall has been taken away,’ I know he saw something there. He saw something, he learnt something in that last moment that we do not know. That last moment is the only real moment of our lives, the only true moment—all the rest is falsehood, delirium, froth. The rest of life is contradictions, distractions, and lies, but in the moment before death I am sure everything becomes quite clear to us. Then we learn what we are. We do not know ourselves until then. If I ask who am I, what am I, there is no answer. We do not believe in ourselves because we do not know who we are; we do not know enough of ourselves to believe in anything. We do not believe; we acquiesce that certain things are so because it is necessary to acquiesce, but we do not believe in anything, not even that we are going to die, for if we did we should live for death, and not for life.”

“Your father’s death has been a great grief to you; only time will help you to recover yourself.”

“Recover myself? But I shall never recover, no, Mother, never, never, never!”

The Prioress asked when Mr. Innes had died.

“I can’t remember, Mother; some time ago.”

The Prioress asked if he were dead a week.

“Oh, more than that, more than that.”

“And you have been in Rome ever since? Why did you not come here at once?”

“Why, indeed, did I not come here?” was all Evelyn could say. She seemed to lose all recollection, or at all events she had no wish to speak, and sat silent, brooding. “Of what is she thinking?” the Prioress asked herself, “or is she thinking of anything? She seems lost in a great terror, some sin committed. If she were to confess to me. Perhaps confession would relieve her.” And the Prioress tried to lead Evelyn into some account of herself, but Evelyn could only say, “I am done for, Mother, I am done for!” She repeated these words without even asking the Prioress to say no more: it seemed to her impossible to give utterance to the terror in her soul. What could have happened to her?”

“Did you meet, my child, either of the men whom you spoke to me of?”

The question only provoked a more intense agony of grief.

“Mother, Mother, Mother!” she cried, “I am done for! let me go, let me leave you.”

“But, my child, you can’t leave us to-night, it is too late. Why should you leave us at all?”

“Why did I ever leave you? But, Mother, don’t let us talk any more about it. I know myself; no one can tell me anything about myself; it is all clear to me, all clear to me from the beginning; and now, and now, and now—”

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“But, my child, all sins can be forgiven. Have you confessed?”

“Yes, Mother, I confessed before I left Italy, and then came on here feeling that I must see you; I only wanted to see you. Now I must go.”

“No, my child, you mustn’t go; we will talk of this to-morrow.”

“No, let us never talk of it again, that I beseech you, Mother; promise me that we shall never talk of it again.”

“As you like, as you like. Perhaps every one knows her own soul best.... It is not for me to pry into yours. You have confessed, and your grief is great.”

The Prioress went back to her chair, feeling relieved, thinking it was well that Evelyn had confessed her sin to some Italian priest who did not know her, for it would be inconvenient for Father Daly to know Evelyn’s story. Evelyn could be of great use to them; it were well, indeed, that she had not even confessed to her. She must not leave the convent; and arriving at that conclusion, suddenly she rang the bell. Nothing was said till the lay sister knocked at the door. “Will you see, Sister Agnes, that Sister Evelyn’s bed is prepared for her?”

“In the guest-room or in the novitiate, Reverend Mother?”

“In the novitiate,” the Prioress answered.

Evelyn had sunk again into a stupor, and, only half-conscious of what was happening to her, she followed the lay sister out of the Prioress’s room.

“It is very late,” the Prioress said to herself, “all the lights in the convent should be out; but the rule doesn’t apply to me.” And she put more coal on the fire, feeling that she must give all her mind to the solution of the question which had arisen—whether Evelyn was to remain with them to-morrow. It had almost been decided, for had she not told Sister Agnes to take Evelyn to the novitiate? But Evelyn might herself wish to leave to-morrow, and if so what inducements, what persuasion, what pressure should be used to keep her? And how far would she be justified in exercising all her influence to keep Evelyn? The Prioress was not quite sure. She sat thinking. Evelyn in her present state of mind could not be thrown out of the convent. The convent was necessary for her salvation in this world and in the next.

“She knows that, and I know it.”

The Prioress’s thoughts drifted into recollections of long ago; and when she awoke from her reverie it seemed that she must have been dreaming a long while: “too long” she thought; “but I have not thought of these things for many a year.... Evelyn has confessed, her sins are behind her, and it would be so inconvenient—” The Prioress’s

thoughts faded away; for even to herself she did not like to admit that it would be inconvenient for Evelyn to confess to Father Daly the sins she had committed—if she had committed any. Perhaps it might be all an aberration, an illusion in the interval between her father's death and her return to the convent. "Her sins have been absolved, and for guidance she will not turn to Father Daly but to me." The Reverend Mother reflected that a man would not be able to help this woman with his advice. She thought of Evelyn's terror, and how she had cried, "I am done for, I am done for!" She remembered the tears upon Evelyn's cheeks and every attitude so explicit of her grief.

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“A penitent if ever there was one, one whom we must help, whom we must lead back to God. Evelyn must remain in the convent. To-morrow we must seek to persuade her. But it will not be difficult.” Then, listening to the wind, the Prioress remembered that the convent roof required re-slating. “Who knows? Perhaps what happened may have been divinely ordered to bring her back to us? Who knows? who knows?” She thought of the many other things the convent required: the chapel wanted re-decorating, and they had to spare every penny they could from their food and clothing to buy candles for the altar; another item of expense was the resident chaplain; and when in bed she lay thinking that perhaps to-morrow she would find a way out of the difficulty that had puzzled her so long.

XX

“Yes, dear Mother, if you are willing to keep me I shall be glad to remain. It is good of you. How kind you all are!”

Very little more than that she could be induced to say, relapsing, after a few words, into a sort of stupor or dream, from which very often it was impossible to rouse her; and the Prioress dreaded these long silences, and often asked herself what they could mean, if the cause were a fixed idea... on which she was brooding. Or it might be that Evelyn’s mind was fading, receding. If so, the responsibility of keeping her in the convent was considerable. A little time would, however, tell them. Any religious instruction was, of course, out of the question, and books would be fatal to her.

“Her mind requires rest,” the Prioress said. “Even her music is a mental excitement.”

“I don’t think that,” Sister Mary John answered. “And as for work, I have been thinking I might teach her a little carpentry. If plain carpentry does not interest her sufficiently, she might learn to work at the lathe.”

“Your idea is a very good one, Sister Mary John. Go to her at once and set her to work. It is terrible to think of her sitting brooding, brooding.”

“But on what is she brooding, dear Mother?”

“No doubt her father’s death was a great shock.”

And Sister Mary John went in search of Evelyn, and found her wandering in the garden.

“Of what are you thinking, Sister?” As Evelyn did not answer, Sister Mary John feared she resented the question. “You don’t like me to walk with you?”

“Yes I do, I don’t mind; but I wonder if the Prioress likes me to be here. Can you find out for me?”

“Why should you think we do not wish to have you here?”

“Well, you see, Sister—oh, it is no use talking.” Her thoughts seemed to float away, and it might be five or ten minutes before she would speak again.

“I wish you would come to the woodshed, Sister. If not, I must leave you.”

“Oh, I’ll go to the woodshed with you.”

“And will you help me with my work?”

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“I help you with your work!”

There was a long, narrow table in the woodshed—some planks laid upon two tressels; and the walls were piled with all kinds of sawn wood, deal planks, and rough timber, and a great deal of broken furniture and heaps of shavings. The woodshed was so full of rubbish of all kinds that there was only just room enough to walk up and down the table. Sister Mary John was making at that time a frame for cucumbers, and Evelyn watched her planing the deal boards, especially interested when she pushed the plane down the edge of the board, and a long, narrow shaving curled out of the plane, but asking no questions.

“Now, wouldn’t you like to do some work on the other side of the table, Sister?”

Evelyn did not answer, and it was not that day nor the next, but at the end of the week, that she was persuaded to take the pincers and pull the nails out of an old board.

“And when you have done that, I will show you how to plane it.”

She seemed to have very little strength—or was it will that she lacked? The pincers often fell from her hands, and she would stand, lost in reverie.

“Now, Sister, you have only pulled two nails out of that board in the last ten minutes; it is really very tiresome of you, and I am waiting for it.”

“Do you really mean that you are waiting for this board? Do you want it?”

“But of course; I shouldn’t have asked you to draw the nails out of it if I didn’t,” And it was by such subterfuges that she induced Evelyn to apply herself. “Now, you won’t think of anything until you have drawn out every nail, will you? Promise me.” Sister Mary John put the pincers into her hand, and when the board was free of nails, it seemed that Evelyn had begun to take an interest in the fate of the board which she had prepared. She came round the table to watch Sister Mary John planing it, and was very sorry when the nun’s plane was gapped by a nail which had been forgotten.

“This iron will have to go to the grinders.”

“I am so sorry, Sister. Will you forgive me?”

“Yes, I’ll forgive you; but you must try to pay attention.”

When the cucumber-frame was finished Sister Mary John was busy making some kitchen chairs, and the cutting out of the chair-backs moved Evelyn’s curiosity.

“Shall you really be able to make a chair that one can sit upon?”

“I hope so.”

“Have you ever made one before?”

“Well, no, this is my first chair, but I made several stools.”

The mystery of dovetailing was explained to Evelyn, and she learned that glue was required.

“Now you may, if you like, melt the glue for me.”

There was a stove in the adjoining shed, and Sister Mary John lighted a fire and told Evelyn that she was to keep stirring the glue. “And be sure not to let it burn.” But when she came back twenty minutes after, she found that Evelyn had wandered away from the stove to the farther end of the shed to watch a large spider.

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“Oh, Sister, just look at the spider! There is a fly in the web; see how he comes out to seize his prey!”

“But, my goodness, Evelyn! what about my glue? There it is, all burnt in the pot, and I shall have to take it to the kitchen and get hot water and scrape it all out. It is really very tiresome of you.”

When she returned with the glue, Evelyn said:

“You see, Sister, it is difficult to fix one’s thoughts on a glue-pot; the glue melts so slowly, and, watching the spider, I lost count of the time. But I think I should like to saw something.”

“That’s a very good idea.”

A saw was put into her hand, and half an hour after the sister came to see how Evelyn had been getting on. “Why, you will be a first-rate carpenter; you have sawn those boards capitally, wandering a little from the line, it is true, but you will do better to-morrow.”

Whenever Sister Mary John heard the saw cease she cried out, “Now, Sister Evelyn, what are you thinking about? You are neglecting your work.” And Evelyn would begin again, and continue until her arm ached.

“Here is Mother Abbess.”

“See, dear Mother, what Evelyn has been doing. She sawed this board through all by herself, and you see she has sawn it quite straight, and she has learned how to plane a board; and as for glueing, she does it capitally!”

XXI

“What are you looking for, Sister Evelyn?”

“Veronica asked me to go into the garden; I think it was to gather some laurel-leaves, but I can’t remember where they grow.”

“Never mind the leaves, I will gather them for you. Take my spade and dig a little while. It is pleasanter being in the open air than in that hot sacristy.”

“But I don’t know how to dig. You’ll only laugh at me.”

“No, no. See, here is a bed of spring onions, and it wants digging out. You press the spade in as far as you can, pull down the handle, and lift out the earth. I shall be some

little while away, and I expect you will have dug some yards. You can dig as far as this. Try, Evelyn, make up your mind that you will; if you make up your mind, you will succeed."

Evelyn promised.

"But you won't stay a long time, will you?" she called after the nun. "Now I know why Sister Mary John wears men's boots." And she stooped to pin up her skirt.

All the while the sky was clearing, the wind drove the clouds westward, breaking up the dark masses, scattering, winnowing, letting the sun through. Delicious was the glow, though it lasted but for a few minutes—perhaps more delicious because it was so transitory. Another patch of wind-driven clouds came up, and the world became cold and grey again. A moment afterwards the clouds passed, the sun shone out, and the delicious warmth filled mind and body with a delight that no artificial warmth could; and, to enjoy the glowing of the sun, Evelyn left her digging, and wandered away through the garden, stopping now and then to notice the progress of the spring. A late frost had cut the blossoms of the pear and the cherry; the half-blown blossom dropped at the touch of the finger, and Evelyn regretted the frost, thinking of the nets she had made.

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“They’ll be of very little use this year.” And she wondered if the currant and gooseberry-bushes had escaped; the apples had, for they were later, unless there was another frost. “And then my nets will be of no use at all; and, I have worked so hard at them!”

The lilac-bushes were not yet in leaf—only some tiny green shoots. “We shall not have any lilac this year till the middle of May. Was there ever such a season?” Larks were everywhere, ascending in short flights, trilling as they ascended; and Evelyn listened to their singing, thinking it most curious—quaint cadenzas in which a note was wanting, like in the bagpipes, a sort of aerial bagpipes. But on a bare bough a thrush sang, breaking out presently into a little tune of five notes. “Quite a little tune; one would think the bird had been taught it.” She waited for him to sing it again, but, as if not wishing to waste his song, being a careful bird, he continued a sort of recitative; then, thinking his listener had waited long enough for his little aria, he broke out again. “There it is, five notes—a distinct little tune.” Why should he sing and no other thrush sing it? There was a robin; but he sang the same little roundelay all the year.... A little, pale-brown bird, fluttering among the bushes, interested her; but it was some time before she could catch fair sight of it. “A dear little wren!” she said. “It must have its nest about here.” She sought it, knowing its beautifully woven house, with one hole, through which the bird passes to feed a numerous progeny, and expected to find it amid the tangle of traveller’s-joy which covered an old wall.

In the convent garden there was a beautiful ash-tree, under which Evelyn had often sat with the nuns during recreation, but it showed no signs of coming into leaf; and the poplars rose up against the bright sky, like enormous brooms. The hawthorns had resisted the frost better than the sycamores. One pitied the sycamore and the chestnut-trees most of all; and, fearing they would bear no leaves that year, Evelyn stood with a black and shrivelled leaf in her hand. “Autumn, before the spring has begun,” she said. “But here is Jack.” And she stooped to pick up the great yellow tom-cat, whom she remembered as a kindly, affectionate animal; but now he ran away from her, turning to snarl at her. “What can have happened to our dear Jack?” she asked herself. And Miss Dingle, who had been watching her from a little distance, cried out:

“You’ll not succeed in catching him; he has been very wicked lately, and is quite changed. The devil must have got into him, in spite of the blue ribbon I tied round his neck.”

“How are you, Miss Dingle?”

Miss Dingle evinced a considerable shyness, and muttered under her breath that she was very well. She hoped Evelyn was the same; and ran away a little distance, then stopped and looked back, her curiosity getting the better of her. “Ordinary conversation does not suit her,” Evelyn said to herself. And, when they were within speaking distance again, Evelyn asked her what had become of the blue ribbon she had tied round the cat’s neck to save him from the devil.

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“He tore it off—I mean the devil took it off. I can’t catch him. If you’d try?—if you’d get between him and that bush. It is a pity to see a good cat go to the devil because we can’t get a bit of blue ribbon on his neck.”

Evelyn stood between the cat and the bush, and creeping near, caught him by the neck, and held him by the forepaws while Miss Dingle tried to tie the ribbon round his neck; but Jack struggled, and raising one of his hind paws obliged Evelyn to loose him.

“There is no use trying; he won’t let it be put on his neck.”

“But what will become of him? He will get more and more savage.” Miss Dingle ran after the cat, who put up his tail and trotted away, eluding her. She came back, telling Evelyn that she might see the devil if she wished. “That is to say, if you are not afraid. He’s in that corner, and I don’t like to go there. I have hunted him out of these bushes —you need not be afraid, my rosary has been over them all.”

Evelyn could see that Miss Dingle wished her to exorcise the dangerous corner, and she offered to do so.

“You have two rosaries, you might lend me one.”

“No, I don’t think I could. I want two, one for each hand, you see.... I have not seen you in the garden this last day or two. You’ve been away, haven’t you?”

“I’ve been in Rome.”

“In Rome! Then why don’t you go and hunt him out... frighten him away? You don’t need a rosary if you have touched the precious relics. You should be able to drive him out of the garden, and out of the park too, though the park is a big place. But here comes Sister Mary John. You will tell me another time if you’ve brought back anything that the Pope has worn.”

Sister Mary John came striding over the broken earth, followed by her jackdaw. The bird stopped to pick up a fat worm, and the nun sent Miss Dingle away very summarily.

“I can’t have you here, Alice. Go to the summer-house and worry the devil away with your holy pictures. I’ve no time for you, dear,” she said to the jackdaw, who had alighted on her shoulder; “and I have been looking for you everywhere,” she said, turning from her bird to Evelyn. “You promised me—But I suppose digging tired you?”

“No, it was not that, Sister, only the sun came out and the warmth was so delicious; I am afraid I am easily beguiled.”

“We are all easily beguiled,” Sister Mary John answered somewhat sharply. “Now we must try to get on with our digging. You can help me a little with it, can’t you?” And

looking up and down a plot about ten yards long and twenty feet wide, protected by a yew-hedge, she said, “This is the rhubarb-bed. And this piece,” she said, walking to another plot between the yew-hedge and the gooseberry bushes, “will have to be dug up. We were short of vegetables last year.”

“You speak very lightly, Sister, of so much digging. Do you never get tired?” So that she might not lose heart altogether, Sister Mary John told her one of these beds had been dug up in autumn, and that no more would be required than the hoeing out of the weeds.

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“Is hoeing lighter work than digging?”

“You will find out soon.” Evelyn set to work; but when she had cleared a large piece of weeds she had to go over the ground again, having missed a great many. “But you will soon get used to the work. Now, there’s the dinner bell. Are you so tired as all that?”

“Well, you see, I have never done any digging before.”

After dinner Sister Mary John without further words told her she was to go in front with the dibble and make holes for the potatoes, for an absent-minded person could not be trusted with the seed potatoes— she would be sure to break the shoots. The next week they were engaged in sowing French beans and scarlet runners, and Evelyn thought it rather unreasonable of the sister to expect her to know by instinct that French beans should not be set as closely together as the scarlet runners, and she laughed outright when the sister said, “But surely you know that broad beans must be trodden firmly into the ground?” Sister Mary John noticed her laugh. “Work in the garden suits her,” she said to herself, “she is getting better; only we must be careful against a relapse. Now, Evelyn, we must weed the flower beds, or there will be no flowers for the Virgin in May.” And they weeded and weeded, day after day, filling in the gaps with plants from the nursery. A few days later came the seed sowing, the mignonette, sweet pea, stocks, larkspur, poppies, and nasturtiums— all of which should have been sown earlier, the nun said, only the season was so late, and the vegetables had taken all their time.

“They all like to see flowers on the altar, but not one of them will tie up her habit and dig, and they are as ignorant as you are, dear.”

“Sister, that is unkind. I have learned as much as can be expected in a month.”

“You aren’t so careless as you were.” The two women walked a little way, and then they sat for a long time looking into the distant park, enjoying the soft south wind blowing over it. Evelyn would have liked to have sat there indefinitely, and far too soon did the nun remind her that time was going by and they must return to their work. “We have had some warm nights lately and the wallflowers are out; come and look at them, dear.” And forgetful of her, Sister Mary John rose and went towards the flower garden. Evelyn was too tired to follow, and she sat watching Sister Mary John, who seemed as much part of the garden as the wind, or the rain, or the sun.

XXII

A cold shower struck the windows of the novitiate.

“Was there ever such weather? Will it never cease raining and blowing?” the novices cried, and they looked through the panes into the windy garden. Next day the same dark clouds rolled overhead, with gleams of sunshine now and then lighting up the

garden and the distant common, where sometimes a horseman was seen galloping at the close of day, just as in a picture.

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“How wet he will be when he gets home!” a novice would sometimes say, and the conversation was not continued.

“I wonder if we shall ever have fine weather again?” broke in another.

“One of these days it will cease raining,” Mother Hilda said, for she was an optimist; and very soon she began to be looked upon as a prophetess, for the weather mended imperceptibly, and one afternoon the sky was in gala toilette, in veils and laces: a great lady stepping into her carriage going to a ball could not be more beautifully attired. An immense sky brushed over with faint wreathing clouds with blue colour showing through, a blue brilliant as any enamel worn by a great lady on her bosom; and the likeness of the clouds to plumes passed through Evelyn’s mind, and her eyes wandering westward, noticed how the sky down there was a rich, almost sulphurous, yellow; it set off the white and blue aerial extravagances of the zenith. The garden was still wet and cold, but a warm air was coming in, and the voices of the nuns and novices sounded so innocent and free that Evelyn was moved by a sudden sympathy to join them.

Under yonder trees the three Mothers were walking, looking towards Evelyn now and then; she was the subject of their conversation, the Prioress maintaining it would be a great benefit to her to take the veil.

“But, dear Mother, do you think she will ever recover her health sufficiently for her to decide, and for us to decide, whether she has a vocation?” Mother Hilda asked.

“It seems to me that Evelyn is recovering every day. Do you remember at first whole days passed without her speaking? Now there are times when she joins in the conversation.”

Mother Mary Hilda did not answer, and a little aggressive glance shot out of the Prioress’s eyes.

“You don’t like to have her in the novitiate. I remember when she returned from Rome —”

“It seems to me that it would be just as well for her to live in the convent as an oblate, occupying the guest-room as before.”

“Now, why do you think that, Hilda? Let us have things precise.”

“Her life as an opera singer clings about her.”

“On the contrary, I cannot discover any trace of her past life in her. In the chapel she seems very often overcome, and for piety seems to set an example to us all.”

“You see, dear Mother, I am responsible for the religious education of some half-dozen young and innocent girls, and, though I like Evelyn herself very much, her influence—”

“But what influence? She doesn’t speak.”

“No matter; it is known to every one in the convent that she has once been a singer, though they don’t know, perhaps, she was on the stage; and she creates an atmosphere which I assure you—”

“Of course, Hilda, you can oppose me; you always oppose. Nothing is easier than opposition. Your responsibilities, I would not attempt to deny that they exist, but you seem to forget that I, too, have responsibilities. The debts of the convent are very pressing. And Mother Philippa, too, has responsibilities.”

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“It would be a great advantage if Evelyn could discover she had a vocation. Four or five, perhaps six hundred a year—she must have at least that, for opera singers are very well paid, so I have always heard—would—”

“But, Mother Philippa, the whole question is whether Evelyn has a vocation. We know what the advantages would be,” said Mother Hilda in a low, insinuating voice which always exasperated the Reverend Mother.

“I think it would be better to wait,” Mother Philippa answered. “You see, she is suffering from a great mental breakdown; I think she should have her chance like another.” And, turning to the Prioress, she said, “Dear Mother, do you think when Evelyn recovers her health sufficiently to arrive at a decision that she will stay with us?”

“Not if a dead set is made against her, and if she is made to feel she has no vocation, and that her influence is a pernicious one.”

“Dear Mother, I never said—”

“Well, don’t let us discuss the matter any more for the moment. Of course, if you decide that Evelyn is not to remain in the novitiate—”

“It is for you to decide the matter. You are Reverend Mother here, it is for us to obey; only since you ask me—”

“Ask you, Hilda? But you tell me nothing. You merely oppose. What is your dislike to Evelyn?”

“Dislike!”

“I am sure there is no dislike on Mother Hilda’s part,” Mother Philippa said; “I am quite sure of that, Reverend Mother. Evelyn’s health is certainly improving, and I hope she will soon be able to sing for us again at Benediction. Haven’t you noticed that our congregation is beginning to fall away? And you won’t deny that the fact that an opera singer wishes to enter our convent gives a distinction—”

“It depends, Mother Philippa, in what sense you use the word ‘distinction.’ But I see you don’t agree with me; you think with the Prioress that Evelyn is—”

“Don’t let us argue this question any more. Hilda, go and tell Evelyn I want her.”

“How Hilda does try to thwart me, to make things more difficult than they are!”

“Evelyn, my dear child, I have sent for you to ask if you feel well enough to-day to sing for us at Benediction?”

“Oh, yes, dear Mother, why shouldn’t I sing for you? What would you like me to sing?"’ The Prioress hesitated, and then asked Evelyn to suggest some pieces, and after several suggestions Evelyn said:

“Perhaps it would be better if I were to call Sister Mary John, if you will allow me, Mother.” And she went away, calling to the other nun, who came quickly from the kitchen garden in her big boots and her habit tucked up nearly to her knees, looking very much more like a labouring woman than a musician.

“We were talking just now of what Evelyn would sing for us at Benediction; perhaps you had better go away and discuss the matter between you.”

“Will you sing Stradella’s ‘Chanson d’Eglise’ or will you sing Schubert’s ‘Ave Maria’? Nothing is more beautiful than that.”

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“I will sing the ‘Ave Maria.’”

The nun sat down to play it, but she had not played many bars when Evelyn interrupted her. “The intention of the single note, dear Sister, the octave you are striking now, has always seemed to me like a distant bell heard in the evening. Will you play it so.”

XXIII

And the idea of a bell sounding across the evening landscape was in the mind of the congregation when Sister Mary John played the octave; and the broken chords she played with her right hand awoke a sensation of lights dying behind distant hills.

It is almost night, and amid a lonely landscape a harsh rock appears, and by it a forlorn woman stands—a woman who is without friend or any mortal hope—and she commends herself to the care of the Virgin. She begins to sing softly, tremulous, like one in pain and doubt, “Ave Maria, hearken to the Virgin’s cry.” The melody she sings is rich, even ornate, but the richness of the phrase, with its two little grace notes, does not mitigate the sorrow at the core; the rich garb in which the idea is clothed does not rob the song of its humanity.

Evelyn’s voice filled with the beauty of the melody, and she sang the phrase which closes the stanza—a phrase which dances like a puff of wind in an evening bough—so tenderly, so lovingly, that acute tears trembled under the eyelids. And all her soul was in her voice when she sang the phrase of passionate faith which the lonely, disheartened woman sings, looking up from the desert rock. Then her voice sank into the calm beauty of the “Ave Maria,” now given with confidence in the Virgin’s intercession, and the broken chords passed down the keyboard, uniting with the last note of the solemn octaves, which had sounded through the song like bells heard across an evening landscape.

“How beautifully she sings it!” a man said out loud, and his neighbour looked and wondered, for the man’s eyes were full of tears.

“You have a beautiful voice, child,” said the Prioress when they came out of church, “and it is a real pleasure to me to hear you sing, and it will be a greater pleasure when I know that for the future your great gift will be devoted to the service of God. Shall we go into the garden for a little walk before supper? We shall have it to ourselves, and the air will do you good.”

It was the month of June, and the convent garden was in all the colour of its summer—-crimson and pink; and all the scents of the month, stocks and sweetbriar, were blown up from St. Peter’s Walk. In the long mixed borders the blue larkspurs stood erect between Canterbury bells and the bush peonies, crimson and pink, and here and there amid

furred leaves, at the end of a long furred stalk, flared the foolish poppy, roses like pale porcelain clustered along the low terraced walk and up the house itself, over the stucco walls; but more beautiful than the roses were the delicate petals of the clematis, stretched out like fingers upon the walls.

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An old nun was being wheeled up and down the terrace in a bath-chair by one of the lay sisters, that she might enjoy the sweet air.

“I must say a word to Sister Lawrence,” the Prioress said, “she will never forgive me if I don’t. She is the eldest member of our community; if she lives another two years, she will complete half a century of convent life.”

As they drew near Evelyn saw two black eyes in a white, almost fleshless face. The eyes alone seemed to live, and the shrunken figure, huddled in many shawls, gave an impression of patriarchal age. Evelyn saw by her veil that Sister Lawrence was a lay sister, and the old nun tried to draw herself up in her chair as they approached, and kissed the hand of the Prioress.

“Well, Sister, how are you feeling? I have brought you our new musical postulant to look at. I want to know what you think of her. You must know, Evelyn,” said the Prioress, “that Sister Lawrence is a great judge of people’s vocations; I always consult her about my new postulants.”

Sister Lawrence took Evelyn’s hands between hers and gazed into her face so earnestly that Evelyn feared her innermost thoughts were being read. Then, with a little touch of wilfulness, that came oddly from one so old and venerable, the Sister said:

“Well, Reverend Mother, she is pretty anyhow, and it is a long time since we had a pretty postulant.”

“Really, Sister Lawrence, I am ashamed of you,” said the Prioress with playful severity; “Sister Evelyn will be quite disedified.”

“Mother, if I like them to be pretty it is only because they have one more gift to bring to the feet of our dear Lord. I see in Sister Evelyn’s face that she has a vocation. I believe she is the providence that God has sent to help us through our difficulties.”

“We are all praying,” said the Prioress, “that it may be so.”

“Well, Hilda, you’ll agree with me now, I think, that we have every reason to hope.”

“Hope for what, dear Mother?”

“That we shall discover a vocation in Evelyn. You heard what Sister Lawrence said, and she has had great experience.”

“It is possible to God, of course, that an opera singer may find a vocation for the religious life, and live happily in a community of nuns devoted to Perpetual Adoration.”

“But you don’t believe God desires that such a thing should come to pass?”

“I shouldn’t like to say that, it would be too presumptuous; but it would be entirely out of the ordinary course.”

The Prioress began to wonder if Mother Hilda suspected that some great sin committed while she was in Rome was the cause of Evelyn’s nervous breakdown; and the Mistress of the Novices, as she walked by the side of the Prioress, began to wonder why the Prioress wished that Evelyn should become a nun. It might be that the Prioress, who was a widow, was interested in the miracle of the great shock which had caused

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Evelyn to relinquish her career and to turn to the Church! That might be her motive, she reflected. Those who have lived in the world are attracted and are interested in each other, and are to some extent alien to the real nun, to her who never doubts her vocation from the first and resolves from the first to bring her virginity to God—it being what is most pleasing to him. It might be that the Prioress was influenced, unconsciously, of course, by some such motive; yet it was strange that she should be able to close her eyes to Evelyn's state of mind. The poor woman was still distracted and perplexed by a great shock which had happened before she came to the convent and which had been aggravated by another when she went to Rome; she had returned to them as to a refuge from herself. Such mental crises often happened to women of the world, to naturally pious women; but natural piety did not in the least mean a vocation, and Mother Hilda had to admit to herself that she could discover no sign of a vocation in Evelyn. How were it possible to discover one? She was not herself, and would not be for a long while, if she ever recovered herself. Mother Prioress had chosen to admit her as a postulant.... Even that concession Mother Hilda did not look upon with favour. Why not go one step farther and make Miss Dingle a postulant? It seemed to her that if Mother Prioress insisted that Evelyn should take the white veil at present, a very serious step would be taken. It was the Mistress of the Novices who would be responsible for Evelyn's instruction, and Evelyn was hardly ever in the novitiate; she was always singing, or working in the garden.

XXIV

"I am afraid, dear Mother, her progress towards recovery is slow."

"I don't agree with you. A great nervous breakdown! That journey to Rome, only to see her father die before her eyes, was a great shock— such a one as it would take anybody a long time to recover from. Evelyn is very highly-strung, there can be no doubt of that. I wonder how it is that you don't understand?"

"But I do understand, dear Mother, only I find it hard to believe that the time has come for her to take the white veil."

"Or that it will ever come?"

"The other day she said in the novitiate she was sure she would go to hell, and that she wouldn't be able to bear the uncertainty much longer...."

"What ever did she mean? You must have misunderstood her, Mother Hilda." And the Prioress determined to talk to Evelyn "on the first occasion"—the first occasion with the Prioress meant the very next minute. So she went in search of her, and finding her by

the fishpond, quite unaware that any one was watching her, the thought crossed the Prioress's mind that Hilda might be right after all: Evelyn might be sitting there thinking how, after a short struggle, the water would end the misery that was consuming her.

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“Evelyn, dear, of what are you thinking?”

“Only of the fish, dear Mother. You know they are quite deaf; fish haven’t ears. There is a legend, however, of a boy playing the flute and the fish leaping to listen.”

“If her health doesn’t improve,” the Prioress said to herself, “we shall not be able to keep her.

“Evelyn, dear, you are not looking very well; I am afraid you haven’t been sleeping lately.”

“Last night I hardly closed my eyes, dear Mother, and to-day there is no reality anywhere. One begins to hate everything—the shapes of the trees, the colour of the sky.”

“It is just what I suspected,” the Prioress said to herself, “she was thinking of suicide. Suicide in a convent—such a thing has never happened. Yet why shouldn’t such a thing happen? Everything happens in this world.”

But, notwithstanding some alarming relapses, Evelyn’s health continued to improve, slowly, but it continued to improve; and after a long day’s work in the garden she would talk quite cheerfully, saying that that night for sure she would get some hours of sleep. The Prioress listened, saying to herself, “There is no doubt that manual work is the real remedy, the only remedy.” Sister Mary John was of the same opinion, and the Prioress relied on Sister Mary John to keep Evelyn hoeing and digging when it was fine, and making nets in the work-shop when it was wet. She was encouraged to look after the different pets; and there were a good many to look after; her three cats occupied a good deal of her time, for the cats were always anxious to kill her tame birds. One cat had killed several, so the question had arisen whether he should be drowned in the fishpond or trained to respect caged birds. The way to do this, Evelyn had been told, was to put a caged bird on the ground in front of the cat, and, standing over him with a cane, strike swiftly and severely the moment the cat crouched to spring. A cat above all other animals hates to be beaten, for a cat is probably one of the most sagacious animals, more even than a dog, though he does not care to show it. The beating of the cat was repellent to Evelyn, but Sister Mary John had no such scruples, and the beatings proved so efficient that the cat would run away the moment he was shown a bird in a cage. In turn each of the cats received its lesson, and henceforth Evelyn’s last presents—blackbirds, thrushes, linnets, and bull-finches—lived in safety.

The feeding of these birds and the cleaning of the aviary occupied two hours a day during the winter. She had also her greenhouse to attend to; herself and Sister Mary John, with some help from the outside, had built one, and hot-water pipes had been put in; and her love of flowers was so great that she would run down the garden even when

the ground was covered with snow to stoke up the fire, if she thought she had forgotten to do so, saying that they would have no tulips, or lily of the valley, or azaleas for the

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altar, if the temperature were allowed to drop. Her talk was all about her garden, and when the spring returned she was working there constantly with Sister Mary John in the morning till the Angelus rang at twelve; then they went into dinner, and as soon as dinner was over Evelyn returned with Sister Mary John to the garden and worked till it was time to go into church for Benediction. Or sometimes they left the garden when the other nuns went there for recreation, having music to try over, for now, since she had recovered her health, Evelyn sang every day at Benediction.

"There is no reason why she should remain any longer with us," the Prioress often said, "unless there is some hope of her staying altogether. You will admit, Hilda, that her health is much improved, and that she is capable now of arriving at some decision."

"There is no doubt her health is improving."

"And her piety—have you noticed it? She almost sets us an example."

Mother Hilda did not answer, and the Prioress understood her silence to mean that she would hardly look upon Evelyn as an example for the convent to follow.

"Well, something will have to be decided." And one evening the Prioress asked Mother Philippa and Mother Hilda to her room after evening prayers.

"We were talking of Evelyn the other day in the garden, Hilda, and you admitted that she was in a state now to decide whether she should go or stay."

"You mean, dear Mother, that Evelyn must either leave us or join the community?"

"Or show some signs that she wishes to join it. Her postulancy has been unduly prolonged; it is nearly a year since she returned from Rome, and she was a postulant for six months before that."

"You think that if she hadn't a vocation she would have left us before? But are you not forgetting that she was suffering from a nervous breakdown, and came here with the intention of seeking rest rather than becoming one of us?"

"Her health has been mending this long while. Really, Hilda—"

"I am sorry, Mother, if I seem stubborn."

"Not stubborn, but I should like to hear you explain your reasons for thinking Evelyn has not a vocation. And Mother Philippa is most anxious to hear them, too."

Mother Philippa listened, thinking of her bed, wondering why Mother Mary Hilda kept them up by refusing to agree with the Prioress.

“I am afraid I shall not be able to say anything that will convince you. I have had some experience—”

“We know that you are very experienced, otherwise you would not be the Mistress of the Novices. You don’t believe in Evelyn’s vocation?”

“I’m afraid I don’t, and—”

“And what, Mother Hilda? We are here for the purpose of listening to you. We shall be influenced by everything you say, so pray speak your mind fully.”

“About Evelyn? But that is just my point; there is nothing for me to say about her. I hardly know her; she has hardly been in the novitiate since she returned from Rome.”
“You think before taking the veil she should receive more religious instruction from you?”

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“She certainly should. I grant you Evelyn is a naturally pious woman, and that counts for a great deal; but what I attach importance to is that she is still alien to the convent, knowing hardly anything of our rule, of our observances. A novice spends six months in the novitiate with me learning obedience, how to forget herself, how she is merely an instrument, and how the greatest purpose of her life is to obey.”

“It is impossible to overestimate the value of obedience, but there are some—I will not say who can dispense with obedience, of course not, but who cannot put off their individualities, who cannot become the merely typical novice—that one who would tell you, if she were asked to describe the first six months of her life in the convent, that all she remembered was a great deal of running up and down stairs. There are some who may not be moulded, but who mould themselves; and they are not the worst, sometimes they are the best nuns. For instance, Sister Mary John—who will doubt her vocation? And yet there is not a more headstrong nun in our community. I don’t wish to say one word against Sister Mary John, who is an example to us all; it is only to answer your objection that I mentioned her.”

“Sister Mary John is quite different,” Mother Hilda answered. And, after waiting some moments for Mother Hilda to continue, the Prioress said:

“You would wish her, then, to spend some time longer with you in the novitiate?”

“I am not sure it would be of any use. There is another matter about which I hardly like to speak; still, I must remind you that the convent has never been the same since she came here. She has not been herself since she came back from Rome, but now she is regaining herself, and you cannot have failed to notice that both Sister Mary John and Veronica are drawn towards her. I am sure they are not aware of it, and would resent my criticism as unjust. Not only Sister Mary John and Veronica, but all of us; it seems to me that we all talk too much about her... I am sometimes almost glad that she is so little in the novitiate. Her influence on such simple-minded young women as Sister Jerome and Sister Barbara must be harmful—how could it be otherwise, coming out of another world? and her voice, too—you don’t agree with me?” And Mother Hilda turned to Mother Philippa. Mother Philippa shook her head, and confessed she had not the slightest notion of what Mother Hilda meant.

“But you have, dear Mother?”

“Yes, I know very well what you mean, only I don’t agree with you. Her singing, of course, gives her an exceptional position in the convent, but I don’t think she avails herself of it; indeed, her humility has often seemed to me most striking.”

“In that I agree with you,” Mother Hilda answered; “so I feel that perhaps, after all, I may be misjudging her.”

At this concession the Prioress’s manner softened at once towards the Mistress of the Novices.

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“Well, Hilda, come, tell me, have you said everything you have to say? Have you given us your full reasons for not wishing Evelyn to take the veil if she should decide to do so? I see you hesitate. I asked you here to-night so that you might speak your mind. Let everything be said. There is no use telling me afterwards that you didn’t say things because you thought I wouldn’t like to hear them. Say everything.”

Pressed by the Prioress, Mother Hilda admitted that she was concerned regarding the motive which actuated the Prioress and Mother Philippa.

“I include her.”

Mother Philippa looked up suddenly. The Prioress smiled.

“My motive!” said Mother Philippa.

“Nothing is farther from my thought than to attribute a wrong motive to anybody, but I am not quite sure, dear Mother, that you would be as anxious for Evelyn to join our community if she had no money... and no voice.”

“Situated as we are, we cannot accept penniless women as choir sisters. You know that well enough—am I not right, Mother Philippa?”

And Mother Philippa agreed that no one could be admitted into the convent as a choir sister unless she brought some money with her.

“But you hold a different opinion, Hilda?”

“I understand that we cannot admit as a choir sister a woman who has no money; but that is quite different from admitting an opera singer because she has money and can sing for us. It seems to me that nuns devoted to Perpetual Adoration should not yield themselves to money considerations.”

“Yield to money considerations—no; but as long as we live upon earth, we shall live dependent upon money in some form or another. Our pecuniary embarrassments—you know all about them. I need not refer to the mortgagee, who, at any moment, may foreclose. Think of what it would be if this house were to be put up for sale, and we had all to return to our relations. How many are there who have relations who would take them in? And the lay sisters—what would become of them and our duties towards them—they who have worked for us all these years? Sister Lawrence—would you like to see her on the roadside, or carried to the workhouse? Spiritual considerations come first, of course, but we must have a house to live in and a chapel to pray in. Do you never think of these things, Hilda?”

“Yes, and I appreciate the anxiety our pecuniary difficulties cause you, dear Mother. I am not indifferent, I assure you, but I cannot help feeling that anything were better than we should stop, instead of going forward, towards the high ideal—”

“Well, Hilda, are you prepared to risk it? We have a chance of redeeming the convent from debt—will you accept the responsibility?”

“Of what, dear Mother?”

“Of refusing to agree that Evelyn shall be allowed to take the white veil, if she wishes to take it.”

“But taking the white veil will not enable us to get hold of her money. We shall have to wait till she is professed.”

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“But if she is given the white veil,” the Prioress answered sternly, “she will be induced to remain. The fact of her taking the white veil is a great inducement, and a year hence who knows—”

“Well, dear Mother, you will act, I am sure, for the best. Perhaps it would have been better if you had not consulted me; but, having consulted me, I had to tell you what I think. I am aware that in practical matters I am but a very poor judge. Remember, I passed, like Veronica, from the schoolroom to the convent. But you know the world.”

“It is very kind of you to admit so much; but it seems to me, Hilda, you are only admitting that much so as to give a point to your contention, or what I suppose is your contention —that those who never knew the world may attain to a more intense spirituality than poor women such as myself and Mother Philippa here, who did not enter the convent as early in life as you did... but who renounced the world.”

The sharp tone of the Prioress’s voice, when she mentioned Mother Philippa’s name, awoke the nun, who had been dozing.

“Well, Mother Philippa, what is your opinion?”

“It seems to me,” the nun answered, now wide awake, “that it is a matter for Evelyn to decide. You think I was asleep, but I wasn’t; I heard everything you said. You were discussing your own scruples of conscience, which seem to me quite beside the question. Our conscience has nothing to do with the matter; it is all a question for Evelyn to decide herself... as soon as she is well, of course.”

“And she is now quite well. I will see her to-morrow on the subject.”

On this the Prioress rose to her feet, and the other two nuns understood that the interview was at an end.

“Dear Mother, I know how great your difficulties are,” said Mother Hilda, “and I am loth to oppose your wishes in anything. I know how wise you are, how much wiser than we —but however foolishly I may appear to be acting, you will understand that I cannot act differently, feeling as I do.”

“I understand that, Hilda; we all must act according to our lights. And now we must go to bed, we are breaking all the rules of the house.”

XXV

After breakfast Veronica came to Evelyn, saying that dear Mother would like to speak to her. Evelyn nodded, and went gaily to see the Prioress in her room on the ground-floor. Its long French windows, opening on to the terrace-walk, appealed to her taste; and the

crowded writing-table, on which stood a beautiful crucifix in yellow ivory. Papers and tin boxes were piled in one corner. But there was no carpet, and only one armchair, over-worn and shabby. There were flowers in vases and bowls, and, in a large cage, canaries uttered their piercing songs.

“I like your room, dear Mother, and wish you would send for me a little oftener. All your writing—now couldn’t I do some of it for you?”

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“Yes, Evelyn, I should like to use you sometimes as a secretary... if you are going to remain with us.”

“I don’t know what you mean, Mother.”

“Well, sit down. I have sent for you because I want to have a little talk with you on this subject.” And she spoke of Evelyn’s postulancy; of how long it had lasted. It seemed to the Prioress that it would be better, supposing Evelyn did not intend to remain with them, for her to live with them as an oblate, occupying the guest-chamber.

“Your health doesn’t permit much religious instruction; but one of these days you will realise better than you do now what our life is, and what its objects are.”

So did the Prioress talk, getting nearer the point towards which she was making, without, however, pressing Evelyn to answer any direct question, leading her towards an involuntary decision.

“But, dear Mother, I am safe here, you know.”

“And yet you fear, my dear child, you have no vocation?”

“Well, it seems extraordinary that I—”

“More extraordinary things have happened in the world than that; besides, there is much time for you to decide. No one proposes that you should be admitted to the Order to-morrow; such a thing, you know, is impossible, but the white veil is a great help. Evelyn, dear, this question has been running in my mind some time back—is it well for you to remain a postulant any longer? The white veil, again I say, is such a help.”

“A help for what, dear Mother?”

“Well, it will tell you if you have a vocation; at the end of the year you will know much better than you know now.”

“I a nun!” Evelyn repeated.

“In a year you will be better able to decide. Extraordinary things have happened.”

“But it would be extraordinary,” Evelyn said, speaking to herself rather than to the nun.

“I have spoken to Mother Hilda and Mother Philippa on the subject, and they are agreed that if you are to remain in the convent it would be better for you to take the white veil.”

“Or do they think that it would be better for me to leave the convent?”

“It would be impossible for us to think such a thing, my dear child.”

“But what I would wish to understand, dear Mother, is this—have I to decide either to leave the convent or to take the white veil?”

“Oh, no; but you have been so long a postulant.”

“But when I went to Rome my postulancy—”

“Even so, you have been a postulant for over a year; and, should you discover that you have no vocation, the fact of having been a novice, of having worn the white veil, will be a protection to you ever afterwards, should you return to the world.”

“You think so, dear Mother?”

And the Prioress read in Evelyn’s face that she had touched the right note.

“Yes, to have a name, for instance—not only the veil, but the name. I have been thinking of a name for you—what do you think of ’Teresa’?”

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“Teresa!” Evelyn answered. And her thoughts went to the great nun whose literature she had first read in the garden outside, when she walked there as a visitor. It was under a certain tree, where she had often sat since with Mother Hilda and the novices, that she had first read the “Autobiography” and “The Way of Perfection.” There were the saints’ poems, too; and, thinking of them, a pride awoke in her that for a time, at least, she should bear the saint’s name. The Prioress was right, the saint’s name would fortify her against her enemy; and her noviceship would be something to look back upon, and the memory of it would protect her when she left the convent.

“I am glad that we shall have you, at all events, for some months more with us—some months more for sure, perhaps always. But take time to consider it.”

“Dear Mother, I am quite decided.”

“Think it over. You can tell me your decision some time in the afternoon, or to-morrow.”

It was a few days after that the Prioress took Evelyn up to the novitiate, where the novices were making the dress that Evelyn was to wear when she received the white veil.

“You see, Teresa, we spare no expense or trouble on your dress,” said the Prioress.

“Oh, it is no trouble, dear Mother.” And Sister Angela rose from her chair and turned the dress right side out and shook it, so that Evelyn might admire the handsome folds into which the silk fell.

“And see, here is the wreath,” said Sister Jerome, picking up a wreath of orange-blossoms from a chair.

“And what do you think of your veil, Sister Teresa? Sister Rufina did this feather-stitch. Hasn’t she done it beautifully?”

“And Sister Rufina is making your wedding-cake. Mother Philippa has told her to put in as many raisins and currants as she pleases. Yours will be the richest cake we have ever had in the convent.” Sister Angela spoke very demurely, for she was thinking of the portion of the cake that would come to her, and there was a little gluttony in her voice as she spoke of the almond paste it would have upon it.

“It is indeed a pity,” said Sister Jerome, “that Sister Teresa’s clothing takes place so early in the year.”

“How so, Sister Jerome?” Evelyn asked incautiously.

“Because if it had been a little later, or if Monsignor had not been delayed in Rome—I only thought,” she added, stopping short, “that you would like Monsignor to give you the

white veil—it would be nicer for you; or if the Bishop gave it," she added, "or Father Ambrose. I am sure Sister Veronica never would have been a nun at all if Father Ambrose had not professed her. Father Daly is such a little frump."

"That will do, children; I cannot really allow our chaplain to be spoken of in that manner." And Mother Hilda looked at Evelyn, thinking, "Well, the Prioress has had her way with her."

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The recreation-bell rang, and the novices clattered down the stairs of the novitiate, their childish eagerness rousing Evelyn from the mild stupor which still seemed to hang about her mind; and she smiled at the novices and at herself, for suddenly it had all begun to seem to her like a scene in a play, herself going to take the white veil and to become a nun, at all events, for a while. "Now, how is all this to end?" she asked herself. "But what does it matter?" Clouds seemed to envelop her mind again, and she acquiesced when the Prioress said:

"I think your retreat had better begin to-day."

"When, Mother?"

"Well, from this moment."

"If Teresa will come into the garden with me," said Mother Hilda.

It was impossible for the Prioress to say no, and a slaty blush of anger came into her cheek. "Hilda will do all she can to prevent her." Nor was the Prioress wholly wrong in her surmise, for they had not walked very far before Evelyn admitted that the idea of the white veil frightened her a great deal.

"Frightens you, my dear child?"

"But if I had a vocation I should not feel frightened. Isn't that so, Mother Hilda?"

"I shouldn't like to say that, Teresa. One can feel frightened and yet desire a thing very much; desire and fear are not incompatible."

Tears glistened in her eyes, and she appealed to Mother Hilda, saying:

"Dear Mother, I don't know why I am crying, but I am very unhappy. There is no reason why I should be, for here I am safe."

"Will she ever recover her mind sufficiently to know what she is doing?" Mother Hilda asked herself.

"It is always," Evelyn said, "as if I were trying to escape from something." Mother Hilda pressed her to explain. "I cannot explain myself better than by telling that it is as if the house were burning behind me, and I were trying to get away."

That evening Mother Hilda consulted the Prioress, telling her of Evelyn's tears and confusion.

"But, Hilda, why do you trouble her with questions as to whether she would like to be a nun or not? As I have said repeatedly, the veil is a great help, and, in a year hence,

Teresa will know whether she'd like to join our community. In the meantime, pray let her be in peace and recover herself." The Prioress's voice was stern.

"Only this, dear Mother—"

"The mistake you make, Hilda, seems to me to be that you imagine every one turns to religion and to the convent for the same reason, whereas the reasons that bring us to God are widely different. You are disappointed in Teresa, not because she lacks piety, but because she is not like Jerome or Angela or Veronica, whom we both know very well. Each seeks her need in religion, and you are not acquainted with Teresa's, that is all. Now, Hilda, obedience is the first of all the virtues, and I claim yours in all that regards Teresa." Mother Hilda raised her quiet eyes and looked into the Prioress's face, and then lowered them again. "We should be lacking in our duty," the Prioress continued, "if we don't try to keep her by all legitimate means. She will receive the white veil at the end of the week; try to prepare her for her clothing, instruct her in the rule of our house; no one can do that as well as you."

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Lifting her eyes again for a moment, Mother Hilda answered that it should be as the Prioress wished—that she would do her best to instruct Teresa; and she moved away slowly, the Prioress not seeking to detain her any longer in her room.

XXVI

Next day in the novitiate Mother Hilda explained to Evelyn how the centre of their life was the perpetual adoration of the Blessed Sacrament exposed on the altar.

“Our life is a life of expiation; we expiate by our prayers and our penances and our acts of adoration the many insults which are daily flung at our divine Lord by those who not only disobey His commandments, but deny His very presence on our altars. To our prayers of expiation we add prayers of intercession; we pray for the many people in this country outside the faith who offend our Lord Jesus Christ more from ignorance than from malice. All our little acts of mortification are offered with this intention. From morning Mass until Benediction our chapel, as you know, is never left empty for a single instant of the day; two silent watchers kneel before the Blessed Sacrament, offering themselves in expiation of the sins of others. This watch before the Blessed Sacrament is the chief duty laid upon the members of our community. Nothing is ever allowed to interfere with it. Unfailing punctuality is asked from every one in being in the chapel at the moment her watch begins, and no excuse is accepted from those who fail in this respect. Our idea is that all through the day a ceaseless stream of supplication should mount to heaven, that not for a single instant should there be a break in the work of prayer. If our numbers permitted it we should have Perpetual Adoration by day and night, as in the mother house in France; but here the bishop only allows us to have exposition once a month throughout the night, and all our Sisters look forward to this as their greatest privilege.”

“It is a very beautiful life, Mother Hilda; but I wonder if I have a vocation?”

“That is the great question, my dear,” and a cloud gathered in Mother Hilda’s face, for it had come into her mind to tell Evelyn that she hardly knew anything of the religious life as yet; but remembering her promise to the Prioress, she said: “Obedience is the beginning of the religious life, and you must try to think that you are a child in school, with nothing to teach and everything to learn. The experience of your past life, which you may think entitles you to consideration—”

“But, dear Mother, I think nothing of the kind; my whole concern is to try to forget my past life. Ah, if I could only—” Mother Hilda wondered what it must be to bring that look of fear into Evelyn’s eyes, but she refrained from questioning her, saying:

“I beg of you to put all the teachings of the world as far from your mind as possible. It will only confuse you. What we think wise the world thinks foolish, and the wisdom of the world is to us a vanity.”

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“If it were only a vanity,” Evelyn answered. And her thoughts moved away from the Mother Mistress to herself, wondering how it was that this conventual life was so sympathetic to her, finding a reason in the fact that her idea had alienated her from the world; she had come here in quest of herself, and had found something, not exactly herself, perhaps, but at all events a refuge from one side of herself, and many other things—a group of women who thought as she did. But would the convent always be as necessary to her as it was to-day? And what a grief it would be to the nuns when the term of her noviceship ended. Would she find courage to tell them that she did not wish to take final vows? But she must listen to Mother Hilda who was instructing her in the virtue of obedience. After obedience came the rule of silence.

“But I don’t know how the work in the garden will be done if one isn’t allowed to speak.”

“The work in the garden must wait until your retreat is over. Now go, my dear; I am waiting for Sisters Winifred and Veronica, who are coming to me for their Latin lesson.”

“May I go into the garden?”

It amused Evelyn to ask the question, so strange did it seem that she should ask, like a little child, permission to go into the garden; and as she went along the passages she began to fear that the old Evelyn was on her way back, the woman who had disappeared for so many months. Be that as it may, she was not altogether Sister Teresa on the day of her clothing, though she tried to imitate the infantile glee of the novices, and of the nuns too; for they were nearly as childish as the novices. In spite of herself she wearied of the babble and the laughter over orange-blossoms and wedding-cake, especially of Sister Jerome’s babble. She was particularly noisy that afternoon; her unceasing humour had begun to jar, and Evelyn had begun to feel that she must get away from it all, and she asked leave to go into the garden.

Ah, the deep breath she drew! How refreshing it was after the long time spent in church in the smell of burning wax and incense. “The incense of the earth is sweeter,” she said; and the sound of the wind in the boughs reminded her of the voice of the priest intoning the “Veni Creator.” “Nature is more musical,” and her eyes strayed over the great park to its rim miles away, indistinct, though the sky was white as white linen above it, only here and there a weaving of some faint cream tones amid clouds rising very slowly; a delicious warmth fell out of the noonday sky, enfolding the earth; and, discomforted by her habit—a voluminous trailing habit with wide hanging sleeves— she stood on the edge of the terrace thinking that the stiff white head-dress made her feel more like a nun than her vows.

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“Of what am I thinking?” she asked herself, for her thoughts seemed to go out faintly, like the clouds; she seemed more conscious of the spring-time than she had ever been before, of a sense of delight going through her when, before her eyes, the sun came out, lighting up the distant inter-spaces and the stems of the trees close by. The ash was coming into leaf, but among the green tufts, every bough could still be traced. The poplars looked like great brooms, but they were reddening, and in another week or two would be dark green again. The season being a little late, the lilacs and laburnums were out together; pink and white blossoms had begun to light up the close leafage of the hawthorns, and under the flowering trees grass was springing up, beautiful silky grass. “There is nothing so beautiful in the world as grabs,” Evelyn thought, “fair spring grass.” The gardener was mowing it between the flower beds, and it lay behind his hissing scythe along the lawn in irregular lines.

“There is the first swallow, just come in time to see the tulips, the tall May tulips which the Dutchmen used to paint.”

So did Evelyn think, and her eyes followed Sister Mary John’s jackdaw. He seemed to know the hour of the day, and was looking out for his mistress, who generally came out after dinner with food for him, and speech—the bird seemed to like being spoken to, and always put his head on one side so that he might listen more attentively. A little further on Evelyn met three goslings straying under the flowering laburnums, and she returned them to their mother in the orchard. Something was moving among the potato ridges, and wondering what it could be, she discovered the cat playing with the long-lost tortoise. How funny her great fluffy tom-cat looked, as he sat in front of the tortoise, tapping its black head whenever it appeared beyond the shell. All cats are a beautiful shape, but this one was a beautiful colour, “grey as a cloud at even”; but to leave him playing with the tortoise would be cruel to the tortoise, so she decided to carry the cat to the other end of the garden, where the sparrows were picking up the green peas.

The pear blossom had disappeared some weeks ago, and now the apple was in bloom. Some trees were later than others, and there were still tight pink knots amid the brown boughs. Evelyn sat down and closed her eyes, so that she might enjoy more intensely the magic of this Maytime. Every now and again a breeze shook the branches, shedding white blossom over the bright grass, and faint shadows rushed out and retreated The sun was swallowed up in a sudden cloud. A dimness came and a chill, but not for long enduring; the world was lit up, all the lilac leaves were catching the light and dancing in the breeze. “How living the world is, no death anywhere.” Then her eyes turned to the convent, for at that moment she caught sight of one of the lay sisters coming towards her, evidently the bearer of a message. Sister Agnes had come to tell her that a lady had called to see her.

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“The lady is in the parlour. Mother Hilda is with her”

“But her name?”

Sister Agnes could not give Evelyn her visitor’s name; but on the way to the parlour they were met by the Prioress, who told Evelyn that the lady who had come to see her was a French lady, Mademoiselle Helbrun.

“Louise! Dear Mother, she is an actress, one of the women I used to sing with.”

“Perhaps you had better not see her, and you may count upon me not to offend her; she will understand that on the day of your clothing—”

“No, no, dear Mother, I must see her.”

“Teresa, one never uses the word ‘must’ to the Prioress, nor to any one in the convent; and on the day of your clothing it seems to me you might have remembered this first rule of our life.”

“Of course I am very sorry, Mother; but now that she has come I am afraid it would agitate me more not to see her than to see her. It was the surprise of hearing her name after such a long while—there is no reason I can think of—”

“Teresa, it is for me to think, it is for you to obey.”

“Well, Mother, if you will allow me.”

“Ah, that is better. Of course she has come here to oppose your being here. How will you answer her?”

“Louise is an old friend, and knows me well, and will not argue with me, so it seems to me; and if she should ask me why I’m here and if I intend to remain, it will be easy for me to answer her, “I am here because I am not safe in the world.”

“But she’ll not understand.”

“Yes she will, Mother. Let me see her.”

“Perhaps you are fight, Teresa; it will be better for you to see her. But it is strange she should have come this afternoon.”

“Some intuition, some voice must have told her.”

“Teresa, those are fancies; you mustn’t let your mind run on such things.”

They were at the door of the parlour. Evelyn opened it for the Prioress, allowing her to pass in first.

“Louise, how good of you to come to see me. How did you find my address? Did Merat give it to you?”

“No, but I have heard—we all know you are thinking of becoming a nun.”

“If you had been here a little earlier,” the Prioress said, “you would have been in time for Teresa’s clothing.” And there was an appeal in the Prioress’s voice, the appeal that one Catholic makes to another. The Prioress, of course, assumed that Louise had been brought up a Catholic, though very likely she did not practise her religion; few actresses did. So did the Prioress’s thoughts run as she leaned forward; her voice became winning, and she led Louise to ask her questions regarding the Order. And she told Louise that it was a French Order originally, wearying her with the story of the arrival of the first nuns. “How can Evelyn stop here listening to such nonsense?” she thought. And then Mother Hilda told Louise about Evelyn’s singing at Benediction, and the number of converts she had won to the Church of Rome.

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“As no doubt you know. Mademoiselle Helbrun, once people are drawn into a Catholic atmosphere—”

“Yes, I quite understand. So you sing every day at Benediction, do you, Evelyn? You are singing to-day? It will be strange to hear you singing an ‘Ave Maria.’”

“But, Louise, if I sing an ‘O Salutaris,’ will you sing Schubert’s ’Ave Maria’?”

“No, you sing Schubert’s ‘Ave Maria’ and I will sing an ’O Salutaris.’”

Evelyn turned to the Prioress.

“Of course, we shall be only too glad if Mademoiselle Helbrun will sing for us.”

“The last time we saw each other, Louise, was the day of your party in the Savoy Hotel.”

“Yes, didn’t we have fun that day? We were like a lot of children. But you went away early.”

“Yes, that day I went to Confession to Monsignor.”

“Was it that day? We noticed something strange in you. You seemed to care less for the stage, to have lost your vocation.”

“We hope she has begun to find her vocation,” Mother Hilda answered.

“But that is just what I mean—in losing her vocation for the stage she has gained, perhaps, her vocation for the religious life.”

“Vocation for the stage?”

“Yes, Mother Hilda,” the Prioress said, turning to the Mistress of the Novices, “the word vocation isn’t used in our limited sense, but for anything for which a person may have a special aptitude.”

“That day of your party—dear me, how long ago it seems, Louise! How much has happened since then? You have sung how many operas? In whose company are you now?” Before they were aware of it the two singers had begun to chatter of opera companies and operas. Ulick Dean was secretary of the opera company with which Louise was travelling. They were going to America in the autumn. The conversation was taking too theatrical a turn, and the Prioress judged it necessary to intervene. And without anybody being able to detect the transition, the talk was led from America to the Pope and the Papal Choir.

“May we go into the garden, dear Mother?” Evelyn said, interrupting. Her interruption was a welcome one; the Prioress in her anxiety to change the subject had forgotten Mr. Innes’s death and Evelyn’s return to Rome. She gave the required permission, and the four women went out together.

“Do you think we shall be able to talk alone?”

“Yes, presently,” Evelyn whispered. Soon after, in St. Peter’s Walk, an opportunity occurred. The nuns had dropped behind, and Evelyn led her friend through the hazels, round by the fish-pond, where they would be able to talk undisturbed. Evelyn took her friend’s arm. “Dear Louise, how kind of you to come to see me. I thought I was forgotten. But how did you find me out?”

“Sir Owen Asher, whom I met in London, told me I would probably get news of you here.”

Evelyn did not answer.

“Aren’t you glad to see me?”

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“Of course I am. Haven’t I said so? Don’t you see I am? And you have brought beautiful weather with you, Louise. Was there ever a more beautiful day? White clouds rising up in the blue sky like great ships, sail over sail.”

“My dear Evelyn, I have not come to talk to you about clouds, nor green trees, though the birds are singing beautifully here, and it would be pleasant to talk about them if we were going to be alone the whole afternoon. But as the nuns may come round the corner at any minute I had better ask you at once if you are going to stop here?”

“Is that what you have come to ask me?”

Evelyn got up, though they had only just sat down.

“Evelyn, dear, sit down. You are not angry with me for asking you these questions? What do you think I came here for?”

“You came here, then, as Reverend Mother suspected, to try to persuade me away? You would like to have me back on the stage?”

“Of course we should like to have you back among us again. Owen Asher—”

“Louise, you mustn’t speak to me of my past life.”

“Ulick—”

“Still less of him. You have come here, sent by Owen Asher or by Ulick Dean—which is it?”

“My dear Evelyn, I came here because we have always been friends and for old friendship’s sake—by nobody.”

These words seemed to reassure her, and she sat down by her friend, saying that if Louise only knew the trouble she had been through.

“But all that is forgotten... if it can be forgotten. Do you know if our sins are ever forgotten, Louise?”

“Sins, Evelyn? What sins? The sin of liking one man a little better than another?”

“That is exactly it, Louise. The sin and the shame are in just what you have said—liking one man better than another. But I wish, Louise, you wouldn’t speak to me of these things, for I’ll have to get up and go back to the convent.”

“Well, Evelyn, let us talk about the white clouds going by, and how beautiful the wood is when the sun is shining, flecking the ground with spots of light; birds are singing in the

branches, and that thrush! I have never heard a better one." Louise walked a little way. Returning to Evelyn quickly, she said, "There are all kinds of birds here—linnets, robins, yes, and a blackbird. A fine contralto!"

"But why, Louise, do you begin to talk about clouds and birds?"

"Well, dear, because you won't talk about our friends."

"Or is it because you think I must be mad to stay here and to wear this dress? You are quite wrong if you think such a thing, for it was to save myself from going mad that I came here."

"My dear Evelyn, what could have put such ideas into your head?"

"Louise, we mustn't talk of the past. I can see you are astonished at this dress, yet you are a Catholic of a sort, but still a Catholic. I was like you once, only a change came. One day perhaps you will be like me."

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“You think I shall end in a convent, Evelyn?”

Evelyn did not answer, and; not knowing exactly what to say next, Louise spoke of the convent garden.

“You always used to be fond of flowers. I suppose a great part of your time is spent in gardening?”

An angry colour rose into Evelyn’s cheek.

“You don’t wish me,” she said, “to talk about myself? You think— Never mind, I don’t care what you think about me.”

Louise assured her that she was mistaken; and in the middle of a long discourse Evelyn’s thoughts seemed suddenly to break away, and she spoke to Louise of the greenhouse which she had made that winter, asking her if she would like to come to see it with her.

“A great deal of it was built with my own hands, Sister Mary John and I. You don’t know her yet; she is our organist, and an excellent one.”

At that moment Evelyn laid her hand on Louise’s arm, and a light seemed to burst into her face.

“Listen!” she said, “listen to the bird! Don’t you hear him?”

“Hear what, dear?”

“The bird in the branches singing the song that leads Siegfried to Brunnhilde.”

“A bird singing Wagner?”

“Well, what more natural than that a bird should sing his own song?”

“But no bird—” A look of wonder, mingled with fear, came into Louise’s face.

“If you listen, Louise.” In the silence of the wood Louise heard somebody whistling Wagner’s music. “Don’t you hear it?”

Louise did not answer at once. Had she caught some of Evelyn’s madness... or was she in an enchanted garden?

“It is a boy in the park, or one of the nuns.”

“Nuns don’t whistle, and the common is hundreds of yards away. And no boy on the common knows the bird music from ‘Siegfried’? Listen, Louise, listen! There it goes, note for note. Francis is singing well to-day.”

“Francis!”

“Look, look, you can see him! Now are you convinced?”

And the wonder in Louise’s face passed into a look of real fear, and she said:

“Let us go away.”

“But why won’t you listen to Francis? None of my birds sings as he does. Let me tell you, Louise—”

But Louise’s step hastened.

“Stop! Don’t you hear the Sword motive? That is Aloysius.”

Louise stopped for a moment, and, true enough, there was the Sword motive whistled from the branches of a sycamore. And Louise began to doubt her own sanity.

“You do hear him, I can see you do.”

“What does all this mean?” Louise said to the Reverend Mother, drawing her aside. “The birds, the birds, Mother Superior, the birds!”

“What birds?”

“The birds singing the motives of ‘The Ring.’”

“You mean Teresa’s bullfinches, Mademoiselle Helbrun? Yes, they whistle very well.”

“But they whistle the motives of ‘The Ring!’”

“Ah! she taught them.”

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“Is that all? I thought she and I were mad. You’ll excuse me, Mother Superior? May I ask her about them?”

“Of course, Mademoiselle Helbrun, you can.” And Louise walked on in front with Evelyn.

“Mother Superior tells me you have taught bullfinches the motives of ‘The Ring,’ is it true?”

“Of course. How could they have learned the motives unless from me?”

“But why the motives of ’The Ring’?”

“Why not, Louise? Short little phrases, just suited to a bird.”

“But, dear, you must have spent hours teaching them.”

“It requires a great deal of patience, but when there is a great whirl in one’s head—”

Evelyn stopped speaking, and Louise understood that she shrank from the confession that to retain her sanity she had taught bullfinches to whistle,

“So she is sane, saner than any of us, for she has kept herself sane by an effort of her own will,” Louise said to herself.

“Some birds learn much quicker than others; they vary a great deal.”

“My dear Evelyn, it is ever so nice of you. Just fancy teaching bullfinches to sing the motives of ‘The Ring,’ It seemed to me I was in an enchanted garden. But tell me, why, when you had taught them, did you let them fly away?”

“Well, you see, they can only remember two tunes. If you teach them a third they forget the first two, and it seemed a pity to confuse them.”

“So when a bullfinch knows two motives you let him go? Well, it is all very simple now you have explained it. They find everything they want in the garden. The bullfinch is a homely little bird, almost as domestic as the robin; they just stay here, isn’t that it?”

“Sometimes they go into the park, but they come every morning to be fed. On the whole, Francis is my best bird; but there is another who in a way excels him—Timothy. I don’t know why we call him Timothy; it isn’t a pretty name, but it seems suited to him because I taught him ‘The Shepherd’s Pipe’; and you know how difficult it is, dropping half a note each time? Yet he knows it nearly all; sometimes he will whistle it through without a mistake. We could have got a great deal of money for him if he had been sold, and Reverend Mother wanted me to sell him, but I wouldn’t.”

And Evelyn led Louise away to a far corner.

“He is generally in this corner; these are his trees.” And Evelyn began to whistle.

“Does he answer you when you whistle?”

“No; scraping one’s feet against the gravel, some little material noise, will set him whistling.” And Evelyn scraped her feet. “I’m afraid he isn’t here to-day. But there is the bell for Benediction. We must not keep the nuns waiting.” And the singers hurried towards the convent, where they met the Prioress and the Mistress of the Novices and Sister Mary John.

“Dear me, how late you are, Sister!” said Sister Mary John. “I suppose you were listening to the bullfinches. Aren’t they wonderful? But won’t you introduce me to Mademoiselle Helbrun? It would be delightful, mademoiselle, if you would only sing for us.”

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“I shall be very pleased indeed.”

“Well, we have only got two or three minutes to decide what it is to be. Will you come up to the organ loft?”

And that afternoon the Wimbledon laity had the pleasure of hearing two prima donne at Benediction.

XXVII

One day in the last month of Evelyn’s noviceship—for it was the Reverend Mother’s plans to put up Evelyn for election, provided she could persuade Evelyn to take her final vows—Sister Mary John sat at the harmonium, her eyes fixed, following Evelyn’s voice like one in a dream. Evelyn was singing Stradella’s “Chanson d’Eglise,” and when she, had finished the nun rose from her seat, clasping her friend’s hand, thanking her for her singing with such effusion that the thought crossed Evelyn’s mind that perhaps her friend was giving to her some part of that love which it was essential to the nun to believe belonged to God alone; and knowing Sister Mary John so well, she could not doubt that, as soon as the nun discovered her infidelity to the celestial Bridegroom, she would separate herself at once from her. A tenderness in the touch of the hand, an ardour in the eye, might reveal the secret to her, or very likely a casual remark from some other nun would awaken her conscience to the danger —an imaginary danger, of course—but that would not be her idea. Formal relations would be impossible between them, one of them would have to leave; and, without this friendship, Evelyn felt she could not live in the convent.

The accident she foresaw happened two days after, when sitting in the library writing. Veronica came in. Evelyn had seen very little of her lately, and at one time Evelyn, Veronica, and Sister Mary John had formed a little group, each possessing a quality which attracted the others; but, insensibly, musical interests and literary interests—Sister Mary John had begun to teach Evelyn Latin—had drawn Evelyn and Sister Mary John together, excluding Veronica a little. This exclusion was more imaginary than real. But some jealousy of Sister Mary John had entered her mind; and Evelyn had noticed, though Sister Mary John had failed to notice, that Veronica had, for some time past, treated them with little disdainful airs. And now, when she opened the door, she did not answer Evelyn at once, though Evelyn welcomed her with a pretty smile, asking her whom she was seeking. There was an accent of concentrated dislike in Veronica’s voice when Evelyn said she was looking for Sister Mary John.

“I heard her trampling about the passage just now; she is on her way here, no doubt, and won’t keep you waiting.”

The word “trampling” was understood by Evelyn as an allusion to the hobnails which Sister Mary John wore in the garden. Veronica often dropped a rude word, which seemed ruder than it was owing to the refinement and distinction of her face and her voice. A rude word seemed incongruous on the lips of this mediaeval virgin; and Evelyn sat nibbling the end of the pen, thinking this jealousy was dangerous. Sister Mary John only had to hear of it. The door opened again; this time it was Sister Mary John, who had come to ask Evelyn what was the matter with Veronica.

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“I passed her in the passage just now, and when I asked her if she had seen you, she said she really was too busy to speak to me; and, a moment after, she stood a long while to play with the black kitten, who was catching flies in the window.”

“There is no doubt that Veronica has changed; lately she has been rather rude to me.”

“To you, Teresa? Now, what could she be rude about to you?” The nun’s face changed expression, and Evelyn sat reading it, “Do you think she is jealous of the time we spend together? We have been together a great deal lately.”

“But it is necessary that we should be—our music.”

“Yes, our music, of course; but I was thinking of other times.”

Evelyn knew that Sister Mary John was thinking of the time they had spent reading the Breviary together—four great volumes, one for every season of the year. It was Sister Mary John who had taught her to appreciate the rich, mysterious tradition of the Church, and how these books of ritual and observances could satisfy the mind more than any secular literature. There was always something in the Office to talk about, something new amid much that remained the same—the reappearance of a favourite hymn.

“All the same, Sister, we should not take so much pleasure in each other’s society. Veronica is quite right.”

At that moment Evelyn was called away by the portress, who had come to tell her that Mother Hilda wanted her in the novitiate, and Sister Mary John was left thinking in the library that Veronica was certainly right, and every moment the conviction grew clearer. It must have been forming in her mind for a long time past, for, within five minutes after Evelyn had left the room, the nun determined to go straight to the Prioress and tell her that her life was being absorbed by Evelyn and beg her to transfer her to the Mother House in France. Never to see Evelyn again! Her strength almost failed her as she went towards the door. But what would it profit her to see Evelyn for a few years if she should lose her for eternity? A little courage, and they would meet to part no more. In a few years both would be in heaven. A confusion of thought began in her; she remembered many things, that she no longer loved Christ as she used to love him. She no longer stood before the picture in which Christ took St. Francis in His arms, saying to Christ, “My embrace will be warmer than his when thou takest me in thy arms.” She had often thought of herself and Evelyn in heaven, walking hand in hand. Once they had sat enfolded in each other’s arms under a flowering oleander. Christ was watching them! And all this could only point to one thing, that her love of Evelyn was infringing upon her love of God. And Evelyn, too, had questioned her love of God as if she were jealous of it, but she had answered Evelyn that nuns were the brides of Christ, and must set no measure on their love of God. “There is no lover,” she had said, “like God; He is always by you, you can turn to Him at any moment. God wishes us to keep all our love

for Him.” She had said these things, but how differently she had acted, forgetful of God, thinking only of Evelyn, and her vows, and not a little of the woman herself.

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The revelation was very sudden.... Sister Mary John seemed to find somebody in herself of whom she knew nothing, and a passion in herself unknown to her before. Therefore, to the Prioress she went at once to tell her everything.

“Mother, I have come to ask you if you will transfer me to the Mother House in France.”

The Reverend Mother repeated the words in astonishment, and listened to Sister Mary John, who was telling her that she had found herself in sin.

“My life is falling to pieces, Mother, and I can only save myself by going away.”

A shipwreck this was, indeed, for all the Prioress’s plans! If Sister Mary John left, how was Evelyn to be persuaded to take the veil? “At every moment I am confronted with some unexpected obstacle.” She tried to argue with Sister Mary John; but the nun was convinced she must go. So the only thing to do was to make terms.

“Teresa must know nothing of what has happened, on that I insist. There is too much of this kind of thing going on in my convent; I have heard of it among the younger nuns, all are thinking of visions. But among you women, who have been in the convent for many years, I had thought—”

“Mother, we are all weak; the flesh errs, and all we can do is to check ourselves, to pray, and take such measures as will save us from falling into sin again. Of what you said just now about the younger nuns I know nothing, nor has any vision been vouchsafed to me, only I have stumbled.”

The Prioress did not answer; she was thinking how Sister Mary John might be transferred.

“Mrs. Cater is going to France next month, you can travel with her.”

“So a month must pass! I thought of leaving to-day or to-morrow, but I see that is impossible. A month! How shall I endure it?”

“No one will know,” the Prioress answered, with a little vehemence. “It is a secret between us, I repeat, and I forbid you to tell any one the reason of your leaving. Teresa will be professed in a few weeks, I hope; she has reached the critical moment of her life, and her mind must not be disturbed. The raising of such a question, at such a time, might be fatal to her vocation.”

The Prioress rose from her chair, and, following Sister Mary John to the door, impressed upon her again that it was essential that no one should ever know why she had left the convent.

“You can tell Teresa before you leave, but she must hear nothing of it till the moment of your leaving. I give you permission merely to say goodbye to her on the day you leave, and in the interval you will see as little of each other as possible.”

But when Sister Mary John said that Sister Elizabeth could accompany Evelyn as well as she could, the Prioress interrupted her.

“You must always accompany her when she sings at Benediction; you must do nothing to let her suspect that you are leaving the convent on her account. You promise me this? You can tell her what you like, of course when you are leaving, but not before. Of course, there is no use arguing with you again, Sister Mary John. You are determined, I can see that; but I do assure you that your leaving us is a sore trial to us, more than you think for.”

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In the passage Sister Mary John came unexpectedly upon Evelyn returning from the novitiate.

“Well, I have got through my Latin lesson, and Mother Hilda is delighted at my progress. She flatters herself on her instruction, but any progress I have made is owing to you.... But what is the matter, Sister? Why do you move away?” Evelyn put her hand on the nun’s shoulder.

“Don’t, Sister; I must go.”

“Why must you go?”

“Teresa, try to think—” She was about to say “of God, and not of me,” but her senses seemed to swoon a little at that moment, and she fell into Evelyn’s arms.

“Teresa! Teresa! What is this?”

It was the Prioress coming from her room.

“A sudden giddiness, Mother,” the nun answered.

“Just as I was telling her of my Latin lesson in the novitiate, that I could learn Latin with her better than with Mother Hilda.”

“We met in the passage,” Sister Mary John said, moving away.

“And a sudden giddiness came over her,” Evelyn explained.

“Teresa, Sister Cecilia, who is our sacristan, is a little slow; she wants help, you are just the one to help her, and come with me.”

XXVIII

And Evelyn followed the Prioress into a fragrance of lavender and orris-root; she was shown the vestments laid out on shelves, with tissue-paper between them. The most expensive were the white satin vestments, and these dated from prosperous times; and she was told how once poverty had become so severe in the convent that the question had arisen whether these vestments should be sold, but the nuns had declared that they preferred bread and water, or even starvation, to parting with their vestments.

“These are for the priest,” the Prioress said, “these are for the deacon and subdeacon, and they are used on Easter Sundays, the professed days of the Sisters, and the visits of the Bishop; and these vestments with the figure of Our Lady, with a blue medallion in the centre of the cross, are used for all feasts of the Virgin.”

On another shelf were the great copes, in satin and brocade, gold and white, with embroidered hoods and orphries, and veils to match; and the processional banners were stored in tall presses, and with them, hanging on wire hooks, were the altar-curtains, thick with gold thread; for the high altar there were curtains and embroidered frontals, and tabernacle hangings, and these, the Prioress explained, had to harmonise with the vestments; and the day before Mass for the Dead the whole altar would have to be stripped after Benediction and black hangings put up.

“Cecilia will tell you about the candles. They have all to be of equal length, Teresa, and it should be your ambition to be economical, with as splendid a show as possible. No candle should ever be allowed to burn into its socket, leaving less than the twelve ordained by the Church for Exposition.”

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As soon as the Prioress left them, Sister Cecilia told Evelyn that she would have to work very hard indeed, for it was the Prioress's whim not to use the ordinary altar cloths with an embroidered hem, but always cloths on which lace frontals were lightly tacked; and Evelyn was warned that the sewing on of the lace, without creasing the white linen, required great care; and the spilling of a little wax could not be passed over, the cloth would have to go to the wash.

It was as she said; they had to work hard, and they were always behindhand with their work. She learned from Cecilia that, apart from the canonical directions for Divine Service, there existed an unwritten code for pious observances—some saints were honoured by having their banner exhibited during the octave of the feast, while others were allowed little temporary altars on which some relic could be exposed. The Sisters themselves were often mistaken regarding what had been done on previous anniversaries; but the Prioress's memory was unfailing, and one of the strictest rules of the house was that the sacristan took orders from none but the Prioress. And when a discussion arose between Cecilia and Evelyn, one of them went to the Prioress to ask her to say which was right.

Sister Cecilia was stupid and slow, and very soon Evelyn had absorbed most of the work of the sacristy doing it as she pleased, until one day, the Prioress coming in to see what progress had been made, found St. Joseph's altar stripped, save for a single pair of candlesticks and two flower vases filled with artificial flowers. Evelyn was admonished, but she dared to answer that she was not interested in St. Joseph, though, of course, he was a worthy man.

"My dear Teresa, I cannot allow you to speak in this way of St. Joseph; he is one of the patrons of the convent. Nor can I allow his altar to be robbed in this fashion. Have you not thought that we are looking forward to the time when you should be one of us?"

Behind them stood Sister Cecilia, overcome with astonishment that a mere novice should dare to speak to the Prioress on terms of equality. When the Prioress left the room she said:

"You didn't answer the Prioress just now when she asked if you had forgotten that you were soon to become one of us."

"How could I answer... I don't know."

This answer seemed to exhaust Sister Cecilia's interest in the question, and, handing Evelyn two more candles, she asked, "Do you want me any more?"

On Evelyn saying she did not, she said:

"Well, then, I may go and meditate in the chapel."

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“On what is she going to meditate?” Evelyn wondered; and from time to time her eyes went towards the nun, who sat crouched on her haunches, now and again beating her ears with both hands—a little trick of hers to scatter casual thoughts, for even sacred things sometimes suggested thoughts of evil to Sister Cecilia, and her plan to reduce her thoughts to order was to slap her ears. Evelyn watched her, wondering what her thoughts might be. Whatever they were, they led poor Cecilia into disgrace, for that evening she forgot to fill the lamp which burnt always before the tabernacle, it being the rule that the Easter light struck on Holy Saturday should be preserved through the year, each new wick being lighted upon the dying one. And Sister Cecilia’s carelessness had broken the continuity. She was severely reprimanded, ate her meals that day kneeling on the refectory floor, and for many a day the shameful occurrence was remembered. And her place was taken by Veronica, who, delighted at her promotion, wore a quaint air of importance, hurrying away with a bundle of keys hanging from her belt by a long chain, amusing Evelyn, who was now under Veronica’s orders.

“Yes, it is rather strange, isn’t it, Sister? But I can’t help it. Of course you ought to be in my place, and I can’t think why dear Mother has arranged it like this.”

Nuns employed in the sacristy might talk, and in a few days Veronica’s nature revealed itself in many little questions.

“It is strange you should wish to be a nun.”

“But why is it strange, Veronica?”

“For you are not like any of us, nor has the convent been the same since you came.”

“Are you sorry that I wish to be a nun?”

“Sorry, Sister Teresa? No, indeed. God has chosen you from the beginning as the means He would employ to save us; only I can’t see you as a nun, always satisfied with the life here.”

“Every one doesn’t know from childhood what she is going to do. But you always knew your vocation, Veronica.”

“I cannot imagine myself anything but a nun, and yet I am not always satisfied. Sometimes I am filled with longings for something which I cannot live without, yet I do not know what I want. It is an extraordinary feeling. Do you know what I mean, Sister?”

“Yes, dear, I think I do.”

“It makes me feel quite faint, and it seizes me so suddenly. I have wanted to tell you for a long time, only I have not liked to. There are days when it makes me so restless that I cannot say my prayers, so I know the feeling must be wrong. Something in the quality

of your voice stirs this feeling in me; your trill brings on this feeling worse than anything. You don't know what I mean?"

"Perhaps I do. But why do you ask?"

"Because your singing seems to affect no one as it does me.... I thought it might affect you in the same way—what is it?"

"I wouldn't worry, Veronica, you will get over it; it will pass."

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“I hope it will.” Evelyn felt that Veronica had not spoken all her mind, and that the incident was not closed. The novice’s eyes were full of reverie, and behind her the open press exhaled a fragrance of lavender. “You see,” she said, turning, “Father Ambrose is coming to-morrow. I wonder what he will think of you? He’ll know if you have a vocation.”

Father Ambrose, an old Carmelite monk and the spiritual adviser of the Prioress, was known to be a great friend of Veronica’s, and whenever he came to the convent Veronica’s excitement started many little pleasantries among the novices. Next day Evelyn waited for one of these to arise. She had not long to wait; all the novices and postulants with Mother Hilda were sitting under the great tree. The air was warm, and Mother Hilda guided the conversation occasionally. Every one was anxious to talk, but every one was anxious to think too, for every one knew she would be questioned by the aged monk, and that the chance of being accepted as a nun depended, in no small measure, on his opinion of her vocation.

“Have you noticed, Sister Teresa, how beaming Sister Veronica has looked for the last day or two? I can’t think what has come to her.”

“Can’t you, indeed? You must be very slow. Hasn’t she been put into the sacristy just before Father Ambrose’s visit; now she will be able to put out his vestments herself. You may be sure we shall have the best vestments out every day, and she will be able to have any amount of private interviews behind our backs.”

“Now, children, that will do,” said Mother Hilda, noticing Veronica’s crimson cheeks as she bent over her work.

Evelyn wondered, and that evening in the sacristy Veronica broke into expostulations with an excitement that took Evelyn by surprise.

“How could I not care for Father Ambrose! I have known him all my life. Once I was very ill with pleurisy. I nearly died, and Father Ambrose anointed me, and gave me the last Sacraments. I had not made my first Communion then. I was only eleven, but they gave me the Sacrament, for they thought I was dying, and I thought so too, and I promised our Lord I would be a nun if I got well. I never told any one except Father Ambrose, and he has helped me all through to keep my vow, so you see he has been everything to me; I have never loved any one as I love Father Ambrose. When he comes here I always ask him for some rule or direction, so that I may have the happiness of obeying him till his next visit; and it is so trying, is it not, Sister Teresa, when the novices make their silly little jokes about it? Of course, they don’t understand, they can’t; but to me Father Ambrose means everything I care for; besides, he is really a saint. I believe he would have been canonised if he had lived in the Middle Ages. He has promised to profess me. It is wrong, I know, but really I should hardly care to be

professed if Father Ambrose could not be by. We must have these vestments for him."
Evelyn was about to take them out. "No, allow me."

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Veronica took the vestments out of her hand, a pretty colour coming into her cheeks as she did so. And Evelyn understood her jealousy, lest any other hands but hers should lay the vestments out that he was to wear, and she turned her head so that Veronica might not think she was being watched. And the little nun was happy in the corner of the sacristy laying out the vestments, putting the gold chalice for him to use, and the gold cruets, which Evelyn had never seen used before."

"You see, being a monk, he has a larger amice than the ordinary priest." And Veronica produced a strip of embroidery which she tacked on the edge of the amice, so that it might give the desired appearance when the monk drew it over his head on entering or leaving the sacristy.

A few days after Evelyn came upon this amice with the embroidery edge put away in a secret corner, so that it should not be used in the ordinary way; and, as she stood wondering at the child's love for the aged monk, Sister Agnes came to tell her she was wanted to bid Sister Mary John goodbye.

"To bid Sister Mary John goodbye!"

"Yes, Sister Teresa, that is what the Prioress told me to tell you."

Evelyn hurried to the library. Sister Mary John was standing near the window, and she wore a long black cloak over her habit, and had a bird-cage in her hand. Evelyn saw the sly jackdaw, with his head on one side, looking at her.

"What is the meaning of this, Sister? You don't tell me you are going away? And for how long?"

"For ever, Sister; we shall never see each other again. I promised the Prioress not to tell you before. It was a great hardship, but I gave my promise, she allowing us to see each other for a few minutes before I left."

"I can't take in what you're saying. Going away for ever? Oh, Sister, this cannot be true!" And Evelyn stood looking at the nun, her eyes dilated, her fingers crisped as if she would hold Sister Mary John back. "But what is taking you away?"

"That is a long story, too long for telling now; besides, you know it. You know I have been very fond of you, Teresa; too fond of you."

"So that's it. And how shall I live here without you?"

"You are going to enter the convent, and as a nun you will learn to live without me; you will learn to love God better than you do now."

“One moment; tell me, it is only fair you should tell me, how our love of each other has altered your love of God?”

“I can never tell you, Teresa, I can only say that I never understood, perhaps, as I do now, that nothing must come between the soul and God, and that there is no room for any other love in our hearts. We must remember always we are the brides of Christ, you and I, Sister.”

“But I am not professed, and never shall be.”

“I hope you will, Sister, and that all your love will go to our crucified Lord.”

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They stood holding each other's hands.

"Won't you let me kiss you before you go?"

"Please let me go; it will be better not. The carriage is waiting; I must go."

"But never, never to see you again!"

"Never is a long while; too long. We shall meet in heaven, and it would be unwise to forfeit that meeting for a moment of time on this earth."

"A moment of time on this earth," Evelyn answered. She stood looking out of the window like one dazed; and taking advantage of her abstraction Sister Mary John left the room. The Prioress came into the library.

"Mother, what does this mean? Why did you let her go?"

The Prioress sat down slowly and looked at Evelyn without speaking.

"Mother, you might have let her stay, for my sake."

"I allowed her to see you before she left, and that was the most I could do, under the circumstances."

"The most you could do under the circumstances? I don't understand. Mother, you might have asked her to wait. She acted on impulse."

"No, Teresa, she came to me some weeks ago to tell me of her scruples."

"Scruples! Her love of me, you mean?"

"I see she has told you. Yes."

The Prioress was about to ask her about her vows; but the present was not the moment to do so, and she allowed Evelyn to go back to the sacristy.

XXIX

"Veronica, she has gone away for good—gone away to France. All I could do—Now I am alone here, with nobody."

"But, Teresa, I don't understand. What are you speaking about?" Evelyn told her of Sister Miry John's departure. "You cared for her a great deal, one could see that."

“Well, she was the one whom I have seen most of since I have been here... except you, Veronica.” A look appeared in the girl’s face which suggested, very vaguely, of course, but still suggested, that Veronica was jealous of the nun who had gone. Evelyn looked into the girl’s face, trying to read the dream in it, until she forgot Veronica, and remembered the nun who had gone; and when she awoke from her dream she saw Veronica still standing before her with a half-cleaned candlestick in her hand.

“She seemed so determined, and all I could say only made her more so; yet I told her I was very fond of her... and she always seemed to like me. Why should she be so determined?”

“I should have thought you would have guessed, Teresa.”

Evelyn begged Veronica to explain, but the girl hesitated, looking at her curiously all the time saying at last:

“It seems to me there can be only one reason for her leaving, and that was because she believed you to be her counterpart.”

“Her counterpart—what’s that?”

“Have you been so long in the convent without knowing what a counterpart is, Teresa? The convent is full of counterparts. Did you never see one in the garden, in a shady corner? You spent many hours in the garden. I am surprised. Are you telling the truth, Sister?”

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Evelyn opened her eyes.

“Telling the truth! But do they come in the summer-time in the garden, while the sun is out?”

“Yes, they do; and very often they come to one in the evening... but more often at night.”

Evelyn stood looking into Veronica’s face without speaking, and at that moment the bell rang.

“We have only just got time,” Veronica said, “to get into chapel.”

“What can she mean? Counterparts visiting the nuns in the twilight... at night! Who are these counterparts?” Evelyn asked herself. “The idle fancies of young girls, of course.” But she was curious to hear what these were, and on the first favourable opportunity she introduced the subject, saying:

“What did you mean, Veronica, when you said that it was strange I had been in the convent so long without finding my counterpart?”

“I didn’t say that, Teresa. I said without a counterpart finding you out, or that is what I meant to say. It is the counterpart which seeks us, not we the counterpart. It would be wrong for us to seek one. You know what I said about your singing, how it disturbed me and prevented me from praying? Well, sometimes a memory of your singing precedes the arrival of my counterpart.”

“But did you not say that Sister Mary John was my counterpart?”

Veronica answered that Sister Mary John may have thought so.

“But she is a choir sister.” And to this Veronica did not know what answer to make. The silence was not broken for a long while, each continuing her work, wondering when the other would speak. “Have all the nuns counterparts?”

“I don’t know anything about the choir sisters, but Rufina and Jerome have. Cecilia is too stupid, and no counterpart ever seems to come to her. Sister Angela has the most beautiful counterpart in the world, except mine!” And the girl’s eyes lit up.

Evelyn was on the point of asking her to describe her visitor, but, fearing to be indiscreet, she asked Veronica to tell her who were the counterparts, and whence they came. Veronica could tell her nothing, and, untroubled by theory or scruple, she seemed to drift away— perhaps into the arms of her spiritual lover. On rousing her from her dream Evelyn learnt that Sister Angela, who was fond of reading the Bible, had discovered many texts anent counter-partial love. Which these could be Evelyn wondered, and Veronica quoted the words of the Creed, “Christ descended into hell.”

“But the counterpart doesn’t emanate out of hell?”

A look of pain came into the nun’s face, and she reminded Evelyn that Christ was away for three days between his death and his resurrection, and there were passages she remembered in Paul, in the Epistle to the Romans, which seemed to point to the belief that he descended into hell, at all events that he had gone underground; but of this Veronica had no knowledge, she could only repeat what Sister Angela had said—that when Christ descended into hell, the warders of the gates covered their faces, so frightened were they, not having had time to lock the gates against him, and all hell was harrowed. But Christ had walked on, preaching to those men and women who had been drowned in the Flood, and they had gone up to heaven with him.

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“But, Veronica, those who are in hell never come out of it.”

“No, they never come out of it; only Christ can do all things, and He descended into hell, not to watch the tortures of the damned—you couldn’t think that, Sister Teresa?—but to save those who had died before His coming. Once we had a meditation on a subject given to us by Mother Hilda from one of the Gospels: Three men were seen coming from a tomb, two supporting a man standing between them, the shadow of the Cross came from behind; and the heads of two men touched the sky, but the head of the man they supported passed through the sky, and far beyond it, for the third man was our Lord coming out of hell.”

“But, Veronica, you were telling me about the counterparts.”

“Well, Sister Teresa, the counterparts are those whom Christ redeemed in those three days, and they come and visit every convent.”

“In what guise do they come?” Evelyn asked. And she heard that the arrival of the counterpart was always unexpected, but was preceded by an especially happy state of quiet exaltation.

“Have you never felt that feeling, Sister Teresa? As if one were detached from everything, and ready to take flight.”

“Yes, dear, I think I know what you mean. But the counterpart is a sort of marriage, and you know Christ says that there is neither marriage, nor giving in marriage, when the kingdom of God shall come to pass.”

“Not giving in marriage,” the girl answered, “as is understood in the world, but we shall all meet in heaven; and the meeting of our counterpart on earth is but a faint shadow of the joy we shall experience after death—an indwelling, spirit within spirit, and nothing external. That is how Mother Hilda teaches St. Teresa when we read her in the novitiate.”

“Sister Teresa is wonderful—her ravishments when God descended upon her and she seemed to be borne away. But I didn’t think that any one among you experienced anything like that. It doesn’t seem to me that a counterpart is quite the same; there is something earthly.”

“No, Sister, nothing earthly whatever.”

“But, Veronica, you said that Sister Mary John left the convent because she believed me to be her counterpart. I am in the world, am I not?”

A perplexed look came into Veronica’s face, and she said:

“There are counterparts and counterparts.”

“And you think I am a wicked counterpart? You wouldn’t like me to be yours?”

“I didn’t say that, Sister; only mine is in heaven.”

“And when did he come last to you?” Evelyn asked, as she folded up the vestments.

“Teresa, you are folding those vestments wrong. You’re not thinking of what you’re doing.” And the vestments turned the talk back to Father Ambrose.

“Surely the monk isn’t the counterpart you were speaking of just now?”

“No, indeed, my counterpart is quite different from Father Ambrose; he is young and beautiful. Father Ambrose has got a beautiful soul, and I love him very dearly; but my counterpart is, as I have said, in heaven, Sister.”

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The conversation fell, and Evelyn did not dare to ask another question; indeed, she determined never to speak on the subject again to Veronica. But a few days afterwards she yielded to the temptation to speak, or Veronica—she could not tell which was to blame in this matter, but she found herself listening to Veronica telling how she had, for weeks before meeting with her counterpart, often felt a soft hand placed upon her, and the touch would seem so real that she would forget what she was doing, and look for the hand without being able to find it.

“One night it seemed, dear, as if I could not keep on much longer, and all the time I kept waking up. At last I awoke, feeling very cold all over; it was an awful feeling, and I was so frightened that I could hardly summon courage to take my habit from the peg and put it upon my bed. But I did this, for, if what was coming were a wicked thought, it would not be able to find me out under my habit. At last I fell asleep, lying on my back with arms and feet folded, a position I always find myself in when I awake, no matter in what position I may go to sleep. Very soon I awoke, every fibre tingling, an exquisite sensation of glow, and I was lying on my left side (something I am never able to do), folded in the arms of my counterpart. I cannot give you any idea of the beauty of his flesh, and with what joy I beheld and felt it. Luminous flesh, and full of tints so beautiful that they cannot be imagined. You would have to see them. And he folded me so closely in his arms, telling me that it was his coming that had caused the coldness; and then telling of his love for me, and how he would watch over me and care for me. After saying that, he folded me so closely that we seemed to become one person; and then my flesh became beautiful, luminous, like his, and I seemed to have a feeling of love and tenderness for it. I saw his face, but it is too lovely to speak about. How could I think such a visitation sinful? for all my thoughts were of pure love, and he did not kiss me; but I fell asleep in his arms, and what a sleep I slept there! When I awoke he was no longer by me.”

“But why should you think it was sinful, dear?”

“Because our counterpart really is, or should be, Jesus Christ; we are His brides, and mine was only an angel.”

“But you’ve said, dear, that those who were drowned in the Flood come down to those living now upon earth to prepare them—” The sentence dropped away on Evelyn’s lips; she could not continue it, for it seemed to her disgraceful to draw out this girl into speaking of things which were sacred to her, and which had a meaning for her that was pure. Her love was for God, and she was trying to explain; and the terms open to her were terms of human love, which she, Evelyn, with a sinful imagination, misconstrued, involuntarily perhaps, but misconstrued nevertheless.

At that moment Sister Angela came into the sacristy, and, seeing Sister Veronica and Teresa looking at each other in silence, a look of surprise came into her face, and she said:

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“Now, you who are always complaining that the work of the sacristy is behindhand, Veronica—”

Veronica awoke from her dream.

“I know, Sister, we ought not to waste time talking, but Teresa asked me about my counterpart.” Evelyn felt the blood rising to her face, and she turned away so that Angela might not see it.

“And you’ve told her?”

“Yes. And you, Sister Angela, have got a counterpart; won’t you tell Teresa about him?”

And then, unable to repress herself at that moment, Evelyn turned to Angela, saying:

“It began about Sister Mary John—who left the convent to my great grief, so Veronica tells me, because she believed herself to be my counterpart.”

At this, Angela’s face grew suddenly very grave, and she said:

“Of course, Teresa, she would leave the convent if she believed that; but there was no reason for her believing it?”

“None,” Evelyn answered, feeling a little frightened. “None. But what do you mean?”

“Only this, that our counterparts are in heaven; but there are counterparts and counterparts. One—I cannot explain now, dear, for I was sent by the Prioress to ask you, Veronica, to go to her room; she wants to speak to you. And I must go back to the novitiate. I suppose,” she added, “Veronica has told you that our counterparts are a little secret among ourselves? Mother Hilda knows nothing of them. It would not do to speak of these visitations; but I never could see any harm, for it isn’t by our own will that the counterpart comes to us; he is sent.”

Evelyn asked in what Gospel Christ’s descent into hell is described, and heard it was in that of Nicodemus; her estimation of Angela went up in consequence. Angela was one of the few with intellectual interests; and it was Evelyn’s wish to hear about this Gospel that led her, a few days afterwards, to walk with Angela and Veronica in the orchard. Angela was delighted to be questioned regarding her reading, and she told all she knew about Nicodemus. Veronica walked a little ahead, plucking the tall grasses and enjoying the beautiful weather. Evelyn, too, enjoyed the beautiful weather while listening to the story of the harrowing of hell, as described by Nicodemus. There were no clouds anywhere, and the sky, a dim blue overhead, turned to grey as it descended. The June verdure of the park was a wonderful spectacle, so many were the varying tints of green; only a few unfledged poplars retained their russet tints. Outside the garden, along the lanes, all the hedges overflowed with the great lush of June; nettles and

young ivy, buttercups, cow-parsley in profusion, and in the hedge itself the white blossom of the hawthorn. “The wild briar,” Evelyn said to herself, “preparing its roses for some weeks later, and in the low-lying lands, where there is a dip in the fields, wild irises are coming into flower, and under the larches on the banks women and children spend the long day chattering. Here we talk of Nicodemus and spiritual loves.”

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Angela, an alert young woman, whose walk still retained a dancing movement, whose face, white like white flowers and lit with laughing eyes, set Evelyn wondering what strange turn of mind should have induced her to enter a convent. Locks of soft golden hair escaped from her hood, intended to grow into long tresses, but she had allowed her hair to be cut. An ideal young mother, she seemed to Evelyn to be; and the thought of motherhood was put into Evelyn's mind by the story Angela was telling, for her counterpart had been drowned in Noah's deluge when he was four years old.

"But he is a dear little fellow, and he creeps into my bed, and lies in my arms; his hair is all curls, and he told me the story of his drowning, how it happened five thousand years ago. He was carried away in his cot by the flood, and had floated away, seeing the tops of trees, until a great brown bear, weary of swimming, laid hold of the cot and overturned it."

Veronica, who had heard Nicodemus's description of the harrowing of hell many times, returned to them, a bunch of wild flowers in her hand.

"Are not these Bright Eyes beautiful? They remind me of the eyes of my baby; his eyes are as blue as these." And she looked into the little blue flower. "Sister Teresa hasn't yet met a counterpart, but that is only because she doesn't wish for it; one must pray and meditate, otherwise one doesn't get one." And Evelyn learned how Rufina had waited a long time for her counterpart. One day an extraordinary fluttering began in her breast, and she heard the being telling her not to forget to warn the doctor that he had grown a little taller, and had come now to reach the end of toes and fingers. Evelyn wanted to understand what that meant, but Angela could not tell her, she could only repeat what Rufina had told her; and a look of reproval came into Veronica's face when Angela said that when Rufina was asked what her counterpart was like she said that it was like having something inside one, and that lately he seemed to be much in search of her mouth and tongue; and when she asked him what he was like he replied that he was all a kiss."

"It really seems to me—" A memory of her past life checked her from reproving the novices for their conversation; they were innocent girls, and though their language seemed strange they were innocent at heart, which was the principal thing, whereas she was not. And the talk went on now about Sister Cecilia, who had been long praying for a counterpart, but whose prayers were not granted.

"She is so stupid; how could a counterpart care about her? What could he say?" Angela whispered to Veronica, pressing the bunch of flowers which Veronica had given to her lips.

"Cecilia isn't pretty. But our counterparts don't seek us for our beauty," Veronica answered, Evelyn thought a little pedantically, "otherwise mine never would have found me." And the novices laughed.

The air was full of larks, some of them lost to view, so high were they; others, rising from the grass, sang as they rose.

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“Listen to that one, how beautifully that bird sings!” And the three women stood listening to a heaven full of larks till the Angelus bell called their thoughts away from the birds.

“We have been a long time away. Mother Hilda will be looking for us.” And they returned slowly to the Novice Mistress, Evelyn thinking of Cecilia. “So it was for a counterpart she was praying all that time in the corner of the chapel; and it was a dream of a counterpart that caused her to forget to fill the sacred lamp.”

XXX

It was the day of the month when the nuns watched by day and night before the Sacrament. Cecilia’s watch came at dawn, at half-past two, and the last watcher knocked at her cell in the dusk, telling her she must get up at once. But Cecilia answered:

“I cannot get up, Sister, I cannot watch before the Sacrament this morning.”

“And why, Sister? Are you ill?”

“Yes, I am very ill.”

“And what has made you ill?”

“A dream, Sister.”

And seeing it was Angela who had come to awaken her, Cecilia rose from her pillow, saying, “A horrible dream, not a counterpart like yours, Angela; oh! I can’t think of it! It would be impossible for me to take my watch.”

And walking down the passage, not knowing what to make of Cecilia’s answers, Angela stopped at Barbara’s cell to tell her Cecilia was ill and could not take her watch that morning.

“And you must watch for her.”

“Why... what is it?”

“I can tell you no more, Cecilia’s ill.”

And she hurried away to avoid further questions, wondering what reason stupid Cecilia would give Mother Hilda for her absence from chapel and the row there would be if she were to tell that a counterpart had visited her! If she could only get a chance to tell Cecilia that she must say she was ill! If she didn’t—Angela’s thoughts turned to her little counterpart, from whom she might be separated for ever. No chance of speaking

happened as the procession moved towards the refectory; and after breakfast the novices bent their heads over their work, when Mother Hilda said:

“I hear, Cecilia, that you were so ill this morning that you couldn’t take your watch.”

“It wasn’t illness—not exactly.”

“What, then?”

“A bad dream, Mother.”

“It must have been a very bad dream to prevent you from getting up to take your watch. I’m afraid I don’t believe in dreams.” The novices breathed more freely, and their spirits rose when Mother Hilda said, “The cake was heavy; you must have eaten too much of it. Barbara, you must take notice of this indigestion, for you are fond of cake.” The novices laughed again, and thought themselves safe. But after breakfast the Prioress sent for Cecilia, and they saw her leave the novitiate angry with them all—she had caught sight of their smiles and dreaded their mockery, and went to the Prioress wondering what plausible contradiction she could give to Angela’s story of the ugly counterpart, so she was taken aback by the first question.

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“Now, what is it that I hear about a refusal to get up to take your watch? Such a thing—”

“Not laziness, Mother. Mother, if you knew what my dream was, you would understand it was impossible for me to watch before the Sacrament.”

“A dream!”

Cecilia didn’t answer.

“You can tell me your dream...I shall be able to judge for myself.”

“No, no; it is too frightful!” And Cecilia fell upon her knees.

“One isn’t responsible for one’s dreams.”

“Is that so, Mother? But if one prays?”

“But you don’t pray for dreams?”

“Not for the dream I had last night.”

“Well, for what did you pray? Praying for dreams, Cecilia, is entirely contrary to the rule, or to the spirit of the rule.”

“But Veronica, Angela, Rufina—they all pray that their counterparts may visit them.”

“Counterparts!” the old woman answered. “What are you talking about?”

“Must I tell you?”

“Of course you must tell me.”

“But it will seem like spite on my part.”

“Spite! Spite?”

“Because they have gotten beautiful counterparts through their prayers, whereas—Oh, Mother, I cannot tell you.”

The Prioress forgot the stupid girl at her feet.

“Counterparts!”

“Who visit them.”

“Counterparts visiting them! You don’t mean that anybody comes into the convent?”

“Only in dreams.”

Cecilia tried to explain, but stumbled in her explanation so often that the Reverend Mother interrupted her:

“Cecilia, you are talking nonsense! I have never heard anything like it before!”

“But what I am telling you, Mother, is in the gospel Nicodemus—”

“Gospel of Nicodemus!”

“The harrowing of hell!”

“But what has all this got to do—I cannot understand you.”

The story was begun again and again.

“Veronica’s counterpart an angel, with luminous tints in his flesh; Angela’s a child drowned in Noah’s flood! But—” The Prioress checked her words. Had all the novices taken leave of their senses? Had they gone mad?... It looked like it. Anyhow, this kind of thing must be put a stop to and at once. She must get the whole truth out of this stupid girl at her feet, who blubbered out her story, obviously trying to escape punishment by incriminating others.

“So you were praying that an angel might visit you; but what came was quite different?”

“Mother, Mother!” howled Cecilia; “it was a dwarf, but I didn’t want him in my bed. I’ve been punished enough.... Anything more horrible—”

“In your bed!... anything so horrible? What do you mean?”

“Am I to tell you? Must I?”

“Certainly.”

“After all, it was only a dream.”

“Go on.”

“First I was awakened by a smell coming down the chimney.”

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“But there are no chimneys.”

“I’m telling what I thought. There was a smell, which sometimes seemed to collect in one corner of the room, sometimes in another. At last it seemed to come from under the bed and... he crawled out.”

“Who crawled out!”

“The dwarf—a creature with a huge head and rolling eyes and a great tongue. That is all I saw, for I was too frightened; I heard him say he was my counterpart, but I cried out, Mother, that it was not true. He laughed at me, and said I had prayed for him. Then it seemed, Mother, I was running away from him, only I was checked at every moment by the others—Veronica, Barbara, and Angela—who put their feet out so that I might fall; and they caught me by the arms; and all were laughing, saying, ’Look at Sister Cecilia’s counterpart; she has got one at last and is running away from him. But he shall get her; he shall get her.’ I ran on until I found myself in a corner, between two brick walls, and the dwarf standing in front of me, rolling up his night-shirt in his hands, and telling me he was in great agony; for his punishment was to swallow all the souls of the nuns who had made bad Communions, and that I was to come at once with him. I wouldn’t go, but he took me by both hands, dragging me towards the chapel. I told him Father Daly would sprinkle holy water upon him; but he didn’t seem to mind, Mother. If I hadn’t been awakened by Barbara knocking at my; door I don’t know—”

“Now you see, my dear child, what comes of praying for counterparts.... This must be seen into at once.”

“But you will not say that I told you?”

“Cecilia, I have heard enough; it isn’t for you to ask me to make any promises. Be sure, I shall try to act for the best. Mother Hilda and Mother Philippa know nothing of these stories?”

“Nothing; it is entirely between the novices.”

“You can go now, and remember not a word of what has passed between us, not a word.”

“But I must confess to Father Daly. My mind wouldn’t be at rest if I didn’t, for the dwarf did take me in his arms.”

“You can confess to Father Daly if you like; but I can’t see you have committed any sin; you’ve been merely very foolish.” And the Prioress turned towards the window, wondering if she should consult with Father Daly. The secret would not be kept; Angela and Veronica would speak about it, and there were others more or less implicated, no doubt, and these would have recourse to Father Daly for advice, or to Mother Hilda.

“Come in. So it is you, Teresa? Disturbing me! No, you are not disturbing me; I am not busy, and if I were it wouldn’t matter. You want to talk to me. Now, about what?”

There was only one subject which would cause Evelyn to hesitate, so the Prioress guessed that she had come to tell her that she wished to leave the convent.

“Well, Teresa, be it so; I cannot argue with you any more about a vocation. I suppose you know best.”

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“You seem very sad, Mother?”

“Yes, I am sad; but you are not the cause of my sadness, though what you have come to tell me is sad enough. I was just coming to the conclusion, when you came into the room, that things must take their course. God is good; his guiding hand is in everything, so I suppose all that is happening is for the best. But it is difficult to see whither it is tending, if it be not towards the dissolution of the Order.”

“The dissolution of the Order, Mother!”

“Well, if not of its dissolution, at all events of a change in the rule. You know that many here—Mother Philippa, Sister Winifred, aided and abetted by Father Daly—are anxious for a school, and we can only have a school by becoming an active Order. You have helped us a great deal, and our debts are no longer as pressing as they were; but we still owe a good deal of money, and as you do not intend to become a member of the community you will take your money away with you. And this fact will strengthen the opposition against me.”

The Prioress lay back in her chair, white and frail, exhausted by the heat.

“May I pull down the blind, Mother?”

“Yes, you may, dear; the sun is very hot.”

“Your determination to leave us isn’t the only piece of bad news which reached me this morning. Have you heard of Sister Cecilia’s adventure with her counterpart?” Evelyn nodded and tried to repress a smile. “It is difficult not to smile, so ridiculous is her story; and if I didn’t look upon the matter as very serious, I shouldn’t be able to prevent myself from smiling.”

“But you will easily be able, Mother, to smile at this nonsense. Veronica, who is a most pious girl, will not allow her mind to dwell on counterparts since she knows it to be a sin, or likely to lead to sin, and Angela and the others—if there are any others—”

“That will not make an end to the evil. Everything, my dear Teresa, declines. Ideas, like everything else, have their term of life. Everything declines, everything turns to clay, and I look upon this desire for spiritual visitations as a warning that the belief which led to the founding of this Order has come to an end! From such noble prayers as led to the founding of this Order we have declined to prayers for the visitation of counterparts.”

Evelyn was about to interrupt, but the Prioress shook her head, saying, “Well, if not the whole of the convent, at all events part of it—several novices.” And she told Evelyn the disease would spread from nun to nun, and that there was no way of checking it.

“Unless by becoming an active order,” Evelyn answered, “founding a school.”

The old woman rose to her feet instantly, saying that she had spoken out of a moment of weakness; and that it would be cowardly for her to give way to Mother Philippa and Sister Winifred; she would never acquiesce in any alteration of the rule.

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“But you, too,” she said, “are inclined towards the school?”

Evelyn admitted she was thinking of the poor, people whom she had left to their fate, so that she might save herself from sin; and the talk of the two women dropped from the impersonal to the personal, Evelyn telling the Prioress a great deal more of herself than she had told before, and the Prioress confiding to Evelyn in the end her own story, a simple one, which Evelyn listened to with tears in her eyes.

“Before I came here I was married, and before I was married I often used to come to the convent, for I was fond of the nuns, and was a pious girl. But after my marriage I was captured by life—the vine of life grew about me and held me tight. One day, passing by the door of the convent, my husband said, ’It is lucky that love rescued you, for when I met you you were a little taken by the convent, and might have become a nun if you hadn’t fallen in love. You might have shut yourself up there and lived in grey habit and penances!’ That day I wore a grey silk dress, and I remember lifting the skirt up as we passed the door and hitting the kerbstone with it. ’Shut up in that prison-house! Did I ever seriously think of such a thing?’ These were my words, but God, in his great goodness and wisdom, resolved to bring me back. A great deal is required to save our souls, so deeply are we enmeshed in the delight of life and in the delight of one another.... God took my husband from me after an illness of three weeks. That happened forty years ago. I used to sit on the seashore, crying all day, and my little child used to put his arms about me and say, ‘What is mammie crying for?’ Then my child died; seemingly without any reason, and I felt that I could not live any longer amid the desires and activities of the world. I’ll not try to tell you what my grief was; you have suffered grief, and can imagine it. Perhaps you can. I left my home and hurried here. When I saw you return, soon after your father’s death; I couldn’t but think of my own returning. I saw myself in you.”

“But, Mother, do you regret that you came here?”

The old nun did not answer for some time.

“It is hard to say, Teresa. There are deceptions everywhere, in the convent as in the world; and the mediocrity of the Sisters here is tiresome; one longs for a little more intelligence. And, as I was saying just now, everything declines; an idea ravels like a sleeve. Are you happy here?... You are not; I see it in your eyes.”

“The only ones who are happy here,” Evelyn answered, “I am sure, are those like Veronica, who pass from the schoolroom to the novitiate.”

“You think that? But the convent is a great escapement. You came here, having escaped death only by an accident, and when you went to Rome to see your father you came back distraught, your mind unhinged, and it was months before you could believe

that your sins could be forgiven. If you leave here, what will become of you? You will return to the stage."

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Evelyn smiled sadly.

“You will meet your lovers again. Temptation will be by you; you are still a young woman. How old are you, Teresa?”

“Thirty-eight. But I no longer feel young.”

“Then, do you not think it better to spend the last term with us? I am an old woman, Teresa, and you are the only friend I have in the convent, the only one who knows me; it would be a great charity if you were to remain with me.... But you fear I shall live too long? No, Teresa, the time will not be very long.”

“Mother, don’t talk like that, it only grieves me. As long as you wish me to stay I’ll stay.”

“But if I weren’t here you would leave?” Evelyn did not answer. “You would be very lonely?”

“Yes, I should be lonely.” And then, speaking at the end of a long silence, she said, “Why did you send away Sister Mary John? She was my friend, and one must have a friend—even in a convent.”

“Teresa, I begged of her to remain. And you are lonely now without her?”

“I should be lonelier, Mother, if you weren’t here.”

“We will share our loneliness together.”

Evelyn seemed to acquiesce.

“My dear child, you are very good; you have a kind heart. One sees it in your eyes.”

She left the Prioress’s room frightened, saying. “Till the Prioress’s death.”

XXXI

Father Daly paced the garden alley, reading his Breviary, and, catching sight of him, Sister Winifred, a tall, thin woman, with a narrow forehead and prominent teeth, said to herself, “Now’s my chance.”

“I hope you won’t mind my interrupting you, Father, but I have come to speak to you on a matter of some importance. It will take some minutes for me to explain it all to you, and in confession, you see, our time is limited. You know how strict the Prioress is that we shouldn’t exceed our regulation three minutes.”

“I know that quite well,” the little man answered abruptly; “a most improper rule. But we’ll not discuss the Prioress, Sister Winifred. What have you come to tell me?”

“Well, in a way, it is about the Prioress. You know all about our financial difficulties, and you know they are not settled yet.”

“I thought that Sister Teresa’s singing—”

“Of course, Sister Teresa’s singing has done us a great deal of good, but the collections have fallen off considerably; and, as for the rich Catholics who were to pay off our debts, they are like the ships coming from the East, but whose masts have not yet appeared above the horizon.”

“But does the Prioress still believe that these rich Catholics will come to her aid?”

“Oh, yes, she believes; she tells us that we must pray, and that if we pray they will come. Well, Father, prayer is very well, but we must try to help ourselves, and we have been thinking it over; and, in thinking it over, some of us have come to very practical conclusions.”

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“You have come to the conclusion that perhaps a good deal of time is wasted in this garden, which might be devoted to good works?”

“Yes, that has struck us, and we think the best way out of our difficulties would be a school.”

“A school!”

“Something must be done,” she said, “and we are thinking of starting a school. We’ve received a great deal of encouragement. I believe I could get twenty pupils to-morrow, but Mother Prioress won’t hear of it. She tells us that we are to pray, and that all will come right. But even she does not depend entirely upon prayer; she depends upon Sister Teresa’s singing.”

“A most uncertain source of income, I should say.”

“So we all think.”

They walked in silence until within a few yards of the end of the walk; and, just as they were about to turn, the priest said:

“I was talking at the Bishop’s to a priest who has been put in charge of a parish in one of the poorest parts of South London. There is no school, and the people are disheartened; and he has gone to live among them, in a wretched house, in one of the worst slums of the district. He lives in one of the upper rooms, and has turned the ground floor, which used to be a greengrocer’s shop, into a temporary chapel and school, and now he is looking for some nuns to help him in the work. He asked me if I could recommend any, and I thought of you all here, Sister Winifred, with your beautiful church and garden, doing, what I call, elegant piety. It has come to seem to me unbearably sad that you and I and these few here, who could do such good work, should be kept back from doing it.”

“I am afraid our habit, Father, makes that sort of work out of the question for us.” And Sister Winifred dropped her habit for a moment and let it trail gracefully.

“Long, grey habits, that a speck of dirt will stain, are very suitable to trail over green swards, but not fit to bring into the houses of the poor, for fear they should be spoiled. “Oh,” he cried, “I have no patience with such rules, such petty observances. I have often asked myself why the Bishop chose to put me here, where I am entirely out of sympathy, where I am useless, where there is nothing for me to do really, except to try to keep my temper. I have spoken of this matter to no one before, but, since you have come to speak to me, Sister Winifred, I, too, must speak. Ever since I’ve been here I’ve been longing for some congenial work—work which I could feel I was intended to do. It

seems hard at times to feel one's life slipping away and the work one could do always withheld from one's reach. You understand?"

"Indeed, I do. It is the fate of many of us here, Father Daly."

"Now, if you could make a new foundation—if some three or four of you—if the Bishop would send me there."

"Of course, we might go and do good work in the district you speak of, but I doubt whether the Bishop would recognise us as a new foundation."

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“I daresay he wouldn’t.” And they walked a little way in silence. “You were telling me of your project for a school, Sister Winifred.”

Sister Winifred entered into the details. But she had unduly excited Father Daly, and he could not listen.

“My position here,” he said, interrupting her, “is an impossible one. The only ones here who consider my advice are the lay sisters, the admirable lay sisters who work from morning till evening, and forego their prayers lest you should want for anything. You know I’m treated very nearly with contempt by almost all the choir sisters. You think I don’t know that I am spoken of as a mere secular priest? Every suggestion of mine meets with a rude answer. You have witnessed a good deal of this, Sister Winifred. I daresay you’ve forgotten, but I remember it all... you have come to speak to me here because the Prioress will not allow you to spend more than three minutes in the confessional, arrogating to herself the position of your spiritual adviser, only allowing to me what is to her no more than the mechanical act of absolution. In her eyes I am a mere secular priest, incapable of advising those who live in an Order! Do you think I haven’t noticed her deference to the very slightest word that Father Ambrose deigns to speak to her? Her rule doesn’t apply to his confessional, only to mine—a rule which I have always regarded as extremely unorthodox; I don’t feel at all sure that the amateur confessional which she carries on upstairs wouldn’t be suppressed were it brought under the notice of Rome; I have long been determined to resist it, and I beg of you, Sister Winifred, when you come to me to confession to stay as long as you think proper. On this matter I now see that the Prioress and I must come to an understanding.”

“But not a word. Father Daly, must we breathe to her of what I have come to tell you about. The relaxation of our Order must be referred to the Bishop, and with your support.”

They walked for some yards in silence, Father Daly reflecting on the admirable qualities of Sister Winifred, her truthfulness and her strength of character which had brought her to him; Sister Winifred congratulating herself on how successfully she had deceived Father Daly and thinking how she might introduce another subject into the conversation (a delicate one it was to introduce); so she began to talk as far away as possible from the subject which she wished to arrive at. The founders of the Orders seemed to her the point to start from; the conversation could be led round to the question of how much time was wasted on meditation; it would be easy to drop a sly hint that the meditations of the nuns were not always upon the Cross; she managed to do this so adroitly that Father Daly fell into the trap at once.

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“Love of God, of course, is eternal; but each age must love God in its own fashion, and our religious sentiments are not those of the Middle Ages.” The exercises of St. Ignatius did not appeal in the least to Father Daly, who disapproved of letting one’s thoughts brood upon hell; far better think of heaven. Too much brooding on hell engenders a feeling of despair, which was the cause of Sister Teresa’s melancholia. Too intense a fear of hell has caused men, so it is said, to kill themselves. It seems strange, but men kill themselves through fear of death. “I suppose it is possible that fear of hell might distract the mind so completely—Well, let us not talk on these subjects. We were talking of—” The nun reminded the priest they were talking of the exercises of St. Ignatius. “Let us not speak of them. St. Ignatius’s descriptions of the licking of the flames round the limbs of the damned may have been suitable in his time, but for us there are better things in the exercises.”

“But do you not think that the time spent in meditation might be spent more profitably, Father? I have often thought so.”

“If the meditation were really one.”

“Exactly, Father, but who can further thoughts; thought wanders, and before one is aware one finds oneself far from the subject of the meditation.”

“No doubt; no doubt.”

“It was through active work that Sister Teresa was cured.” “If any fact has come to your knowledge, Sister, it is your duty to tell it to me, the spiritual adviser of the nuns, notwithstanding all the attempts of the Prioress to usurp my position.”

“Well, Father, if you ask me—”

“Yes, certainly I ask you.” And Sister Winifred told how, through a dream, Sister Cecilia had been unable to go down from her cell to watch before the Sacrament.

“We are not answerable for our dreams,” the priest answered.

“No; but if we pray for dreams?”

“But Cecilia could not desire such a dream?”

“Not exactly that dream.” And so the story was gradually unfolded to the priest.

“What you tell me is very serious. The holy hours which should be devoted to meditation of the Cross wasted in dreams of counterparts! A strange name they have given these visitations, some might have given them a harsher name.” Father Daly’s thoughts went to certain literature of the Middle Ages. “The matter is, of course, one that is not entirely unknown to me; it is one of the traditional sins of the convent, one of

the plagues of the Middle Ages. The early Fathers suffered from the visits of Succubi. What you tell me is very alarming. Would it not be well for me to speak to the Prioress on the subject?"

"No, on no account."

"But she must be exceedingly anxious to put a stop to such a pollution of the meditation?"

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“Yes, indeed, I will say that nobody is more opposed to it; but she is one of these women who, though she sees that something is wrong, will not go to the root of the wrong at once. The tendency of her mind is towards the contemplative, and not towards the active orders, and she will not give way to the relaxation of the rule. You had better just take the matter into your hands, feeling sure she will approve of the action in the end. A word or two on the subject in your sermon on Sunday would be very timely.”

Father Daly promised to think the matter over, and Sister Winifred said:

“But you must know we shall have much opposition?”

“But who will oppose us?”

“Those who have succeeded in getting counterparts will not surrender them easily.” And Sister Winifred was persuaded to mention the names of the nuns incriminated in this traffic with the spirits of the children who had been drowned in Noah’s flood.

“Beings from the other world!” Father Daly cried, alarmed that not one of the nuns had spoken on this subject to him in the convent. “This is the first time a nun has spoken to me—”

“All will speak to you on this matter when you explain to them the danger they are incurring—when you tell them in your sermon. There is the bell; now I must fly. I will tell you more when I come to confession this afternoon.” As she went up the path she resolved to remain ten minutes in the confessional at least, for such a breach of the rule would challenge the Prioress’s spiritual authority, and in return for this Father Daly would use his influence with the Bishop to induce the Prioress to relax the rule of the community. To make her disobedience more remarkable, she loitered before slipping into the confessional, and the Prioress, who had just come into the chapel, noticed her. But without giving it another thought the Prioress began her prayers. At the end of five minutes, however, she began to grow impatient, and at the end of ten minutes to feel that her authority had been set aside.

“You’ve been at least ten minutes in the confessional, Sister Winifred.”

“It is hard, indeed, dear Mother, if one isn’t allowed to confess in peace,” Sister Winifred answered. And she tossed her head somewhat defiantly.

“All the hopes of my life are at an end,” the Prioress said to Mother Hilda.” Every one is in rebellion against me; and this branch of our Order is about to disappear. I feel sure the Bishop will decide against us, and what can we do with the school? Sister Winifred will have to manage it herself. I will resign. It is hard indeed that this should happen

after so many years of struggle; and, after redeeming the convent from its debts, to be divided in the end."

XXXII

Next Sunday Father Daly took for his text, "And all nations shall turn and fear the Lord truly, and shall bury their idols" (Toby xiv. 6).

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“Yes, indeed, we should bury our idols.” And then Father Daly asked if our idols were always external things, made of brass and gold, or if they were not very often cherished in our hearts—the desires of the flesh to which we give gracious forms, and which we supply with specious words; “we think,” he said, “to deceive ourselves with those fair images born of our desires; and we give them names, and attribute to them the perfections of angels, believing that our visitations are angels, but are we sure they are not devils?”

The Prioress raised her eyes, and looked at him long and steadily, asking herself what he was going to say next.

He went on to tell how one of the chief difficulties of monastic life was to distinguish between the good and the evil visitant, between the angel and the demon; for permission was often given to the demon to disguise himself as an angel, in order that the nun and the monk might be approved. Returning then to the text, he told the story of Tobit and Tobias’s son, and how Tobias had to have resort to burning perfumes in order to save himself from death from the evil spirit, who, when he smelt the perfume, fled into Egypt and was bound by an angel. “We, too, must strive to bind the evil spirit, and we can do so with prayer. We must have recourse to prayer in order to put the evil spirit to flight. Prayer is a perfume, and it ascends sweeter than the scent of roses and lilies, greeting God’s nostrils, which are in heaven.”

The Prioress thought this expression somewhat crude, and she again looked at the preacher long and steadfastly, asking herself if the text and Father Daly’s interpretation of it were merely coincidences, or if he were speaking from knowledge of the condition of convents... Cecilia, had she told him everything? The Prioress frowned. Sister Winifred was careful not to raise her eyes to the preacher, for she was regretting his words, foreseeing the difficulties they would lead her into, knowing well that the Prioress would resent this interference with her authority, and she would have given much to stop Father Daly; but that, of course, was impossible now, and she heard him say that the angel who bound the evil spirit in Egypt four thousand years ago is to-day the symbol of the priest in the confessional, and it was only by availing themselves of that Sacrament, not in any invidious sense, but in the fullest possible sense, confiding their entire souls to the care of their spiritual adviser, that they could escape from the evil spirits which penetrated into monasteries to-day no less than before, as they had always done, from the earliest times; for the more pious men and women are, the more they retire from the world, the more delicate are the temptations which the devil invents. Convents dedicate to the Adoration of the Sacrament, to meditation on the Cross, convents in which active work is eschewed are especially sought by the evil spirits, “the larvae of monasticism,” he called them.

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An abundance of leisure is favourable to the hatching of these; and he drew a picture of how the grub first appears, and then the winged moth, sometimes brown and repellant, sometimes dressed in attractive colours like the butterfly. The soul follows as a child follows the butterfly, from flower to flower through the sunshine, led on out of the sunshine into dark alleys, at the end of which are dangerous places, from whence the soul may never return again.

"Nuns and monks of the Middle Ages, those who knew monasticism better than it ever could be known in these modern days, dreaded these larvae more than anything else, and they had methods of destroying them and repelling the beguilements of evil spirits better than we have, for the contemplative orders were more kindred to those earlier times than to-day. Monasticism of today takes another turn. Love of God is eternal, but we must love God in the idiom and spirit of our time." And Father Daly believed that there was no surer method of escaping from the danger than by active work, by teaching, which, he argued, was not incompatible with contemplation, not carried to excess; and there were also the poor people, and to work for them was always pleasing to God. Any drastic changes were, of course, out of the question, but he had been asked to speak on this subject, and it seemed to him that they should look to Nature for guidance, and in Nature they found not revolution but evolution; the law of Nature was progression. Why should any rule remain for ever the same? It must progress just as our ideas progress. He wandered on, words coming up in his mouth involuntarily, saying things which immediately after they were said he regretted having said, trying to bring his sermon to a close, unable to do so, obliged, at last, to say hurriedly that he hoped they would reflect on this matter, and try to remember he was always at their service and prepared to give them the best advice.

As soon as Mass was over Mother Hilda went to the Prioress. "We'll speak on this matter later." And the Prioress went to her room, hurriedly. The nuns hung about the cloister, whispering in little groups, forgetful of the rule; the supporters of the Prioress indignant with the priest, who had dared to call into question the spiritual value of their Order, and to tell them it would be more pleasing to God for them to start a school. It was felt even by the supporters of the school that the priest had gone too far, not in advocating the school, but in what he had said regarding the liability of the contemplative orders to be attacked by demons, for really what he had said amounted to that.

XXXIII

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When the news arrived that Father Daly had been transferred suddenly by the Bishop to another parish, Sister Winifred walked about in terror, expecting every minute to bring her a summons to the Prioress's room. A shiver went through her when she thought of the interview which probably awaited her; but as the morning wore away without any command reaching her, she began to take pleasure in the hope that she had escaped, and in the belief that the Prioress was afraid of an explanation. No doubt that was it; and Sister Winifred picked up courage and the threads of the broken intrigue, resolving this time to confine herself to laying stress on the necessitous condition of the convent, which was still in debt, and the impossibility of Sister Teresa's singing redeeming it entirely.

It would have been wiser if she had conducted her campaign as she intended to do, but the temptation was irresistible to point out, occasionally, that those who did not agree with her were the very nuns—Angela, Veronica, Rufina, and one or two others—who had confessed to the sin of praying for the visitations of counterparts during the hour of meditation and other hours. By doing this she prejudiced her cause. Her inuendoes reached the ears of the Bishop and Monsignor Mostyn, who came to the convent to settle the difficulty of an alteration in the rule; she was severely reprimanded, and it was decreed that the contemplative Orders were not out of date, and that nuns should be able to meditate on the Cross without considering too closely the joys that awaited the brides of Christ in heaven. St. Teresa's writings were put under ban, only the older nuns, who would not accept the words of the saint too literally, being allowed to read them. "Added to which," as Monsignor said, "the idle thoughts of the novices are occupying too much of our attention. This is a matter for the spiritual adviser of the novices, and Father Rawley is one who will keep a strict watch."

The Bishop concurred with Monsignor, and then applied his mind to the consideration of the proposed alteration of the rule, deciding that no alteration could receive his sanction, at all events during the life of the present Prioress. Sister Winifred was told that the matter must be dropped for the present. It so happened that Monsignor came upon her and Evelyn together before the Bishop left; and he tried to reconcile them, saying that when the Prioress was called to God—it was only a question of time for all of us, and it didn't seem probable that she would live very long; of course, it was a very painful matter, one which they did not care to speak about—but after her death, if it should be decided that the Order might become a teaching Order, Sister Teresa would be the person who would be able to assist Sister Winifred better than any other.

"But, Monsignor," Evelyn said, "I do not feel sure I've a vocation for the religious life."

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Out of a shrivelled face pale, deeply-set eyes looked at her, and it seemed that she could read therein the disappointment he felt that she was not remaining in the convent. She was sorry she had disappointed him, for he had helped her; and she left him talking to Sister Winifred and wandered down the passage, not quite certain whether he doubted her strength to lead a chaste life in the world, or could she attribute that change of expression in his eyes to wounded vanity at finding that the living clay put into his hands was escaping from them unmoulded... by him? Hard to say. There was a fear in her heart! Now was it that she might lack the force of character to leave the convent when the time came... after the Prioress's death? Life is but a ceaseless uprooting of oneself. Sister Winifred might be elected....

"Who will have the strength to turn the convent into an active Order when I am gone?" the Prioress often asked Evelyn, who could only answer her that she hoped she would be with them for many a day yet. "No, my dear, not for many months. I am a very old woman." She questioned Evelyn regarding Mother Philippa's administration; and Evelyn disguised from her the disorder that had come into the convent, not telling how the nuns spent a great deal of time visiting each other in their cells, how in the garden some walked on one side and some on the other, how the bitterest enmities had sprung up. But, though she was not told these things, the Prioress knew her convent had fallen into decadence, and sometimes she said:

"Well, I haven't the strength to restore dignity to this Order; so it had better disappear, become an active Order. But who among you will be able to reorganise it? Mother Philippa—what do you think, dear?"

"Mother Philippa is an excellent woman," Evelyn answered; "but as an administrator—"

"You don't believe in her?"

"Only when she is guided by another, one superior to herself."

"One who will see that the rule is maintained?"

Evelyn was thinking of Mother Hilda.

"Mother Hilda," she said, "seems to me too quiet, too subtle, too retiring." And the Prioress agreed with her, saying under her breath:

"She prefers to confine herself to the education of her novices. So what is to be done?"

From Mother Hilda Evelyn's thoughts went to Sister Mary John, and it seemed to her she never realised before the irreparable loss the convent had sustained. But what was the good in reminding the Prioress of Sister Mary John? No doubt, lying back there in her chair, the old mind was thinking of the nun she had lost, and who would have proved of such extraordinary service in the present circumstances. While looking at the

Prioress, thinking with her (for it is true the Prioress was thinking of Sister Mary John), Evelyn understood suddenly, in a single second, that if Sister Mary John had not left Sister Winifred would not have come forward with the project of a school, nor would there have been any schism. But in spite of all her wisdom, the Prioress had not known, until this day, how dependent they were on Sister Mary John. A great mistake had been made, but there was no use going into that now.

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A bell rang, and Evelyn said:

“Now, Mother, will you take my arm and we’ll go down to chapel together?”

“And after Benediction I will take a turn in the garden with you,” the Prioress said.

She was so weary of singing Gounod’s “Ave Maria” that she accentuated the vulgarity of the melody, and wondered if the caricature would be noticed. “The more vulgarly it is sung the more money it draws.” And smiling at the theatrical phrase, which had arisen unexpectedly to her lips, she went into the garden to join the Prioress.

“Come this way, dear; I want to talk to you.” And the Prioress and the novice wandered away from the other nuns towards the fish-pond, and stood listening to the gurgle of the stream and to the whisper of the woods. An inspiring calm seemed to fall out of the sky, filling the heart with sympathy, turning all things to one thing, drawing the earth and sky and thoughts of men and women together.

“Teresa, dear, when you leave us what do you intend to do? You have never told me. Do you intend to return to the stage?”

“Mother, I cannot bear to think of leaving you.” The old nun raised her eyes for a moment, and there was a great sadness in them, for she felt that without Evelyn her death would be lonely.

“We came here for the same reason, or very nearly. I stayed, and you are going.”

“And which do you think is the better part, Mother?”

The nun did not answer for a long time, and Evelyn’s heart seemed to beat more quickly as she waited for the answer.

“These are things we shall never know, whether it is better to go or to stay. All the wisdom of the ages has never solved this question— which ever course we take; it costs a great deal to come here.”

“And it costs a great deal to remain in the world. Something terrible would have happened to me. I should have killed myself. But you know everything, Mother; there is no use going over that story again.”

“No, there is none. Only one thing remains to be said, Teresa—to thank you for remaining with me. You are a gift from God, the best I have received for a long time, and if I reach heaven my prayers will always be with you.”

“And, Mother, if you reach heaven, will you promise me one thing, that you will come to me and tell me the truth?”

“That I promise, and I will keep my promise if I am allowed.”

The ripple of the stream sounded loud in their ears, and the skies became more lovely as Evelyn and the Prioress thought of the promise that had been asked and been given.

“I’ll ask you to do some things for me.” And she gave Evelyn instructions regarding her papers. “When you have done all these things you will leave the convent. You will not be able to remain. I have seen a great deal of you, more than I saw of any other novice, and I know you as if you were my own child.... I am very old, and you are still a young woman.”

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“Mother, I am nearly, forty, and my trials are at an end, or nearly.”

“Truly, a great trial. I am old enough now, Teresa, to speak about it without shame. A great trial, yet one is sorry when it is over. And you still believe that a calamity would have befallen you?”

“And a great calamity nearly did befall me.”

They sat side by side, their eyes averted, knowing well that they had reached a point beyond which words could not carry them.

“We are always anxious to be understood, every one wants to be understood. But why? Of what use?”

“Mother, we must never speak on this subject again, for I love you very dearly, and it is a great pain to me to think that your death will set me free.”

“It seems wrong, Teresa, but I wouldn’t have you remain in the convent after me; you are not suited to it. I knew it all the while, only I tried to keep you. One is never free from temptation. Now you know everything.... We have been here long enough.”

“We have only been here a few minutes,” Evelyn answered; “at least it has only seemed a few minutes to me. The evening is so beautiful, the sky is so calm, the sound of the water so extraordinary in the stillness! Listen to those birds, the chaffinch shrieking in that aspen, and the thrush singing all his little songs somewhere at the end of the garden.”

“And there is your bullfinch, dear. He will remain in the convent to remind them of you when you have left.”

The bird whistled a stave of the Bird Music from “Siegfried,” and then came to their feet to pick. Evelyn threw him some bread, and they wandered back to the novices, who had forgotten their differences, and were sitting under their tree with Mother Hilda discussing a subject of great interest to them.

“We haven’t seen them united before for a long time.”

“That odious Sister Winifred waiting for your death, thinking only of her school.”

“That is the way of the world, and we find the world everywhere, even in a convent. Her idea comes before everything else. Only you, Teresa, are good; you are sacrificing yourself to me; I hope it will not be for long.”

“But we said, Mother, we wouldn’t talk of that any more. Now, what are the novices so eager about?”

Sister Agatha ran forward to tell them that it had been suddenly remembered that the thirtieth of the month would be Sister Bridget's fortieth anniversary of her vows.

"Forty years she has been in the convent, and we are thinking that we might do something to commemorate the anniversary."

"I should like to see her on an elephant, riding round the garden. What a spree it would be!" said Sister Jerome.

The words were hardly out of her mouth when she regretted them, foreseeing allusions to elephants till the end of her days, for Sister Jerome often said foolish things, and was greatly quizzed for them. But the absurdity of the proposal did not seem to strike any one; only the difficulty of procuring an elephant, with a man who would know how to manage the animal, was very great. Why not a donkey? They could easily get one from Wimbledon; the gardener would bring one. But a donkey ride seemed a strange come-down after an elephant ride, and an idea had suddenly struck Sister Agatha.

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“Sister Jerome doesn’t mean a real elephant, I suppose. We might easily make a very fine elephant indeed by piling the long table from the library with cushions, stuffing it as nearly as possible into the shape of an elephant.”

“And the making of the elephant would be such a lark!” cried Sister Jerome.

Mother Hilda raised no objection, and the Prioress and Evelyn walked aside, saying:

“Well, it is better they should be making elephants than dreaming of counterparts.”

XXXIV

The creation of the beast was accomplished in the novitiate, no one being allowed to see it except the Prioress. The great difficulty was to find beads large enough for the eyes, and it threatened to frustrate the making of their beast. But the latest postulant suggested that perhaps the buttons off her jacket would do, they were just the thing,’ and the legs of the beast were most natural and life-like; it had even a tail.

As no one out of the novitiate had seen this very fine beast, the convent was on tip-toe with excitement, and when, at the conclusion of dinner, the elephant was wheeled into the refectory, every one clapped her hands, and there were screams of delight. Then the saddle was brought in and attached by blue ribbons. Sister Bridget, who did not seem quite sure that the elephant was not alive, was lifted on it and held there; and was wheeled round the refectory in triumph, the novices screaming with delight, the professed, too. Only Evelyn stood silent and apart, sorry she could not mix with the others, sharing their pleasures. To stand watching them she felt to be unkind, so she went into the garden, and wandered to the sundial, whence she could see Richmond Park; and looking into the distance, hearing the childish gaiety of the nuns, she remembered Louise’s party at the Savoy Hotel years and years ago. The convent had ceased to have any meaning for her; so she must return, but not to the mummers, they, too, had faded out of her life. She did not know whither she was going, only that she must wander on... as soon as the Prioress died. The thought caused her to shudder, and, remembering that the old woman was alone in her room, she went up to ask her if she would care to come into the garden with her. The Prioress was too weak to leave her room, but she was glad to have Evelyn, and to listen to her telling of the great success of the elephant.

“Of course, my dear, the recreations here must seem to you very childish. I wonder what your life will be when I’m gone?”

“To-morrow you will be stronger, and will be able to come into the garden.”

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But the old nun never left her room again, and Evelyn's last memory of her in the garden was when they had sat by the fish-pond, looking into the still water, reflecting sky and trees, with a great carp moving mysteriously through a dim world of water-weed and flower. There were many other memories of the Prioress which lingered through many years, memories of an old woman lying back in her chair, frail and white, slipping quite consciously out of life into death. Every day she seemed to grow a trifle smaller, till there was hardly anything left of her. It was terrible to be with her, so conscious was she that death was approaching, that she and death were drawing nearer and nearer, and to hear her say, "Four planks are the only habit I want now." Another time, looking into Evelyn's eyes, she said, "It is strange that I should be so old and you so young."

"But I don't feel young, Mother." And every day the old woman grew more and more dependent upon Evelyn.

"You are very good to me. Why should you wait here till I am dead? Only it won't be long, dear. Of what matter to me that the convent will be changed when I am dead. If I am a celestial spirit, our disputes—which is the better, prayer or good works—will raise a smile upon my lips. But celestial spirits have no lips. Why should I trouble myself? And yet—"

Evelyn could see that the old woman could not bear to think that her life's work was to fall to pieces when she was gone.

"But, dear Mother, we all wish that what we have done shall remain; and we all wish to be remembered, at least for a little while. There is nothing more human. And your papers, dear Mother, will have to be published; they will vindicate you, as nothing else could."

"But who is to publish them?" the Prioress asked. "They would require to be gone over carefully, and I am too weak to do that, too weak even to listen to you reading them."

Evelyn promised the Prioress again that she would collect all the papers, and, as far as she could, select those which the Prioress would herself select; and the promise she could see pleased the dying woman. It was at the end of the week that the end came. Evelyn sat by her, holding her hand, and hearing an ominous rattling sound in the throat, she waited, waited, heard it again, saw the body tremble a little, and then, getting up, she closed the eyes, said a little prayer, and went out of the room to tell the nuns of the Prioress's death, surprised at what seemed to her like indifference, without tears in her eyes, or any manifestation of grief. There could be none, for she was not feeling anything; she seemed to herself to be mechanically performing certain duties, telling Mother Philippa, whom she met in the passage, in a smooth, even voice, that the Prioress had died five minutes ago, without any suffering, quite calmly. Her lack of feeling seemed to her to give the words a strange ring, and she wondered if Mother Philippa would be stirred very deeply.

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“Dead, Sister, dead? How terrible! None of us there. And the prayers for the dying not said. Surely, Teresa, you could have sent for us. I must summon the community at once.” And the sub-Prioress hurried away, feeling already on her shoulders the full weight of the convent affairs.

In a few moments the Sisters, with scared faces, were hurrying from all parts of the house to the room where the Prioress lay dead. Evelyn felt she could not go back, and she slipped away to look for Veronica, whom she found in the sacristy.

“Veronica, dear, it is all over.”

The girl turned towards her and clasped her hands.

“Auntie is dead,” was all she said, and, dropping into a chair, her tears began to flow.

“Dear Veronica, we both loved her very much.”

“So we did, Sister; the convent will be very different without her. Whom will they elect? Sister Winifred very possibly. It won’t matter to you, dear, you will go, and we shall have a school; everything will be different.”

“But many weeks will pass before I leave. Your aunt asked me to put her papers in order; I shall be at work in the library for a long while.”

“Oh, I am so glad, Sister. I thought perhaps you would go at once.” And Veronica dried her tears. “But, dear, we can’t talk now. I must join the others in the prayers for the dead, and there will be so much to do.”

“We shall have to strip the altar, I suppose?”

“Oh, yes, the whole chapel—we shall want all our black hangings. But I must go.”

At that moment a Sister hurried in to say the bell was to be tolled at once, and Evelyn went with Veronica to the corner of the cloister where the ropes hung, and stood by listlessly while Veronica dragged at the heavy rope, leaving a long interval between each clang.

“Oughtn’t we to go up, Sister?” Veronica asked again.

“No, I can’t go back yet,” Evelyn answered. And she went into the garden and followed the winding paths, wondering at the solemn clanging, for it all seemed so useless.

The chaplain arrived half an hour afterwards, and next day several priests came down from London, and there was a great assembly to chant the Requiem Mass. But Evelyn, though she worked hard at decorating the altar, was not moved by the black hangings,

nor by the doleful chant, nor by the flutter of the white surplice and the official drone about the grave. All the convent had followed the prelates down the garden paths; by the side of the grave Latin prayers were recited and holy water was sprinkled. On the day the Prioress was buried there were few clouds in the sky, sunshine was pretty constant, and all the birds were singing in the trees; every moment Evelyn expected one of her bullfinches to come out upon a bough and sing its little stave. If it did, she would take his song for an omen. But the bullfinches happened to be away, and she wished that the priests' drone would cease to interrupt the melody of the birds and boughs. The dear Prioress would prefer Nature's own music, it was kinder; and the sound of the earth mixed with the stones falling on the coffin-lid was the last sensation. After it the prelates and nuns returned to the convent, everybody wondering what was going to happen next, every nun asking herself who would be elected Prioress.

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“Dear Mother, it is all over now,” Evelyn said to Mother Hilda in the passage, and the last of the ecclesiastics disappeared through a doorway, going to his lunch.

“Yes, dear Teresa, it is all over so far as this world is concerned. We must think of her now in heaven.”

“And to-morrow we shall begin to think for whom we shall vote—at least, you will be thinking. I am not a choir sister, and am leaving you.”

“Is that decided, Teresa?”

“Yes, I think so. Perhaps now would be the time for me to take off this habit; I only retained it at the Prioress’s wish. But, Mother, though I have not discovered a vocation, and feel that you have wasted much time upon me, still, I wouldn’t have you think I am ungrateful.”

“My dear, it never occurred to me to think so.” And the two women walked to the end of the cloister together, Evelyn telling Mother Hilda about the Prioress and the Prioress’s papers.

And from that day onward, for many weeks, Evelyn worked in the library, collecting her papers, and writing the memoir of the late Prioress, which, apparently, the nun had wished her to do, though why she should have wished it Evelyn often wondered, for if she were a soul in heaven it could matter to her very little what anybody thought of her on earth. How a soul in heaven must smile at the importance attached to this rule and to these exercises! How trivial it all must seem to the soul!... And yet it could not seem trivial to the soul, if it be true that by following certain rules we get to heaven. If it be true! Evelyn’s thoughts paused, for a doubt had entered into her mind—the old familiar doubt, from which no one can separate herself or himself, from which even the saints could not escape. Are they not always telling of the suffering doubt caused them? And following this doubt, which prayers can never wholly stifle, the old original pain enters the heart. We are only here for a little while, and the words lose nothing of their original freshness by repetition; and, in order to drink the anguish to its dregs, Evelyn elaborated the words, reminding herself that time is growing shorter every year, even the years are growing shorter.

“The space is very little between me and the grave.”

Some celebrated words from a celebrated poet, calling attention to the brevity of life, came into her mind, and she repeated them again and again, enjoying their bitterness. We like to meditate on death; even the libertine derives satisfaction from such meditation, and poets are remembered by their powers of expressing our great sorrow in stinging terms. “Our lives are not more intense than our dreams,” Evelyn thought; “and yet our only reason for believing life to be reality is its intensity. Looked at from the

outside, what is it but a little vanishing dust? Millions have preceded that old woman into the earth, millions shall follow her. I shall be in the earth too—in how many

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years? In a few months perhaps, in a few weeks perhaps. Possibly within the next few days I may hear how long I may expect to live, for what is more common than to wake with a pain, and on consulting a doctor to see a grave look come into his face, and to hear him tell of some mortal disease beyond his knife's reach? Words come reluctantly to one's tongue. "How long have I to live?" "About a year, about six months; I cannot say for certain."

Doctors are answering men and women in these terms every day, and Evelyn thought of some celebrated sayings that life's mutability has inspired. She remembered some from the Bible, and some from Shakespeare; and those she remembered from Fitzgerald, from his "Omar Khayyam," took her back to the afternoon she spent with Owen by the Serpentine, to the very day when he gave her the poem to read, thinking to overcome her scruples with literature.

"There were no scruples in me then. My own business, 'The Ring,' is full of the pagan story of life and death. We have babbled about it ever since, trying to forget or explain it, without, however, doing either; I tried to forget it on the stage, and did not succeed, but it was not fear of death that brought me here. The nuns do not succeed better than I; all screens are unavailing, for the wind is about everywhere—a cold, searching wind, which prayers cannot keep out; our doorways are not staunch—the wind comes under the door of the actress's dressing-room and under the door of the nun's cell in draughts chilling us to the bone, and then leaving us to pursue our avocations for a time in peace. The Prioress thought that in coming here she had discovered a way to heaven, yet she was anxious to defend herself from her detractors upon earth. If she had believed in her celestial inheritance she would have troubled very little, and I should be free to go away now. Perhaps it is better as it is," she reflected. And it seemed to her that no effort on her part was called for or necessary. She was certain she was drifting, and that the current would carry her to the opposite bank in good time; she was content to wait, for had she not promised the Prioress to perform a certain task? And it was part of her temperament to leave nothing undone; she also liked a landmark, and the finishing of her book would be a landmark.

She was even a little curious to see what turn the convent affairs would take, and as she sat biting the end of her pen, thinking, the sound of an axe awoke her from her reverie. Trees were being felled in the garden; "and an ugly, red-brick building will be run up, in which children of city merchants will be taught singing and the piano." Was it contempt for the world's ignorance in matters of art that filled her heart? or was she animated with a sublime pity for those parents who would come to her (if she remained in the convent, a thing she had no intention of doing) to ask her, Evelyn Innes, if she thought that Julia would come to something

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if she were to persevere, or if Kitty would succeed if she continued to practice “The Moonlight Sonata,” a work of the beauty of which no one in the convent had any faintest comprehension? She herself had some gifts, and, after much labour, had brought her gifts to fruition, not to any splendid, but to some fruition. It was not probable that any one who came to the convent would do more than she had done; far better to learn knitting or cooking—anything in the world except music. Her gift of singing had brought her to this convent. Was it really so? Was her gift connected in some obscure way with the moral crisis which had drawn her into this convent? There seemed to be a connection, only she did not seem to be able to work it out. But there must be one surely, otherwise her poor people, whom she loved so dearly, would not have been abandoned. A very cruel abandonment it was, and she pondered a long while on this subject without arriving at any other conclusion except that for her to remain in the convent to teach music to the children of rich merchants, who had villas in Wimbledon, was out of the question. Her poor people were calling to her, and the convent had no further concern in her life. Of that she was sure. It was no longer the same convent. The original aspiration had declined; the declension had been from the late Prioress to Sister Winifred, who, knowing that her own election to Prioress was impossible, had striven to get Mother Philippa elected Prioress and herself sub-Prioress—a very clever move on her part, for with Mother Philippa as Prioress the management of the school would be left to her, and the school was what interested her. Of course, the money they made would be devoted to building a chapel, or something of that kind; but it was the making of money which would henceforth be the pleasure of the convent. Evelyn took a certain pleasure in listening negligently to Mother Winifred, who seemed unable to resist the desire to talk to her about vocations whenever they met. From whatever point they started, the conversation would soon turn upon a vocation, and Evelyn found herself in the end listening to a story of some novice who thought she had no vocation and had left the convent, but had returned.

“And very often,” Mother Winifred would say sententiously, “those who think themselves most sure of their vocation find themselves without one.”

And Evelyn would answer, “Those who would take the last place are put up first—isn’t that it, Mother Winifred?”

Very often as they walked round the great, red-brick building, with rows of windows on either side facing each other, so that the sky could be seen through the building, Evelyn said:

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“But do you not regret the trees?” She took pleasure in reminding every nun that they sacrificed the beauty of the garden in the hope of making a little money; and these remarks, though they annoyed Mother Winifred, did not prevent her from speaking with pride of the school, now rapidly advancing towards completion, nor did Evelyn’s criticism check her admiration of Evelyn herself. It seemed to Evelyn that Mother Winifred was always paying her compliments, or if she were not doing that, she would seek opportunities to take Evelyn into her confidence, telling her of the many pupils they had been promised, and of the conversions that would follow their teaching. The girls would be impressed by the quiet beauty of the nun’s life; some of them would discover in themselves vocations for the religious life, and a great many would certainly go away anxious for conversion; and, even if their conversions did not happen at once, though they might be delayed for years, sooner or later many conversions would be the result of this school. And the result of all this flummery was:

“Now, why should you not stay with us, dear, only a little while longer? It would be such a sad thing if you were to go away, and find that, after all, you had a vocation for the religious life, for if you return to us you will have to go through the novitiate again.”

“But, Mother Winifred, you always begin upon the supposition that I have a vocation. Now, supposing you begin upon the other supposition —that I have not one.”

Mother Winifred hesitated, and looked sharply at Evelyn; but, unable to take her advice, on the very next opportunity she spoke to Evelyn of the vocation which she might discover in herself when it was too late.

“You have forgotten what I said, Mother Winifred.”

Mother Winifred laughed, but, undaunted, she soon returned with some new argument, which had occurred to her in the interval, as she prayed in church, or in her cell at night, and the temptation to try the effect of the new argument on Evelyn was irresistible.

“Dear Sister Teresa—you see the familiar name comes to my tongue though you have put off the habit—we shall be a long time in straitened circumstances. A new mortgage has had, as you know, to be placed on the property in order to get money to build the school; the school will pay, but not at once.”

Evelyn protested she was not responsible for this new debt. She had advised the Prioress and Mother Winifred against it, warning them that she did not intend to remain in the convent.

“But we always expected that you would remain.”

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And in this way Evelyn was made to feel her responsibility so much that in the end she consented to give up part of her money to the nuns. So long as she had just enough to live upon it did not matter, and she owed these nuns a great deal. True that she had paid them ten times over what she owed them, but still, it was difficult to measure one's debts in pounds, shillings, and pence. However, that was the way the nuns wanted her to measure them, and if she could leave them fifteen hundred pounds—. And as soon as this sum was agreed upon, Sister Winifred never lost an opportunity of regretting that the convent was obliged to accept this magnificent donation, hinting that the Prioress and herself would be willing (and there would be no difficulty in obtaining the consent of the choir sisters) to accept Evelyn's services for three years in the school instead of the money.

"Five hundred a year we shall be paying you, but the value of your teaching will be very great; mothers will be especially anxious to send their daughters to our school, so that they may get good singing lessons from you."

"And when I leave?"

"Well, the school will have obtained a reputation by that time. Of course, you will be a loss, but we must try to do without you."

"Three years in this convent!"

"But you are quite free here; you come and go as you please. After all, your intention in leaving the convent is to teach music. Why not teach music here?"

The argument was an ingenious one, but Evelyn did not feel that it would appeal to her in the least, either to continue living in the convent after she had finished her book, or to go back to the convent to give singing lessons three or four times a week.

It would be preferable for her to give fifteen hundred pounds to the convent, and so finish with the whole thing; and this she intended to do, though she put Mother Winifred off with evasion, leaving her thinking that perhaps after all she would teach for some little while in the convent. It was necessary to do this, for Mother Winifred could persuade Mother Philippa as she pleased; and it had occurred to Evelyn that perhaps Mother Winfred might arrange for her expulsion. Nothing could be easier than to tell her that somebody's friend was going to stay with them in the convent, that the guest-room would be wanted. To leave now would not suit Evelyn at all. The late Prioress's papers belonged to the convent; and to deceive Mother Winifred completely Evelyn agreed to give some singing lessons, for they had already begun to receive pupils, though the school was not yet finished.

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This teaching proved very irksome to her, for it delayed the completion of her book, and she often meditated an escape, thinking how this might be accomplished while the nuns played at ball in the autumn afternoon. Very often they were all in the garden, all except Sister Agnes, the portress, and she often left her keys on the nail. So it would be easy for Evelyn to run down the covered way and take the keys from the nail and open the door. And the day came when she could not resist the temptation of opening the door, not with a view to escape; but just to know what the sensation of the open door was like. And she stood for some time looking into the landscape, remembering vaguely, somewhere at the back of her mind, that she could not take the Prioress's papers with her, they did not belong to her; the convent could institute an action for theft against her, the Prioress not having made any formal will, only a memorandum saying she would like Evelyn to collect her papers.

So it was necessary for her to lock the gate again, to restore the keys to the nail, and return to the library. But in a few weeks more her task would be done, and it would be pleasanter to go away when it was done; and, as it has already been said, Evelyn liked landmarks. "To pass out is easy, but the Evelyn that goes out will not be the same as the Evelyn who came in." And a terror gathered in her mind, remembering that she was forty, and to begin life again after forty, and after such an experience as hers, might prove beyond her strength. Doubts enter into every mind, doubt entered into hers; perhaps the convent was the natural end of her life, not as a nun, but as an oblate. The guest-room was a pleasant room, and she could live more cheaply in the convent than elsewhere. There are cowardly hours in every life, and there were hours when this compromise appealed to Evelyn Innes. But if she remained she would have to continue teaching under Mother Winifred's direction. A little revolt awoke in her. She could not do that; and she began to think what would happen to her when she left the convent. There would not be money enough left her to sit down in a small flat and do nothing; she would have to work. Well, she would have to do that in any case, for idleness was not natural to her, and she would have to work for somebody besides herself—for her poor people—and this she could do by giving singing lessons. Where? In Dulwich? But to go back to the house in which she lived her life, to the room which used to be hung with the old instruments, and to revive her mother's singing classes? No, she could not begin her life from exactly the same point at which she left off. And gradually the project formed in her mind of a new life, a life which would be at once new and old. And the project seemed to take shape as she wrote the last pages of her memoir of the late Prioress.

"It is done, and I have got a right to my own manuscript; they cannot take that from me." And she went into the sacristy, her manuscript in her hand.

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The cool, sweet room seemed empty, and Veronica emerged from the shadow, almost a shadow. There were two windows, lattice panes, and these let the light fall upon the counter, along which the vestments were laid for the priest. The oak press was open, and it exhaled an odour of orris root and lavender, and Veronica, standing beside it, a bunch of keys at her girdle, once more reminded Evelyn of the mediaeval virgin she had seen in the Rhenish churches.

“I have finished collecting your aunt’s papers.”

“And now you are going to leave us?”

There was a sob in the girl’s voice, and all Evelyn’s thoughts about her seemed to converge and to concentrate. There was the girl before her who passed through life without knowing it, interested in putting out the vestments for an old priest, hiding his amice so that no other hands but hers should touch it; this and the dream of an angel who visited her in sleep and whose flesh was filled with luminous tints constituted all she knew of life, all she would ever know. There were tears in her eyes now, there was a sob in her voice; she would regret her friend for a day, for a week, and then the convent life would draw about her like great heavy curtains. Evelyn remembered how she had told her of a certain restlessness which kept her from her prayers; she remembered how she had said to her, “It will pass, everything will pass away.” She would become an old nun, and would be carried to the graveyard just as her aunt had been. When would that happen? Perhaps not for fifty years. Sooner or later it would happen. And Evelyn listened to Veronica saying the convent would never be the same without her, saying:

“Once you leave us you will never come back.”

“Yes, I shall, Veronica; I shall come once or twice to see you.”

“Perhaps it would be better for you not to come at all,” the girl cried, and turned away; and then going forward suddenly as Evelyn was about to leave the sacristy, she said:

“But when are you leaving? When are you leaving?”

“To-morrow; there is no reason why I should wait any longer.”

“We cannot part like this.” And she put down the chalice, and the women went into a chill wind; the pear-trees were tossing, and there were crocuses in the bed and a few snowdrops.

“You had better remain until the weather gets warmer; to leave in this bleak season! Oh, Sister, how we shall miss you! But you were never like a nun.”

They walked many times to and fro, forgetful of the bleak wind blowing.

“It must be so, you were never like a nun. Of course we all knew, I at least knew... only we are sorry to lose you.”

The next day a carriage came for Evelyn. The nuns assembled to bid her goodbye; they were as kind as their ideas allowed them to be, but, of course, they disapproved of Evelyn going, and the fifteen hundred pounds she left them did not seem to reconcile them to her departure. It certainly did not reconcile Mother Winifred, who refused to come down to wish her goodbye, saying that Evelyn had deceived them by promising to remain, or at all events led them to think she would stay with them until the school was firmly established. Mother Philippa apologised for her, but Evelyn said it was not necessary.

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“After all, what Mother Winifred says is the truth, only I could not do otherwise. Now, goodbye, I’ll come to see you again, may I not?”

They did not seem very anxious on this point, and Evelyn thought it quite possible she might never see the convent again, which had meant so much to her and which was now behind her. Her thoughts were already engaged in the world towards which she was going, and thinking of the etiolated hands of the nuns she remembered the brown hands of her poor people; it was these hands that had drawn her out of the convent, so she liked to think; and it was nearly the truth, not the whole truth, for that we may never know.

XXXV

The blinds of 27, Berkeley Square were always down, and when Sir Owen’s friends called the answer was invariably the same: “No news of Sir Owen yet; his letters aren’t forwarded; business matters are attended to by Mr. Watts, the secretary.” And Sir Owen’s friends went away wondering when the wandering spirit would die in him.

It was these last travels, extending over two years, in the Far East, that killed it; Owen felt sure of that when he entered his house, glad of its comfort, glad to be home again; and sinking into his armchair he began to read his letters, wondering how he should answer the different invitations, for every one was now more than six months old, some going back as far as eighteen months. It seemed absurd to write to Lady So-and-so, thanking her for an invitation so long gone by. All the same, he would like to see her, and all his friends, the most tedious would be welcome now. He tore open the envelopes, reading the letters greedily, unsuspicious of one amongst them which would make him forget the others—a letter from Evelyn. It came at last under his hand, and having glanced through it he sank back in his chair, overcome, not so much by surprise that she had left her convent as at finding that the news had put no great gladness into his heart, rather, a feeling of disappointment.

“How little one knows about oneself!” But he wasn’t sorry she had left the convent. A terrible result of time and travel it would be if his first feeling on opening her letter were one of disappointment. He was sorry she had been disappointed, and thought for a long time of that long waste of life, five years spent with nuns. “We are strange beings, indeed,” he said. And getting up, he looked out the place she wrote from, discovering it to be a Surrey village, probably about thirty miles from London, with a bad train service; and having sent a telegram asking if it would suit her for him to go down to see her next day, he fell back in his chair to think more easily how his own life had been affected by Evelyn’s retreat from the convent; and again he experienced a feeling of disappointment. “A long waste of life, not only of her life, but of mine,” for he had travelled thousands of miles... to forget her? Good heavens, no!

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What would his life be without remembrance of Evelyn? He had come home believing himself reconciled to the loss of Evelyn, and willing to live in memories of her—the management of his estate a sufficient interest for his life, and his thoughts were already engaged in the building of a new gatehouse; after all, Riversdale was his business, and he had come home to work for his successor while cherishing a dream— wasn't it strange? But this letter had torn down his dream and his life was again in pieces. Would he ever be at rest while she was abroad? Would it not have been better for them both if she had remained in her convent? The thought seemed odiously selfish. If she were to read his disappointment on hearing that she was no longer in the convent? ... Telepathy! There were instances! And his thoughts drifted away, and he seemed to lose consciousness of everything, until he was awakened by the butler bringing back her reply.

Now he would see her in twenty-four hours, and hear from her lips a story of adventure, for it is an adventure to renounce the world, the greatest, unless a return to the world be a greater. She had known both; and it would be interesting to hear her tell both stories —if she could tell her stories; she might only be half aware of their interest and importance.

"God only knows what she is like now! A wreck, a poor derelict woman, with no life to call her own. The life of an actress which I gave her, and which was so beautiful, wrecked; and the life of a nun, which she insisted on striving after, wrecked." A cold, blighting sorrow like a mist came up, it seemed to penetrate to his very bones, and he asked why she had left the convent—of what use could she be out of it?... only to torment him again. Twenty times during the course of the evening and the next morning he resolved not to go to see her, and as many times a sudden desire to see her ripped up his resolution; and he ordered the brougham. "Five years' indulgence in vigils and abstinences, superstitions must have made a great change in her; utterly unlike the Evelyn Innes whom I discovered years ago in Dulwich, the beautiful pagan girl whom I took away to Paris." He was convinced. But anxious to impugn his conviction, he took her letter from his pocket, and in it discovered traces, which cheered him, of the old Evelyn.

"She must have suffered terribly on finding herself obliged after five years to retreat, and something of the original spirit was required for her to fight her way out, for, of course, she was opposed at every moment."

The little stations went by one by one: the train stopped nine or ten times before it reached the penultimate.

"In the next few minutes I shall see her. She is sure to come to the station to meet me. If she doesn't I'll go back—what an end that would be! A strange neighbourhood to

choose. Why did she come here? With whom is she living? In a few minutes I shall know."

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The train began to slacken speed. “Why, there she is on the platform.” The train rushed by her, the first-class carriages stopping at the other end; and, calling to the porter to take his bag out of the carriage, he sprang out, tall and thin. “Like one who had never had the gout,” she said, as she hurried to meet him, smiling, so intimately did his appearance bring back old times. “He is so like himself, and better dressed than I am; the embroidered waistcoat still goes in at the waist; and he still wears shirts with mauve stripes. But he is a good deal greyer... and more wrinkled than I am.”

“So it is you, Evelyn. Let me look at you.” And, holding both her hands, he stood looking into the face which he had expected to find so much changed that he hardly found it changed at all, his eyes passing over, almost without notice, the white hairs among the red, and the wrinkles about the eyes and forehead, which, however, became more apparent when she smiled. His touch was more conclusive of disappointment than his eyes; her hands seemed harder than they used to be, the knuckles had thickened, and, not altogether liking his scrutiny, she laughed, withdrawing her hands.

“Where is your valet, Owen?”

It was then that he saw that her teeth had aged a little, yellowed a little; a dark spot menaced the loss of one of the eye-teeth if not attended to at once. But her figure seemed the same, and to get a back view he dropped his stick. No, the convent had not bent her; a tall, erect figure was set off to advantage by a dark blue linen dress, and the small, well-reared head and its roll of thick hair by the blue straw hat trimmed with cornflowers.

“Her appearance is all right; the vent must be in her mind,” he said, preparing himself for a great disillusionment as soon as their talk passed out of the ordinary ruts.

“My valet? I didn’t bring him. You might not be able to put him up.”

“I shouldn’t.”

“But is there any one to carry my bag? I’ll carry it myself if you don’t live too far from here.”

“About a mile. We can call at the inn and tell them to send a fly for your bag—if you don’t mind the walk.”

“Mind the walk—and you for companionship? Evelyn, dear, it is delightful to find myself walking with you, and in the country,” he added, looking round.

“The country is prettier farther on.”

Owen looked round without, however, being able to give his attention to the landscape.

“Prettier farther on? But how long have you been here?”

“Nearly two years now. And you—when did you return?”

“How did you know I was away?”

“You didn’t write.”

“I returned yesterday.”

“Yesterday? You only read yesterday my letter written six months ago.”

“We have so much to talk about, Evelyn, so much to learn from each other.”

“The facts will appear one by one quite naturally. Tell me, weren’t you surprised to hear I had left the convent? And tell me, weren’t you a little disappointed?”

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“Disappointed, my dear Evelyn? Should I have wired to you, and come down here if—. It seemed as if the time would never pass.”

“I don’t mean that you aren’t glad to see me. I can see you are. But admit that you were disappointed that I hadn’t succeeded—”

“I see what you mean. Well, I was disappointed that you were disappointed; I admit so much.” And, walking up the sunny road, he wondered how it was that she had been able to guess what his thoughts were on reading her letter. After all, he was not such a brute as he had fancied himself, and her divination relieved his mind of the fear that he lacked natural feeling, since she had guessed that a certain feeling of disappointment was inevitable on hearing that she had not been able to follow the chosen path. But how clever of her! What insight!

“I hope you don’t misunderstand. I cannot put into words the pleasure—.”

“I quite understand. Even if we turn out of our path sometimes, we don’t like others to vacillate... conversions, divagations, are not sympathetic.”

“Quite true. The man who knows, or thinks he knows, whither he is going commands our respect, and we are willing to follow—”

“Even though he is the stupider?”

“Which is nearly always.” And they ceased talking, each agreeably surprised by the other’s sympathy.

It was on his lips to say, “We are both elderly people now, and must cling to each other.” But no one cares to admit he is elderly, and he did not speak the words for his sake and for hers, and he refrained from asking her further questions about the convent; for he had come to see a woman, loved for so many years, and who would always be loved by him, and not to gratify his curiosity; he asked why she had chosen this distant country to live in.

“Distant country? You call this country distant? You, who have only just come back—”

“Returned yesterday from the Amur.”

“From the Amur? I thought I was *the* amour.”

“So you are. I am speaking now of a river in Manchuria.”

’Manchuria? But why did you go there?”

“Oh, my dear Evelyn, we have so much to tell each other that it seems hopeless. Can you tell me why you—no, don’t answer, don’t try to tell why you went to the convent; but tell me why you came to live in this neighbourhood?”

“Well, the land is very cheap here, and I wanted a large piece of ground.”

“Oh, so you’ve settled here?”

“Yes; I’ve built a cottage... But I haven’t been able to lay the garden out yet.”

“Built a cottage?”

“What is there surprising in that?”

“Only this, that I returned home resolved to do some building at Riversdale—a gate lodge,” and he talked to her of the gate lodge he had in mind, until he became aware of the incongruity. “But I didn’t come here to talk to you of gate lodges. Tell me, Evelyn, how do you spend your time?”

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“I go to town every morning to teach singing; I have singing-classes.”

“So you are a singing-mistress now. Well, everything comes round at last. Your mother —”

“Yes, everything comes round again,” she said, sighing; “and the neighbourhood isn’t inconvenient. There is a good train in the morning and a good train in the evening; the one you came by is a wretched one, but if you had come by the later train you would have seen less of me. You’re not sorry?”

“My dear Evelyn, don’t be affected. I’m trying to take it all in. You have retreated from the convent, and are now a singing-mistress. Have you lost your voice?”

“I’m afraid a good deal of it.” And, pointing with her parasol, she said, “There is the inn; I will tell them to fetch your bag.”

As she went towards the “Stag and Hounds” he congratulated himself that the earlier woman still subsisted in the later, there could be no doubt of that, and in sufficient proportion for her to create a new life, and out of nothing but her own wits, for if she had escaped from the convent with her intelligence, or part of it, she hadn’t escaped with her money; the nuns had got her money safe enough. She would be loth to admit it, but it could not be otherwise. So out of her own wits she had negotiated the purchase of a large piece of ground (she had said a large piece), and built a cottage, and a very pretty cottage too, he was sure of that; and his face assumed a blank expression, for he was away with her in some past time, in the midst of an architectural discussion. But returning gradually from this happy past, her intelligence seemed to him like some strong twine or wire! “How clever of her to have discovered this country where land was cheap!” And he looked round, seeing its beauty because she lived in it. Above all, to have found work to do, no easy matter when one has torn oneself and one’s past to shreds, as she had done. No doubt she was making quite a nice little income by teaching; and, in increasing admiration, he walked round the dusty inn and the triangular piece of grass in front of it. A game of bat-and-trap was in progress, and he conceived a love for that old English game, though till now he thought it stupid and vulgar. The horse-pond appealed to him as a picturesque piece of water, and, standing back from it, he admired the rows of trees on the further bank—pollards of some kind—-and, still more, the reflections of these trees in the dark green water; and his eyes followed the swallows, dipping and gliding through the moveless air. A spire showed between the trees, a girl and some children were gathering wild flowers in the hedgerows. How like England! But here was Evelyn!

“Did you ever see a more beautiful evening? And aren’t you glad that the evening in which I see you again is—one would like to call it beatific, only I don’t like the word; it reminds me of the convent you have left.”

“One goes away in order that one may return home, Owen.”

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“Quite true; and all my travels were necessary for me to admire your long, red road winding gracefully up the hillside between tall hedges, full of roses, convolvulus, and ivy, under trees throwing a pleasant shade.” And coming suddenly upon an extraordinary fragrance, he threw up his head, and, with dilated nostrils, cried out, “Honeysuckle!”

“Yes, isn’t it sweet?” she said. And, standing under a cottage porch, he thought of the days gone by; and their memory was as overpowering as the vine.

“I have brought you no present.”

“Owen, you only returned yesterday.”

“All the same, I should have brought you something. A bunch of wild flowers I can give you, and I will begin my nosegay with a branch of this honeysuckle. There are dog-roses in the hedges. I used to send you expensive flowers, but times have changed.” And he insisted on returning to the brook, having seen, so he said, some forget-me-nots among the sedges. And with these and some sprays of a little pink flower, which he told her was the cuckoo-flower, they walked, telling and asking each other the names of different wayside weeds till they arrived at the cottage.

“There is my cottage.”

And Owen saw, some twenty or thirty yards from the roadside, the white gables of a cottage thrusting over against a space of blue sky. Flights of swallows flew shrieking past, and the large elms on the right threw out branches so invitingly that Owen thought of long hours passed in the shade with books and music; but, despite these shady elms, the cottage wore a severe air—a severe cottage it was, if a cottage can be severe. Owen was glad Evelyn hadn’t forgotten a verandah.

“A verandah always suggests a Creole. But there is no Creole in you.”

“You wouldn’t have thought my cottage severe if you hadn’t known that I had come from a convent, Owen. You like it, all the same.”

Owen fell to praising the cottage which he didn’t like.

“On one thing I did insist—that the hall was to be the principal room. What do you think of it? And tell me if you like the chimney-piece. There are going to be seats in the windows. Of course, I haven’t half finished furnishing.” And she took him round the room, telling how lucky she had been picking up that old oak dresser with handles, everything complete for five pounds ten, and the oak settle standing in the window for seven.

“I can’t consider the furniture till I have put these flowers in water.” So he fetched a vase and filled it, and when his nosegay had been sufficiently admired, he said “But, Evelyn, I must give you some flower-vases.... And you have no writing-table.”

“Not a very good one. You see, I have had to buy so many things.”

“You must let me give you one. The first time you come up to London we will go round the shops.”

“You’ll want to buy me an expensive piece, unsuitable to my cottage, won’t you, Owen?” She led him through the dining-room past the kitchen, into which they peeped.

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“Eliza’s cooking an excellent dinner!” he said. And they went through the kitchen into the garden.

“You see what a piece of ground I have. We are enclosing it.” And Owen saw two little boys painting a paling. “Now, do you like the green? It was too green, but this morning I put a little yellow into it; it is better now.” They walked round the acre of rough ground overlooking the valley, Owen saying that Evelyn was quite a landed proprietor.

“But who are these boys? You have quite a number,” he said, coming upon three more digging, or trying to dig.

“They are digging the celery-bed.”

“But one is a hunchback, he can’t do much work; and that one has a short leg; the third boy seems all right, but he isn’t more than seven or eight. I am afraid you won’t have very much celery this year.” They passed through the wicket into the farther end of Evelyn’s domain, which part projected on the valley, and there they came upon two more children, one of whom was blind.

“This poor child—what work can he do?”

“You’d be surprised; and his ear is excellent. We’re thinking of putting him to piano-tuning.”

“We are thinking?”

“Yes, Owen; these little boys live here with me in the new wing. I’m afraid they are not very comfortable there, but they don’t complain.”

“Seven little crippled boys, whom you look after!”

“Six—the seventh is my servant’s son; he is delicate, but he isn’t a cripple. We don’t call him her son here, she is nominally his aunt.”

“You look after these boys, and go up to London to earn their living?”

“I earn sufficient to run my little establishment.”

As they returned to the cottage, one of the boys thrust his spade into the ground.

“Please, miss, may we stay up a little longer this evening? It won’t be dark till nine or half-past, miss.”

“Yes, you can stay up.” And Owen and Evelyn went into the house. “I do hope, Owen, that Eliza’s cooking will not seem to you too utterly undistinguished.”

“You have forgotten, Evelyn, that I have been living on hunter’s fare for the last two years.”

At that moment Eliza put the soup-tureen on the table.

“Why, the soup is excellent! An excellent soup, Eliza!”

“There is a chicken coming, Sir Owen, and Miss Innes told me to be sure to put plenty of butter on it before putting it into the oven, that that was the way you liked it cooked.”

“I am glad you did, Eliza; the buttering of the chicken is what we always overlook in England. We never seem to understand the part that good butter plays in cooking; only in England does any one talk of such a thing as cooking-butter.” And he detained Eliza, who fidgeted before him, thinking of the vegetables waiting in the kitchen, of what a strange man he was, while he told her that his cook, a Frenchman, always insisted on having his butter from France, costing him, Owen, nearly three shillings a pound.

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“Law, Sir Owen!” And Eliza went back to the kitchen to fetch her vegetables, and Evelyn laughed, saying:

“You have succeeded in impressing her.”

“You have cooked the chicken excellently well, Eliza, and the butter you used must have been particularly good,” he said, when the servant returned with the potatoes and brussels sprouts. But he was anxious for her to leave the room so that he might ask Evelyn if she remembered the chickens they used to eat in France.

“Evelyn, dear, shall we ever be in France again?”

“My poor little boys, what would happen to them while I was away? For you, who care about sweets, Owen, I’m afraid Eliza will seem a little behind the times; afraid of a failure, we decided on a rice pudding.”

“Excellent; I should like nothing better.”

Owen was in good humour, and she asked him if he had brought something to smoke —a cigar.

“Some cigarettes. I have given up smoking cigars, stinking things!”

“But you used to be so fond of cigars, Owen?”

“Oh, a long time ago. Didn’t you notice that man in the trap in front of us as we came from the station? That vile cigar, the whole evening smelt of it.”

“My dear Owen!”

Then he got up from the table and went to the piano and waited there for Evelyn, who was talking to Eliza about the purchase of another bed and where it should be placed in the dormitory, a matter so trivial that a dozen words should suffice to settle it, so he thought; but they kept on talking, and when Eliza left the room she took up some coarse sewing. To bring her to the piano he struck a few notes, saying:

“The Muses are awake, Evelyn.”

“No, Owen, no; I am in no mood for singing.”

When he asked her if she never sang, the answer was, “Sometimes I go to the piano when I am restless; I sing a little, yes, a little into my muff; you know what I mean. But this evening I would sooner talk. You said we had so much to talk about.” He admitted she knew what his feelings were better than he knew them himself. It would be a pity to waste this evening in music (this evening was consecrate to themselves), and from

talking of Elizabeth and Isolde they drifted into remembrances of the old days so dear to him. But he had always reproached Evelyn with a fault, a certain restlessness; it was rare for her to settle herself down to a nice quiet chat, and this was a serious fault in a woman, a fault in everybody, for a nice quiet chat is one of the best things in life. He was prone to admit, however, that when the mood for a chat was upon her nobody could talk or listen as she could by a fireside. Yielding to her humour, like a bird she would talk on and on with an enthusiasm and an interest in what she was saying which made her a wonder and a delight; and seeing that by some good fortune he had come upon her in one of these rare humours, he did not regret her refusal

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to sing, and watched her at his feet listening to him with an avidity which was enchanting, making him feel that there was nothing in the world but he and she. She had once said, enchanting him with the admission, for it was so true, that if she were alone with a man for an evening he must hate her very much if he was not to fall in love with her. On reminding her of her saying she admitted that she had forgotten it. It seemed to him that his dead mistress had come to life again. Her eyes shone with something of their old light, and he said to himself, “The convent has faded out of her mind and out of her face.” Interpenetrated with her sweet atmosphere, which had for ever haunted him, he breathed like one who hears music going by. Every moment was a surprise. The next great surprise being the discovery that the convent had not quelled the daring of her thought—it came and went swallow-like, as before.

“Because there were no men in the convent. Though I am virtuous, Owen, and must remain so, I can’t live without men. If I am deprived of men’s society for a few days I wilt.”

The picture of herself painted in these few words, Evelyn wilting amid the treble of the nuns like a plant in an uncongenial soil, delighted Owen, enabling him to forget the sad fact that she was virtuous and would have to remain so. For she was still his Evelyn, a hero worshipper, with man for her hero always, even though it were a priest. A moment of the thought caused him a sigh, but he was in the seventh heaven when she told him the first letter she had written when she left the convent was for him. He had maligned her in thinking the past had no meaning for her. For who was so faithful to her friends? Again he forgot everything but himself sitting by her, seeing her bright eyes, listening to her voice, absorbed by her atmosphere; and talking and listening by turns he was carried away in a delicious oblivion of everything except the sensation of the moment. It seemed to him like floating down the current of some enchanted river; but even in enchanted rivers there are eddies, otherwise the enchantment of the current and the flowery banks under which it flows would become monotonous, and presently Owen was caught in an eddy. The stream flowed gaily while he told her of his experience in the desert; she was interested in the gazelles and in the eagles, though qualifying the sport as cruel, and in his synthesis of the desert—a desire for a drink of clean water. Nor did she resent his allusion to his meeting with Ulick at Dowlands, interrupting him, however, to tell him that Ulick had married Louise.

“Married Louise!”

Louise! What an evocation of past times was in this name! And their talk passed into a number of little sallies.

“Well, he’ll spend a great deal of her money for her.”

“No, he is doing pretty well for himself.”

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It seemed like listening to a fairy tale to hear that Ulick was doing very well for himself; and travelling back to the convent, by those mysterious roads which conversation follows, Owen learned that it was at the end of the first year of her postulancy that Evelyn had heard of her father's illness. Up to that moment he had not noticed a change in her humour, not until he began to question her as to her reason for suddenly returning from Rome to the convent. It was then that a strange look came into her face; she got up from her chair and walked about the room, gloomy and agitated, sitting down in a corner like one overcome, whelmed in some extraordinary trouble. When he went to her she crossed the room, settling herself in another corner, tucking herself away into it. His question had awakened some terrific memory; and perforce he did not dare to ask her what her trouble was, none that she could confide to him, that was clear, and he began to think that it would be better to leave her for a while. He could go out and speak with the little boys, for a memory like the one which had laid hold of her must pass away suddenly, and his absence would help to pass it. If she were not better when he returned it would be well for him to seek some excuse to sleep at the inn, for her appearance in the corner frightened him; and standing by the window, looking into the quiet evening, he railed against his folly. Any one but himself would have guessed that there was some grave reason for her life in the convent. Such an end as this to the evening that had begun so well! "My God, what am I to do!" And, turning impulsively, he was about to fling himself at her feet, beseeching of her to confide her trouble, but something in her appearance prevented him, and in dismay he wondered what he had said to provoke such a change. What had been said could not be unsaid, the essential was that the ugly thought upon her like some nightmare should be forgotten. Now what could he say to win her out of this dreadful gloom? If he were to play something!

A very few bars convinced him that music would prove no healer to her trouble. To lead her thoughts out of this trouble—was there no way? What had they been talking about? The bullfinches which she had taught to whistle the motives of "The Ring"; but such a laborious occupation could only have been undertaken for some definite purpose, to preserve her sanity, perhaps, and it would be natural for a woman to resent any mention of mental trouble such as she had suffered from on her return from Rome. Something had happened to her in Rome—what? And he sat for a long time, or what seemed to him a long time, perplexed, fearing to speak lest he might say something to irritate her, prolonging her present humour.

"If I had only known, Evelyn, if I had only known!" he said, unable to resist the temptation of speech any longer. As she did not answer, he added, after a moment's pause, "I think I shall go out and talk to those boys." But on his way to the door he stopped. "I wish that brig had gone down."

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“That brig? What do you mean?”

“The boat which took me round the world and brought me back, and which I am going to sell, my travelling days being over.” Seeing she was interested, he continued to tell her how the *Medusa* had been declared no longer seaworthy, and of his purchase of another yacht.

“But you said you wished the brig had gone down.”

And, seizing the pretext, he began to tell her of the first thing that came into his head; how he had sailed some thousands of miles from the Cape to the Mauritius, explaining the mysteries of great circle sailing, and why they had sailed due south, though the Mauritius was in the north-west, in order that they might catch the trade winds. Before reaching these there were days when the sailors did little else but shift the sails, trying to catch every breeze that fluttered about them, tacking all the while, with nothing to distract them but the monotonous albatross. The birds would come up the seas, venturing within a few yards of the vessel, and float away again, becoming mere specks on the horizon. Again the specks would begin to grow larger, and the birds would return easily on moveless wings.

“When one hears the albatross flies for thousands of miles one wonders how it could do this without fatigue; but one wonders no longer when one has seen them fly, for they do not weary themselves by moving their wings, their wings never move, they float month after month until the mating instinct begins to stir in them, and then in couples they float down the seas to the pole. There is nothing so wonderful as the flight of a bird; and it seemed to me that I never could weary of watching it. But I did weary of the albatross, and one night, after praying that I might never see one again, I was awakened by the pitching of the vessel, by the rattling of ropes, and the clashing of the blocks against swaying spars. I had been awakened before by storms at sea. You remember, Evelyn, when I returned to Dulwich—I had been nearly wrecked off the coast of Marseilles?” Evelyn nodded. “But the sensation was not like anything I had ever experienced at sea before, and interested and alarmed I climbed, catching a rope, steadying myself, reaching the poop somehow.”

“‘We’re in the trades, Sir Owen!’ the man at the helm shouted to me. ‘We’re making twelve or fourteen knots an hour; a splendid wind!’

“The sails were set and the vessel leaned to starboard, and then the rattle of ropes began again and the crashing of the blocks as she leaned over to port. Such surges, you have no idea, Evelyn, threatening the brig, but slipping under the keel, lifting her to the crest of the wave. Caught by the wind for a moment she seemed to be driven into the depths, her starboard grazing the sea or very nearly. The spectacle was terrific; the lone stars and the great cloud of canvas, the whole seeming such a little thing beneath it, and no one on deck but the helmsman

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bound to the helm, and well for him—a slip would have cost him his life, he would have been carried into the sea. An excellent sailor, yet even he was alarmed at the canvas we carried, so he confided to me; but my skipper knew his business, a first-rate man that skipper, the best sailor I have ever met. There are few like him left, for the art of sailing is nearly a lost art, and the difficulty of getting men who can handle square sails is extraordinary. But this one, the last of an old line, came up, crying out quite cheerfully, “Sir Owen, we’re in luck indeed to have caught the trades so soon.”

“Day after day, night after night, we flew like a seagull. ’Record sailing,’ my skipper often cried to me, telling me the number of knots we had made in the last four-and-twenty hours.”

“And the albatrosses, I hope you didn’t catch one?”

“One day the skipper suggested that we should, the breast feathers being very beautiful; and, the wind having slackened a little, a hook was baited with a piece of salt pork, which the hungry bird seized. As soon as he was drawn on board he flapped about more helpless than anything I have ever seen, falling into everything he could fall into, biting several of the crew. You know the sonnet in which Baudelaire compares the bird on the wing to the poet with the Muse beside him, and the albatross on deck to the poet in the drawing-room. You remember the sonnet, how the sailors teased the bird with their short black pipes.”

“But the breast feathers?”

“We didn’t kill the bird; I wouldn’t allow him to be killed. We threw him overboard, and down into the sea he went like a log.”

Evelyn asked if he were drowned.

“Albatrosses don’t drown. He swam for a time and fluttered, and at last succeeded in getting on the wing. I was very glad to see him float away, and was still more glad a few minutes afterwards, for before the bird was out of sight a sign appeared in the heavens, and I began to think of the story of ‘The Ancient Mariner.’ You know—”

“Yes, I know the story, how all his misfortunes arose from the killing of an albatross. But what was the sign?”

“A dull yellow like a rainbow, only more pointed, and my skipper said to me, ’Sir Owen, that is one of them hurricanes; if I knew which way she was going I’d try to get out of the way as fast as I could, for we shall be torn to pieces in a very few minutes.’ I assure you it was an anxious moment watching that red, yellow light in the sky; it grew fainter, and eventually disappeared, and the skipper said, ’We have just missed it.’ A few days

afterwards we came into the Mauritius, and the first thing we saw was a great vessel in the ports, her iron masts twisted and torn just like hairpins, Evelyn. She had been caught in the tornado, a great three-masted vessel.... We should have gone down like an open boat."

"And after you left the Mauritius your destination was—"

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“Borneo, Sumatra, the Malay Archipelago.”

“But what were you seeking in the Malay Archipelago?”

“What does one ever seek? One seeks, no matter what; and, not being able to see you, Evelyn, I thought I would try to see everything in the world.”

“But there is nothing to see in Borneo?”

“Well, you will laugh when I tell you, but it seemed to me that I’d like to see the orang-outang in his native forests. I had been to Greece, and I knew the Italian Renaissance —”

“And after so much art to see an orang-outang in a tree would be a new experience, Owen.”

“Soon there will be no more higher apes, if medical science continues to progress; no more gorillas or chimpanzees.”

“In a world without gorillas life will not be worth living. I quite understand.”

Owen laughed.

“I should be sorry for anything to disappear. The poor mother is speared, for she will fight for her little one; ugly as he may be in our eyes he is beautiful in hers.”

“But you didn’t do this, Owen?”

“No; after two or three days in a forest one wearies of it; and after all it wasn’t very likely that I should have got a snapshot. The camera is my weapon.”

“And after the orang-outang which you failed to meet?”

“I spent some time in Japan.”

“And then?”

“Well, then, I went to Manchuria, to the Amur, a country almost forgotten.” And he told her how the eagles drove the wild sheep over the precipices, and of a wolf hunt with eagles.”

“You have seen now everything the world has to show?”

“Very nearly, and after seeing it all I come back to the one thing that interests me.”

Tears rose to Evelyn’s eyes; such an avowal of love a woman hardly ever hears.

The voices of the children playing in the garden reached their ears, and Evelyn said:

“They should have been in bed long ago, but, Owen, your being here makes everything so exceptional.”

“Really? I’m glad of that,” he answered shyly, fearing to say anything which would carry her thoughts back among unpleasant memories. But it was quite safe to speak of her love of the poor, and of poor children. “What inspired you to start this home, Evelyn?”

“Well, you see, I had to have something to work for, some interest; and not having any children of my own... They really must go to bed.”

“But, Evelyn, why will you interrupt our talk? Let us go on talking; tell me about the convent. Your adventures are so much more wonderful than mine. You haven’t half told me what there is to tell—the Prioress and the sub-Prioress, you never liked her?”

A smile gathered about her lips, and he asked her what she was smiling at; and it was with some difficulty he persuaded her to tell him about Sister Winifred and Father Daly.”

“Counterparts! counterparts!” he said. “And Cecilia giving the whole show away because her counterpart was a dwarf! How could you live among such babies?”

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“After all, Owen, are they any more babies than we are? Our interests are just as unreal.”

“Your interest here is not as unreal; their hope is to build a wall of prayer between a sinful world and the wrath of God. Such silliness passes out of perception.”

“Your perception? We come into the world with different perceptions; but do not let us drift into argument, not this evening, Owen.”

“Quite so, let us not drift into argument.... I am sorry you charged me with being disappointed that you didn’t remain in the convent; you see I didn’t know of the wonderful work you were doing here. Your kindness is more than a nun’s kindness.” But he feared his casual words might provoke her, and hastened to ask her about Sister Winifred, at length persuading her into the admission that Sister Winifred used to whip the children.

“I’m sure she liked whipping them. Women who shut themselves out from life develop cruelty. I can quite understand how she would like to hear them cry.”

“Tell me more about the nuns.”

“No, Owen, I wouldn’t speak ill of the nuns. Don’t press me to speak ill of them. You don’t know, Owen, what might have become of me had it not been for the convent. I don’t know what might have become of me. I might have drifted away and nothing have ever been heard of me again.” A dark look gathered in her face, “vanishing like the shadow of a black wing over a sunny surface,” Owen said to himself, “Now what has frightened her? Not her love of me, for that love she always looked on as legitimate.” He remembered how she used to cling to that view, while admitting it to be contrary to the teaching of the Church. Did she still cling to this belief? “Probably, for we do hot change our instinctive beliefs,” he said, and longed to question her; but not daring, and, thinking a lighter topic of conversation desirable, he told her he would like to teach Eliza how to make coffee.

“There is only one way of making coffee” he said, and he had learned the secret from a friend, who had always the best coffee. He had known him as a bachelor, he had known him as a married man, and afterwards as a divorced man, but in these different circumstances the coffee remained the same. So he said, “My good friend how is it that your cooks make equally good coffee?” And the friend answered that it was himself who had taught every cook how to make coffee; it was only a question of boiling water. And, still talking of the making of coffee, they wandered into the garden and stood watching the little boys all arow, their heads tucked in for Eliza’s son to jump over them, and they were laughing, enjoying their play, inspired, no doubt, by the dusk and the mystery of yon great moon rising out of the end of the grey valley.

“I’m afraid Jack will hurt the others, or tire them; they really must go to bed. You’ll excuse me, Owen, I shall be back with you in about half an hour?”

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He strolled through the wicket about the piece of waste ground, thinking of the change that had come over her when he spoke of her return from Rome. Possibly she had met Ulick in Rome and had fled from him, or some other man. But he was not in the least curious to inquire out her secret, sufficient it was for him to know that her mood had passed. How suddenly it had passed! And how fortunate his mention of the yacht! Her attention had suddenly been distracted, now she was as charming as before... gone to look after those little boys, to see that their beds were comfortable, and that their night-shirts had buttons on them. Every day in London their living was earned in tiresome lessons to pupils who had no gift for singing, but had to be encouraged for the sake of their money, which was spent on this hillside.

“Such is the mysterious way of life. Our rewards are never those we anticipate, but we are rewarded.”

The money he had spent on her had brought her to this hillside to attend on six cripples, destitute little boys. After all what better reward could he have hoped for? But a great part of his love of her had been lost. Never again would he take her hand or kiss her again. So his heart filled with a natural sadness and a great tenderness, and he stood watching the smoke rising from the cottagers’ chimneys straight into the evening air. She had told him that one of her little boys had come from that village, and to hear how the child had been adopted he must scramble down this rough path. The moment was propitious for a chat with the cottagers, whom he would find sitting at their doors, the men smoking their pipes, the women knitting or gossiping, “the characteristic end of every day since the beginning of the world,” he said, “and it will be pleasant to read her portrait in these humble minds.”

“A fine evening, my man?”

“Fine enough, sir; the wheat rick will be up before the Goodwood races, the first time for the last thirty years.” And the talk turned on the price of corn and on the coming harvest, and then on Miss Innes, who sometimes came down to see them and sang songs for the children.

“So she sings for the children? She used to do that in Italy.”

“Has she been in Italy, sir?”

To interest them he told how Evelyn had sung in all the opera houses of Europe; and then, fearing his confessions were indiscreet, he asked the woman nearest him if she was the mother of the little boy Evelyn had taken to live with her.

“No, sir, ’e is Mrs. Watney’s son in the next cottage.” And Owen moved away to interrogate Mrs. Watney, who told him that her son was not a cripple.

“’Is limbs be sound enough, only the poor little chap ’ad the small-pox badly when he was four, and ’as been blind ever since. A extraordinary ’appy child; and Miss Innes has promised to ’ave him taught the pianna.”

“A piano-tuner must have a good ear, and Miss Innes says his ear is perfect. He’ll whistle anything he hears.”

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Owen bade the cottagers good-night and climbed up the hillside again. The lights were burning in the boy's dormitory, so Evelyn must still be there, and finding a large stone among the rough ground where he could sit he waited for her, interested in the round moon, looking like the engraved dial of some great clock, and in the grey valley and the sullen sky passing overhead into a dim blueness, in which he could detect a star here and there. The evening hummed a little still, and the sounds of voices, the last sounds to die out of a landscape, became rare and faint. One by one the gossiping folk under the hill crept within doors, and Owen was so absorbed by the silence that he did not hear Evelyn approaching; and when she spoke he hardly answered her, and she, as if participating already in his emotion, stood by him, not asking for words from him, looking with him into the solitude of the valley, seeking to see beyond the veils of blue mist gathering and blotting out all detail, creeping up intimately tender. What could he say to her worth saying at such a moment? he began to ask himself; and just then a song came from a hawthorn growing by the edge of the hill, a solitary song, mysterious and strange, a passionate strain which freed their souls, till, walking about this dusky hillside, the lovers seemed to lose their bodies and to become all spirit; and they walked on in silence, speech seeming a sacrilege.

"So now you are going to settle down at Riversdale; your travels are over?"

"Yes, they are over. I shall travel no more. I didn't find what I sought."

"And what was that?"

And her words as she spoke them sounded to Owen passionate, tender, and melancholy as the nightingale; and his words, too, seemed to partake of the same passionate melancholy.

"Forgetfulness of you."

"So you wished to forget me? I am sorry."

"Sorry that I haven't forgotten you? That, Evelyn, is impossible for me to believe; it isn't human to wish ourselves forgotten."

"No, Owen, I don't wish you to forget me, I am glad you have not; but I am sorry there was any need for you to seek forgetfulness."

"And is there any need?"

"Yes, for the Evelyn you loved died years ago."

"Oh, Evelyn, don't say that; she is not dead?"

“Perhaps not altogether, a trace here and there, a slight flavour, but not a woman who could bring you happiness as you understand happiness, Owen.”

“All the happiness I ever had I owe to you. How can I thank you for those ten years?”

“But you paid for them with a great deal of sorrow.”

“Had it not been for you, Evelyn, I shouldn’t have lived at all. How often have I told you that? I have seen all the world, and yet I have only seen one thing in the world—you.”

“Owen, you mustn’t speak to me like that.”

“While that bird is singing you are afraid to listen to me! How passionately it sings, but how little it feels compared with what I am feeling. Why did you say that the Evelyn of old is dead?”

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“Well, Owen, don’t you know that we are always dying, always changing. You are in love, not with me, but with your memory of me.”

“A great deal of my love is memory, of course, still—”

Words again seemed vain, foolish, even sacrilegious, so little could he convey to her of what he believed to be the truth, and they walked in silence through the fragrance of the soft night, thinking of the colour of the sky, in which the sunset was not yet quite dead. His memory of his love of this woman long ago in Dulwich, in Paris, and in all the cities and scenes they had visited together, raised him above himself; and he felt that her soul mingled with his in an ecstatic sadness beyond words, but which the nightingale sang clearly; the stars, too, sang it clearly; and they stood mute in the midst of the immortal symphony about them. “Evelyn, I love you. How wonderful our lives have been!” But what use to break the music, audible and inaudible, with such weak words? The villagers under the hill could speak as well; the bird in the bush and the stars above it were speaking for him; and he was content to listen.

The silence of the night grew more intense, there were millions of stars, small and great, and the moon now shone amidst them alone, “of different birth,” divided from them for ever as he was divided from this woman, whose arm touched his as they walked through the darkness, divided for ever, unable to communicate his soul to hers. Did she understand what he was feeling—the mystery of their lives written in the stars, sung by the nightingale and breathed by the flowers? Did she understand? Had the convent rule left her sufficient sensibility to understand such simple human truths?

“How sweetly the tobacco plant smells!” she said.

“Yes, doesn’t it? But what is the meaning of our story? My finding you at Dulwich—-Evelyn, have you ever thought enough about it? How extraordinary that event was, extraordinary as the stars above us; my going down that evening and hearing you sing? Do you remember the look with which you greeted me—do you remember that cup of tea?”

“It was coffee.”

“And then all our meetings in the garden under the cedar-tree?”

“You used to say we looked like a picture by Marcus Stone when we sat under it.”

“Never mind what we looked like. Think of it! Of our journey to Paris, and my visit to Brussels to hear you sing.”

“And Madame Savelli, who wouldn’t let me speak to you; she said I might tire my voice.”

“Yes, how I hated her and Olive that day! You sang ‘Elizabeth,’ and when you walked up, to the sound of flutes and clarionettes,’ seemingly to the stars, there was something in the way you did it that put a fear into my heart. It was all predestined from the beginning.”

“So you believe, Owen, that the end is fated, and that I was created to come back after many wanderings to help these poor little crippled boys?”

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“Is that the meaning of it all, Evelyn?”

“Maybe—who knows?—that meaning as well as another.” And through the dusk he could see her eyes shining with something of their old light.

“Was it fated from the beginning that I should only, meet you here to part with you again? Is that the meaning you read in the song of the nightingale, in the stare of the moon and the perfume of the garden? There is a meaning, Evelyn, in our lives for certain, but are you reading it aright?”

For a moment the meaning of their lives seemed clear to them. Life had a meaning! for a moment, they were both sure of it; they had met for something, there was a design in life, and though they were separated on earth they seemed to move in celestial circles, just as the stars moved in that great design above them, each sphere rolling on, filled with love for its sister sphere, guided and controlled each by the other, yet always apart. Owen walked thinking how, billions of years hence, all those lights might wax into one light, all souls to one soul, all ends to one end. For one moment he Height possess Evelyn’s soul as he had never been able to possess it on earth... perhaps.

“I love you now just as much as I loved you before, perhaps more, for there is memory to aid me.”

“You are in love with memory, not with me.”

Her words went to his heart, as the thorn of the rose is said to go to the nightingale’s heart, and, unable to answer her, he listened. “How wonderfully the bird sings, the interpreter of the primal melancholy from which we never escape... since the beginning of time, its interpreter.”

“Is he telling his own story, or is he telling ours?”

“Both, for all love songs are as ours, made of the same intense passionate melancholy. Why is love the most melancholy of all joys? With what passionate melancholy he enchants her who is sitting in the nest close by! The origin of art is sex; woman is a reed, and our desire—”

“Hush! Listen to the nightingale! His discourse is better than yours.”

“How absorbed he is in his song, stave after stave; he seems to say, ‘You want more tunes? If that is all, you shall have more.’ Hush!” And they listened to the rich warble, sounding so strange in the midst of the lonely country. “A love-call of three notes, which he repeats before passing into cadenzas. Hush!” The bird started again, and this time as if encouraged by the success of his last efforts.

“What flutings! What trills! What runs! Pearls and jewels scattered. Little tunes of three or four notes, casting a spell about the hillside, followed by passionate cadenzas.”

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Another bird answered far away out of the stillness, the same sweet strain it was; and listening, they seemed to hear the same strain within their hearts—a silent, mysterious song. All the world seemed singing the same sweet strain of melancholy, now when the moon passed out of the dusk—shining high up in the heavens, with stars above and beneath—Owen thought of some mysterious music-maker. Flocks of various coloured stars, flaming Jupiter high up in the sky, red Mars low down in the horizon, the Great Bear beautifully distinct, the polar star at an angle—the star whereby Owen used to steer. All the world seemed to be going to the same sweet strain, the soul, seemingly freed, rose to the lips, and, in her pride, sought words wherewith to tell the passionate melancholy of the night and of life. But the soul could not tell it; only the nightingale, who, without knowing it, was singing what the soul may only feel.

“The bird is telling me what your voice used to tell me long ago.”

The lovers wandered through the garden, suffused with delicate scents, and Owen told her of the legend of the nightingale and the swallow, a legend coming down from some barbaric age, from a king called Pandion, who, despite his wife’s beauty, fell in love with her sister, and ravished her in some town in Thessaly, the name of which Owen could not remember. Fearing, however, that his lust would reach his wife’s ears, Pandion cut out the girl’s tongue. This barbarous act, committed before Greece was, had been redeemed by the Grecian spirit, which had added that the girl; though without tongue to tell the cruel deed, had, nevertheless, hands wherewith to weave it. The weft of her misfortune only inspired another barbarous deed: Pandion killed both sisters and his son Italus. Again the Grecian spirit touched the legend, changing the tongueless girl into a swallow, a bird with a little cry, and fleet wings to carry its cry all over the world, and the unhappy wife into the bird “which sleeps all day and sings all night.” “Sophocles,” Owen said, “speaks of the nightingale as moaning all the night in ivy clusters, moaning or humming. A strange expression his seems to us, our musical sense being different from that of the antique world, if the antique world really possessed any musical sense.” The lovers wandered round the house, listening to the bird’s sweet singing, stopping at the hill’s steep side so that they might listen better.

“Now the bird is telling of sorrows other than ours—isn’t that so, Evelyn? I don’t seem to recognise anything of ourselves in its song; it is singing a new song.”

“Perhaps,” Evelyn answered, “now it is singing the sadness of the mother under the hill for her son.”

“I went to see her, she is not unhappy; she is happy that her son is With you.”

“But another child died last year; and for her, if she is listening, the bird is certainly singing the death of that child.”

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When they had completed once more the round of the garden, the bird seemed to have again changed his intervals; a gaiety seemed to have come into his singing, and Owen said:

“Now his music is lighter; he is singing an inveigling little story, the story of first love. Look, Evelyn, do you see that boy and girl walking under the hedge with their arms entwined? They, too, have stopped to listen to the nightingale, but the song they really hear comes out of their own hearts.”

Then the song changed, suddenly acquiring a strange, voluptuous accent, which carried Owen’s thoughts back to a night when he had been awakened out of his sleep by a woman’s voice singing, and, starting up in bed, he had listened, rousing himself sufficiently from sleep to distinguish that the voice he was listening to was Evelyn’s. The song was a love-call, and, believing it to be such, he had thrown aside the curtain, and had found her leaning out of her window, singing the Star Song, not to the evening star, as in the opera, but to the morning star shining white like a diamond out of the dawning of the sky. The valley under the castle walls was submerged in mist, and the distant hillside was indistinguishable. The castle seemed to stand by the side of some frozen sea, so intense was the silence. He had always looked back upon this morning as one of the great moments of his life, and going to her room like going to some great religious rite. Each man must worship where he finds the Godhead.

“Who knows,” he said to Evelyn, “that the bird in the nest close by does not listen with the same rapture—”

“As you, in the box, used to listen to me on the stage? For the comparison to hold good, I should have sung Italian music, roulades. Listen to those cadenzas!”

“How melancholy are their gaieties!”

“Yes, aren’t they?” she answered. “How poignant the two notes!—with which *il commence son grand air*.”

“But our love-call ended years ago,” she said, with an accent of regret in her voice. And they walked towards the house, Owen dreading that some sudden impulse might throw her into his arms and her mind might be unhinged again, and he would lose her utterly. So he spoke to her of the first; thing that came into her mind, and what came first was a memory of Moschus’s lament for Bion and the brevity of human life as contrasted with the long life of the world.

“‘The mallows wither in the garden, and the green parsley—’ how does it go?” And he tried to remember as they went upstairs. “’The mallows wither in the garden—’ no, that is not how it begins. ’Ah me! when the mallows wither in the garden, and the green parsley, and the curled tendrils of the anise, on a later day these live again and spring in

another year; but we men, we, the great and mighty, or wise, when once we have died in the hollow earth we sleep, gone down into silence, a fight long and endless and unawakening sleep.”

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“Begin, ye Sicilian Muses, begin the Dirge!”

And Evelyn listened, saying, “How very beautiful! how very wonderful!”

“But you believe, Evelyn, that we do live again?”

“It is too late to argue that question; it is nearly midnight. I hope you will like your room. Eliza has unstrapped your portmanteau, I see. Your bed is comfortable, I think.”

It surprised him that she should follow him into his room, and stand there talking to him, talking even about the bed he was to sleep in. It would have been easy to lay his hands upon her shoulder, saying, “Evelyn, are we to be parted?” but something held him back. And he listened to her story of the buying of the bed, hearing that it had been forgotten in the interest excited by the rumour of certain portfolios filled with engravings supposed to be of great value. The wardrobe, too, had been bought at the same auction, and he looked into its panels, praising them.

“But you want more light.” She went over and lighted the candles on the dressing-table, accomplishing the duties of hostess quite unconcerned, ignoring the past. “One would think she had forgotten it,” he said to himself. “Are we to part like this? But it is for her to decide. So quiet, so self-contained; it doesn’t seem even to occur to her.” He waited, incapable of speech or action, paralysed, till she bade him good-night. As soon as the door closed, or a moment after, he began to realise his mistake. What he should have done was to lay his hand upon her shoulder and lead her to the window-seat, and sit with her there till a greyness came into the sky and a cold air rustled in the trees. “Of course, of course,” he muttered, for he could see himself and her in the dawn together, united again and tasting again in a kiss infinity. In her kiss he had tasted that unity, that binding together of the mortal to the immortal, of the finite to the infinite, which Paracelsus—He tried to recall the words, “He who tastes a crust of bread has tasted of the universe, even to the furthest star.” She had always been his universe, and he had always believed that she had come out of the star-shine like a goddess when it pleases Divinity to lie with a mortal. Of this he was sure, that he had never kissed her except in this belief.... This had sanctified their love, whereas other men knew love as an animal satisfaction. It had always seemed to him that there was something essential in her, something which had always been in human nature and which always would be. This light, this joy, and this aspiration he had seen in certain moments: when she walked on the stage as Elizabeth or Elza, she had always seemed to reflect a little of that light which floats down through the generations ... illuminating “the liquid surface of man’s life.” But a change had come, darkening that light, causing it to pass, at least into eclipse. He drew his hand across his eyes—a phase of her life was hidden from him; yet it, too, may

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have had a meaning.... We understand so little of life. No, no, it had no meaning in his mind, and we are only concerned with our own minds. All the same, the fact remained —she had had to seek rest in a convent; and the idea that had driven her there, though now lying at the bottom of her mind, might be brought to the surface—any chance word; he had had proof. Perhaps it was as well that he had not laid his hand upon her shoulder and asked her to stay with him, for by what spectacle of remorse, of terror, might he not have been confronted to-morrow or the next day? Cured! Nobody is ever cured. Never again would she be the same woman as had left Dulwich to go to Paris with him, he knew that well enough; and he, too, was very far indeed from being the same Owen Asher who had gone to Dulwich to hear a concert of Elizabethan music.

A period for every one, for every one a season. The gates of love open, and we pass into the garden and out of it by another gate, which never opens for us again. To linger by a closed or a closing gate is not wise: the tarrying lover is a subject for contempt and jeers; better to pass out quickly and to fare on, though it requires courage to fare on through the autumn, knowing that after autumn comes winter. True, the winds would grow harder. The autumn of their lives was not over, the skies were still bright above them, and the winds soft and low. The winds would grow harder, but they must still fare on through the snow. But there is a joy by the hearth when the yule-log is burning. So thanking God that he had not attempted to detain her, he wandered to the window to watch the stars, which seemed to him like a golden net; and he asked who had cast that net, and if he and she were parcel of some great draught which, at some indefinite date, would be drawn out of the depths, and if, when that time came, they would remember the joy and sorrow they had endured upon earth, or if all would be swept into forgetfulness. At some indefinite date they might meet among the stars, but what stellar infinities might be drawn together mattered little to him; his sole interest was in this lag end of their journey—if their lives should be united henceforth or lived separately.

Nothing repeats itself, so it was well he had not asked her to stay with him. Of mistress and lover a fitting end had been written long ago, just as the end of those stars was written long before the stars came into being; but it might well be that they might take the road, this lag end of it, together as husband and wife. If he didn’t marry —he could marry nobody but her—what would he do with his life? what sort of end? He had no heart for further travels, and feared to wear away the years amid books and pictures, collecting rare porcelain and French furniture; there is very little else for an old man. With her the lag end of the journey would be delectable. In the same house together, leading her in the evenings to the piano! Even if she had lost part of her voice, sufficient remained to recall the old days when he used to journey thousands of miles to hear her; and he lay quite still, listening to the sweet thought of marriage, singing like a bird in the acacia-tree, trill after trill, and then a run— delicious crescendos reaching to the stars, diminuendos sinking into the valley.

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The bird suddenly ceased, and with its song in his brain Owen dozed, awakening at dawn, remembering her, how she had built herself a cottage, and settled her life here among four or five little crippled boys. Could she undo her life to follow him? Uprooted, transplanted, her brain might give way again, and this time without hope of recovery. Or was he cheating himself, trying to find reasons for not asking her to marry him—perhaps his manifest duty towards her. Owen looked into his soul, asking himself if he were acting from a selfish or an unselfish motive.

Sleep seemed as far away as ever, and, getting out of bed, he drew the curtains, seeking the landscape, still hidden in the mist, only a few tree-tops showing over the grey vapour—the valley filled with it—and over the hidden hill one streak of crimson. A rook cawed and flew away into the mist, leaving Owen to wonder what the bird's errand might be; and this rook was followed by others, and seeing nothing distinctly, and knowing nothing of himself or of this woman whom he had loved so long, he returned to his bed frightened, counting his years, asking himself how many more he had to live.

A knock! Only Eliza bringing his bath water. Good heavens! he had been asleep. "Eliza, what time is it?"

"Half-past eight, Sir Owen. Miss Innes will be soon home from Mass to give the little boys their breakfast."

"Home from Mass!" he muttered. And he learned from Eliza that Miss Innes got up every morning at seven, for a Catholic gentleman lived in the neighbourhood who had a private chaplain. "And she goes to Mass," Owen muttered, "every morning, and comes back to give the little boys their breakfast!"

There was no Catholic gentleman within a mile of Riversdale, he was thankful to say, and his thankfulness on the point was proof to him of how years and circumstances had estranged him from Evelyn; for, though he would not obstruct or forbid, it would be impossible for him to keep a sneer out of his face when she told him she had been to the sacraments or refrained from meat on Friday. "What a strange notion it is to think that a priest can help one," he said, thinking then that his presence would be a sneer, however he might control his tongue or his face; she would feel that he held her little observances in contempt, and her, too, just a little. How could it be otherwise? How could he admire one who slipped her neck into a spiritual halter and allowed herself to be led? Yet he loved her—or was it the memory of their love that he loved? Which? He loved her when he saw her among the crippled children distributing porridge and milk, or maybe it was not love, but admiration.

"My dear, I didn't know you would be down so soon. If you will only go into the garden and wait for me, I shan't be long."

“Now then, children, you must hurry with your porridge; Sir Owen is waiting for his breakfast.”

“My dear Evelyn, I am not in a hurry. Let the children take their time.”

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And he went into the garden to think if life at Riversdale would suit her as well as this life. It would be impossible for him to accompany her to chapel, and if he did not do so there would be an estrangement.... Nor could he allow Riversdale to be turned into an orphanage. Perhaps he would allow her to do anything; that pleased her; all the same, she would feel that the permission did not come out of his instinct, only out of a desire to please her.

“Well, Owen,” she said as soon as he had finished breakfast, “I don’t want to hurry you, but if you are to catch that train we must start at once.”

It was one of her off days, and she was going to spend it at the cottage. There were a great many things for her to do. She never had much time, but she would go to the station with him.

“But you have already walked two miles.”

“Ah! Eliza has told you?”

“Yes, that you go to Mass every morning.”

Owen seemed to regret the fact, and when he broke silence again it was to inquire into the expenses of the orphanage and to deplore the necessity which governed her life of going to London every day, returning home late, and he offered her a subscription which would cover the entire cost. But his offer of money seemed to embarrass her, and he understood that her pleasure was to go to London to work for these children, for only in that way could the home be entirely her own. If she were to accept help from the outside it would drift away from her and from its original intention, just as the convent had done. Nor was it very likely that she would care to give up her work and come to live at Riversdale, as his wife, of course as his wife, and it would pain her to refuse him.... Better leave things as they were.

“You are right,” he said, “not to live in London; one avoids a great deal of loneliness. One is more lonely in London than anywhere I know. The country is the natural home of man. Man is an arborial animal,” he added, laughing, “and is only happy among trees.”

“And woman, what is she? A material animal?”

“I suppose so. You have your children; I have my trees.”

The words seemed to have a meaning which eluded them, and they pondered while they descended the hillside until the piece of low-lying land came into view and the bridge crossing the sluggish stream, amid whose rushes he had gathered the wild forget-me-not. As he was about to speak of them he remembered her singing classes, and that yester evening had worn away without hearing her sing. “You have lost all

interest in music, I fear. You think of it now as a means of making money... for your children," he added, so that his words might not wound her.

"And you, Owen, does music still interest you,"—she nearly said, "now that I am out of it?" but stopped, the words on her lips.

"Yes," he said, "I think it does," and there was an eagerness in his voice when he said, "I have been trying my hand at composition again, and I have written a good many songs and some piano pieces, one for piano and violin."

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“A sonata?”

“Well, something in that way... not very strict in form perhaps.”

“That doesn’t matter.”

“When you come to see me I should like to show you some of my things. You will come to see me when you are in London... when you have a moment?”

“Evelyn always keeps her promises,” he said to himself, and he did not give up hope that she would come to see him, although nearly two weeks went by without his hearing from her. Then a note came, saying that she had been kept busy and had not been able to find spare time, but yesterday a pupil had written saying she would not come to her lesson, “so now I can come to you.”

“Miss Innes, Sir Owen.”

His face lighted up, and laying his book aside he sprang out of his chair, and all consciousness of time ceased in his mind till she began to put on her glove.

“You have only just arrived, and already you are going.”

“My dear Owen, I have been here an hour, and the time has passed quickly for you because you have been playing your music over for me and I have been singing... humming, for it is hardly singing now.”

“I am sorry, Evelyn, the time has seemed so long to you. I didn’t intend to bore you. You said you would like to see some of my music.”

“So I did, Owen, and some of the best things you have composed are among those you have shown me. Your writing has improved a great deal.”

“I am so glad you think so. When will you come again?”

“The first spare hour.”

“Really? You promise.”

They saw each other at intervals. Sometimes the intervals were very long, and Owen would write to her complaining, and he would get a note telling that her time was not her own, and that a great deal of money was necessary for her boys. But she would try to come and see him next week, and he would write begging her not to disappoint him, as he was giving a concert and wanted her help to compose the programme.

A great deal of time was spent in Berkeley Square, more than she could afford, trying pieces over; and she would often say, “My dear Owen, I really must go now or I shall miss my train at Victoria.” He always looked disappointed when she said she was going, and he never could understand why she would not sing at his concerts. It was very difficult even to persuade her to come to one.

“You see, I cannot sleep here, Owen. I have to go to a hotel.”

One day she got a letter from him which she feared to open. “It is to ask me to help him to compose another programme, and I haven’t got a minute.”

She was mistaken. The letter was to tell her that he had been elected president of the new choral society... “a group of young musicians.” The envelope enclosed a programme, and she read: “President, Sir Owen Asher, Bart.” “I’m glad, I’m glad,” she said as she walked up the room. “He has some natural talent for music, and if he hadn’t been born a rich man and spent his life doing other things he might have done something in music. If he had begun younger... if he hadn’t met me... a good many ifs; but there it is, and that is how it has ended.”