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Title: The Collected Works in Verse and Prose of William Butler Yeats, Vol. 7 (of 8)

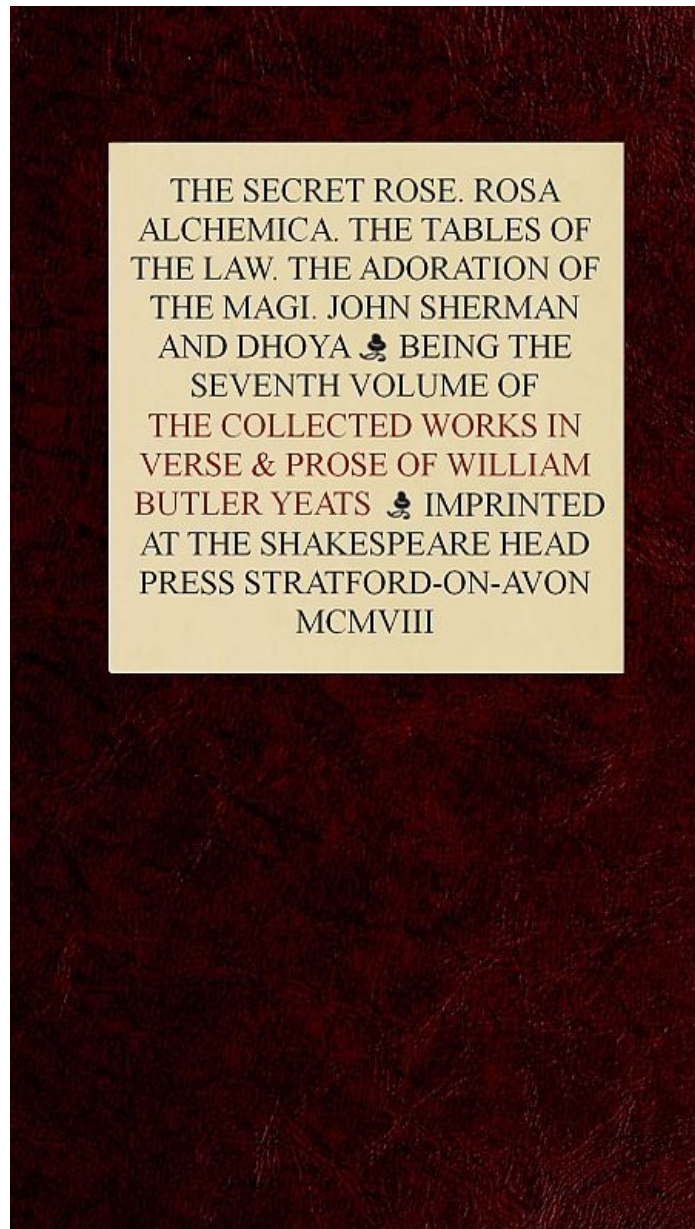
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**THE COLLECTED WORKS OF WILLIAM
BUTLER YEATS**



**THE SECRET ROSE. ROSA ALCHEMICA.
THE TABLES OF THE LAW. THE
ADORATION OF THE MAGI. JOHN
SHERMAN AND DHOYA  BEING THE
SEVENTH VOLUME OF THE COLLECTED
WORKS IN VERSE & PROSE
OF WILLIAM BUTLER YEATS  IMPRINTED
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As for living, our servants will do that for us.—*Villiers de L'Isle Adam.*

[2]

Helen, when she looked in her mirror, seeing the withered wrinkles made in her face by old age, wept, and wondered why she had twice been carried away.—*Leonardo da Vinci.*

My Dear A.E.—I dedicate this book to you because, whether you think it well or ill written, you will sympathize with the sorrows and the ecstasies of its personages, perhaps even more than I do myself. Although I wrote these stories at different times and in different manners, and without any definite plan, they have but one subject, the war of spiritual with natural order; and how can I dedicate such a book to anyone but to you, the one poet of modern Ireland who has moulded a spiritual ecstasy into verse? My friends in Ireland sometimes ask me when I am going to write a really national poem or romance, and by a national poem or romance I understand them to mean a poem or romance founded upon some famous moment of Irish history, and built up out of the thoughts and feelings which move the greater number of patriotic Irishmen. I on the other hand believe that poetry and romance cannot be made by the most conscientious study of famous moments and of the thoughts and feelings of others, but only by looking into that little, infinite, faltering, eternal flame that we call ourselves. If a writer wishes to interest a certain people among whom he has grown up, or fancies he has a duty towards them, he may choose for the symbols of his art their legends, their history, their beliefs, their opinions, because he has a right to choose among things less than himself, but he cannot choose among the substances of art. So far, however, as this book is visionary it is Irish; for Ireland, which is still predominantly Celtic, has preserved with some less excellent things a gift of vision, which has died out among more hurried and more successful nations: no shining candelabra have prevented us from looking into the darkness, and when one looks into the darkness there is always something there.

W. B. YEATS.

*Far off, most secret, and inviolate Rose,
Enfold me in my hour of hours; where those
Who sought thee at the Holy Sepulchre,
Or in the wine-vat, dwell beyond the stir
And tumult of defeated dreams; and deep
Among pale eyelids heavy with the sleep
Men have named beauty. Your great leaves enfold
The ancient beards, the helms of ruby and gold
Of the crowned Magi; and the king whose eyes
Saw the Pierced Hands and Rood of Elder rise
In druid vapour and make the torches dim;
Till vain frenzy awoke and he died; and him
Who met Fand walking among flaming dew,
By a grey shore where the wind never blew,
And lost the world and Emir for a kiss;
And him who drove the gods out of their liss
And till a hundred morns had flowered red
Feasted, and wept the barrows of his dead;
And the proud dreaming king who flung the crown
And sorrow away, and calling bard and clown
Dwelt among wine-stained wanderers in deep woods;
And him who sold tillage and house and goods,
And sought through lands and islands numberless years
Until he found with laughter and with tears
A woman of so shining loveliness
That men threshed corn at midnight by a tress,
A little stolen tress. I too await
The hour of thy great wind of love and hate.
When shall the stars be blown about the sky,
Like the sparks blown out of a smithy, and die?
Surely thine hour has come, thy great wind blows,
Far off, most secret, and inviolate Rose?*

A MAN, with thin brown hair and a pale face, half ran, half walked, along the road that wound from the south to the town of Sligo. Many called him Cumhal, the son of Cormac, and many called him the Swift, Wild Horse; and he was a gleeman, and he wore a short parti-coloured doublet, and had pointed shoes, and a bulging wallet. Also he was of the blood of the Ernaans, and his birth-place was the Field of Gold; but his eating and sleeping places were the four provinces of Eri, and his abiding place was not upon the ridge of the earth. His eyes strayed from the Abbey tower of the White Friars and the town battlements to a row of crosses which stood out against the sky upon a hill a little to the eastward of the town, and he clenched his fist, and shook it at the crosses. He knew they were not empty, for the birds were fluttering about them; and he thought how, as like as not, just such another vagabond as himself was hanged on one of them; and he muttered: 'If it were hanging or bowstringing, or stoning or beheading, it would be bad enough. But to have the birds pecking your eyes and the wolves eating your feet! I would that the red wind of the Druids had withered in his cradle the soldier of Dathi, who brought the tree of death out of barbarous lands, or that the lightning, when it smote Dathi at the foot of the mountain, had smitten him also, or that his grave had been dug by the green-haired and green-toothed merrows deep at the roots of the deep sea.'

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While he spoke, he shivered from head to foot, and the sweat came out upon his face, and he knew not why, for he had looked upon many crosses. He passed over two hills and under the battlemented gate, and then round by a left-hand way to the door of the Abbey. It was studded with great nails, and when he knocked at it, he roused the lay brother who was the porter, and of him he asked a place in the guest-house. Then the lay brother took a glowing turf on a shovel, and led the way to a big and naked outhouse strewn with very dirty rushes; and lighted a rush-candle fixed between two of the stones of the wall, and set the glowing turf upon the hearth and gave him two unlighted sods and a wisp of straw, and showed him a blanket hanging from a nail, and a shelf with a loaf of bread and a jug of water, and a tub in a far corner. Then the lay brother left him and went back to his place by the door. And Cumhal the son of Cormac began to blow upon the glowing turf that he might light the two sods and the wisp of straw; but the sods and the straw would not light, for they were damp. So he took off his pointed shoes, and drew the tub out of the corner with the thought of washing the dust of the highway from his feet; but the water was so dirty that he could not see the bottom. He was very hungry, for he had not eaten all that day; so he did not waste much anger upon the tub, but took up the black loaf, and bit into it, and then spat out the bite, for the bread was hard and mouldy. Still he did not give way to his anger, for he had not drunken these many hours; having a hope of heath beer or wine at his day's end, he had left the brooks untasted, to make his supper the more delightful. Now he put the jug to his lips, but he flung it from him straightway, for the water was bitter and ill-smelling. Then he gave the jug a kick, so that it broke against the opposite wall, and he took down the blanket to wrap it about him for the night. But no sooner did he touch it than it was alive with skipping fleas. At this, beside himself with anger, he rushed to the door of the guest-house, but the lay brother, being well accustomed to such outcries, had locked it on the outside; so he emptied the tub and began to beat the door with it, till the lay brother came to the door and asked what ailed him, and why he woke him out of sleep. 'What ails me!' shouted Cumhal, 'are not the sods as wet as the sands of the Three Rosses? and are not the fleas in the blanket as many as the waves of the sea and as lively? and is not the bread as hard as the heart of a lay brother who has forgotten God? and is not the water in the jug as bitter and as ill-smelling as his soul? and is not the foot-water the colour that shall be upon him when he has been charred in the Undying Fires?' The lay brother saw that the lock was fast, and went back to his niche, for he was too sleepy to talk with comfort. And Cumhal went on beating at the door, and presently he heard the lay brother's foot once more, and cried out at him, 'O cowardly and tyrannous race of friars, persecutors of the bard and the gleeman, haters of life and joy! O race that does not draw the sword and tell the truth! O race that melts the bones of the people with cowardice and with deceit!'

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'Gleeman,' said the lay brother, 'I also make rhymes; I make many while I sit in my niche by the door, and I sorrow to hear the bards railing upon the friars. Brother, I would sleep, and therefore I make known to you that it is the head of the monastery, our gracious abbot, who orders all things concerning the lodging of travellers.'

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'You may sleep,' said Cumhal, 'I will sing a bard's curse on the abbot.' And he set the tub upside down under the window, and stood upon it, and began to sing in a very loud voice. The singing awoke the abbot, so that he sat up in bed and blew a silver whistle until the lay brother came to him. 'I cannot get a wink of sleep with that noise,' said the abbot. 'What is happening?'

'It is a gleeman,' said the lay brother, 'who complains of the sods, of the bread, of the water in the jug, of the foot-water, and of the blanket. And now he is singing a bard's curse upon you, O brother abbot, and upon your father and your mother, and your grandfather and your grandmother, and upon all your relations.'

'Is he cursing in rhyme?'

'He is cursing in rhyme, and with two assonances in every line of his curse.'

The abbot pulled his night-cap off and crumpled it in his hands, and the circular brown patch of hair in the middle of his bald head looked like an island in the midst of a pond, for in Connaught they had not yet abandoned the ancient tonsure for the style then coming into use. 'If we do not somewhat,' he said, 'he will teach his curses to the children in the street, and the girls

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spinning at the doors, and to the robbers upon Ben Bulben.'

'Shall I go, then,' said the other, 'and give him dry sods, a fresh loaf, clean water in a jug, clean foot-water, and a new blanket, and make him swear by the blessed Saint Benignus, and by the sun and moon, that no bond be lacking, not to tell his rhymes to the children in the street, and the girls spinning at the doors, and the robbers upon Ben Bulben?'

'Neither our blessed Patron nor the sun and moon would avail at all,' said the abbot; 'for tomorrow or the next day the mood to curse would come upon him, or a pride in those rhymes would move him, and he would teach his lines to the children, and the girls, and the robbers. Or else he would tell another of his craft how he fared in the guest-house, and he in his turn would begin to curse, and my name would wither. For learn there is no steadfastness of purpose upon the roads, but only under roofs, and between four walls. Therefore I bid you go and awaken Brother Kevin, Brother Dove, Brother Little Wolf, Brother Bald Patrick, Brother Bald Brandon, Brother James and Brother Peter. And they shall take the man, and bind him with ropes, and dip him in the river that he may cease to sing. And in the morning, lest this but make him curse the louder, we will crucify him.'

'The crosses are all full,' said the lay brother.

'Then we must make another cross. If we do not make an end of him another will, for who can eat and sleep in peace while men like him are going about the world? Ill should we stand before blessed Saint Benignus, and sour would be his face when he comes to judge us at the Last Day, were we to spare an enemy of his when we had him under our thumb! Brother, the bards and the gleemen are an evil race, ever cursing and ever stirring up the people, and immoral and immoderate in all things, and heathen in their hearts, always longing after the Son of Lir, and Aengus, and Bridget, and the Dagda, and Dana the Mother, and all the false gods of the old days; always making poems in praise of those kings and queens of the demons, Finvaragh, whose home is under Cruachmaa, and Red Aodh of Cnocna-Sidhe, and Cleena of the Wave, and Aoibhell of the Grey Rock, and him they call Donn of the Vats of the Sea; and railing against God and Christ and the blessed Saints.' While he was speaking he crossed himself, and when he had finished he drew the nightcap over his ears, to shut out the noise, and closed his eyes, and composed himself to sleep.

The lay brother found Brother Kevin, Brother Dove, Brother Little Wolf, Brother Bald Patrick, Brother Bald Brandon, Brother James and Brother Peter sitting up in bed, and he made them get up. Then they bound Cumhal, and they dragged him to the river, and they dipped him in it at the place which was afterwards called Buckley's Ford.

'Gleeman,' said the lay brother, as they led him back to the guest-house, 'why do you ever use the wit which God has given you to make blasphemous and immoral tales and verses? For such is the way of your craft. I have, indeed, many such tales and verses well nigh by rote, and so I know that I speak true! And why do you praise with rhyme those demons, Finvaragh, Red Aodh, Cleena, Aoibhell and Donn? I, too, am a man of great wit and learning, but I ever glorify our gracious abbot, and Benignus our Patron, and the princes of the province. My soul is decent and orderly, but yours is like the wind among the salley gardens. I said what I could for you, being also a man of many thoughts, but who could help such a one as you?'

'Friend,' answered the gleeman, 'my soul is indeed like the wind, and it blows me to and fro, and up and down, and puts many things into my mind and out of my mind, and therefore am I called the Swift, Wild Horse.' And he spoke no more that night, for his teeth were chattering with the cold.

The abbot and the friars came to him in the morning, and bade him get ready to be crucified, and led him out of the guest-house. And while he still stood upon the step a flock of great grass-barnacles passed high above him with clanking cries. He lifted his arms to them and said, 'O great grass-barnacles, tarry a little, and mayhap my soul will travel with you to the waste places of the shore and to the ungovernable sea!' At the gate a crowd of beggars gathered about them, being come there to beg from any traveller or pilgrim who might have spent the night in the guest-house. The abbot and the friars led the gleeman to a place in the woods at some distance, where many straight young trees were growing, and they made him cut one down and fashion it to the right length, while the beggars stood round them in a ring, talking and gesticulating. The abbot then bade him cut off another and shorter piece of wood, and nail it upon the first. So there was his cross for him; and they put it upon his shoulder, for his crucifixion was to be on the top of the hill where the others were. A half-mile on the way he asked them to stop and see him juggle for them; for he knew, he said, all the tricks of Aengus the Subtle-hearted. The old friars were for pressing on, but the young friars would see him: so he did many wonders for them, even to the drawing of live frogs out of his ears. But after a while they turned on him, and said his tricks were dull and a shade unholy, and set the cross on his shoulders again. Another half-mile on the way, and he asked them to stop and hear him jest for them, for he knew, he said, all the jests of Conan the Bald, upon whose back a sheep's wool grew. And the young friars, when they had heard his merry tales, again bade him take up his cross, for it ill became them to listen to such follies. Another half-mile on the way, he asked them to stop and hear him sing the story of White-breasted Deirdre, and how she endured many sorrows, and how the sons of Usna died to serve her. And the young friars were mad to hear him, but when he had ended they grew angry, and beat him for waking forgotten longings in their hearts. So they set the cross upon his back, and hurried him to the hill.

When he was come to the top, they took the cross from him, and began to dig a hole to stand it in, while the beggars gathered round, and talked among themselves. 'I ask a favour before I die,' says Cumhal.

'We will grant you no more delays,' says the abbot.

'I ask no more delays, for I have drawn the sword, and told the truth, and lived my vision, and am content.'

'Would you, then, confess?'

'By sun and moon, not I; I ask but to be let eat the food I carry in my wallet. I carry food in my wallet whenever I go upon a journey, but I do not taste of it unless I am well-nigh starved. I have not eaten now these two days.'

'You may eat, then,' says the abbot, and he turned to help the friars dig the hole.

The gleeman took a loaf and some strips of cold fried bacon out of his wallet and laid them upon the ground. 'I will give a tithe to the poor,' says he, and he cut a tenth part from the loaf and the bacon. 'Who among you is the poorest?' And thereupon was a great clamour, for the beggars began the history of their sorrows and their poverty, and their yellow faces swayed like Gara Lough when the floods have filled it with water from the bogs. [18]

He listened for a little, and, says he, 'I am myself the poorest, for I have travelled the bare road, and by the edges of the sea; and the tattered doublet of particoloured cloth upon my back and the torn pointed shoes upon my feet have ever irked me, because of the towered city full of noble raiment which was in my heart. And I have been the more alone upon the roads and by the sea because I heard in my heart the rustling of the rose-bordered dress of her who is more subtle than Aengus, the Subtle-hearted, and more full of the beauty of laughter than Conan the Bald, and more full of the wisdom of tears than White-breasted Deirdre, and more lovely than a bursting dawn to them that are lost in the darkness. Therefore, I award the tithe to myself; but yet, because I am done with all things, I give it unto you.' [19]

So he flung the bread and the strips of bacon among the beggars, and they fought with many cries until the last scrap was eaten. But meanwhile the friars nailed the gleeman to his cross, and set it upright in the hole, and shovelled the earth in at the foot, and trampled it level and hard. So then they went away, but the beggars stared on, sitting round the cross. But when the sun was sinking, they also got up to go, for the air was getting chilly. And as soon as they had gone a little way, the wolves, who had been showing themselves on the edge of a neighbouring coppice, came nearer, and the birds wheeled closer and closer. 'Stay, outcasts, yet a little while,' the crucified one called in a weak voice to the beggars, 'and keep the beasts and the birds from me.' But the beggars were angry because he had called them outcasts, so they threw stones and mud at him, and went their way. Then the wolves gathered at the foot of the cross, and the birds flew lower and lower. And presently the birds lighted all at once upon his head and arms and shoulders, and began to peck at him, and the wolves began to eat his feet. 'Outcasts,' he moaned, 'have you also turned against the outcast?'

ONE winter evening an old knight in rusted chain-armour rode slowly along the woody southern slope of Ben Bulben, watching the sun go down in crimson clouds over the sea. His horse was tired, as after a long journey, and he had upon his helmet the crest of no neighbouring lord or king, but a small rose made of rubies that glimmered every moment to a deeper crimson. His white hair fell in thin curls upon his shoulders, and its disorder added to the melancholy of his face, which was the face of one of those who have come but seldom into the world, and always for its trouble, the dreamers who must do what they dream, the doers who must dream what they do.

After gazing a while towards the sun, he let the reins fall upon the neck of his horse, and, stretching out both arms towards the west, he said, 'O Divine Rose of Intellectual Flame, let the gates of thy peace be opened to me at last!' And suddenly a loud squealing began in the woods some hundreds of yards further up the mountain side. He stopped his horse to listen, and heard behind him a sound of feet and of voices. 'They are beating them to make them go into the narrow path by the gorge,' said someone, and in another moment a dozen peasants armed with short spears had come up with the knight, and stood a little apart from him, their blue caps in their hands. [21]

'Where do you go with the spears?' he asked; and one who seemed the leader answered: 'A troop of wood-thieves came down from the hills a while ago and carried off the pigs belonging to an old man who lives by Glen Car Lough, and we turned out to go after them. Now that we know they are four times more than we are, we follow to find the way they have taken; and will presently tell our story to De Courcey, and if he will not help us, to Fitzgerald; for De Courcey and Fitzgerald have lately made a peace, and we do not know to whom we belong.'

'But by that time,' said the knight, 'the pigs will have been eaten.'

'A dozen men cannot do more, and it was not reasonable that the whole valley should turn out and risk their lives for two, or for two dozen pigs.' [22]

'Can you tell me,' said the knight, 'if the old man to whom the pigs belong is pious and true of heart?'

'He is as true as another and more pious than any, for he says a prayer to a saint every morning before his breakfast.'

'Then it were well to fight in his cause,' said the knight, 'and if you will fight against the wood-thieves I will take the main brunt of the battle, and you know well that a man in armour is worth many like these wood-thieves, clad in wool and leather.'

And the leader turned to his fellows and asked if they would take the chance; but they seemed anxious to get back to their cabins.

'Are the wood-thieves treacherous and impious?'

'They are treacherous in all their dealings,' said a peasant, 'and no man has known them to pray.'

'Then,' said the knight, 'I will give five crowns for the head of every wood-thief killed by us in the fighting'; and he bid the leader show the way, and they all went on together. After a time they came to where a beaten track wound into the woods, and, taking this, they doubled back upon their previous course, and began to ascend the wooded slope of the mountains. In a little while the path grew very straight and steep, and the knight was forced to dismount and leave his horse tied to a tree-stem. They knew they were on the right track: for they could see the marks of pointed shoes in the soft clay and mingled with them the cloven footprints of the pigs. Presently the path became still more abrupt, and they knew by the ending of the cloven footprints that the thieves were carrying the pigs. Now and then a long mark in the clay showed that a pig had slipped down, and been dragged along for a little way. They had journeyed thus for about twenty minutes, when a confused sound of voices told them that they were coming up with the thieves. And then the voices ceased, and they understood that they had been overheard in their turn. They pressed on rapidly and cautiously, and in about five minutes one of them caught sight of a leather jerkin half hidden by a hazel-bush. An arrow struck the knight's chain-armour, but glanced off harmlessly, and then a flight of arrows swept by them with the buzzing sound of great bees. They ran and climbed, and climbed and ran towards the thieves, who were now all visible standing up among the bushes with their still quivering bows in their hands: for they had only their spears, and they must at once come hand to hand. The knight was in the front, and smote down first one and then another of the wood-thieves. The peasants shouted, and, pressing on, drove the wood-thieves before them until they came out on the flat top of the mountain, and there they saw the two pigs quietly grubbing in the short grass, so they ran about them in a circle, and began to move back again towards the narrow path: the old knight coming now the last of all, and striking down thief after thief. The peasants had got no very serious hurts among them, for he had drawn the brunt of the battle upon himself, as could well be seen from the bloody rents in his armour; and when they came to the entrance of the narrow path he bade them drive the pigs down into the valley, while he stood there to guard the way behind them. So in a moment he was alone, and, being weak with loss of blood, might have been ended there and then by the wood-thieves he had beaten off, had fear not made them begone out of sight in a great hurry. [23]

An hour passed, and they did not return; and now the knight could stand on guard no longer, [24]

but had to lie down upon the grass. A half-hour more went by, and then a young lad, with what appeared to be a number of cock's feathers stuck round his hat, came out of the path behind him, and began to move about among the dead thieves, cutting their heads off. Then he laid the heads in a heap before the knight, and said: 'O great knight, I have been bid come and ask you for the crowns you promised for the heads: five crowns a head. They bid me tell you that they have prayed to God and His Mother to give you a long life, but that they are poor peasants, and that they would have the money before you die. They told me this over and over for fear I might forget it, and promised to beat me if I did.'

The knight raised himself upon his elbow, and opening a bag that hung to his belt, counted out the five crowns for each head. There were thirty heads in all.

'O great knight,' said the lad, 'they have also bid me take all care of you, and light a fire, and put this ointment upon your wounds.' And he gathered sticks and leaves together, and, flashing his flint and steel under a mass of dry leaves, had made a very good blaze. Then, drawing off the coat of mail, he began to anoint the wounds: but he did it clumsily, like one who does by rote what he had been told. The knight motioned him to stop, and said: 'You seem a good lad.'

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'I would ask something of you for myself.'

'There are still a few crowns,' said the knight; 'shall I give them to you?'

'O no,' said the lad. 'They would be no good to me. There is only one thing that I care about doing, and I have no need of money to do it. I go from village to village and from hill to hill, and whenever I come across a good cock I steal him and take him into the woods, and I keep him there under a basket, until I get another good cock, and then I set them to fight. The people say I am an innocent, and do not do me any harm, and never ask me to do any work but go a message now and then. It is because I am an innocent that they send me to get the crowns: anyone else would steal them; and they dare not come back themselves, for now that you are not with them they are afraid of the wood-thieves. Did you ever hear how, when the wood-thieves are christened, the wolves are made their godfathers, and their right arms are not christened at all?'

'If you will not take these crowns, my good lad, I have nothing for you, I fear, unless you would have that old coat of mail which I shall soon need no more.'

[27]

'There was something I wanted: yes, I remember now,' said the lad. 'I want you to tell me why you fought like the champions and giants in the stories and for so little a thing. Are you indeed a man like us? Are you not rather an old wizard who lives among these hills, and will not a wind arise presently and crumble you into dust?'

'I will tell you of myself,' replied the knight, 'for now that I am the last of the fellowship, I may tell all and witness for God. Look at the Rose of Rubies on my helmet, and see the symbol of my life and of my hope.' And then he told the lad this story, but with always more frequent pauses; and, while he told it, the Rose shone a deep blood-colour in the firelight, and the lad stuck the cock's feathers in the earth in front of him, and moved them about as though he made them actors in the play.

'I live in a land far from this, and was one of the Knights of Saint John,' said the old man; 'but I was one of those in the Order who always longed for more arduous labours in the service of the Most High. At last there came to us a knight of Palestine, to whom the truth of truths had been revealed by God Himself. He had seen a great Rose of Fire, and a Voice out of the Rose had told him how men would turn from the light of their own hearts, and bow down before outer order and outer fixity, and that then the light would cease, and none escape the curse except the foolish good man who could not, and the passionate wicked man who would not, think. Already, the Voice told him, the wayward light of the heart was shining out upon the world to keep it alive, with a less clear lustre, and that, as it paled, a strange infection was touching the stars and the hills and the grass and the trees with corruption, and that none of those who had seen clearly the truth and the ancient way could enter into the Kingdom of God, which is in the Heart of the Rose, if they stayed on willingly in the corrupted world; and so they must prove their anger against the Powers of Corruption by dying in the service of the Rose of God. While the knight of Palestine was telling us these things we seemed to see in a vision a crimson Rose spreading itself about him, so that he seemed to speak out of its heart, and the air was filled with fragrance. By this we knew that it was the very Voice of God which spoke to us by the knight, and we gathered about him and bade him direct us in all things, and teach us how to obey the Voice. So he bound us with an oath, and gave us signs and words whereby we might know each other even after many years, and he appointed places of meeting, and he sent us out in troops into the world to seek good causes, and die in doing battle for them. At first we thought to die more readily by fasting to death in honour of some saint; but this he told us was evil, for we did it for the sake of death, and thus took out of the hands of God the choice of the time and manner of our death, and by so doing made His power the less. We must choose our service for its excellence, and for this alone, and leave it to God to reward us at His own time and in His own manner. And after this he compelled us to eat always two at a table to watch each other lest we fasted unduly, for some among us said that if one fasted for a love of the holiness of saints and then died, the death would be acceptable. And the years passed, and one by one my fellows died in the Holy Land, or in warring upon the evil princes of the earth, or in clearing the roads of robbers; and among them died the knight of Palestine, and at last I was alone. I fought in every cause where the few contended against the many, and my hair grew white, and a terrible fear lest I had fallen under the displeasure of God came upon me. But, hearing at last how this western isle was fuller of

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wars and rapine than any other land, I came hither, and I have found the thing I sought, and, behold! I am filled with a great joy.'

Thereat he began to sing in Latin, and, while he sang, his voice grew fainter and fainter. Then his eyes closed, and his lips fell apart, and the lad knew he was dead. 'He has told me a good tale,' he said, 'for there was fighting in it, but I did not understand much of it, and it is hard to remember so long a story.'

And, taking the knight's sword, he began to dig a grave in the soft clay. He dug hard, and a faint light of dawn had touched his hair and he had almost done his work when a cock crowed in the valley below. 'Ah,' he said, 'I must have that bird'; and he ran down the narrow path to the valley.

THE High-Queen of the Island of Woods had died in childbirth, and her child was put to nurse with a woman who lived in a hut of mud and wicker, within the border of the wood. One night the woman sat rocking the cradle, and pondering over the beauty of the child, and praying that the gods might grant him wisdom equal to his beauty. There came a knock at the door, and she got up, not a little wondering, for the nearest neighbours were in the dun of the High-King a mile away; and the night was now late. 'Who is knocking?' she cried, and a thin voice answered, 'Open! for I am a crone of the grey hawk, and I come from the darkness of the great wood.' In terror she drew back the bolt, and a grey-clad woman, of a great age, and of a height more than human, came in and stood by the head of the cradle. The nurse shrank back against the wall, unable to take her eyes from the woman, for she saw by the gleaming of the firelight that the feathers of the grey hawk were upon her head instead of hair. But the child slept, and the fire danced, for the one was too ignorant and the other too full of gaiety to know what a dreadful being stood there. 'Open!' cried another voice, 'for I am a crone of the grey hawk, and I watch over his nest in the darkness of the great wood.' The nurse opened the door again, though her fingers could scarce hold the bolts for trembling, and another grey woman, not less old than the other, and with like feathers instead of hair, came in and stood by the first. In a little, came a third grey woman, and after her a fourth, and then another and another and another, until the hut was full of their immense bodies. They stood a long time in perfect silence and stillness, for they were of those whom the dropping of the sand has never troubled, but at last one muttered in a low thin voice: 'Sisters, I knew him far away by the redness of his heart under his silver skin'; and then another spoke: 'Sisters, I knew him because his heart fluttered like a bird under a net of silver cords'; and then another took up the word: 'Sisters, I knew him because his heart sang like a bird that is happy in a silver cage.' And after that they sang together, those who were nearest rocking the cradle with long wrinkled fingers; and their voices were now tender and caressing, now like the wind blowing in the great wood, and this was their song:

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Out of sight is out of mind:
 Long have man and woman-kind,
 Heavy of will and light of mood,
 Taken away our wheaten food,
 Taken away our Altar stone;
 Hail and rain and thunder alone,
 And red hearts we turn to grey,
 Are true till Time gutter away.

When the song had died out, the crone who had first spoken, said: 'We have nothing more to do but to mix a drop of our blood into his blood.' And she scratched her arm with the sharp point of a spindle, which she had made the nurse bring to her, and let a drop of blood, grey as the mist, fall upon the lips of the child; and passed out into the darkness. Then the others passed out in silence one by one; and all the while the child had not opened his pink eyelids or the fire ceased to dance, for the one was too ignorant and the other too full of gaiety to know what great beings had bent over the cradle.

When the crones were gone, the nurse came to her courage again, and hurried to the dun of the High-King, and cried out in the midst of the assembly hall that the Sidhe, whether for good or evil she knew not, had bent over the child that night; and the king and his poets and men of law, and his huntsmen, and his cooks, and his chief warriors went with her to the hut and gathered about the cradle, and were as noisy as magpies, and the child sat up and looked at them.

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Two years passed over, and the king died fighting against the Fer Bolg; and the poets and the men of law ruled in the name of the child, but looked to see him become the master himself before long, for no one had seen so wise a child, and tales of his endless questions about the household of the gods and the making of the world went hither and thither among the wicker houses of the poor. Everything had been well but for a miracle that began to trouble all men; and all women, who, indeed, talked of it without ceasing. The feathers of the grey hawk had begun to grow in the child's hair, and though his nurse cut them continually, in but a little while they would be more numerous than ever. This had not been a matter of great moment, for miracles were a little thing in those days, but for an ancient law of Eri that none who had any blemish of body could sit upon the throne; and as a grey hawk was a wild thing of the air which had never sat at the board, or listened to the songs of the poets in the light of the fire, it was not possible to think of one in whose hair its feathers grew as other than marred and blasted; nor could the people separate from their admiration of the wisdom that grew in him a horror as at one of unhuman blood. Yet all were resolved that he should reign, for they had suffered much from foolish kings and their own disorders, and moreover they desired to watch out the spectacle of his days; and no one had any other fear but that his great wisdom might bid him obey the law, and call some other, who had but a common mind, to reign in his stead.

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When the child was seven years old the poets and the men of law were called together by the chief poet, and all these matters weighed and considered. The child had already seen that those about him had hair only, and, though they had told him that they too had had feathers but had lost them because of a sin committed by their forefathers, they knew that he would learn the truth when he began to wander into the country round about. After much consideration they decreed a new law commanding every one upon pain of death to mingle artificially the feathers of

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the grey hawk into his hair; and they sent men with nets and slings and bows into the countries round about to gather a sufficiency of feathers. They decreed also that any who told the truth to the child should be flung from a cliff into the sea.

The years passed, and the child grew from childhood into boyhood and from boyhood into manhood, and from being curious about all things he became busy with strange and subtle thoughts which came to him in dreams, and with distinctions between things long held the same and with the resemblance of things long held different. Multitudes came from other lands to see him and to ask his counsel, but there were guards set at the frontiers, who compelled all that came to wear the feathers of the grey hawk in their hair. While they listened to him his words seemed to make all darkness light and filled their hearts like music; but, alas, when they returned to their own lands his words seemed far off, and what they could remember too strange and subtle to help them to live out their hasty days. A number indeed did live differently afterwards, but their new life was less excellent than the old: some among them had long served a good cause, but when they heard him praise it and their labour, they returned to their own lands to find what they had loved less lovable and their arm lighter in the battle, for he had taught them how little a hair divides the false and true; others, again, who had served no cause, but wrought in peace the welfare of their own households, when he had expounded the meaning of their purpose, found their bones softer and their will less ready for toil, for he had shown them greater purposes; and numbers of the young, when they had heard him upon all these things, remembered certain words that became like a fire in their hearts, and made all kindly joys and traffic between man and man as nothing, and went different ways, but all into vague regret. [37]

When any asked him concerning the common things of life; disputes about the mear of a territory, or about the straying of cattle, or about the penalty of blood; he would turn to those nearest him for advice; but this was held to be from courtesy, for none knew that these matters were hidden from him by thoughts and dreams that filled his mind like the marching and counter-marching of armies. Far less could any know that his heart wandered lost amid throngs of overcoming thoughts and dreams, shuddering at its own consuming solitude. [38]

Among those who came to look at him and to listen to him was the daughter of a little king who lived a great way off; and when he saw her he loved, for she was beautiful, with a strange and pale beauty unlike the women of his land; but Dana, the great mother, had decreed her a heart that was but as the heart of others, and when she considered the mystery of the hawk feathers she was troubled with a great horror. He called her to him when the assembly was over and told her of her beauty, and praised her simply and frankly as though she were a fable of the bards; and he asked her humbly to give him her love, for he was only subtle in his dreams. Overwhelmed with his greatness, she half consented, and yet half refused, for she longed to marry some warrior who could carry her over a mountain in his arms. Day by day the king gave her gifts; cups with ears of gold and findrinny wrought by the craftsmen of distant lands; cloth from over sea, which, though woven with curious figures, seemed to her less beautiful than the bright cloth of her own country; and still she was ever between a smile and a frown; between yielding and withholding. He laid down his wisdom at her feet, and told how the heroes when they die return to the world and begin their labour anew; how the kind and mirthful Men of Dea drove out the huge and gloomy and misshapen People from Under the Sea; and a multitude of things that even the Sidhe have forgotten, either because they happened so long ago or because they have not time to think of them; and still she half refused, and still he hoped, because he could not believe that a beauty so much like wisdom could hide a common heart. [39]

There was a tall young man in the dun who had yellow hair, and was skilled in wrestling and in the training of horses; and one day when the king walked in the orchard, which was between the foss and the forest, he heard his voice among the salley bushes which hid the waters of the foss. 'My blossom,' it said, 'I hate them for making you weave these dingy feathers into your beautiful hair, and all that the bird of prey upon the throne may sleep easy o' nights'; and then the low, musical voice he loved answered: 'My hair is not beautiful like yours; and now that I have plucked the feathers out of your hair I will put my hands through it, thus, and thus, and thus; for it casts no shadow of terror and darkness upon my heart.' Then the king remembered many things that he had forgotten without understanding them, doubtful words of his poets and his men of law, doubts that he had reasoned away, his own continual solitude; and he called to the lovers in a trembling voice. They came from among the salley bushes and threw themselves at his feet and prayed for pardon, and he stooped down and plucked the feathers out of the hair of the woman and then turned away towards the dun without a word. He strode into the hall of assembly, and having gathered his poets and his men of law about him, stood upon the dais and spoke in a loud, clear voice: 'Men of law, why did you make me sin against the laws of Eri? Men of verse, why did you make me sin against the secrecy of wisdom, for law was made by man for the welfare of man, but wisdom the gods have made, and no man shall live by its light, for it and the hail and the rain and the thunder follow a way that is deadly to mortal things? Men of law and men of verse, live according to your kind, and call Eocha of the Hasty Mind to reign over you, for I set out to find my kindred.' He then came down among them, and drew out of the hair of first one and then another the feathers of the grey hawk, and, having scattered them over the rushes upon the floor, passed out, and none dared to follow him, for his eyes gleamed like the eyes of the birds of prey; and no man saw him again or heard his voice. Some believed that he found his eternal abode among the demons, and some that he dwelt henceforth with the dark and dreadful goddesses, who sit all night about the pools in the forest watching the constellations rising and setting in those desolate mirrors. [41]

A VERY old man, whose face was almost as fleshless as the foot of a bird, sat meditating upon the rocky shore of the flat and hazel-covered isle which fills the widest part of the Lough Gill. A russet-faced boy of seventeen years sat by his side, watching the swallows dipping for flies in the still water. The old man was dressed in threadbare blue velvet, and the boy wore a frieze coat and a blue cap, and had about his neck a rosary of blue beads. Behind the two, and half hidden by trees, was a little monastery. It had been burned down a long while before by sacrilegious men of the Queen's party, but had been roofed anew with rushes by the boy, that the old man might find shelter in his last days. He had not set his spade, however, into the garden about it, and the lilies and the roses of the monks had spread out until their confused luxuriance met and mingled with the narrowing circle of the fern. Beyond the lilies and the roses the ferns were so deep that a child walking among them would be hidden from sight, even though he stood upon his toes; and beyond the fern rose many hazels and small oak trees.

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'Master,' said the boy, 'this long fasting, and the labour of beckoning after nightfall with your rod of quicken wood to the beings who dwell in the waters and among the hazels and oak-trees, is too much for your strength. Rest from all this labour for a little, for your hand seemed more heavy upon my shoulder and your feet less steady under you to-day than I have known them. Men say that you are older than the eagles, and yet you will not seek the rest that belongs to age.' He spoke in an eager, impulsive way, as though his heart were in the words and thoughts of the moment; and the old man answered slowly and deliberately, as though his heart were in distant days and distant deeds.

'I will tell you why I have not been able to rest,' he said. 'It is right that you should know, for you have served me faithfully these five years and more, and even with affection, taking away thereby a little of the doom of loneliness which always falls upon the wise. Now, too, that the end of my labour and the triumph of my hopes is at hand, it is the more needful for you to have this knowledge.'

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'Master, do not think that I would question you. It is for me to keep the fire alight, and the thatch close against the rain, and strong, lest the wind blow it among the trees; and it is for me to take the heavy books from the shelves, and to lift from its corner the great painted roll with the names of the Sidhe, and to possess the while an incurious and reverent heart, for right well I know that God has made out of His abundance a separate wisdom for everything which lives, and to do these things is my wisdom.'

'You are afraid,' said the old man, and his eyes shone with a momentary anger.

'Sometimes at night,' said the boy, 'when you are reading, with the rod of quicken wood in your hand, I look out of the door and see, now a great grey man driving swine among the hazels, and now many little people in red caps who come out of the lake driving little white cows before them. I do not fear these little people so much as the grey man; for, when they come near the house, they milk the cows, and they drink the frothing milk, and begin to dance; and I know there is good in the heart that loves dancing; but I fear them for all that. And I fear the tall white-armed ladies who come out of the air, and move slowly hither and thither, crowning themselves with the roses or with the lilies, and shaking about their living hair, which moves, for so I have heard them tell each other, with the motion of their thoughts, now spreading out and now gathering close to their heads. They have mild, beautiful faces, but, Aengus, son of Forbis, I fear all these beings, I fear the people of the Sidhe, and I fear the art which draws them about us.'

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'Why,' said the old man, 'do you fear the ancient gods who made the spears of your father's fathers to be stout in battle, and the little people who came at night from the depth of the lakes and sang among the crickets upon their hearths? And in our evil day they still watch over the loveliness of the earth. But I must tell you why I have fasted and laboured when others would sink into the sleep of age, for without your help once more I shall have fasted and laboured to no good end. When you have done for me this last thing, you may go and build your cottage and till your fields, and take some girl to wife, and forget the ancient gods. I have saved all the gold and silver pieces that were given to me by earls and knights and squires for keeping them from the evil eye and from the love-weaving enchantments of witches, and by earls' and knights' and squires' ladies for keeping the people of the Sidhe from making the udders of their cattle fall dry, and taking the butter from their churns. I have saved it all for the day when my work should be at an end, and now that the end is at hand you shall not lack for gold and silver pieces enough to make strong the roof-tree of your cottage and to keep cellar and larder full. I have sought through all my life to find the secret of life. I was not happy in my youth, for I knew that it would pass; and I was not happy in my manhood, for I knew that age was coming; and so I gave myself, in youth and manhood and age, to the search for the Great Secret. I longed for a life whose abundance would fill centuries, I scorned the life of fourscore winters. I would be—nay, I *will* be!—like the Ancient Gods of the land. I read in my youth, in a Hebrew manuscript I found in a Spanish monastery, that there is a moment after the Sun has entered the Ram and before he has passed the Lion, which trembles with the Song of the Immortal Powers, and that whosoever finds this moment and listens to the Song shall become like the Immortal Powers themselves; I came back to Ireland and asked the fairy men, and the cow-doctors, if they knew when this moment was; but though all had heard of it, there was none could find the moment upon the hour-glass. So I gave myself to magic, and spent my life in fasting and in labour that I might bring the Gods and the Fairies to my side; and now at last one of the Fairies has told me that the moment is at hand. One, who wore a red cap and whose lips were white with the froth of the new milk,

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whispered it into my ear. To-morrow, a little before the close of the first hour after dawn, I shall find the moment, and then I will go away to a southern land and build myself a palace of white marble amid orange trees, and gather the brave and the beautiful about me, and enter into the eternal kingdom of my youth. But, that I may hear the whole Song, I was told by the little fellow with the froth of the new milk on his lips, that you must bring great masses of green boughs and pile them about the door and the window of my room; and you must put fresh green rushes upon the floor, and cover the table and the rushes with the roses and the lilies of the monks. You must do this to-night, and in the morning at the end of the first hour after dawn, you must come and find me.'

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'Will you be quite young then?' said the boy.

'I will be as young then as you are, but now I am still old and tired, and you must help me to my chair and to my books.'

When the boy had left Aengus son of Forbis in his room, and had lighted the lamp which, by some contrivance of the wizard's, gave forth a sweet odour as of strange flowers, he went into the wood and began cutting green boughs from the hazels, and great bundles of rushes from the western border of the isle, where the small rocks gave place to gently sloping sand and clay. It was nightfall before he had cut enough for his purpose, and well-nigh midnight before he had carried the last bundle to its place, and gone back for the roses and the lilies. It was one of those warm, beautiful nights when everything seems carved of precious stones. Sleuth Wood away to the south looked as though cut out of green beryl, and the waters that mirrored them shone like pale opal. The roses he was gathering were like glowing rubies, and the lilies had the dull lustre of pearl. Everything had taken upon itself the look of something imperishable, except a glow-worm, whose faint flame burnt on steadily among the shadows, moving slowly hither and thither, the only thing that seemed alive, the only thing that seemed perishable as mortal hope. The boy gathered a great armful of roses and lilies, and thrusting the glow-worm among their pearl and ruby, carried them into the room, where the old man sat in a half-slumber. He laid armful after armful upon the floor and above the table, and then, gently closing the door, threw himself upon his bed of rushes, to dream of a peaceful manhood with his chosen wife at his side, and the laughter of children in his ears. At dawn he rose, and went down to the edge of the lake, taking the hour-glass with him. He put some bread and a flask of wine in the boat, that his master might not lack food at the outset of his journey, and then sat down to wait until the hour from dawn had gone by. Gradually the birds began to sing, and when the last grains of sand were falling, everything suddenly seemed to overflow with their music. It was the most beautiful and living moment of the year; one could listen to the spring's heart beating in it. He got up and went to find his master. The green boughs filled the door, and he had to make a way through them. When he entered the room the sunlight was falling in flickering circles on floor and walls and table, and everything was full of soft green shadows. But the old man sat clasping a mass of roses and lilies in his arms, and with his head sunk upon his breast. On the table, at his left hand, was a leathern wallet full of gold and silver pieces, as for a journey, and at his right hand was a long staff. The boy touched him and he did not move. He lifted the hands but they were quite cold, and they fell heavily.

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'It were better for him,' said the lad, 'to have told his beads and said his prayers like another, and not to have spent his days in seeking amongst the Immortal Powers what he could have found in his own deeds and days had he willed. Ah, yes, it were better to have said his prayers and kissed his beads!' He looked at the threadbare blue velvet, and he saw it was covered with the pollen of the flowers, and while he was looking at it a thrush, who had alighted among the boughs that were piled against the window, began to sing.

ONE summer night, when there was peace, a score of Puritan troopers under the pious Sir Frederick Hamilton, broke through the door of the Abbey of the White Friars which stood over the Gara Lough at Sligo. As the door fell with a crash they saw a little knot of friars gathered about the altar, their white habits glimmering in the steady light of the holy candles. All the monks were kneeling except the abbot, who stood upon the altar steps with a great brazen crucifix in his hand. 'Shoot them!' cried Sir Frederick Hamilton, but none stirred, for all were new converts, and feared the crucifix and the holy candles. The white lights from the altar threw the shadows of the troopers up on to roof and wall. As the troopers moved about, the shadows began a fantastic dance among the corbels and the memorial tablets. For a little while all was silent, and then five troopers who were the body-guard of Sir Frederick Hamilton lifted their muskets, and shot down five of the friars. The noise and the smoke drove away the mystery of the pale altar lights, and the other troopers took courage and began to strike. In a moment the friars lay about the altar steps, their white habits stained with blood. 'Set fire to the house!' cried Sir Frederick Hamilton, and at his word one went out, and came in again carrying a heap of dry straw, and piled it against the western wall, and, having done this, fell back, for the fear of the crucifix and of the holy candles was still in his heart. Seeing this, the five troopers who were Sir Frederick Hamilton's body-guard darted forward, and taking each a holy candle set the straw in a blaze. The red tongues of fire rushed up and flickered from corbel to corbel and from tablet to tablet, and crept along the floor, setting in a blaze the seats and benches. The dance of the shadows passed away, and the dance of the fires began. The troopers fell back towards the door in the southern wall, and watched those yellow dancers springing hither and thither.

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For a time the altar stood safe and apart in the midst of its white light; the eyes of the troopers turned upon it. The abbot whom they had thought dead had risen to his feet and now stood before it with the crucifix lifted in both hands high above his head. Suddenly he cried with a loud voice, 'Woe unto all who smite those who dwell within the Light of the Lord, for they shall wander among the ungovernable shadows, and follow the ungovernable fires!' And having so cried he fell on his face dead, and the brazen crucifix rolled down the steps of the altar. The smoke had now grown very thick, so that it drove the troopers out into the open air. Before them were burning houses. Behind them shone the painted windows of the Abbey filled with saints and martyrs, awakened, as from a sacred trance, into an angry and animated life. The eyes of the troopers were dazzled, and for a while could see nothing but the flaming faces of saints and martyrs. Presently, however, they saw a man covered with dust who came running towards them. 'Two messengers,' he cried, 'have been sent by the defeated Irish to raise against you the whole country about Manor Hamilton, and if you do not stop them you will be overpowered in the woods before you reach home again! They ride north-east between Ben Bulben and Cashel-na-Gael.'

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Sir Frederick Hamilton called to him the five troopers who had first fired upon the monks and said, 'Mount quickly, and ride through the woods towards the mountain, and get before these men, and kill them.'

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In a moment the troopers were gone, and before many moments they had splashed across the river at what is now called Buckley's Ford, and plunged into the woods. They followed a beaten track that wound along the northern bank of the river. The boughs of the birch and quicken trees mingled above, and hid the cloudy moonlight, leaving the pathway in almost complete darkness. They rode at a rapid trot, now chatting together, now watching some stray weasel or rabbit scuttling away in the darkness. Gradually, as the gloom and silence of the woods oppressed them, they drew closer together, and began to talk rapidly; they were old comrades and knew each other's lives. One was married, and told how glad his wife would be to see him return safe from this harebrained expedition against the White Friars, and to hear how fortune had made amends for rashness. The oldest of the five, whose wife was dead, spoke of a flagon of wine which awaited him upon an upper shelf; while a third, who was the youngest, had a sweetheart watching for his return, and he rode a little way before the others, not talking at all. Suddenly the young man stopped, and they saw that his horse was trembling. 'I saw something,' he said, 'and yet I do not know but it may have been one of the shadows. It looked like a great worm with a silver crown upon his head.' One of the five put his hand up to his forehead as if about to cross himself, but remembering that he had changed his religion he put it down, and said: 'I am certain it was but a shadow, for there are a great many about us, and of very strange kinds.' Then they rode on in silence. It had been raining in the earlier part of the day, and the drops fell from the branches, wetting their hair and their shoulders. In a little they began to talk again. They had been in many battles against many a rebel together, and now told each other over again the story of their wounds, and so awakened in their hearts the strongest of all fellowships, the fellowship of the sword, and half forgot the terrible solitude of the woods.

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Suddenly the first two horses neighed, and then stood still, and would go no further. Before them was a glint of water, and they knew by the rushing sound that it was a river. They dismounted, and after much tugging and coaxing brought the horses to the river-side. In the midst of the water stood a tall old woman with grey hair flowing over a grey dress. She stood up to her knees in the water, and stooped from time to time as though washing. Presently they could see that she was washing something that half floated. The moon cast a flickering light upon it, and they saw that it was the dead body of a man, and, while they were looking at it, an eddy of the river turned the face towards them, and each of the five troopers recognized at the same moment his own face. While they stood dumb and motionless with horror, the woman began to speak, saying slowly and loudly: 'Did you see my son? He has a crown of silver on his head, and

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there are rubies in the crown.' Then the oldest of the troopers, he who had been most often wounded, drew his sword and cried: 'I have fought for the truth of my God, and need not fear the shadows of Satan,' and with that rushed into the water. In a moment he returned. The woman had vanished, and though he had thrust his sword into air and water he had found nothing.

The five troopers remounted, and set their horses at the ford, but all to no purpose. They tried again and again, and went plunging hither and thither, the horses foaming and rearing. 'Let us,' said the old trooper, 'ride back a little into the wood, and strike the river higher up.' They rode in under the boughs, the ground-ivy crackling under the hoofs, and the branches striking against their steel caps. After about twenty minutes' riding they came out again upon the river, and after another ten minutes found a place where it was possible to cross without sinking below the stirrups. The wood upon the other side was very thin, and broke the moonlight into long streams. The wind had arisen, and had begun to drive the clouds rapidly across the face of the moon, so that thin streams of light seemed to be dancing a grotesque dance among the scattered bushes and small fir-trees. The tops of the trees began also to moan, and the sound of it was like the voice of the dead in the wind; and the troopers remembered the belief that tells how the dead in purgatory are spitted upon the points of the trees and upon the points of the rocks. They turned a little to the south, in the hope that they might strike the beaten path again, but they could find no trace of it.

Meanwhile, the moaning grew louder and louder, and the dance of the white moon-fires more and more rapid. Gradually they began to be aware of a sound of distant music. It was the sound of a bagpipe, and they rode towards it with great joy. It came from the bottom of a deep, cup-like hollow. In the midst of the hollow was an old man with a red cap and withered face. He sat beside a fire of sticks, and had a burning torch thrust into the earth at his feet, and played an old bagpipe furiously. His red hair dripped over his face like the iron rust upon a rock. 'Did you see my wife?' he cried, looking up a moment; 'she was washing! she was washing!' 'I am afraid of him,' said the young trooper, 'I fear he is one of the Sidhe.' 'No,' said the old trooper, 'he is a man, for I can see the sun-freckles upon his face. We will compel him to be our guide'; and at that he drew his sword, and the others did the same. They stood in a ring round the piper, and pointed their swords at him, and the old trooper then told him that they must kill two rebels, who had taken the road between Ben Bulben and the great mountain spur that is called Cashel-na-Gael, and that he must get up before one of them and be their guide, for they had lost their way. The piper turned, and pointed to a neighbouring tree, and they saw an old white horse ready bitted, bridled, and saddled. He slung the pipe across his back, and, taking the torch in his hand, got upon the horse, and started off before them, as hard as he could go.

The wood grew thinner and thinner, and the ground began to slope up toward the mountain. The moon had already set, and the little white flames of the stars had come out everywhere. The ground sloped more and more until at last they rode far above the woods upon the wide top of the mountain. The woods lay spread out mile after mile below, and away to the south shot up the red glare of the burning town. But before and above them were the little white flames. The guide drew rein suddenly, and pointing upwards with the hand that did not hold the torch, shrieked out, 'Look; look at the holy candles!' and then plunged forward at a gallop, waving the torch hither and thither. 'Do you hear the hoofs of the messengers?' cried the guide. 'Quick, quick! or they will be gone out of your hands!' and he laughed as with delight of the chase. The troopers thought they could hear far off, and as if below them, rattle of hoofs; but now the ground began to slope more and more, and the speed grew more headlong moment by moment. They tried to pull up, but in vain, for the horses seemed to have gone mad. The guide had thrown the reins on to the neck of the old white horse, and was waving his arms and singing a wild Gaelic song. Suddenly they saw the thin gleam of a river, at an immense distance below, and knew that they were upon the brink of the abyss that is now called Lug-na-Gael, or in English the Stranger's Leap. The six horses sprang forward, and five screams went up into the air, a moment later five men and horses fell with a dull crash upon the green slopes at the foot of the rocks.

At the place, close to the Dead Man's Point, at the Rosses, where the disused pilot-house looks out to sea through two round windows like eyes, a mud cottage stood in the last century. It also was a watchhouse, for a certain old Michael Bruen, who had been a smuggler in his day, and was still the father and grandfather of smugglers, lived there, and when, after nightfall, a tall schooner crept over the bay from Roughley, it was his business to hang a horn lantern in the southern window, that the news might travel to Dorren's Island, and from thence, by another horn lantern, to the village of the Rosses. But for this glimmering of messages, he had little communion with mankind, for he was very old, and had no thought for anything but for the making of his soul, at the foot of the Spanish crucifix of carved oak that hung by his chimney, or bent double over the rosary of stone beads brought to him in a cargo of silks and laces out of France. One night he had watched hour after hour, because a gentle and favourable wind was blowing, and *La Mère de Miséricorde* was much overdue; and he was about to lie down upon his heap of straw, seeing that the dawn was whitening the east, and that the schooner would not dare to round Roughley and come to an anchor after daybreak; when he saw a long line of herons flying slowly from Dorren's Island and towards the pools which lie, half choked with reeds, behind what is called the Second Rosses. He had never before seen herons flying over the sea, for they are shore-keeping birds, and partly because this had startled him out of his drowsiness, and more because the long delay of the schooner kept his cupboard empty, he took down his rusty shot-gun, of which the barrel was tied on with a piece of string, and followed them towards the pools.

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When he came close enough to hear the sighing of the rushes in the outermost pool, the morning was grey over the world, so that the tall rushes, the still waters, the vague clouds, the thin mist lying among the sand-heaps, seemed carved out of an enormous pearl. In a little he came upon the herons, of whom there were a great number, standing with lifted legs in the shallow water; and crouching down behind a bank of rushes, looked to the priming of his gun, and bent for a moment over his rosary to murmur: 'Patron Patrick, let me shoot a heron; made into a pie it will support me for nearly four days, for I no longer eat as in my youth. If you keep me from missing I will say a rosary to you every night until the pie is eaten.' Then he lay down, and, resting his gun upon a large stone, turned towards a heron which stood upon a bank of smooth grass over a little stream that flowed into the pool; for he feared to take the rheumatism by wading, as he would have to do if he shot one of those which stood in the water. But when he looked along the barrel the heron was gone, and, to his wonder and terror, a man of infinitely great age and infirmity stood in its place. He lowered the gun, and the heron stood there with bent head and motionless feathers, as though it had slept from the beginning of the world. He raised the gun, and no sooner did he look along the iron than that enemy of all enchantment brought the old man again before him, only to vanish when he lowered the gun for the second time. He laid the gun down, and crossed himself three times, and said a *Paternoster* and an *Ave Maria*, and muttered half aloud: 'Some enemy of God and of my patron is standing upon the smooth place and fishing in the blessed water,' and then aimed very carefully and slowly. He fired, and when the smoke had gone saw an old man, huddled upon the grass and a long line of herons flying with clamour towards the sea. He went round a bend of the pool, and coming to the little stream looked down on a figure wrapped in faded clothes of black and green of an ancient pattern and spotted with blood. He shook his head at the sight of so great a wickedness. Suddenly the clothes moved and an arm was stretched upwards towards the rosary which hung about his neck, and long wasted fingers almost touched the cross. He started back, crying: 'Wizard, I will let no wicked thing touch my blessed beads'; and the sense of a great danger just escaped made him tremble.

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'If you listen to me,' replied a voice so faint that it was like a sigh, 'you will know that I am not a wizard, and you will let me kiss the cross before I die.'

'I will listen to you,' he answered, 'but I will not let you touch my blessed beads,' and sitting on the grass a little way from the dying man, he reloaded his gun and laid it across his knees and composed himself to listen.

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'I know not how many generations ago we, who are now herons, were the men of learning of the King Leaghair; we neither hunted, nor went to battle, nor listened to the Druids preaching, and even love, if it came to us at all, was but a passing fire. The Druids and the poets told us, many and many a time, of a new Druid Patrick; and most among them were fierce against him, while a few thought his doctrine merely the doctrine of the gods set out in new symbols, and were for giving him welcome; but we yawned in the midst of their tale. At last they came crying that he was coming to the king's house, and fell to their dispute, but we would listen to neither party, for we were busy with a dispute about the merits of the Great and of the Little Metre; nor were we disturbed when they passed our door with sticks of enchantment under their arms, travelling towards the forest to contend against his coming, nor when they returned after nightfall with torn robes and despairing cries; for the click of our knives writing our thoughts in Ogham filled us with peace and our dispute filled us with joy; nor even when in the morning crowds passed us to hear the strange Druid preaching the commandments of his god. The crowds passed, and one, who had laid down his knife to yawn and stretch himself, heard a voice speaking far off, and knew that the Druid Patrick was preaching within the king's house; but our hearts were deaf, and we carved and disputed and read, and laughed a thin laughter together. In a little we heard many feet coming towards the house, and presently two tall figures stood in the door, the one in white, the other in a crimson robe; like a great lily and a heavy poppy; and we knew

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the Druid Patrick and our King Leaghair. We laid down the slender knives and bowed before the king, but when the black and green robes had ceased to rustle, it was not the loud rough voice of King Leaghair that spoke to us, but a strange voice in which there was a rapture as of one speaking from behind a battlement of Druid flame: "I preached the commandments of the Maker of the world," it said; "within the king's house and from the centre of the earth to the windows of Heaven there was a great silence, so that the eagle floated with unmoving wings in the white air, and the fish with unmoving fins in the dim water, while the linnets and the wrens and the sparrows stilled their ever-trembling tongues in the heavy boughs, and the clouds were like white marble, and the rivers became their motionless mirrors, and the shrimps in the far-off sea-pools were still, enduring eternity in patience, although it was hard." And as he named these things, it was like a king numbering his people. "But your slender knives went click, click! upon the oaken staves, and, all else being silent, the sound shook the angels with anger. O, little roots, nipped by the winter, who do not awake although the summer pass above you with innumerable feet. O, men who have no part in love, who have no part in song, who have no part in wisdom, but dwell with the shadows of memory where the feet of angels cannot touch you as they pass over your heads, where the hair of demons cannot sweep about you as they pass under your feet, I lay upon you a curse, and change you to an example for ever and ever; you shall become grey herons and stand pondering in grey pools and flit over the world in that hour when it is most full of sighs, having forgotten the flame of the stars and not yet found the flame of the sun; and you shall preach to the other herons until they also are like you, and are an example for ever and ever; and your deaths shall come to you by chance and unforeseen, that no fire of certainty may visit your hearts."

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The voice of the old man of learning became still, but the voteen bent over his gun with his eyes upon the ground, trying in vain to understand something of this tale; and he had so bent, it may be for a long time, had not a tug at his rosary made him start out of his dream. The old man of learning had crawled along the grass, and was now trying to draw the cross down low enough for his lips to reach it.

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'You must not touch my blessed beads,' cried the voteen, and struck the long withered fingers with the barrel of his gun. He need not have trembled, for the old man fell back upon the grass with a sigh and was still. He bent down and began to consider the black and green clothes, for his fear had begun to pass away when he came to understand that he had something the man of learning wanted and pleaded for, and now that the blessed beads were safe, his fear had nearly all gone; and surely, he thought, if that big cloak, and that little tight-fitting cloak under it, were warm and without holes, Saint Patrick would take the enchantment out of them and leave them fit for human use. But the black and green clothes fell away wherever his fingers touched them, and while this was a new wonder, a slight wind blew over the pool and crumbled the old man of learning and all his ancient gear into a little heap of dust, and then made the little heap less and less until there was nothing but the smooth green grass.

THE little wicker houses at Tullagh, where the Brothers were accustomed to pray, or bend over many handicrafts, when twilight had driven them from the fields, were empty, for the hardness of the winter had brought the brotherhood together in the little wooden house under the shadow of the wooden chapel; and Abbot Malathgeneus, Brother Dove, Brother Bald Fox, Brother Peter, Brother Patrick, Brother Bittern, Brother Fair-brows, and many too young to have won names in the great battle, sat about the fire with ruddy faces, one mending lines to lay in the river for eels, one fashioning a snare for birds, one mending the broken handle of a spade, one writing in a large book, and one shaping a jewelled box to hold the book; and among the rushes at their feet lay the scholars, who would one day be Brothers, and whose school-house it was, and for the succour of whose tender years the great fire was supposed to leap and flicker. One of these, a child of eight or nine years, called Olioll, lay upon his back looking up through the hole in the roof, through which the smoke went, and watching the stars appearing and disappearing in the smoke with mild eyes, like the eyes of a beast of the field. He turned presently to the Brother who wrote in the big book, and whose duty was to teach the children, and said, 'Brother Dove, to what are the stars fastened?' The Brother, rejoicing to see so much curiosity in the stupidest of his scholars, laid down the pen and said, 'There are nine crystalline spheres, and on the first the Moon is fastened, on the second the planet Mercury, on the third the planet Venus, on the fourth the Sun, on the fifth the planet Mars, on the sixth the planet Jupiter, on the seventh the planet Saturn; these are the wandering stars; and on the eighth are fastened the fixed stars; but the ninth sphere is a sphere of the substance on which the breath of God moved in the beginning.'

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'What is beyond that?' said the child.

'There is nothing beyond that; there is God.'

And then the child's eyes strayed to the jewelled box, where one great ruby was gleaming in the light of the fire, and he said, 'Why has Brother Peter put a great ruby on the side of the box?'

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'The ruby is a symbol of the love of God.'

'Why is the ruby a symbol of the love of God?'

'Because it is red, like fire, and fire burns up everything, and where there is nothing, there is God.'

The child sank into silence, but presently sat up and said, 'There is somebody outside.'

'No,' replied the Brother. 'It is only the wolves; I have heard them moving about in the snow for some time. They are growing very wild, now that the winter drives them from the mountains. They broke into a fold last night and carried off many sheep, and if we are not careful they will devour everything.'

'No, it is the footstep of a man, for it is heavy; but I can hear the footsteps of the wolves also.'

He had no sooner done speaking than somebody rapped three times, but with no great loudness.

'I will go and open, for he must be very cold.'

'Do not open, for it may be a man-wolf, and he may devour us all.'

But the boy had already drawn back the heavy wooden bolt, and all the faces, most of them a little pale, turned towards the slowly-opening door.

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'He has beads and a cross, he cannot be a man-wolf,' said the child, as a man with the snow heavy on his long, ragged beard, and on the matted hair, that fell over his shoulders and nearly to his waist, and dropping from the tattered cloak that but half-covered his withered brown body, came in and looked from face to face with mild, ecstatic eyes. Standing some way from the fire, and with eyes that had rested at last upon the Abbot Malathgeneus, he cried out, 'O blessed abbot, let me come to the fire and warm myself and dry the snow from my beard and my hair and my cloak; that I may not die of the cold of the mountains and anger the Lord with a wilful martyrdom.'

'Come to the fire,' said the abbot, 'and warm yourself, and eat the food the boy Olioll will bring you. It is sad indeed that any for whom Christ has died should be as poor as you.'

The man sat over the fire, and Olioll took away his now dripping cloak and laid meat and bread and wine before him; but he would eat only of the bread, and he put away the wine, asking for water. When his beard and hair had begun to dry a little and his limbs had ceased to shiver with the cold, he spoke again.

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'O blessed abbot, have pity on the poor, have pity on a beggar who has trodden the bare world this many a year, and give me some labour to do, the hardest there is, for I am the poorest of God's poor.'

Then the Brothers discussed together what work they could put him to, and at first to little purpose, for there was no labour that had not found its labourer in that busy community; but at last one remembered that Brother Bald Fox, whose business it was to turn the great quern in the quern-house, for he was too stupid for anything else, was getting old for so heavy a labour; and

so the beggar was put to the quern from the morrow.

The cold passed away, and the spring grew to summer, and the quern was never idle, nor was it turned with grudging labour, for when any passed the beggar was heard singing as he drove the handle round. The last gloom, too, had passed from that happy community, for Olioll, who had always been stupid and unteachable, grew clever, and this was the more miraculous because it had come of a sudden. One day he had been even duller than usual, and was beaten and told to know his lesson better on the morrow or be sent into a lower class among little boys who would make a joke of him. He had gone out in tears, and when he came the next day, although his stupidity, born of a mind that would listen to every wandering sound and brood upon every wandering light, had so long been the byword of the school, he knew his lesson so well that he passed to the head of the class, and from that day was the best of scholars. At first Brother Dove thought this was an answer to his own prayers to the Virgin, and took it for a great proof of the love she bore him; but when many far more fervid prayers had failed to add a single wheatsheaf to the harvest, he began to think that the child was trafficking with bards, or druids, or witches, and resolved to follow and watch. He had told his thought to the abbot, who bid him come to him the moment he hit the truth; and the next day, which was a Sunday, he stood in the path when the abbot and the Brothers were coming from vespers, with their white habits upon them, and took the abbot by the habit and said, 'The beggar is of the greatest of saints and of the workers of miracle. I followed Olioll but now, and by his slow steps and his bent head I saw that the weariness of his stupidity was over him, and when he came to the little wood by the quern-house I knew by the path broken in the under-wood and by the foot-marks in the muddy places that he had gone that way many times. I hid behind a bush where the path doubled upon itself at a sloping place, and understood by the tears in his eyes that his stupidity was too old and his wisdom too new to save him from terror of the rod. When he was in the quern-house I went to the window and looked in, and the birds came down and perched upon my head and my shoulders, for they are not timid in that holy place; and a wolf passed by, his right side shaking my habit, his left the leaves of a bush. Olioll opened his book and turned to the page I had told him to learn, and began to cry, and the beggar sat beside him and comforted him until he fell asleep. When his sleep was of the deepest the beggar knelt down and prayed aloud, and said, "O Thou Who dwellest beyond the stars, show forth Thy power as at the beginning, and let knowledge sent from Thee awaken in his mind, wherein is nothing from the world, that the nine orders of angels may glorify Thy name"; and then a light broke out of the air and wrapped Aodh, and I smelt the breath of roses. I stirred a little in my wonder, and the beggar turned and saw me, and, bending low, said, "O Brother Dove, if I have done wrong, forgive me, and I will do penance. It was my pity moved me"; but I was afraid and I ran away, and did not stop running until I came here.'

Then all the Brothers began talking together, one saying it was such and such a saint, and one that it was not he but another; and one that it was none of these, for they were still in their brotherhoods, but that it was such and such a one; and the talk was as near to quarreling as might be in that gentle community, for each would claim so great a saint for his native province. At last the abbot said, 'He is none that you have named, for at Easter I had greeting from all, and each was in his brotherhood; but he is Aengus the Lover of God, and the first of those who have gone to live in the wild places and among the wild beasts. Ten years ago he felt the burden of many labours in a brotherhood under the Hill of Patrick and went into the forest that he might labour only with song to the Lord; but the fame of his holiness brought many thousands to his cell, so that a little pride clung to a soul from which all else had been driven. Nine years ago he dressed himself in rags, and from that day none has seen him, unless, indeed, it be true that he has been seen living among the wolves on the mountains and eating the grass of the fields. Let us go to him and bow down before him; for at last, after long seeking, he has found the nothing that is God; and bid him lead us in the pathway he has trodden. They passed in their white habits along the beaten path in the wood, the acolytes swinging their censers before them, and the abbot, with his crozier studded with precious stones, in the midst of the incense; and came before the quern-house and knelt down and began to pray, awaiting the moment when the child would wake, and the Saint cease from his watch and come to look at the sun going down into the unknown darkness, as his way was.'

COSTELLO had come up from the fields and lay upon the ground before the door of his square tower, resting his head upon his hands and looking at the sunset, and considering the chances of the weather. Though the customs of Elizabeth and James, now going out of fashion in England, had begun to prevail among the gentry, he still wore the great cloak of the native Irish; and the sensitive outlines of his face and the greatness of his indolent body had a commingling of pride and strength which belonged to a simpler age. His eyes wandered from the sunset to where the long white road lost itself over the south-western horizon and to a horseman who toiled slowly up the hill. A few more minutes and the horseman was near enough for his little and shapeless body, his long Irish cloak, and the dilapidated bagpipes hanging from his shoulders, and the rough-haired garron under him, to be seen distinctly in the grey dusk. So soon as he had come within earshot, he began crying: 'Is it sleeping you are, Tumaus Costello, when better men break their hearts on the great white roads? Get up out of that, proud Tumaus, for I have news! Get up out of that, you great omadhaun! Shake yourself out of the earth, you great weed of a man!'

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Costello had risen to his feet, and as the piper came up to him seized him by the neck of his jacket, and lifting him out of his saddle threw him on to the ground.

'Let me alone, let me alone,' said the other, but Costello still shook him.

'I have news from Dermott's daughter, Winny.' The great fingers were loosened, and the piper rose gasping.

'Why did you not tell me,' said Costello, 'that you came from her? You might have railed your fill.'

'I have come from her, but I will not speak unless I am paid for my shaking.'

Costello fumbled at the bag in which he carried his money, and it was some time before it would open, for the hand that had overcome many men shook with fear and hope. 'Here is all the money in my bag,' he said, dropping a stream of French and Spanish money into the hand of the piper, who bit the coins before he would answer.

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'That is right, that is a fair price, but I will not speak till I have good protection, for if the Dermotts lay their hands upon me in any boreen after sundown, or in Cool-a-vin by day, I will be left to rot among the nettles of a ditch, or hung on the great sycamore, where they hung the horse-thieves last Beltaine four years.' And while he spoke he tied the reins of his garron to a bar of rusty iron that was mortared into the wall.

'I will make you my piper and my body-servant,' said Costello, 'and no man dare lay hands upon the man, or the goat, or the horse, or the dog that is Tumaus Costello's.'

'And I will only tell my message,' said the other, flinging the saddle on the ground, 'in the corner of the chimney with a noggin in my hand, and a jug of the Brew of the Little Pot beside me, for though I am ragged and empty, my forebears were well clothed and full until their house was burnt and their cattle harried seven centuries ago by the Dillons, whom I shall yet see on the hob of hell, and they screeching'; and while he spoke the little eyes gleamed and the thin hands clenched.

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Costello led him into the great rush-strewn hall, where were none of the comforts which had begun to grow common among the gentry, but a feudal gauntness and bareness, and pointed to the bench in the great chimney; and when he had sat down, filled up a horn noggin and set it on the bench beside him, and set a great black jack of leather beside the noggin, and lit a torch that slanted out from a ring in the wall, his hands trembling the while; and then turned towards him and said: 'Will Dermott's daughter come to me, Duallach, son of Daly?'

'Dermott's daughter will not come to you, for her father has set women to watch her, but she bid me tell you that this day sennight will be the eve of St. John and the night of her betrothal to Namara of the Lake, and she would have you there that, when they bid her drink to him she loves best, as the way is, she may drink to you, Tumaus Costello, and let all know where her heart is, and how little of gladness is in her marriage; and I myself bid you go with good men about you, for I saw the horse-thieves with my own eyes, and they dancing the "Blue Pigeon" in the air.' And then he held the now empty noggin towards Costello, his hand closing round it like the claw of a bird, and cried: 'Fill my noggin again, for I would the day had come when all the water in the world is to shrink into a periwinkle-shell, that I might drink nothing but Poteen.'

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Finding that Costello made no reply, but sat in a dream, he burst out: 'Fill my noggin, I tell you, for no Costello is so great in the world that he should not wait upon a Daly, even though the Daly travel the road with his pipes and the Costello have a bare hill, an empty house, a horse, a herd of goats, and a handful of cows.'

'Praise the Dalys if you will,' said Costello as he filled the noggin, 'for you have brought me a kind word from my love.'

For the next few days Duallach went hither and thither trying to raise a bodyguard, and every man he met had some story of Costello, how he killed the wrestler when but a boy by so straining at the belt that went about them both that he broke the big wrestler's back; how when somewhat

older he dragged fierce horses through a ford in the Unchion for a wager; how when he came to manhood he broke the steel horseshoe in Mayo; how he drove many men before him through Rushy Meadow at Drum-an-air because of a malevolent song they had about his poverty; and of many another deed of his strength and pride; but he could find none who would trust themselves with any so passionate and poor in a quarrel with careful and wealthy persons like Dermott of the Sheep and Namara of the Lake.

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Then Costello went out himself, and after listening to many excuses and in many places, brought in a big half-witted fellow, who followed him like a dog, a farm-labourer who worshipped him for his strength, a fat farmer whose forefathers had served his family, and a couple of lads who looked after his goats and cows; and marshalled them before the fire in the empty hall. They had brought with them their stout cudgels, and Costello gave them an old pistol apiece, and kept them all night drinking Spanish ale and shooting at a white turnip which he pinned against the wall with a skewer. Duallach of the Pipes sat on the bench in the chimney playing 'The Green Bunch of Rushes,' 'The Unchion Stream,' and 'The Princes of Breffeny' on his old pipes, and railing now at the appearance of the shooters, now at their clumsy shooting, and now at Costello because he had no better servants. The labourer, the half-witted fellow, the farmer and the lads were all well accustomed to Duallach's railing, for it was as inseparable from wake or wedding as the squealing of his pipes, but they wondered at the forbearance of Costello, who seldom came either to wake or wedding, and if he had would scarce have been patient with a scolding piper.

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On the next evening they set out for Cool-a-vin, Costello riding a tolerable horse and carrying a sword, the others upon rough-haired garrons, and with their stout cudgels under their arms. As they rode over the bogs and in the boreens among the hills they could see fire answering fire from hill to hill, from horizon to horizon, and everywhere groups who danced in the red light on the turf, celebrating the bridal of life and fire. When they came to Dermott's house they saw before the door an unusually large group of the very poor, dancing about a fire, in the midst of which was a blazing cartwheel, that circular dance which is so ancient that the gods, long dwindled to be but fairies, dance no other in their secret places. From the door and through the long loop-holes on either side came the pale light of candles and the sound of many feet dancing a dance of Elizabeth and James.

They tied their horses to bushes, for the number so tied already showed that the stables were full, and shoved their way through a crowd of peasants who stood about the door, and went into the great hall where the dance was. The labourer, the half-witted fellow, the farmer and the two lads mixed with a group of servants who were looking on from an alcove, and Duallach sat with the pipers on their bench, but Costello made his way through the dancers to where Dermott of the Sheep stood with Namara of the Lake pouring Poteen out of a porcelain jug into horn noggins with silver rims.

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'Tumaus Costello,' said the old man, 'you have done a good deed to forget what has been, and to fling away enmity and come to the betrothal of my daughter to Namara of the Lake.'

'I come,' answered Costello, 'because when in the time of Costello De Angalo my forebears overcame your forebears and afterwards made peace, a compact was made that a Costello might go with his body-servants and his piper to every feast given by a Dermott for ever, and a Dermott with his body-servants and his piper to every feast given by a Costello for ever.'

'If you come with evil thoughts and armed men,' said the son of Dermott flushing, 'no matter how strong your hands to wrestle and to swing the sword, it shall go badly with you, for some of my wife's clan have come out of Mayo, and my three brothers and their servants have come down from the Ox Mountains'; and while he spoke he kept his hand inside his coat as though upon the handle of a weapon.

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'No,' answered Costello, 'I but come to dance a farewell dance with your daughter.'

Dermott drew his hand out of his coat and went over to a tall pale girl who was now standing but a little way off with her mild eyes fixed upon the ground.

'Costello has come to dance a farewell dance, for he knows that you will never see one another again.'

The girl lifted her eyes and gazed at Costello, and in her gaze was that trust of the humble in the proud, the gentle in the violent, which has been the tragedy of woman from the beginning. Costello led her among the dancers, and they were soon drawn into the rhythm of the Pavane, that stately dance which, with the Saraband, the Gallead, and the Morrice dances, had driven out, among all but the most Irish of the gentry, the quicker rhythms of the verse-interwoven, pantomimic dances of earlier days; and while they danced there came over them the unutterable melancholy, the weariness with the world, the poignant and bitter pity for one another, the vague anger against common hopes and fears, which is the exultation of love. And when a dance ended and the pipers laid down their pipes and lifted their horn noggins, they stood a little from the others waiting pensively and silently for the dance to begin again and the fire in their hearts to leap up and to wrap them anew; and so they danced and danced Pavane and Saraband and Gallead and Morrice through the night long, and many stood still to watch them, and the peasants came about the door and peered in, as though they understood that they would gather their children's children about them long hence, and tell how they had seen Costello dance with Dermott's daughter Oona, and become by the telling themselves a portion of ancient romance; but through all the dancing and piping Namara of the Lake went hither and thither talking loudly

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and making foolish jokes that all might seem well with him, and old Dermott of the Sheep grew redder and redder, and looked oftener and oftener at the doorway to see if the candles there grew yellow in the dawn.

At last he saw that the moment to end had come, and, in a pause after a dance, cried out from where the horn noggins stood that his daughter would now drink the cup of betrothal; then Oona came over to where he was, and the guests stood round in a half-circle, Costello close to the wall to the right, and the piper, the labourer, the farmer, the half-witted man and the two farm lads close behind him. The old man took out of a niche in the wall the silver cup from which her mother and her mother's mother had drunk the toasts of their betrothals, and poured Poteen out of a porcelain jug and handed the cup to his daughter with the customary words, 'Drink to him whom you love the best.'

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She held the cup to her lips for a moment, and then said in a clear soft voice: 'I drink to my true love, Tumaus Costello.'

And then the cup rolled over and over on the ground, ringing like a bell, for the old man had struck her in the face and the cup had fallen, and there was a deep silence.

There were many of Namara's people among the servants now come out of the alcove, and one of them, a story-teller and poet, a last remnant of the bardic order, who had a chair and a platter in Namara's kitchen, drew a French knife out of his girdle and made as though he would strike at Costello, but in a moment a blow had hurled him to the ground, his shoulder sending the cup rolling and ringing again. The click of steel had followed quickly, had not there come a muttering and shouting from the peasants about the door and from those crowding up behind them; and all knew that these were no children of Queen's Irish or friendly Namaras and Dermotts, but of the wild Irish about Lough Gara and Lough Cara, who rowed their skin coracles, and had masses of hair over their eyes, and left the right arms of their children unchristened that they might give the stouter blows, and swore only by St. Atty and sun and moon, and worshipped beauty and strength more than St. Atty or sun and moon.

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Costello's hand had rested upon the handle of his sword and his knuckles had grown white, but now he drew it away, and, followed by those who were with him, strode towards the door, the dancers giving way before him, the most angrily and slowly, and with glances at the muttering and shouting peasants, but some gladly and quickly, because the glory of his fame was over him. He passed through the fierce and friendly peasant faces, and came where his good horse and the rough-haired garrons were tied to bushes; and mounted and bade his ungainly bodyguard mount also and ride into the narrow boreen. When they had gone a little way, Duallach, who rode last, turned towards the house where a little group of Dermotts and Namaras stood next to a more numerous group of countrymen, and cried: 'Dermott, you deserve to be as you are this hour, a lantern without a candle, a purse without a penny, a sheep without wool, for your hand was ever niggardly to piper and fiddler and story-teller and to poor travelling people.' He had not done before the three old Dermotts from the Ox Mountains had run towards their horses, and old Dermott himself had caught the bridle of a garron of the Namaras and was calling to the others to follow him; and many blows and many deaths had been had not the countrymen caught up still glowing sticks from the ashes of the fires and hurled them among the horses with loud cries, making all plunge and rear, and some break from those who held them, the whites of their eyes gleaming in the dawn.

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For the next few weeks Costello had no lack of news of Oona, for now a woman selling eggs or fowls, and now a man or a woman on pilgrimage to the Well of the Rocks, would tell him how his love had fallen ill the day after St. John's Eve, and how she was a little better or a little worse, as it might be; and though he looked to his horses and his cows and goats as usual, the common and uncomely, the dust upon the roads, the songs of men returning from fairs and wakes, men playing cards in the corners of fields on Sundays and Saints' Days, the rumours of battles and changes in the great world, the deliberate purposes of those about him, troubled him with an inexplicable trouble; and the country people still remember how when night had fallen he would bid Duallach of the Pipes tell, to the chirping of the crickets, 'The Son of Apple,' 'The Beauty of the World,' 'The King of Ireland's Son,' or some other of those traditional tales which were as much a piper's business as 'The Green Bunch of Rushes,' 'The Unchion Stream,' or 'The Chiefs of Breffeny'; and while the boundless and phantasmal world of the legends was a-building, would abandon himself to the dreams of his sorrow.

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Duallach would often pause to tell how some clan of the wild Irish had descended from an incomparable King of the Blue Belt, or Warrior of the Ozier Wattle, or to tell with many curses how all the strangers and most of the Queen's Irish were the seed of the misshapen and horned People from Under the Sea or of the servile and creeping Ferbolg; but Costello cared only for the love sorrows, and no matter whither the stories wandered, whether to the Isle of the Red Lough, where the blessed are, or to the malign country of the Hag of the East, Oona alone endured their shadowy hardships; for it was she and no king's daughter of old who was hidden in the steel tower under the water with the folds of the Worm of Nine Eyes round and about her prison; and it was she who won by seven years of service the right to deliver from hell all she could carry, and carried away multitudes clinging with worn fingers to the hem of her dress; and it was she who endured dumbness for a year because of the little thorn of enchantment the fairies had thrust into her tongue; and it was a lock of her hair, coiled in a little carved box, which gave so great a light that men threshed by it from sundown to sunrise, and awoke so great a wonder that kings spent years in wandering or fell before unknown armies in seeking to discover her hiding-

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place; for there was no beauty in the world but hers, no tragedy in the world but hers: and when at last the voice of the piper, grown gentle with the wisdom of old romance, was silent, and his rheumatic steps had toiled upstairs and to bed, and Costello had dipped his fingers into the little delf font of holy water and begun to pray to Mary of the Seven Sorrows, the blue eyes and star-covered dress of the painting in the chapel faded from his imagination, and the brown eyes and homespun dress of Dermott's daughter Winny came in their stead; for there was no tenderness in the world but hers. He was of those ascetics of passion who keep their hearts pure for love or for hatred as other men for God, for Mary and for the Saints, and who, when the hour of their visitation arrives, come to the Divine Essence by the bitter tumult, the Garden of Gethsemane, and the desolate Rood ordained for immortal passions in mortal hearts.

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One day a serving-man rode up to Costello, who was helping his two lads to reap a meadow, and gave him a letter, and rode away without a word; and the letter contained these words in English: 'Tumaus Costello, my daughter is very ill. The wise woman from Knock-na-Sidhe has seen her, and says she will die unless you come to her. I therefore bid you come to her, whose peace you stole by treachery.—DERMOTT, THE SON OF DERMOTT.'

Costello threw down his scythe, and sent one of the lads for Duallach, who had become woven into his mind with Oona, and himself saddled his great horse and Duallach's garron.

When they came to Dermott's house it was late afternoon, and Lough Gara lay down below them, blue, mirror-like, and deserted; and though they had seen, when at a distance, dark figures moving about the door, the house appeared not less deserted than the Lough. The door stood half open, and Costello knocked upon it again and again, so that a number of lake gulls flew up out of the grass and circled screaming over his head, but there was no answer.

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'There is no one here,' said Duallach, 'for Dermott of the Sheep is too proud to welcome Costello the Proud,' and he threw the door open, and they saw a ragged, dirty, very old woman, who sat upon the floor leaning against the wall. Costello knew that it was Bridget Delaney, a deaf and dumb beggar; and she, when she saw him, stood up and made a sign to him to follow, and led him and his companion up a stair and down a long corridor to a closed door. She pushed the door open and went a little way off and sat down as before; Duallach sat upon the ground also, but close to the door, and Costello went and gazed upon Winny sleeping upon a bed. He sat upon a chair beside her and waited, and a long time passed and still she slept on, and then Duallach motioned to him through the door to wake her, but he hushed his very breath, that she might sleep on, for his heart was full of that un governable pity which makes the fading heart of the lover a shadow of the divine heart. Presently he turned to Duallach and said: 'It is not right that I stay here where there are none of her kindred, for the common people are always ready to blame the beautiful.' And then they went down and stood at the door of the house and waited, but the evening wore on and no one came.

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'It was a foolish man that called you Proud Costello,' Duallach cried at last; 'had he seen you waiting and waiting where they left none but a beggar to welcome you, it is Humble Costello he would have called you.'

Then Costello mounted and Duallach mounted, but when they had ridden a little way Costello tightened the reins and made his horse stand still. Many minutes passed, and then Duallach cried: 'It is no wonder that you fear to offend Dermott of the Sheep, for he has many brothers and friends, and though he is old, he is a strong man and ready with his hands, and he is of the Queen's Irish, and the enemies of the Gael are upon his side.'

And Costello answered flushing and looking towards the house: 'I swear by the Mother of God that I will never return there again if they do not send after me before I pass the ford in the Brown River,' and he rode on, but so very slowly that the sun went down and the bats began to fly over the bogs. When he came to the river he lingered awhile upon the bank among the flowers of the flag, but presently rode out into the middle and stopped his horse in a foaming shallow. Duallach, however, crossed over and waited on a further bank above a deeper place. After a good while Duallach cried out again, and this time very bitterly: 'It was a fool who begot you and a fool who bore you, and they are fools of all fools who say you come of an old and noble stock, for you come of whey-faced beggars who travelled from door to door, bowing to gentles and to serving-men.'

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With bent head, Costello rode through the river and stood beside him, and would have spoken had not hoofs clattered on the further bank and a horseman splashed towards them. It was a serving-man of Dermott's, and he said, speaking breathlessly like one who had ridden hard: 'Tumaus Costello, I come to bid you again to Dermott's house. When you had gone, his daughter Winny awoke and called your name, for you had been in her dreams. Bridget Delaney the Dummy saw her lips move and the trouble upon her, and came where we were hiding in the wood above the house and took Dermott of the Sheep by the coat and brought him to his daughter. He saw the trouble upon her, and bid me ride his own horse to bring you the quicker.'

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Then Costello turned towards the piper Duallach Daly, and taking him about the waist lifted him out of the saddle and hurled him against a grey rock that rose up out of the river, so that he fell lifeless into the deep place, and the waters swept over the tongue which God had made bitter, that there might be a story in men's ears in after time. Then plunging his spurs into the horse, he rode away furiously toward the north-west, along the edge of the river, and did not pause until he came to another and smoother ford, and saw the rising moon mirrored in the water. He paused for a moment irresolute, and then rode into the ford and on over the Ox Mountains, and down

towards the sea; his eyes almost continually resting upon the moon which glimmered in the dimness like a great white rose hung on the lattice of some boundless and phantasmal world. But now his horse, long dark with sweat and breathing hard, for he kept spurring it to an extreme speed, fell heavily, hurling him into the grass at the road-side. He tried to make it stand up, and failing in this, went on alone towards the moonlight; and came to the sea and saw a schooner lying there at anchor. Now that he could go no further because of the sea, he found that he was very tired and the night very cold, and went into a shebeen close to the shore and threw himself down upon a bench. The room was full of Spanish and Irish sailors who had just smuggled a cargo of wine and ale, and were waiting a favourable wind to set out again. A Spaniard offered him a drink in bad Gaelic. He drank it greedily and began talking wildly and rapidly.

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For some three weeks the wind blew inshore or with too great violence, and the sailors stayed drinking and talking and playing cards, and Costello stayed with them, sleeping upon a bench in the shebeen, and drinking and talking and playing more than any. He soon lost what little money he had, and then his horse, which some one had brought from the mountain boreen, to a Spaniard, who sold it to a farmer from the mountains, and then his long cloak and his spurs and his boots of soft leather. At last a gentle wind blew towards Spain, and the crew rowed out to their schooner, singing Gaelic and Spanish songs, and lifted the anchor, and in a little while the white sails had dropped under the horizon. Then Costello turned homeward, his life gaping before him, and walked all day, coming in the early evening to the road that went from near Lough Gara to the southern edge of Lough Cay. Here he overtook a great crowd of peasants and farmers, who were walking very slowly after two priests and a group of well-dressed persons, certain of whom were carrying a coffin. He stopped an old man and asked whose burying it was and whose people they were, and the old man answered: 'It is the burying of Oona, Dermott's daughter, and we are the Namaras and the Dermotts and their following, and you are Tumaus Costello who murdered her.'

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Costello went on towards the head of the procession, passing men who looked at him with fierce eyes, and only vaguely understanding what he had heard, for now that he had lost the understanding that belongs to good health, it seemed impossible that a gentleness and a beauty which had been so long the world's heart could pass away. Presently he stopped and asked again whose burying it was, and a man answered: 'We are carrying Dermott's daughter Winny whom you murdered, to be buried in the island of the Holy Trinity,' and the man stooped and picked up a stone and cast it at Costello, striking him on the cheek and making the blood flow out over his face. Costello went on scarcely feeling the blow, and coming to those about the coffin, shouldered his way into the midst of them, and laying his hand upon the coffin, asked in a loud voice: 'Who is in this coffin?'

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The three old Dermotts from the Ox Mountains caught up stones and bid those about them do the same; and he was driven from the road, covered with wounds, and but for the priests would surely have been killed.

When the procession had passed on, Costello began to follow again, and saw from a distance the coffin laid upon a large boat, and those about it get into other boats, and the boats move slowly over the water to Insula Trinitatis; and after a time he saw the boats return and their passengers mingle with the crowd upon the bank, and all disperse by many roads and boreens. It seemed to him that Winny was somewhere on the island smiling gently as of old, and when all had gone he swam in the way the boats had been rowed and found the new-made grave beside the ruined Abbey of the Holy Trinity, and threw himself upon it, calling to Oona to come to him. Above him the square ivy leaves trembled, and all about him white moths moved over white flowers, and sweet odours drifted through the dim air.

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He lay there all that night and through the day after, from time to time calling her to come to him, but when the third night came he had forgotten, worn out with hunger and sorrow, that her body lay in the earth beneath; but only knew she was somewhere near and would not come to him.

Just before dawn, the hour when the peasants hear his ghostly voice crying out, his pride awoke and he called loudly: 'Winny, daughter of Dermott of the Sheep, if you do not come to me I will go and never return to the island of the Holy Trinity,' and before his voice had died away a cold and whirling wind had swept over the island and he saw many figures rushing past, women of the Sidhe with crowns of silver and dim floating drapery; and then Oona, but no longer smiling gently, for she passed him swiftly and angrily, and as she passed struck him upon the face crying: 'Then go and never return.'

He would have followed, and was calling out her name, when the whole glimmering company rose up into the air, and, rushing together in the shape of a great silvery rose, faded into the ashen dawn.

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Costello got up from the grave, understanding nothing but that he had made his beloved angry and that she wished him to go, and wading out into the lake, began to swim. He swam on and on, but his limbs were too weary to keep him afloat, and her anger was heavy about him, and when he had gone a little way he sank without a struggle, like a man passing into sleep and dreams.

The next day a poor fisherman found him among the reeds upon the lake shore, lying upon the white lake sand with his arms flung out as though he lay upon a rood, and carried him to his own house. And the very poor lamented over him and sang the keen, and when the time had come, laid him in the Abbey on Insula Trinitatis with only the ruined altar between him and Dermott's

daughter, and planted above them two ash-trees that in after days wove their branches together and mingled their trembling leaves.

O blessed and happy he, who knowing the mysteries of the gods, sanctifies his life, and purifies his soul, celebrating orgies in the mountains with holy purifications.—*Euripides*.

It is now more than ten years since I met, for the last time, Michael Robartes, and for the first time and the last time his friends and fellow students; and witnessed his and their tragic end, and endured those strange experiences, which have changed me so that my writings have grown less popular and less intelligible, and driven me almost to the verge of taking the habit of St. Dominic. I had just published *Rosa Alchemica*, a little work on the Alchemists, somewhat in the manner of Sir Thomas Browne, and had received many letters from believers in the arcane sciences, upbraiding what they called my timidity, for they could not believe so evident sympathy but the sympathy of the artist, which is half pity, for everything which has moved men's hearts in any age. I had discovered, early in my researches, that their doctrine was no merely chemical phantasy, but a philosophy they applied to the world, to the elements and to man himself; and that they sought to fashion gold out of common metals merely as part of an universal transmutation of all things into some divine and imperishable substance; and this enabled me to make my little book a fanciful reverie over the transmutation of life into art, and a cry of measureless desire for a world made wholly of essences.

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I was sitting dreaming of what I had written, in my house in one of the old parts of Dublin; a house my ancestors had made almost famous through their part in the politics of the city and their friendships with the famous men of their generations; and was feeling an unwonted happiness at having at last accomplished a long-cherished design, and made my rooms an expression of this favourite doctrine. The portraits, of more historical than artistic interest, had gone; and tapestry, full of the blue and bronze of peacocks, fell over the doors, and shut out all history and activity untouched with beauty and peace; and now when I looked at my Crevelli and pondered on the rose in the hand of the Virgin, wherein the form was so delicate and precise that it seemed more like a thought than a flower, or at the grey dawn and rapturous faces of my Francesca, I knew all a Christian's ecstasy without his slavery to rule and custom; when I pondered over the antique bronze gods and goddesses, which I had mortgaged my house to buy, I had all a pagan's delight in various beauty and without his terror at sleepless destiny and his labour with many sacrifices; and I had only to go to my bookshelf, where every book was bound in leather, stamped with intricate ornament, and of a carefully chosen colour: Shakespeare in the orange of the glory of the world, Dante in the dull red of his anger, Milton in the blue grey of his formal calm; and I could experience what I would of human passions without their bitterness and without satiety. I had gathered about me all gods because I believed in none, and experienced every pleasure because I gave myself to none, but held myself apart, individual, indissoluble, a mirror of polished steel: I looked in the triumph of this imagination at the birds of Hera, glowing in the firelight as though they were wrought of jewels; and to my mind, for which symbolism was a necessity, they seemed the doorkeepers of my world, shutting out all that was not of as affluent a beauty as their own; and for a moment I thought as I had thought in so many other moments, that it was possible to rob life of every bitterness except the bitterness of death; and then a thought which had followed this thought, time after time, filled me with a passionate sorrow. All those forms: that Madonna with her brooding purity, those rapturous faces singing in the morning light, those bronze divinities with their passionless dignity, those wild shapes rushing from despair to despair, belonged to a divine world wherein I had no part; and every experience, however profound, every perception, however exquisite, would bring me the bitter dream of a limitless energy I could never know, and even in my most perfect moment I would be two selves, the one watching with heavy eyes the other's moment of content. I had heaped about me the gold born in the crucibles of others; but the supreme dream of the alchemist, the transmutation of the weary heart into a weariless spirit, was as far from me as, I doubted not, it had been from him also. I turned to my last purchase, a set of alchemical apparatus which, the dealer in the Rue le Peletier had assured me, once belonged to Raymond Lully, and as I joined the *alembic* to the *athanor* and laid the *lavacrum maris* at their side, I understood the alchemical doctrine, that all beings, divided from the great deep where spirits wander, one and yet a multitude, are weary; and sympathized, in the pride of my connoisseurship, with the consuming thirst for destruction which made the alchemist veil under his symbols of lions and dragons, of eagles and ravens, of dew and of nitre, a search for an essence which would dissolve all mortal things. I repeated to myself the ninth key of Basilius Valentinus, in which he compares the fire of the last day to the fire of the alchemist, and the world to the alchemist's furnace, and would have us know that all must be dissolved before the divine substance, material gold or immaterial ecstasy, awake. I had dissolved indeed the mortal world and lived amid immortal essences, but had obtained no miraculous ecstasy. As I thought of these things, I drew aside the curtains and looked out into the darkness, and it seemed to my troubled fancy that all those little points of light filling the sky were the furnaces of innumerable divine alchemists, who labour continually, turning lead into gold, weariness into ecstasy, bodies into souls, the darkness into God; and at their perfect labour my mortality grew heavy, and I cried out, as so many dreamers and men of letters in our age have cried, for the birth of that elaborate spiritual beauty which could alone uplift souls weighted with so many dreams.

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II

My reverie was broken by a loud knocking at the door, and I wondered the more at this because I had no visitors, and had bid my servants do all things silently, lest they broke the dream of my inner life. Feeling a little curious, I resolved to go to the door myself, and, taking one of the silver candlesticks from the mantelpiece, began to descend the stairs. The servants appeared to be out, for though the sound poured through every corner and crevice of the house

there was no stir in the lower rooms. I remembered that because my needs were so few, my part in life so little, they had begun to come and go as they would, often leaving me alone for hours. The emptiness and silence of a world from which I had driven everything but dreams suddenly overwhelmed me, and I shuddered as I drew the bolt. I found before me Michael Robartes, whom I had not seen for years, and whose wild red hair, fierce eyes, sensitive, tremulous lips and rough clothes made him look now, just as they used to do fifteen years before, something between a debauchee, a saint, and a peasant. He had recently come to Ireland, he said, and wished to see me on a matter of importance; indeed, the only matter of importance for him and for me. His voice brought up before me our student years in Paris, and remembering the magnetic power he had once possessed over me, a little fear mingled with much annoyance at this irrelevant intrusion, as I led the way up the wide staircase, where Swift had passed joking and railing, and Curran telling stories and quoting Greek, in simpler days, before men's minds, subtilized and complicated by the romantic movement in art and literature, began to tremble on the verge of some unimagined revelation. I felt that my hand shook, and saw that the light of the candle wavered and quivered more than it need have upon the Mænads on the old French panels, making them look like the first beings slowly shaping in the formless and void darkness. When the door had closed, and the peacock curtain, glimmering like many-coloured flame, fell between us and the world, I felt, in a way I could not understand, that some singular and unexpected thing was about to happen. I went over to the mantelpiece, and finding that a little chainless bronze censer, set, upon the outside, with pieces of painted china by Orazio Fontana, which I had filled with antique amulets, had fallen upon its side and poured out its contents, I began to gather the amulets into the bowl, partly to collect my thoughts and partly with that habitual reverence which seemed to me the due of things so long connected with secret hopes and fears. 'I see,' said Michael Robartes, 'that you are still fond of incense, and I can show you an incense more precious than any you have ever seen,' and as he spoke he took the censer out of my hand and put the amulets in a little heap between the *athanor* and the *alembic*. I sat down, and he sat down at the side of the fire, and sat there for awhile looking into the fire, and holding the censer in his hand. 'I have come to ask you something,' he said, 'and the incense will fill the room, and our thoughts, with its sweet odour while we are talking. I got it from an old man in Syria, who said it was made from flowers, of one kind with the flowers that laid their heavy purple petals upon the hands and upon the hair and upon the feet of Christ in the Garden of Gethsemane, and folded Him in their heavy breath, until He cried against the cross and his destiny.' He shook some dust into the censer out of a small silk bag, and set the censer upon the floor and lit the dust which sent up a blue stream of smoke, that spread out over the ceiling, and flowed downwards again until it was like Milton's banyan tree. It filled me, as incense often does, with a faint sleepiness, so that I started when he said, 'I have come to ask you that question which I asked you in Paris, and which you left Paris rather than answer.'

He had turned his eyes towards me, and I saw them glitter in the firelight, and through the incense, as I replied: 'You mean, will I become an initiate of your Order of the Alchemical Rose? I would not consent in Paris, when I was full of unsatisfied desire, and now that I have at last fashioned my life according to my desire, am I likely to consent?'

'You have changed greatly since then,' he answered. 'I have read your books, and now I see you among all these images, and I understand you better than you do yourself, for I have been with many and many dreamers at the same cross-ways. You have shut away the world and gathered the gods about you, and if you do not throw yourself at their feet, you will be always full of lassitude, and of wavering purpose, for a man must forget he is miserable in the bustle and noise of the multitude in this world and in time; or seek a mystical union with the multitude who govern this world and time.' And then he murmured something I could not hear, and as though to someone I could not see.

For a moment the room appeared to darken, as it used to do when he was about to perform some singular experiment, and in the darkness the peacocks upon the doors seemed to glow with a more intense colour. I cast off the illusion, which was, I believe, merely caused by memory, and by the twilight of incense, for I would not acknowledge that he could overcome my now mature intellect; and I said: 'Even if I grant that I need a spiritual belief and some form of worship, why should I go to Eleusis and not to Calvary?' He leaned forward and began speaking with a slightly rhythmical intonation, and as he spoke I had to struggle again with the shadow, as of some older night than the night of the sun, which began to dim the light of the candles and to blot out the little gleams upon the corner of picture-frames and on the bronze divinities, and to turn the blue of the incense to a heavy purple; while it left the peacocks to glimmer and glow as though each separate colour were a living spirit. I had fallen into a profound dream-like reverie in which I heard him speaking as at a distance. 'And yet there is no one who communes with only one god,' he was saying, 'and the more a man lives in imagination and in a refined understanding, the more gods does he meet with and talk with, and the more does he come under the power of Roland, who sounded in the Valley of Roncesvalles the last trumpet of the body's will and pleasure; and of Hamlet, who saw them perishing away, and sighed; and of Faust, who looked for them up and down the world and could not find them; and under the power of all those countless divinities who have taken upon themselves spiritual bodies in the minds of the modern poets and romance writers, and under the power of the old divinities, who since the Renaissance have won everything of their ancient worship except the sacrifice of birds and fishes, the fragrance of garlands and the smoke of incense. The many think humanity made these divinities, and that it can unmake them again; but we who have seen them pass in rattling harness, and in soft robes, and heard them speak with articulate voices while we lay in deathlike trance, know that they are always making and unmaking humanity, which is indeed but the trembling of their lips.'

He had stood up and begun to walk to and fro, and had become in my waking dream a shuttle weaving an immense purple web whose folds had begun to fill the room. The room seemed to have become inexplicably silent, as though all but the web and the weaving were at an end in the world. 'They have come to us; they have come to us,' the voice began again; 'all that have ever been in your reverie, all that you have met with in books. There is Lear, his head still wet with the thunder-storm, and he laughs because you thought yourself an existence who are but a shadow, and him a shadow who is an eternal god; and there is Beatrice, with her lips half parted in a smile, as though all the stars were about to pass away in a sigh of love; and there is the mother of the God of humility who cast so great a spell over men that they have tried to unpeople their hearts that he might reign alone, but she holds in her hand the rose whose every petal is a god; and there, O swiftly she comes! is Aphrodite under a twilight falling from the wings of numberless sparrows, and about her feet are the grey and white doves.' In the midst of my dream I saw him hold out his left arm and pass his right hand over it as though he stroked the wings of doves. I made a violent effort which seemed almost to tear me in two, and said with forced determination: 'You would sweep me away into an indefinite world which fills me with terror; and yet a man is a great man just in so far as he can make his mind reflect everything with indifferent precision like a mirror.' I seemed to be perfectly master of myself, and went on, but more rapidly: 'I command you to leave me at once, for your ideas and phantasies are but the illusions that creep like maggots into civilizations when they begin to decline, and into minds when they begin to decay.' I had grown suddenly angry, and seizing the *alembeic* from the table, was about to rise and strike him with it, when the peacocks on the door behind him appeared to grow immense; and then the *alembeic* fell from my fingers and I was drowned in a tide of green and blue and bronze feathers, and as I struggled hopelessly I heard a distant voice saying: 'Our master Avicenna has written that all life proceeds out of corruption.' The glittering feathers had now covered me completely, and I knew that I had struggled for hundreds of years, and was conquered at last. I was sinking into the depth when the green and blue and bronze that seemed to fill the world became a sea of flame and swept me away, and as I was swirled along I heard a voice over my head cry, 'The mirror is broken in two pieces,' and another voice answer, 'The mirror is broken in four pieces,' and a more distant voice cry with an exultant cry, 'The mirror is broken into numberless pieces'; and then a multitude of pale hands were reaching towards me, and strange gentle faces bending above me, and half wailing and half caressing voices uttering words that were forgotten the moment they were spoken. I was being lifted out of the tide of flame, and felt my memories, my hopes, my thoughts, my will, everything I held to be myself, melting away; then I seemed to rise through numberless companies of beings who were, I understood, in some way more certain than thought, each wrapped in his eternal moment, in the perfect lifting of an arm, in a little circling of rhythmical words, in dreaming with dim eyes and half-closed eyelids. And then I passed beyond these forms, which were so beautiful they had almost ceased to be, and, having endured strange moods, melancholy, as it seemed, with the weight of many worlds, I passed into that Death which is Beauty herself, and into that Loneliness which all the multitudes desire without ceasing. All things that had ever lived seemed to come and dwell in my heart, and I in theirs; and I had never again known mortality or tears, had I not suddenly fallen from the certainty of vision into the uncertainty of dream, and become a drop of molten gold falling with immense rapidity, through a night elaborate with stars, and all about me a melancholy exultant wailing. I fell and fell and fell, and then the wailing was but the wailing of the wind in the chimney, and I awoke to find myself leaning upon the table and supporting my head with my hands. I saw the *alembeic* swaying from side to side in the distant corner it had rolled to, and Michael Robartes watching me and waiting. 'I will go wherever you will,' I said, 'and do whatever you bid me, for I have been with eternal things.' 'I knew,' he replied, 'you must need answer as you have answered, when I heard the storm begin. You must come to a great distance, for we were commanded to build our temple between the pure multitude by the waves and the impure multitude of men.'

III

I did not speak as we drove through the deserted streets, for my mind was curiously empty of familiar thoughts and experiences; it seemed to have been plucked out of the definite world and cast naked upon a shoreless sea. There were moments when the vision appeared on the point of returning, and I would half-remember, with an ecstasy of joy or sorrow, crimes and heroisms, fortunes and misfortunes; or begin to contemplate, with a sudden leaping of the heart, hopes and terrors, desires and ambitions, alien to my orderly and careful life; and then I would awake shuddering at the thought that some great imponderable being had swept through my mind. It was indeed days before this feeling passed perfectly away, and even now, when I have sought refuge in the only definite faith, I feel a great tolerance for those people with incoherent personalities, who gather in the chapels and meeting-places of certain obscure sects, because I also have felt fixed habits and principles dissolving before a power, which was *hysterica passio* or sheer madness, if you will, but was so powerful in its melancholy exultation that I tremble lest it wake again and drive me from my new-found peace.

When we came in the grey light to the great half-empty terminus, it seemed to me I was so changed that I was no more, as man is, a moment shuddering at eternity, but eternity weeping and laughing over a moment; and when we had started and Michael Robartes had fallen asleep, as he soon did, his sleeping face, in which there was no sign of all that had so shaken me and that now kept me wakeful, was to my excited mind more like a mask than a face. The fancy possessed me that the man behind it had dissolved away like salt in water, and that it laughed and sighed, appealed and denounced at the bidding of beings greater or less than man. 'This is not Michael

Robartes at all: Michael Robartes is dead; dead for ten, for twenty years perhaps,' I kept repeating to myself. I fell at last into a feverish sleep, waking up from time to time when we rushed past some little town, its slated roofs shining with wet, or still lake gleaming in the cold morning light. I had been too preoccupied to ask where we were going, or to notice what tickets Michael Robartes had taken, but I knew now from the direction of the sun that we were going westward; and presently I knew also, by the way in which the trees had grown into the semblance of tattered beggars flying with bent heads towards the east, that we were approaching the western coast. Then immediately I saw the sea between the low hills upon the left, its dull grey broken into white patches and lines.

When we left the train we had still, I found, some way to go, and set out, buttoning our coats about us, for the wind was bitter and violent. Michael Robartes was silent, seeming anxious to leave me to my thoughts; and as we walked between the sea and the rocky side of a great promontory, I realized with a new perfection what a shock had been given to all my habits of thought and of feelings, if indeed some mysterious change had not taken place in the substance of my mind, for the grey waves, plumed with scudding foam, had grown part of a teeming, fantastic inner life; and when Michael Robartes pointed to a square ancient-looking house, with a much smaller and newer building under its lee, set out on the very end of a dilapidated and almost deserted pier, and said it was the Temple of the Alchemical Rose, I was possessed with the phantasy that the sea, which kept covering it with showers of white foam, was claiming it as part of some indefinite and passionate life, which had begun to war upon our orderly and careful days, and was about to plunge the world into a night as obscure as that which followed the downfall of the classical world. One part of my mind mocked this phantastic terror, but the other, the part that still lay half plunged in vision, listened to the clash of unknown armies, and shuddered at unimaginable fanaticisms, that hung in those grey leaping waves. [122]

We had gone but a few paces along the pier when we came upon an old man, who was evidently a watchman, for he sat in an overset barrel, close to a place where masons had been lately working upon a break in the pier, and had in front of him a fire such as one sees slung under tinkers' carts. I saw that he was also a voteeen, as the peasants say, for there was a rosary hanging from a nail on the rim of the barrel, and as I saw I shuddered, and I did not know why I shuddered. We had passed him a few yards when I heard him cry in Gaelic, 'Idolaters, idolaters, go down to Hell with your witches and your devils; go down to Hell that the herrings may come again into the bay'; and for some moments I could hear him half screaming and half muttering behind us. 'Are you not afraid,' I said, 'that these wild fishing people may do some desperate thing against you?' [123]

'I and mine,' he answered, 'are long past human hurt or help, being incorporate with immortal spirits, and when we die it shall be the consummation of the supreme work. A time will come for these people also, and they will sacrifice a mullet to Artemis, or some other fish to some new divinity, unless indeed their own divinities, the Dagda, with his overflowing cauldron, Lug, with his spear dipped in poppy-juice lest it rush forth hot for battle, Aengus, with the three birds on his shoulder, Bodb and his red swineherd, and all the heroic children of Dana, set up once more their temples of grey stone. Their reign has never ceased, but only waned in power a little, for the Sidhe still pass in every wind, and dance and play at hurley, and fight their sudden battles in every hollow and on every hill; but they cannot build their temples again till there have been martyrdoms and victories, and perhaps even that long-foretold battle in the Valley of the Black Pig.' [124]

Keeping close to the wall that went about the pier on the seaward side, to escape the driving foam and the wind, which threatened every moment to lift us off our feet, we made our way in silence to the door of the square building. Michael Robartes opened it with a key, on which I saw the rust of many salt winds, and led me along a bare passage and up an uncarpeted stair to a little room surrounded with bookshelves. A meal would be brought, but only of fruit, for I must submit to a tempered fast before the ceremony, he explained, and with it a book on the doctrine and method of the Order, over which I was to spend what remained of the winter daylight. He then left me, promising to return an hour before the ceremony. I began searching among the bookshelves, and found one of the most exhaustive alchemical libraries I have ever seen. There were the works of Morienus, who hid his immortal body under a shirt of hair-cloth; of Avicenna, who was a drunkard and yet controlled numberless legions of spirits; of Alfarabi, who put so many spirits into his lute that he could make men laugh, or weep, or fall in deadly trance as he would; of Lully, who transformed himself into the likeness of a red cock; of Flamel, who with his wife Parnella achieved the elixir many hundreds of years ago, and is fabled to live still in Arabia among the Dervishes; and of many of less fame. There were very few mystics but alchemical mystics, and because, I had little doubt, of the devotion to one god of the greater number and of the limited sense of beauty, which Robartes would hold an inevitable consequence; but I did notice a complete set of facsimiles of the prophetic writings of William Blake, and probably because of the multitudes that thronged his illumination and were 'like the gay fishes on the wave when the moon sucks up the dew.' I noted also many poets and prose writers of every age, but only those who were a little weary of life, as indeed the greatest have been everywhere, and who cast their imagination to us, as a something they needed no longer now that they were going up in their fiery chariots. [125]

Presently I heard a tap at the door, and a woman came in and laid a little fruit upon the table. I judged that she had once been handsome, but her cheeks were hollowed by what I would have held, had I seen her anywhere else, an excitement of the flesh and a thirst for pleasure, instead of [126]

which it doubtless was an excitement of the imagination and a thirst for beauty. I asked her some question concerning the ceremony, but getting no answer except a shake of the head, saw that I must await initiation in silence. When I had eaten, she came again, and having laid a curiously wrought bronze box on the table, lighted the candles, and took away the plates and the remnants. So soon as I was alone, I turned to the box, and found that the peacocks of Hera spread out their tails over the sides and lid, against a background, on which were wrought great stars, as though to affirm that the heavens were a part of their glory. In the box was a book bound in vellum, and having upon the vellum and in very delicate colours, and in gold, the alchemical rose with many spears thrusting against it, but in vain, as was shown by the shattered points of those nearest to the petals. The book was written upon vellum, and in beautiful clear letters, interspersed with symbolical pictures and illuminations, after the manner of the *Splendor Solis*. [127]

The first chapter described how six students, of Celtic descent, gave themselves separately to the study of alchemy, and solved, one the mystery of the Pelican, another the mystery of the green Dragon, another the mystery of the Eagle, another that of Salt and Mercury. What seemed a succession of accidents, but was, the book declared, the contrivance of preternatural powers, brought them together in the garden of an inn in the South of France, and while they talked together the thought came to them that alchemy was the gradual distillation of the contents of the soul, until they were ready to put off the mortal and put on the immortal. An owl passed, rustling among the vine-leaves overhead, and then an old woman came, leaning upon a stick, and, sitting close to them, took up the thought where they had dropped it. Having expounded the whole principle of spiritual alchemy, and bid them found the Order of the Alchemical Rose, she passed from among them, and when they would have followed was nowhere to be seen. They formed themselves into an Order, holding their goods and making their researches in common, and, as they became perfect in the alchemical doctrine, apparitions came and went among them, and taught them more and more marvellous mysteries. The book then went on to expound so much of these as the neophyte was permitted to know, dealing at the outset and at considerable length with the independent reality of our thoughts, which was, it declared, the doctrine from which all true doctrines rose. If you imagine, it said, the semblance of a living being, it is at once possessed by a wandering soul, and goes hither and hither working good or evil, until the moment of its death has come; and gave many examples, received, it said, from many gods. Eros had taught them how to fashion forms in which a divine soul could dwell, and whisper what they would into sleeping minds; and Ate, forms from which demonic beings could pour madness, or unquiet dreams, into sleeping blood; and Hermes, that if you powerfully imagined a hound at your bedside it would keep watch there until you woke, and drive away all but the mightiest demons, but that if your imagination was weakly, the hound would be weakly also, and the demons prevail, and the hound soon die; and Aphrodite, that if you made, by a strong imagining, a dove crowned with silver and had it flutter over your head, its soft cooing would make sweet dreams of immortal love gather and brood over mortal sleep; and all divinities alike had revealed with many warnings and lamentations that all minds are continually giving birth to such beings, and sending them forth to work health or disease, joy or madness. If you would give forms to the evil powers, it went on, you were to make them ugly, thrusting out a lip, with the thirsts of life, or breaking the proportions of a body with the burdens of life; but the divine powers would only appear in beautiful shapes, which are but, as it were, shapes trembling out of existence, folding up into a timeless ecstasy, drifting with half-shut eyes, into a sleepy stillness. The bodiless souls who descended into these forms were what men call the moods; and worked all great changes in the world; for just as the magician or the artist could call them when he would, so they could call out of the mind of the magician or the artist, or if they were demons, out of the mind of the mad or the ignoble, what shape they would, and through its voice and its gestures pour themselves out upon the world. In this way all great events were accomplished; a mood, a divinity, or a demon, first descending like a faint sigh into men's minds and then changing their thoughts and their actions until hair that was yellow had grown black, or hair that was black had grown yellow, and empires moved their border, as though they were but drifts of leaves. The rest of the book contained symbols of form, and sound, and colour, and their attribution to divinities and demons, so that the initiate might fashion a shape for any divinity or any demon, and be as powerful as Avicenna among those who live under the roots of tears and of laughter. [128] [129] [130]

IV

A couple of hours after sunset Michael Robartes returned and told me that I would have to learn the steps of an exceedingly antique dance, because before my initiation could be perfected I had to join three times in a magical dance, for rhythm was the wheel of Eternity, on which alone the transient and accidental could be broken, and the spirit set free. I found that the steps, which were simple enough, resembled certain antique Greek dances, and having been a good dancer in my youth and the master of many curious Gaelic steps, I soon had them in my memory. He then robed me and himself in a costume which suggested by its shape both Greece and Egypt, but by its crimson colour a more passionate life than theirs; and having put into my hands a little chainless censer of bronze, wrought into the likeness of a rose, by some modern craftsman, he told me to open a small door opposite to the door by which I had entered. I put my hand to the handle, but the moment I did so the fumes of the incense, helped perhaps by his mysterious glamour, made me fall again into a dream, in which I seemed to be a mask, lying on the counter of a little Eastern shop. Many persons, with eyes so bright and still that I knew them for more than human, came in and tried me on their faces, but at last flung me into a corner with a little laughter; but all this passed in a moment, for when I awoke my hand was still upon the handle. I opened the door, and found myself in a marvellous passage, along whose sides were many [131]

divinities wrought in a mosaic, not less beautiful than the mosaic in the Baptistery at Ravenna, but of a less severe beauty; the predominant colour of each divinity, which was surely a symbolic colour, being repeated in the lamps that hung from the ceiling, a curiously-scented lamp before every divinity. I passed on, marvelling exceedingly how these enthusiasts could have created all this beauty in so remote a place, and half persuaded to believe in a material alchemy, by the sight of so much hidden wealth; the censer filling the air, as I passed, with smoke of ever-changing colour. [132]

I stopped before a door, on whose bronze panels were wrought great waves in whose shadow were faint suggestions of terrible faces. Those beyond it seemed to have heard our steps, for a voice cried: 'Is the work of the Incorruptible Fire at an end?' and immediately Michael Robartes answered: 'The perfect gold has come from the *athanor*.' The door swung open, and we were in a great circular room, and among men and women who were dancing slowly in crimson robes. Upon the ceiling was an immense rose wrought in mosaic; and about the walls, also in mosaic, was a battle of gods and angels, the gods glimmering like rubies and sapphires, and the angels of the one greyness, because, as Michael Robartes whispered, they had renounced their divinity, and turned from the unfolding of their separate hearts, out of love for a God of humility and sorrow. Pillars supported the roof and made a kind of circular cloister, each pillar being a column of confused shapes, divinities, it seemed, of the wind, who rose as in a whirling dance of more than human vehemence, and playing upon pipes and cymbals; and from among these shapes were thrust out hands, and in these hands were censers. I was bid place my censer also in a hand and take my place and dance, and as I turned from the pillars towards the dancers, I saw that the floor was of a green stone, and that a pale Christ on a pale cross was wrought in the midst. I asked Robartes the meaning of this, and was told that they desired 'To trouble His unity with their multitudinous feet.' The dance wound in and out, tracing upon the floor the shapes of petals that copied the petals in the rose overhead, and to the sound of hidden instruments which were perhaps of an antique pattern, for I have never heard the like; and every moment the dance was more passionate, until all the winds of the world seemed to have awakened under our feet. After a little I had grown weary, and stood under a pillar watching the coming and going of those flame-like figures; until gradually I sank into a half-dream, from which I was awakened by seeing the petals of the great rose, which had no longer the look of mosaic, falling slowly through the incense-heavy air, and, as they fell, shaping into the likeness of living beings of an extraordinary beauty. Still faint and cloud-like, they began to dance, and as they danced took a more and more definite shape, so that I was able to distinguish beautiful Grecian faces and august Egyptian faces, and now and again to name a divinity by the staff in his hand or by a bird fluttering over his head; and soon every mortal foot danced by the white foot of an immortal; and in the troubled eyes that looked into untroubled shadowy eyes, I saw the brightness of uttermost desire as though they had found at length, after unreckonable wandering, the lost love of their youth. Sometimes, but only for a moment, I saw a faint solitary figure with a veiled face, and carrying a faint torch, flit among the dancers, but like a dream within a dream, like a shadow of a shadow, and I knew by an understanding born from a deeper fountain than thought, that it was Eros himself, and that his face was veiled because no man or woman from the beginning of the world has ever known what love is, or looked into his eyes, for Eros alone of divinities is altogether a spirit, and hides in passions not of his essence if he would commune with a mortal heart. So that if a man love nobly he knows love through infinite pity, unspeakable trust, unending sympathy; and if ignobly through vehement jealousy, sudden hatred, and unappeasable desire; but unveiled love he never knows. While I thought these things, a voice cried to me from the crimson figures: 'Into the dance! there is none that can be spared out of the dance; into the dance! into the dance! that the gods may make them bodies out of the substance of our hearts'; and before I could answer, a mysterious wave of passion, that seemed like the soul of the dance moving within our souls, took hold of me, and I was swept, neither consenting nor refusing, into the midst. I was dancing with an immortal august woman, who had black lilies in her hair, and her dreamy gesture seemed laden with a wisdom more profound than the darkness that is between star and star, and with a love like the love that breathed upon the waters; and as we danced on and on, the incense drifted over us and round us, covering us away as in the heart of the world, and ages seemed to pass, and tempests to awake and perish in the folds of our robes and in her heavy hair. [133] [134] [135] [136]

Suddenly I remembered that her eyelids had never quivered, and that her lilies had not dropped a black petal, or shaken from their places, and understood with a great horror that I danced with one who was more or less than human, and who was drinking up my soul as an ox drinks up a wayside pool; and I fell, and darkness passed over me.

V

I awoke suddenly as though something had awakened me, and saw that I was lying on a roughly painted floor, and that on the ceiling, which was at no great distance, was a roughly painted rose, and about me on the walls half-finished paintings. The pillars and the censers had gone; and near me a score of sleepers lay wrapped in disordered robes, their upturned faces looking to my imagination like hollow masks; and a chill dawn was shining down upon them from a long window I had not noticed before; and outside the sea roared. I saw Michael Robartes lying at a little distance and beside him an overset bowl of wrought bronze which looked as though it had once held incense. As I sat thus, I heard a sudden tumult of angry men and women's voices mix with the roaring of the sea; and leaping to my feet, I went quickly to Michael Robartes, and tried to shake him out of his sleep. I then seized him by the shoulder and tried to lift him, but he fell backwards, and sighed faintly; and the voices became louder and angrier; and there was a [137]

sound of heavy blows upon the door, which opened on to the pier. Suddenly I heard a sound of rending wood, and I knew it had begun to give, and I ran to the door of the room. I pushed it open and came out upon a passage whose bare boards clattered under my feet, and found in the passage another door which led into an empty kitchen; and as I passed through the door I heard two crashes in quick succession, and knew by the sudden noise of feet and the shouts that the door which opened on to the pier had fallen inwards. I ran from the kitchen and out into a small yard, and from this down some steps which descended the seaward and sloping side of the pier, and from the steps clambered along the water's edge, with the angry voices ringing in my ears. This part of the pier had been but lately refaced with blocks of granite, so that it was almost clear of seaweed; but when I came to the old part, I found it so slippery with green weed that I had to climb up on to the roadway. I looked towards the Temple of the Alchemical Rose, where the fishermen and the women were still shouting, but somewhat more faintly, and saw that there was no one about the door or upon the pier; but as I looked, a little crowd hurried out of the door and began gathering large stones from where they were heaped up in readiness for the next time a storm shattered the pier, when they would be laid under blocks of granite. While I stood watching the crowd, an old man, who was, I think, the voteen, pointed to me, and screamed out something, and the crowd whitened, for all the faces had turned towards me. I ran, and it was well for me that pullers of the oar are poorer men with their feet than with their arms and their bodies; and yet while I ran I scarcely heard the following feet or the angry voices, for many voices of exultation and lamentation, which were forgotten as a dream is forgotten the moment they were heard, seemed to be ringing in the air over my head.

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There are moments even now when I seem to hear those voices of exultation and lamentation, and when the indefinite world, which has but half lost its mastery over my heart and my intellect, seems about to claim a perfect mastery; but I carry the rosary about my neck, and when I hear, or seem to hear them, I press it to my heart and say: 'He whose name is Legion is at our doors deceiving our intellects with subtlety and flattering our hearts with beauty, and we have no trust but in Thee'; and then the war that rages within me at other times is still, and I am at peace.

[139]

'Will you permit me, Aherne,' I said, 'to ask you a question, which I have wanted to ask you for years, and have not asked because we have grown nearly strangers? Why did you refuse the berretta, and almost at the last moment? When you and I lived together, you cared neither for wine, women, nor money, and had thoughts for nothing but theology and mysticism.' I had watched through dinner for a moment to put my question, and ventured now, because he had thrown off a little of the reserve and indifference which, ever since his last return from Italy, had taken the place of our once close friendship. He had just questioned me, too, about certain private and almost sacred things, and my frankness had earned, I thought, a like frankness from him.

When I began to speak he was lifting to his lips a glass of that old wine which he could choose so well and valued so little; and while I spoke, he set it slowly and meditatively upon the table and held it there, its deep red light dyeing his long delicate fingers. The impression of his face and form, as they were then, is still vivid with me, and is inseparable from another and fanciful impression: the impression of a man holding a flame in his naked hand. He was to me, at that moment, the supreme type of our race, which, when it has risen above, or is sunken below, the formalisms of half-education and the rationalisms of conventional affirmation and denial, turns away, unless my hopes for the world and for the Church have made me blind, from practicable desires and intuitions towards desires so unbounded that no human vessel can contain them, intuitions so immaterial that their sudden and far-off fire leaves heavy darkness about hand and foot. He had the nature, which is half monk, half soldier of fortune, and must needs turn action into dreaming, and dreaming into action; and for such there is no order, no finality, no contentment in this world. When he and I had been students in Paris, we had belonged to a little group which devoted itself to speculations about alchemy and mysticism. More orthodox in most of his beliefs than Michael Robartes, he had surpassed him in a fanciful hatred of all life, and this hatred had found expression in the curious paradox—half borrowed from some fanatical monk, half invented by himself—that the beautiful arts were sent into the world to overthrow nations, and finally life herself, by sowing everywhere unlimited desires, like torches thrown into a burning city. This idea was not at the time, I believe, more than a paradox, a plume of the pride of youth; and it was only after his return to Ireland that he endured the fermentation of belief which is coming upon our people with the reawakening of their imaginative life. [144]

Presently he stood up, saying: 'Come, and I will show you, for you at any rate will understand,' and taking candles from the table, he lit the way into the long paved passage that led to his private chapel. We passed between the portraits of the Jesuits and priests—some of no little fame—his family had given to the Church; and engravings and photographs of pictures that had especially moved him; and the few paintings his small fortune, eked out by an almost penurious abstinence from the things most men desire, had enabled him to buy in his travels. The pictures that I knew best, for they had hung there longest, whether reproductions or originals, were of the Sienese School, which he had studied for a long time, claiming that it alone of the schools of the world pictured not the world but what is revealed to saints in their dreams and visions. The Sienese alone among Italians, he would say, could not or would not represent the pride of life, the pleasure in swift movement or sustaining strength, or voluptuous flesh. They were so little interested in these things that there often seemed to be no human body at all under the robe of the saint, but they could represent by a bowed head, or uplifted face, man's reverence before Eternity as no others could, and they were at their happiest when mankind had dwindled to a little group silhouetted upon a golden abyss, as if they saw the world habitually from far off. When I had praised some school that had dipped deeper into life, he would profess to discover a more intense emotion than life knew in those dark outlines. 'Put, even Francesca, who felt the supernatural as deeply,' he would say, 'beside the work of Siena, and one finds a faint impurity in his awe, a touch of ghostly terror, where love and humbleness had best been all.' He had often told me of his hope that by filling his mind with those holy pictures he would help himself to attain at last to vision and ecstasy, and of his disappointment at never getting more than dreams of a curious and broken beauty. But of late he had added pictures of a different kind, French symbolic pictures which he had bought for a few pounds from little-known painters, English and French pictures of the School of the English Pre-Raphaelites; and now he stood for a moment and said, 'I have changed my taste. I am fascinated a little against my will by these faces, where I find the pallor of souls trembling between the excitement of the flesh and the excitement of the spirit, and by landscapes that are created by heightening the obscurity and disorder of nature. These landscapes do not stir the imagination to the energies of sanctity but as to orgaic dancing and prophetic frenzy.' I saw with some resentment new images where the old ones had often made that long gray, dim, empty, echoing passage become to my eyes a vestibule of Eternity. [146]

Almost every detail of the chapel, which we entered by a narrow Gothic door, whose threshold had been worn smooth by the secret worshippers of the penal times, was vivid in my memory; for it was in this chapel that I had first, and when but a boy, been moved by the mediævalism which is now, I think, the governing influence in my life. The only thing that seemed new was a square bronze box which stood upon the altar before the six unlighted candles and the ebony crucifix, and was like those made in ancient times of more precious substances to hold the sacred books. Aherne made me sit down on an oak bench, and having bowed very low before the crucifix, took the bronze box from the altar, and sat down beside me with the box upon his knees. [147]

'You will perhaps have forgotten,' he said, 'most of what you have read about Joachim of Flora, for he is little more than a name to even the well read. He was an abbot in Cortale in the twelfth century, and is best known for his prophecy, in a book called *Expositio in Apocalypsin*, that the Kingdom of the Father was passed, the Kingdom of the Son passing, the Kingdom of the Spirit yet to come. The Kingdom of the Spirit was to be a complete triumph of the Spirit, the *spiritualis intelligentia* he called it, over the dead letter. He had many followers among the more extreme Franciscans, and these were accused of possessing a secret book of his called the *Liber Inducens in Evangelium Aeternum*. Again and again groups of visionaries were accused of possessing this terrible book, in which the freedom of the Renaissance lay hidden, until at last Pope Alexander IV. had it found and cast into the flames. I have here the greatest treasure the world contains. I have a copy of that book; and see what great artists have made the robes in which it is wrapped. The greater portion of the book itself is illuminated in the Byzantine style, which so few care for to-day, but which moves me because these tall, emaciated angels and saints seem to have less relation to the world about us than to an abstract pattern of flowing lines, that suggest an imagination absorbed in the contemplation of Eternity. Even if you do not care for so formal an art, you cannot help seeing that work where there is so much gold, and of that purple colour which has gold dissolved in it, was valued at a great price in its day. But it was only at the Renaissance the labour was spent upon it which has made it the priceless thing it is. The wooden boards of the cover show by the astrological allegories painted upon them, as by the style of painting itself, some craftsman of the school of Francesco Cossi of Ferrara, but the gold clasps and hinges are known to be the work of Benvenuto Cellini, who made likewise the bronze box and covered it with gods and demons, whose eyes are closed, to signify an absorption in the inner light.

I took the book in my hands and began turning over the gilded, many-coloured pages, holding it close to the candle to discover the texture of the paper.

'Where did you get this amazing book?' I said. 'If genuine, and I cannot judge by this light, you have discovered one of the most precious things in the world.'

'It is certainly genuine,' he replied. 'When the original was destroyed, one copy alone remained, and was in the hands of a lute-player of Florence, and from him it passed to his son, and so from generation to generation until it came to the lute-player who was father to Benvenuto Cellini, and from Benvenuto Cellini to that Cardinal of Ferrara who released him from prison, and from him to a natural son, so from generation to generation, the story of its wandering passing on with it, until it came into the possession of the family of Aretino, and to Giulio Aretino, an artist and worker in metals, and student of the kabalistic heresies of Pico della Mirandola. He spent many nights with me at Rome, discussing philosophy; and at last I won his confidence so perfectly that he showed me this, his greatest treasure; and, finding how much I valued it, and feeling that he himself was growing old and beyond the help of its teaching, he sold it to me for no great sum, considering its great preciousness.'

'What is the doctrine?' I said. 'Some mediæval straw-splitting about the nature of the Trinity, which is only useful to-day to show how many things are unimportant to us, which once shook the world?'

'I could never make you understand,' he said, with a sigh, 'that nothing is unimportant in belief, but even you will admit that this book goes to the heart. Do you see the tables on which the commandments were written in Latin?' I looked to the end of the room, opposite to the altar, and saw that the two marble tablets were gone, and that two large empty tablets of ivory, like large copies of the little tablets we set over our desks, had taken their place. 'It has swept the commandments of the Father away,' he went on, 'and displaced the commandments of the Son by the commandments of the Holy Spirit. The first book is called *Fractura Tabularum*. In the first chapter it mentions the names of the great artists who made them graven things and the likeness of many things, and adored them and served them; and the second the names of the great wits who took the name of the Lord their God in vain; and that long third chapter, set with the emblems of sanctified faces, and having wings upon its borders, is the praise of breakers of the seventh day and wasters of the six days, who yet lived comely and pleasant days. Those two chapters tell of men and women who railed upon their parents, remembering that their god was older than the god of their parents; and that which has the sword of Michael for an emblem commends the kings that wrought secret murder and so won for their people a peace that was *amore somnoque gravata et vestibus versicoloribus*, heavy with love and sleep and many-coloured raiment; and that with the pale star at the closing has the lives of the noble youths who loved the wives of others and were transformed into memories, which have transformed many poorer hearts into sweet flames; and that with the winged head is the history of the robbers who lived upon the sea or in the desert, lives which it compares to the twittering of the string of a bow, *nervi stridentis instar*; and those two last, that are fire and gold, are devoted to the satirists who bore false witness against their neighbours and yet illustrated eternal wrath, and to those that have coveted more than other men the house of God, and all things that are His, which no man has seen and handled, except in madness and in dreams.

'The second book is called *Lex Secreta*, and describes the true inspiration of action, the only Eternal Evangel; and ends with a vision, which he saw among the mountains of La Sila, of his disciples sitting throned in the blue deep of the air, and laughing aloud, with a laughter that was like the rustling of the wings of Time: *Cœlis in cœruleis ridentes sedebant discipuli mei super thronos: talis erat risus, qualis temporis pennati susurrus.*'

'I know little of Joachim of Flora,' I said, 'except that Dante set him in Paradise among the great doctors. If he held a heresy so singular, I cannot understand how no rumours of it came to the ears of Dante; and Dante made no peace with the enemies of the Church.'

'Joachim of Flora acknowledged openly the authority of the Church, and even asked that all his published writings, and those to be published by his desire after his death, should be submitted to the censorship of the Pope. He considered that those whose work was to live and not to reveal were children and that the Pope was their Father; but he taught in secret that certain others, and in always increasing numbers, were elected, not to live, but to reveal that hidden substance of God which is colour and music and softness and a sweet odour; and that these have no father but the Holy Spirit. Just as poets and painters and musicians labour at their works, building them with lawless and lawful things alike, so long as they embody the beauty that is beyond the grave, these children of the Holy Spirit labour at their moments with eyes upon the shining substance on which Time has heaped the refuse of creation; for the world only exists to be a tale in the ears of coming generations; and terror and content, birth and death, love and hatred, and the fruit of the Tree, are but instruments for that supreme art which is to win us from life and gather us into eternity like doves into their dove-cots. [154]

'I shall go away in a little while and travel into many lands, that I may know all accidents and destinies, and when I return, will write my secret law upon those ivory tablets, just as poets and romance writers have written the principles of their art in prefaces; and when I know what principle of life, discoverable at first by imagination and instinct, I am to express, I will gather my pupils that they may discover their law in the study of my law, as poets and painters discover their own art of expression by the study of some Master. I know nothing certain as yet but this—I am to become completely alive, that is, completely passionate, for beauty is only another name for perfect passion. I shall create a world where the whole lives of men shall be articulated and simplified as if seventy years were but one moment, or as they were the leaping of a fish or the opening of a flower.' [155]

He was pacing up and down, and I listened to the fervour of his words and watched the excitement of his gestures with not a little concern. I had been accustomed to welcome the most singular speculations, and had always found them as harmless as the Persian cat who half closes her meditative eyes and stretches out her long claws before my fire. But now I would battle in the interests of orthodoxy, even of the commonplace: and yet could find nothing better to say than: 'It is not necessary to judge everyone by the law, for we have also Christ's commandment of love.'

He turned and said, looking at me with shining eyes: 'Jonathan Swift made a soul for the gentlemen of this city by hating his neighbour as himself.'

'At any rate, you cannot deny that to teach so dangerous a doctrine is to accept a terrible responsibility.' [156]

'Leonardo da Vinci,' he replied, 'has this noble sentence: "The hope and desire of returning home to one's former state is like the moth's desire for the light; and the man who with constant longing awaits each new month and new year, deeming that the things he longs for are ever too late in coming, does not perceive that he is longing for his own destruction." How, then, can the pathway which will lead us into the heart of God be other than dangerous? Why should you, who are no materialist, cherish the continuity and order of the world as those do who have only the world? You do not value the writers who will express nothing unless their reason understands how it will make what is called the right more easy; why, then, will you deny a like freedom to the supreme art, the art which is the foundation of all arts? Yes, I shall send out of this chapel saints, lovers, rebels and prophets: souls who will surround themselves with peace, as with a nest made with grass; and others over whom I shall weep. The dust shall fall for many years over this little box; and then I shall open it; and the tumults, which are, perhaps, the flames of the last day, shall come from under the lid.' [157]

I did not reason with him that night, because his excitement was great and I feared to make him angry; and when I called at his house a few days later, he was gone and his house was locked up and empty. I have deeply regretted my failure both to combat his heresy and to test the genuineness of his strange book. Since my conversion I have indeed done penance for an error which I was only able to measure after some years.

II

I was walking along one of the Dublin quays, on the side nearest the river, about ten years after our conversation, stopping from time to time to turn over the books upon an old bookstall, and thinking, curiously enough, of the terrible destiny of Michael Robartes, and his brotherhood; when I saw a tall and bent man walking slowly along the other side of the quay. I recognized, with a start, in a lifeless mask with dim eyes, the once resolute and delicate face of Owen Aherne. I crossed the quay quickly, but had not gone many yards before he turned away, as though he had seen me, and hurried down a side street; I followed, but only to lose him among the intricate streets on the north side of the river. During the next few weeks I inquired of everybody who had once known him, but he had made himself known to nobody; and I knocked, without result, at the door of his old house; and had nearly persuaded myself that I was mistaken, when I saw him again in a narrow street behind the Four Courts, and followed him to the door of his house. [158]

I laid my hand on his arm; he turned quite without surprise; and indeed it is possible that to

him, whose inner life had soaked up the outer life, a parting of years was a parting from forenoon to afternoon. He stood holding the door half open, as though he would keep me from entering; and would perhaps have parted from me without further words had I not said: 'Owen Aherne, you trusted me once, will you not trust me again, and tell me what has come of the ideas we discussed in this house ten years ago?—but perhaps you have already forgotten them.'

'You have a right to hear,' he said, 'for since I have told you the ideas, I should tell you the extreme danger they contain, or rather the boundless wickedness they contain; but when you have heard this we must part, and part for ever, because I am lost, and must be hidden!'

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I followed him through the paved passage, and saw that its corners were choked, and the pictures gray, with dust and cobwebs; and that the dust and cobwebs which covered the ruby and sapphire of the saints on the window had made it very dim. He pointed to where the ivory tablets glimmered faintly in the dimness, and I saw that they were covered with small writing, and went up to them and began to read the writing. It was in Latin, and was an elaborate casuistry, illustrated with many examples, but whether from his own life or from the lives of others I do not know. I had read but a few sentences when I imagined that a faint perfume had begun to fill the room, and turning round asked Owen Aherne if he were lighting the incense.

'No,' he replied, and pointed where the thurible lay rusty and empty on one of the benches; as he spoke the faint perfume seemed to vanish, and I was persuaded I had imagined it.

'Has the philosophy of the *Liber Inducens in Evangelium Æternum* made you very unhappy?' I said.

'At first I was full of happiness,' he replied, 'for I felt a divine ecstasy, an immortal fire in every passion, in every hope, in every desire, in every dream; and I saw, in the shadows under leaves, in the hollow waters, in the eyes of men and women, its image, as in a mirror; and it was as though I was about to touch the Heart of God. Then all changed and I was full of misery, and I said to myself that I was caught in the glittering folds of an enormous serpent, and was falling with him through a fathomless abyss, and that henceforth the glittering folds were my world; and in my misery it was revealed to me that man can only come to that Heart through the sense of separation from it which we call sin, and I understood that I could not sin, because I had discovered the law of my being, and could only express or fail to express my being, and I understood that God has made a simple and an arbitrary law that we may sin and repent!'

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He had sat down on one of the wooden benches and now became silent, his bowed head and hanging arms and listless body having more of dejection than any image I have met with in life or in any art. I went and stood leaning against the altar, and watched him, not knowing what I should say; and I noticed his black closely-buttoned coat, his short hair, and shaven head, which preserved a memory of his priestly ambition, and understood how Catholicism had seized him in the midst of the vertigo he called philosophy; and I noticed his lightless eyes and his earth-coloured complexion, and understood how she had failed to do more than hold him on the margin: and I was full of an anguish of pity.

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'It may be,' he went on, 'that the angels whose hearts are shadows of the Divine Heart, and whose bodies are made of the Divine Intellect, may come to where their longing is always by a thirst for the divine ecstasy, the immortal fire, that is in passion, in hope, in desire, in dreams; but we whose hearts perish every moment, and whose bodies melt away like a sigh, must bow and obey!'

I went nearer to him and said: 'Prayer and repentance will make you like other men.'

'No, no,' he said, 'I am not among those for whom Christ died, and this is why I must be hidden. I have a leprosy that even eternity cannot cure. I have seen the whole, and how can I come again to believe that a part is the whole? I have lost my soul because I have looked out of the eyes of the angels.'

Suddenly I saw, or imagined that I saw, the room darken, and faint figures robed in purple, and lifting faint torches with arms that gleamed like silver, bending, above Owen Aherne; and I saw, or imagined that I saw, drops, as of burning gum, fall from the torches, and a heavy purple smoke, as of incense, come pouring from the flames and sweeping about us. Owen Aherne, more happy than I who have been half initiated into the Order of the Alchemical Rose, and protected perhaps by his great piety, had sunk again into dejection and listlessness, and saw none of these things; but my knees shook under me, for the purple-robed figures were less faint every moment, and now I could hear the hissing of the gum in the torches. They did not appear to see me, for their eyes were upon Owen Aherne; now and again I could hear them sigh as though with sorrow for his sorrow, and presently I heard words which I could not understand except that they were words of sorrow, and sweet as though immortal was talking to immortal. Then one of them waved her torch, and all the torches waved, and for a moment it was as though some great bird made of flames had fluttered its plumage, and a voice cried as from far up in the air: 'He has charged even his angels with folly, and they also bow and obey; but let your heart mingle with our hearts, which are wrought of divine ecstasy, and your body with our bodies, which are wrought of divine intellect.' And at that cry I understood that the Order of the Alchemical Rose was not of this earth, and that it was still seeking over this earth for whatever souls it could gather within its glittering net; and when all the faces turned towards me, and I saw the mild eyes and the unshaken eyelids, I was full of terror, and thought they were about to fling their torches upon me, so that all I held dear, all that bound me to spiritual and social order, would be burnt up, and my

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soul left naked and shivering among the winds that blow from beyond this world and from beyond the stars; and then a faint voice cried, 'Why do you fly from our torches that were made out of the trees under which Christ wept in the Garden of Gethsemane? Why do you fly from our torches that were made out of sweet wood, after it had perished from the world and come to us who made it of old times with our breath?'

It was not until the door of the house had closed behind my flight, and the noise of the street was breaking on my ears, that I came back to myself and to a little of my courage; and I have never dared to pass the house of Owen Aherne from that day, even though I believe him to have been driven into some distant country by the spirits whose name is legion, and whose throne is in the indefinite abyss, and whom he obeys and cannot see.

THE ADORATION OF THE MAGI

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I WAS sitting reading late into the night a little after my last meeting with Aherne, when I heard a light knocking on my front door. I found upon the doorstep three very old men with stout sticks in their hands, who said they had been told I should be up and about, and that they were to tell me important things. I brought them into my study, and when the peacock curtains had closed behind us, I set their chairs for them close to the fire, for I saw that the frost was on their great-coats of frieze and upon the long beards that flowed almost to their waists. They took off their great-coats, and leaned over the fire warming their hands, and I saw that their clothes had much of the cold of the country of our time, but a little also, as it seemed to me, of the town life of a more courtly time. When they had warmed themselves—and they warmed themselves, I thought, less because of the cold of the night than because of a pleasure in warmth for the sake of warmth—they turned towards me, so that the light of the lamp fell full upon their weather-beaten faces, and told the story I am about to tell. Now one talked and now another, and they often interrupted one another, with a desire, like that of countrymen, when they tell a story, to leave no detail untold. When they had finished they made me take notes of whatever conversation they had quoted, so that I might have the exact words, and got up to go. When I asked them where they were going, and what they were doing, and by what names I should call them, they would tell me nothing, except that they had been commanded to travel over Ireland continually, and upon foot and at night, that they might live close to the stones and the trees and at the hours when the immortals are awake.

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I have let some years go by before writing out this story, for I am always in dread of the illusions which come of that inquietude of the veil of the Temple, which M. Mallarmé considers a characteristic of our times; and only write it now because I have grown to believe that there is no dangerous idea which does not become less dangerous when written out in sincere and careful English.

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The three old men were three brothers, who had lived in one of the western islands from their early manhood, and had cared all their lives for nothing except for those classical writers and old Gaelic writers who expounded an heroic and simple life; night after night in winter, Gaelic story-tellers would chant old poems to them over the poteen; and night after night in summer, when the Gaelic story-tellers were at work in the fields or away at the fishing, they would read to one another Virgil and Homer, for they would not enjoy in solitude, but as the ancients enjoyed. At last a man, who told them he was Michael Robartes, came to them in a fishing-boat, like St. Brandan drawn by some vision and called by some voice; and spoke of the coming again of the gods and the ancient things; and their hearts, which had never endured the body and pressure of our time, but only of distant times, found nothing unlikely in anything he told them, but accepted all simply and were happy. Years passed, and one day, when the oldest of the old men, who travelled in his youth and thought sometimes of other lands, looked out on the grey waters, on which the people see the dim outline of the Islands of the Young—the Happy Islands where the Gaelic heroes live the lives of Homer's Phæacians—a voice came out of the air over the waters and told him of the death of Michael Robartes. They were still mourning when the next oldest of the old men fell asleep while reading out the Fifth Eclogue of Virgil, and a strange voice spoke through him, and bid them set out for Paris, where a woman lay dying, who would reveal to them the secret names of the gods, which can be perfectly spoken only when the mind is steeped in certain colours and certain sounds and certain odours; but at whose perfect speaking the immortals cease to be cries and shadows, and walk and talk with one like men and women.

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They left their island, at first much troubled at all they saw in the world, and came to Paris, and there the youngest met a person in a dream, who told him they were to wander about at hazard until those who had been guiding their footsteps had brought them to a street and a house, whose likeness was shown him in the dream. They wandered hither and thither for many days, but one morning they came into some narrow and shabby streets, on the south of the Seine, where women with pale faces and untidy hair looked at them out of the windows; and just as they were about to turn back because Wisdom could not have alighted in so foolish a neighbourhood, they came to the street and the house of the dream. The oldest of the old men, who still remembered some of the modern languages he had known in his youth, went up to the door and knocked, but when he had knocked, the next in age to him said it was not a good house, and could not be the house they were looking for, and urged him to ask for some one that they knew was not there and go away. The door was opened by an old over-dressed woman, who said, 'O, you are her three kinsmen from Ireland. She has been expecting you all day.' The old men looked at one another and followed her upstairs, passing doors from which pale and untidy women thrust out their heads, and into a room where a beautiful woman lay asleep in a bed, with another woman sitting by her.

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The old woman said: 'Yes, they have come at last; now she will be able to die in peace,' and went out.

'We have been deceived by devils,' said one of the old men, 'for the immortals would not speak through a woman like this.'

'Yes,' said another, 'we have been deceived by devils, and we must go away quickly.'

'Yes,' said the third, 'we have been deceived by devils, but let us kneel down for a little, for we are by the deathbed of one that has been beautiful.' They knelt down, and the woman who sat by the bed, and seemed to be overcome with fear and awe, lowered her head. They watched for a

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little the face upon the pillow and wondered at its look, as of unquenchable desire, and at the porcelain-like refinement of the vessel in which so malevolent a flame had burned.

Suddenly the second oldest of them crowed like a cock, and until the room seemed to shake with the crowing. The woman in the bed still slept on in her death-like sleep, but the woman who sat by her head crossed herself and grew pale, and the youngest of the old men cried out: 'A devil has gone into him, and we must begone or it will go into us also.' Before they could rise from their knees, a resonant chanting voice came from the lips that had crowed and said: 'I am not a devil, but I am Hermes the Shepherd of the Dead, and I run upon the errands of the gods, and you have heard my sign, that has been my sign from the old days. Bow down before her from whose lips the secret names of the immortals, and of the things near their hearts, are about to come, that the immortals may come again into the world. Bow down, and understand that when they are about to overthrow the things that are to-day and bring the things that were yesterday, they have no one to help them, but one whom the things that are to-day have cast out. Bow down and very low, for they have chosen for their priestess this woman in whose heart all follies have gathered, and in whose body all desires have awaked; this woman who has been driven out of Time and has lain upon the bosom of Eternity. After you have bowed down the old things shall be again, and another Argo shall carry heroes over sea, and another Achilles beleaguer another Troy.'

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The voice ended with a sigh, and immediately the old man awoke out of sleep, and said: 'Has a voice spoken through me, as it did when I fell asleep over my Virgil, or have I only been asleep?'

The oldest of them said: 'A voice has spoken through you. Where has your soul been while the voice was speaking through you?'

'I do not know where my soul has been, but I dreamed I was under the roof of a manger, and I looked down and I saw an ox and an ass; and I saw a red cock perching on the hay-rack; and a woman hugging a child; and three old men, in armour studded with rubies, kneeling with their heads bowed very low in front of the woman and the child. While I was looking the cock crowed and a man with wings on his heels swept up through the air, and as he passed me, cried out: "Foolish old men, you had once all the wisdom of the stars." I do not understand my dream or what it would have us do, but you who have heard the voice out of the wisdom of my sleep know what we have to do.'

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Then the oldest of the old men told him they were to take the parchments they had brought with them out of their pockets and spread them on the ground. When they had spread them on the ground, they took out of their pockets their pens, made of three feathers, which had fallen from the wing of the old eagle that is believed to have talked of wisdom with St. Patrick.

'He meant, I think,' said the youngest, as he put their ink-bottles by the side of the rolls of parchment, 'that when people are good the world likes them and takes possession of them, and so eternity comes through people who are not good or who have been forgotten. Perhaps Christianity was good and the world liked it, so now it is going away and the immortals are beginning to awake.'

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'What you say has no wisdom,' said the oldest, 'because if there are many immortals, there cannot be only one immortal.'

Then the woman in the bed sat up and looked about her with wild eyes; and the oldest of the old men said: 'Lady, we have come to write down the secret names,' and at his words a look of great joy came into her face. Presently she began to speak slowly, and yet eagerly, as though she knew she had but a little while to live, and in the Gaelic of their own country; and she spoke to them many secret powerful names, and of the colours, and odours, and weapons, and instruments of music and instruments of handicraft belonging to the owners of those names; but most about the Sidhe of Ireland and of their love for the Cauldron, and the Whetstone, and the Sword, and the Spear. Then she tossed feebly for a while and moaned, and when she spoke again it was in so faint a murmur that the woman who sat by the bed leaned down to listen, and while she was listening the spirit went out of the body.

Then the oldest of the old men said in French to the woman who was still bending over the bed: 'There must have been yet one name which she had not given us, for she murmured a name while the spirit was going out of the body,' and the woman said, 'She was but murmuring over the name of a symbolist painter she was fond of. He used to go to something he called the Black Mass, and it was he who taught her to see visions and to hear voices. She met him for the first time a few months ago, and we have had no peace from that day because of her talk about visions and about voices. Why! It was only last night that I dreamed I saw a man with a red beard and red hair, and dressed in red, standing by my bedside. He held a rose in one hand, and tore it in pieces with the other hand, and the petals drifted about the room, and became beautiful people who began to dance slowly. When I woke up I was all in a heat with terror.'

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This is all the old men told me, and when I think of their speech and of their silence, of their coming and of their going, I am almost persuaded that had I gone out of the house after they had gone out of it, I should have found no footsteps on the snow. They may, for all I or any man can say, have been themselves immortals: immortal demons, come to put an untrue story into my mind for some purpose I do not understand. Whatever they were, I have turned into a pathway which will lead me from them and from the Order of the Alchemical Rose. I no longer live an elaborate and haughty life, but seek to lose myself among the prayers and the sorrows of the

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multitude. I pray best in poor chapels, where the frieze coats brush by me as I kneel, and when I pray against the demons I repeat a prayer which was made I know not how many centuries ago to help some poor Gaelic man or woman who had suffered with a suffering like mine.

*Seacht b-pàidreacha fò seacht
Chuir Muire faoi n-a Mac,
Chuir Brighid faoi n-a brat,
Chuir Dia faoi n-a neart,
Eidir sinn 'san Sluagh Sidhe,
Eidir sinn 'san Sluagh Gaoith.*

Seven paters seven times,
Send Mary by her Son,
Send Bridget by her mantle,
Send God by His strength,
Between us and the faery host,
Between us and the demons of the air.

JOHN SHERMAN
AND
DHOYA:
TWO EARLY STORIES

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Having been persuaded somewhat against my judgment to include these early stories, I have read them for the first time these many years. They have come to interest me very deeply; for I am something of an astrologer, and can see in them a young man—was I twenty-three? and we Irish ripen slowly—born when the Water-Carrier was on the horizon, at pains to overcome Saturn in Saturn's hour, just as I can see in much that follows his struggle with the still all-too-unconquered Moon, and at last, as I think, the summons of the prouder Sun. Sligo, where I had lived as a child and spent some months or weeks of every year till long after, is Ballah, and Pool Dhoya is at the river mouth there, and he who gave me all of Sherman that was not born at the rising of the Water-Carrier has still the bronze upon his face, and is at this moment, it may be, in his walled garden, wondering, as he did twenty years ago, whether he will ever mend the broken glass of the conservatory, where I am not too young to recollect the vine-trees and grapes that did not ripen.

W. B. YEATS.

November 14th, 1907.

FIRST PART
JOHN SHERMAN LEAVES BALLAH

I

IN the west of Ireland, on the 9th of December, in the town of Ballah, in the Imperial Hotel there was a single guest, clerical and youthful. With the exception of a stray commercial traveller, who stopped once for a night, there had been nobody for a whole month but this guest, and now he was thinking of going away. The town, full enough in summer of trout and salmon fishers, slept all winter like the bears.

On the evening of the 9th of December, in the coffee-room of the Imperial Hotel, there was nobody but this guest. The guest was irritated. It had rained all day, and now that it was clearing up night had almost fallen. He had packed his portmanteau; his stockings, his clothes-brush, his razor, his dress shoes were each in their corner, and now he had nothing to do. He had tried the paper that was lying on the table. He did not agree with its politics. [184]

The waiter was playing an accordion in a little room over the stairs. The guest's irritation increased, for the more he thought about it the more he perceived that the accordion was badly played. There was a piano in the coffee-room; he sat down at it and played the tune correctly, as loudly as possible. The waiter took no notice. He did not know that he was being played for. He was wholly absorbed in his own playing, and besides he was old, obstinate, and deaf. The guest could stand it no longer. He rang for the waiter, and then, remembering that he did not need anything, went out before he came.

He went through Martin's Street and Peter's Lane, and turned down by the burnt house at the corner of the fish-market, picking his way towards the bridge. The town was dripping, but the rain was almost over. The large drops fell seldomer and seldomer into the puddles. It was the hour of ducks. Three or four had squeezed themselves under a gate, and were now splashing about in the gutter of the main street. There was scarcely anyone abroad. Once or twice a countryman went by in yellow gaiters covered with mud and looked at the guest. Once an old woman with a basket of clothes, recognizing the Protestant curate's *locum tenens*, made a low curtsy. [185]

The clouds gradually drifted away, the twilight deepened and the stars came out. The guest, having bought some cigarettes, had spread his waterproof on the parapet of the bridge and was now leaning his elbows upon it, looking at the river and feeling at last quite tranquil. His meditations, he repeated, to himself, were plated with silver by the stars. The water slid noiselessly, and one or two of the larger stars made little roadways of fire into the darkness. The light from a distant casement made also its roadway. Once or twice a fish leaped. Along the banks were the vague shadows of houses, seeming like phantoms gathering to drink.

Yes; he felt now quite contented with the world. Amidst his enjoyment of the shadows and the river—a veritable festival of silence—was mixed pleasantly the knowledge that, as he leant there with the light of a neighbouring gas-jet flickering faintly on his refined form and nervous face and glancing from the little medal of some Anglican order that hung upon his watch-guard, he must have seemed—if there had been any to witness—a being of a different kind to the inhabitants—at once rough and conventional—of this half-deserted town. Between these two feelings the unworldly and the worldly tossed a leaping wave of perfect enjoyment. How pleasantly conscious of his own identity it made him when he thought how he and not those whose birthright it was, felt most the beauty of these shadows and this river! For him who had read much, seen operas and plays, known religious experiences, and written verse to a waterfall in Switzerland, and not for those who dwelt upon its borders for their whole lives, did this river raise a tumult of images and wonders. What meaning it had for them he could not imagine. Some meaning surely it must have! [186]

As he gazed out into the darkness, spinning a web of thoughts from himself to the river, from the river to himself, he saw, with a corner of his eye, a spot of red light moving in the air at the other end of the bridge. He turned towards it. It came closer and closer, there appearing behind it the while a man and a cigar. The man carried in one hand a mass of fishing-line covered with hooks, and in the other a tin porringer full of bait.

'Good evening, Howard.' [187]

'Good evening,' answered the guest, taking his elbows off the parapet and looking in a preoccupied way at the man with the hooks. It was only gradually he remembered that he was in Ballah among the barbarians, for his mind had strayed from the last evening flies, making circles on the water beneath, to the devil's song against 'the little spirits' in *Mefistofele*. Looking down at the stone parapet he considered a moment and then burst out—

'Sherman, how do you stand this place—you who have thoughts above mere eating and sleeping and are not always grinding at the stubble mill? Here everybody lives in the eighteenth century—the squalid century. Well, I am going to-morrow, you know. Thank Heaven, I am done with your grey streets and grey minds! The curate must come home, sick or well. I have a religious essay to write, and besides I should die. Think of that old fellow at the corner there, our

most important parishioner. There are no more hairs on his head than thoughts in his skull. To merely look at him is to rob life of its dignity. Then there is nothing in the shops but school-books and Sunday-school prizes. Excellent, no doubt, for anyone who has not had to read as many as I have. Such a choir! such rain!

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'You need some occupation peculiar to the place,' said the other, baiting his hooks with worms out of the little porringer. 'I catch eels. You should set some night-lines too. You bait them with worms in this way, and put them among the weeds at the edge of the river. In the morning you find an eel or two, if you have good fortune, turning round and round and making the weeds sway. I shall catch a great many after this rain.'

'What a suggestion! Do you mean to stay here,' said Howard, 'till your mind rots like our most important parishioner's?'

'No, no! To be quite frank with you,' replied the other, 'I have some good looks and shall try to turn them to account by going away from here pretty soon and trying to persuade some girl with money to fall in love with me. I shall not be altogether a bad match, you see, because after she has made me a little prosperous my uncle will die and make me much more so. I wish to be able always to remain a lounge. Yes, I shall marry money. My mother has set her heart on it, and I am not, you see, the kind of person who falls in love inconveniently. For the present—'

'You are vegetating,' interrupted the other.

'No, I am seeing the world. In your big towns a man finds his minority and knows nothing outside its border. He knows only the people like himself. But here one chats with the whole world in a day's walk, for every man one meets is a class. The knowledge I am picking up may be useful to me when I enter the great cities and their ignorance. But I have lines to set. Come with me. I would ask you home, but you and my mother, you know, do not get on well.'

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'I could not live with anyone I did not believe in,' said Howard; 'you are so different from me. You can live with mere facts, and that is why, I suppose, your schemes are so mercenary. Before this beautiful river, these stars, these great purple shadows, do you not feel like an insect in a flower? As for me, I also have planned my future. Not too near or too far from a great city, I see myself in a cottage with diamond panes, sitting by the fire. There are books everywhere and etchings on the wall; on the table is a manuscript essay on some religious matter. Perhaps I shall marry some day. Probably not, for I shall ask so much. Certainly I shall not marry for money, for I hold that when we have lost the directness and sincerity of our nature we have no compass. If we once break it the world grows trackless.'

'Good-bye,' said Sherman, briskly; 'I have baited the last hook. Your schemes suit you, but a sluggish fellow like me, poor devil, who wishes to lounge through the world, would find them expensive.'

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They parted; Sherman to set his lines and Howard to his hotel in high spirits, for it seemed to him he had been eloquent. The billiard-room, which opened on the street, was lighted up. A few young men came round to play sometimes. He went in, for among these provincial youths he felt distinguished; besides, he was a really good player. As he came in one of the players missed and swore. Howard reproved him with a look. He joined the play for a time, and then catching sight through a distant door of the hotel-keeper's wife putting a kettle on the hob he hurried off, and, drawing a chair to the fire, began one of those long gossips about everybody's affairs peculiar to the cloth.

As Sherman, having set his lines, returned home, he passed a tobacconist's—a sweet-shop and tobacconist's in one—the only shop in town, except public-houses, that remained open. The tobacconist was standing in his door, and, recognizing one who dealt consistently with a rival at the other end of the town, muttered: 'There goes that Jack o' Dreams; been fishing most likely. Ugh!' Sherman paused for a moment as he repassed the bridge and looked at the water, on which now a new-risen and crescent moon was shining dimly. How full of memories it was to him! what playmates and boyish adventures did it not bring to mind! To him it seemed to say, 'Stay near to me,' as to Howard it had said, 'Go yonder, to those other joys and other sceneries I have told you of.' It bade him who loved stay still and dream, and gave flying feet to him who imagined.

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II

The house where Sherman and his mother lived was one of those bare houses so common in country towns. Their dashed fronts mounting above empty pavements have a kind of dignity in their utilitarianism. They seem to say, 'Fashion has not made us, nor ever do its caprices pass our sand-cleaned doorsteps.' On every basement window is the same dingy wire blind; on every door the same brass knocker. Custom everywhere! 'So much the longer,' the blinds seem to say, 'have eyes glanced through us'; and the knockers to murmur, 'And fingers lifted us.'

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No. 15, Stephens' Row, was in no manner peculiar among its twenty fellows. The chairs in the drawing-room facing the street were of heavy mahogany with horsehair cushions worn at the corners. On the round table was somebody's commentary on the New Testament laid like the spokes of a wheel on a table-cover of American oilcloth with stamped Japanese figures half worn away. The room was seldom used, for Mrs. Sherman was solitary because silent. In this room the dressmaker sat twice a year, and here the rector's wife used every month or so to drink a cup of

tea. It was quite clean. There was not a fly-mark on the mirror, and all summer the fern in the grate was constantly changed. Behind this room and overlooking the garden was the parlour, where cane-bottomed chairs took the place of mahogany. Sherman had lived here with his mother all his life, and their old servant hardly remembered having lived anywhere else; and soon she would absolutely cease to remember the world she knew before she saw the four walls of this house, for every day she forgot something fresh. The son was almost thirty, the mother fifty, and the servant near seventy. Every year they had two hundred pounds among them, and once a year the son got a new suit of clothes and went into the drawing-room to look at himself in the mirror.

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On the morning of the 10th of December Mrs. Sherman was down before her son. A spare, delicate-featured woman, with somewhat thin lips tightly closed as with silent people, and eyes at once gentle and distrustful, tempering the hardness of the lips. She helped the servant to set the table, and then, for her old-fashioned ideas would not allow her to rest, began to knit, often interrupting her knitting to go into the kitchen or to listen at the foot of the stairs. At last, hearing a sound upstairs, she put the eggs down to boil, muttering the while, and began again to knit. When her son appeared she received him with a smile.

'Late again, mother,' he said.

'The young should sleep,' she answered, for to her he seemed still a boy.

She had finished her breakfast some time before the young man, and because it would have appeared very wrong to her to leave the table, she sat on knitting behind the tea-urn: an industry the benefit of which was felt by many poor children—almost the only neighbours she had a good word for.

'Mother,' said the young man, presently, 'your friend the *locum tenens* is off to-day.'

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'A good riddance.'

'Why are you so hard on him? He talked intelligently when here, I thought,' answered her son.

'I do not like his theology,' she replied, 'nor his way of running about and flirting with this body and that body, nor his way of chattering while he buttons and unbuttons his gloves.'

'You forget he is a man of the great world, and has about him a manner that must seem strange to us.'

'Oh, he might do very well,' she answered, 'for one of those Carton girls at the rectory.'

'That eldest girl is a good girl,' replied her son.

'She looks down on us all, and thinks herself intellectual,' she went on. 'I remember when girls were content with their catechism and their Bibles and a little practice at the piano, maybe, for an accomplishment. What does any one want more? It is all pride.'

'You used to like her as a child,' said the young man.

'I like all children.'

Sherman having finished his breakfast, took a book of travels in one hand and a trowel in the other and went out into the garden. Having looked under the parlour window for the first tulip shoots, he went down to the further end and began covering some sea-kale for forcing. He had not been long at work when the servant brought him a letter. There was a stone roller at one side of the grass plot. He sat down upon it, and taking the letter between his finger and thumb began looking at it with an air that said: 'Well! I know what you mean.' He remained long thus without opening it, the book lying beside him on the roller.

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The garden—the letter—the book! You have there the three symbols of his life. Every morning he worked in that garden among the sights and sounds of nature. Month by month he planted and hoed and dug there. In the middle he had set a hedge that divided the garden in two. Above the hedge were flowers; below it, vegetables. At the furthest end from the house, lapping broken masonry full of wallflowers, the river said, month after month to all upon its banks, 'Hush!' He dined at two with perfect regularity, and in the afternoon went out to shoot or walk. At twilight he set night-lines. Later on he read. He had not many books—a Shakespeare, Mungo Park's travels, a few two-shilling novels, *Percy's Reliques*, and a volume on etiquette. He seldom varied his occupations. He had no profession. The town talked of it. They said: 'He lives upon his mother,' and were very angry. They never let him see this, however, for it was generally understood he would be a dangerous fellow to rouse; but there was an uncle from whom Sherman had expectations who sometimes wrote remonstrating. Mrs. Sherman resented these letters, for she was afraid of her son going away to seek his fortune—perhaps even in America. Now this matter preyed somewhat on Sherman. For three years or so he had been trying to make his mind up and come to some decision. Sometimes when reading he would start and press his lips together and knit his brows for a moment.

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It will now be seen why the garden, the book, and the letter were the three symbols of his life, summing up as they did his love of out-of-door doings, his meditations, his anxieties. His life in the garden had granted serenity to his forehead, the reading of his few books had filled his eyes with reverie, and the feeling that he was not quite a good citizen had given a slight and occasional trembling to his lips.

He opened the letter. Its contents were what he had long expected. His uncle offered to take him into his office. He laid it spread out before him—a foot on each margin, right and left—and looked at it, turning the matter over and over in his mind. Would he go? would he stay? He did not like the idea much. The lounge in him did not enjoy the thought of London. Gradually his mind wandered away into scheming—infinite scheming—what would he do if he went, what would he do if he did not go? [197]

A beetle, attracted by the faint sunlight, had crawled out of its hole. It saw the paper and crept on to it, the better to catch the sunlight. Sherman saw the beetle but his mind was not occupied with it. 'Shall I tell Mary Carton?' he was thinking. Mary had long been his adviser and friend. She was, indeed, everybody's adviser. Yes, he would ask her what to do. Then again he thought—no, he would decide for himself. The beetle began to move. 'If it goes off the paper by the top I will ask her—if by the bottom I will not.'

The beetle went off by the top. He got up with an air of decision and went into the tool-house and began sorting seeds and picking out the light ones, sometimes stopping to watch a spider; for he knew he must wait till the afternoon to see Mary Carton. The tool-house was a favourite place with him. He often read there and watched the spiders in the corners. [198]

At dinner he was preoccupied.

'Mother,' he said, 'would you much mind if we went away from this?'

'I have often told you,' she answered, 'I do not like one place better than another. I like them all equally little.'

After dinner he went again into the tool-house. This time he did not sort seeds—only watched the spiders.

III

Towards evening he went out. The pale sunshine of winter flickered on his path. The wind blew the straws about. He grew more and more melancholy. A dog of his acquaintance was chasing rabbits in a field. He had never been known to catch one, and since his youth had never seen one, for he was almost wholly blind. They were his form of the eternal chimera. The dog left the field and followed with a friendly sniff.

They came together to the rectory. Mary Carton was not in. There was a children's practice in the school-house. They went thither.

A child of four or five with a swelling on its face was sitting under a wall opposite the school door, waiting to make faces at the Protestant children as they came out. Catching sight of the dog she seemed to debate in her mind whether to throw a stone at it or call it to her. She threw the stone and made it run. In after times he remembered all these things as though they were of importance. [199]

He opened the latched green door and went in. About twenty children were singing in shrill voices, standing in a row at the further end. At the harmonium he recognised Mary Carton, who nodded to him and went on with her playing. The whitewashed walls were covered with glazed prints of animals; at the further end was a large map of Europe; by a fire at the near end was a table with the remains of tea. This tea was an idea of Mary's. They had tea and cake first, afterwards the singing. The floor was covered with crumbs. The fire was burning brightly. Sherman sat down beside it. A child with a great deal of oil in her hair was sitting on the end of a form at the other side.

'Look,' she whispered, 'I have been sent away. At any rate they are further from the fire. They have to be near the harmonium. I would not sing. Do you like hymns? I don't. Will you have a cup of tea? I can make it quite well. See, I did not spill a drop. Have you enough milk?' It was a cup full of milk—children's tea. 'Look, there is a mouse carrying away a crumb. Hush!' [200]

They sat there, the child watching the mouse, Sherman pondering on his letter, until the music ceased and the children came tramping down the room. The mouse having fled, Sherman's self-appointed hostess got up with a sigh and went out with the others.

Mary Carton closed the harmonium and came towards Sherman. Her face and all her movements showed a gentle decision of character. Her glance was serene, her features regular, her figure at the same time ample and beautifully moulded; her dress plain yet not without a certain air of distinction. In a different society she would have had many suitors. But she was of a type that in country towns does not get married at all. Its beauty is too lacking in pink and white, its nature in that small assertiveness admired for character by the uninstructed. Elsewhere she would have known her own beauty—as it is right that all the beautiful should—and have learnt how to display it, to add gesture to her calm and more of mirth and smiles to her grave cheerfulness. As it was, her manner was much older than herself. [201]

She sat down by Sherman with the air of an old friend. They had long been accustomed to consult together on every matter. They were such good friends they had never fallen in love with each other. Perfect love and perfect friendship are indeed incompatible; for the one is a battlefield where shadows war beside the combatants, and the other a placid country where Consultation has her dwelling.

These two were such good friends that the most gossiping townspeople had given them up with a sigh. The doctor's wife, a faded beauty and devoted romance reader, said one day, as they passed, 'They are such cold creatures'; the old maid who kept the Berlin-wool shop remarked, 'They are not of the marrying sort'; and now their comings and goings were no longer noticed. Nothing had ever come to break in on their quiet companionship and give obscurity as a dwelling-place for the needed illusions. Had one been weak and the other strong, one plain and the other handsome, one guide and the other guided, one wise and the other foolish, love might have found them out in a moment, for love is based on inequality as friendship is on equality.

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'John,' said Mary Carton, warming her hands at the fire, 'I have had a troublesome day. Did you come to help me teach the children to sing? It was good of you: you were just too late.'

'No,' he answered, 'I have come to be your pupil. I am always your pupil.'

'Yes, and a most disobedient one.'

'Well, advise me this time at any rate. My uncle has written, offering me a hundred pounds a year to begin with in his London office. Am I to go?'

'You know quite well my answer,' she said.

'Indeed I do not. Why should I go? I am contented here. I am now making my garden ready for spring. Later on there will be trout fishing and saunters by the edge of the river in the evening when the bats are flickering about. In July there will be races. I enjoy the bustle. I enjoy life here. When anything annoys me I keep away from it, that is all. You know I am always busy. I have occupation and friends and am quite contented.'

'It is a great loss to many of us, but you must go, John,' she said. 'For you know you will be old some day, and perhaps when the vitality of youth is gone you will feel that your life is empty and find that you are too old to change it; and you will give up, perhaps, trying to be happy and likeable and become as the rest are. I think I can see you,' she said, with a laugh, 'a hypochondriac, like Gorman, the retired excise officer, or with a red nose like Dr. Stephens, or growing like Peters, the elderly cattle merchant, who starves his horse.'

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'They were bad material to begin with,' he answered, 'and, besides, I cannot take my mother away with me at her age, and I cannot leave her alone.'

'What annoyance it may be,' she answered, 'will soon be forgotten. You will be able to give her many more comforts. We women—we all like to be dressed well and have pleasant rooms to sit in, and a young man at your age should not be idle. You must go away from this little backward place. We shall miss you, but you are clever and must go and work with other men and have your talents admitted.'

'How emulous you would have me! Perhaps I shall be well-to-do some day; meanwhile I only wish to stay here with my friends.'

She went over to the window and looked out with her face turned from him. The evening light cast a long shadow behind her on the floor. After some moments, she said, 'I see people ploughing on the slope of the hill. There are people working on a house to the right. Everywhere there are people busy,' and with a slight tremble in her voice she added, 'and, John, nowhere are there any doing what they wish. One has to think of so many things—of duty and God.'

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'Mary, I didn't know you were so religious.'

Coming towards him with a smile, she said, 'No more did I, perhaps. But sometimes the self in one is very strong. One has to think a great deal and reason with it. Yet I try hard to lose myself in things about me. These children now—I often lie awake thinking about them. That child who was talking to you is often on my mind. I do not know what will happen to her. She makes me unhappy. I am afraid she is not a good child at all. I am afraid she is not taught well at home. I try hard to be gentle and patient with her. I am a little displeased with myself to-day, so I have lectured you. There! I have made my confession. But,' she added, taking one of his hands in both hers and reddening, 'you must go away. You must not be idle. You will gain everything.'

As she stood there with bright eyes, the light of evening about her, Sherman for perhaps the first time saw how beautiful she was, and was flattered by her interest. For the first time also her presence did not make him at peace with the world.

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'Will you be an obedient pupil?'

'You know so much more than I do,' he answered, 'and are so much wiser. I will write to my uncle and agree to his offer.'

'Now you must go home,' she said. 'You must not keep your mother waiting for her tea. There! I have raked the fire out. We must not forget to lock the door behind us.'

As they stood on the doorstep the wind blew a whirl of dead leaves about them.

'They are my old thoughts,' he said; 'see, they are all withered.'

They walked together silently. At the vicarage he left her and went homeward.

The deserted flour-store at the corner of two roads, the house that had been burnt hollow ten

years before and still lifted its blackened beams, the straggling and leafless fruit-trees rising above garden walls, the church where he was christened—these foster-mothers of his infancy seemed to nod and shake their heads over him.

‘Mother,’ he said, hurriedly entering the room, ‘we are going to London.’

‘As you wish. I always knew you would be a rolling stone,’ she answered, and went out to tell the servant that as soon as she had finished the week’s washing they must pack up everything, for they were going to London. [206]

‘Yes, we must pack up,’ said the old peasant; she did not stop peeling the onion in her hand—she had not comprehended. In the middle of the night she suddenly started up in bed with a pale face and a prayer to the Virgin whose image hung over her head—she had now comprehended.

IV

On January the 5th, about two in the afternoon, Sherman sat on the deck of the steamer *Lavinia* enjoying a period of sunshine between two showers. The steamer *Lavinia* was a cattle-boat. It had been his wish to travel by some more expensive route, but his mother, with her old-fashioned ideas of duty, would not hear of it, and now, as he foresaw, was extremely uncomfortable below, while he, who was a good sailor, was pretty happy on deck, and would have been quite so if the pigs would only tire of their continual squealing. With the exception of a very dirty old woman sitting by a crate of geese, all the passengers but himself were below. This old woman made the journey monthly with geese for the Liverpool market. [207]

Sherman was dreaming. He began to feel very desolate, and commenced a letter to Mary Carton in his notebook to state this fact. He was a laborious and unpractised writer, and found it helped him to make a pencil copy. Sometimes he stopped and watched the puffin sleeping on the waves. Each one of them had its head tucked in in a somewhat different way. ‘That is because their characters are different,’ he thought.

Gradually he began to notice a great many corks floating by, one after the other. The old woman saw them too, and said, waking out of a half sleep: ‘Misther John Sherman, we will be in the Mersey before evening. Why are ye goin’ among them savages in London, Misther John? Why don’t ye stay among your own people—for what have we in this life but a mouthful of air?’ [208]

SECOND PART MARGARET LELAND

I

Sherman and his mother rented a small house on the north side of St. Peter’s Square, Hammersmith. The front windows looked out on to the old rank and green square, the windows behind on to a little patch of garden round which the houses gathered and pressed as though they already longed to trample it out. In this garden was a single tall pear tree that never bore fruit.

Three years passed by without any notable event. Sherman went every day to his office in Tower Hill Street, abused his work a great deal, and was not unhappy perhaps. He was probably a bad clerk, but then nobody was very exacting with the nephew of the head of the firm.

The firm of Sherman and Saunders, ship-brokers, was a long-established, old-fashioned house. Saunders had been dead some years and old Michael Sherman ruled alone—an old bachelor full of family pride and pride in his wealth. He lived, for all that, in a very simple fashion. His mahogany furniture was a little solider than other people’s perhaps. He did not understand display. Display finds its excuse in some taste good or bad, and in a long industrious life Michael Sherman had never found leisure to form one. He seemed to live only from habit. Year by year he grew more silent, gradually ceasing to regard anything but his family and his ships. His family were represented by his nephew and his nephew’s mother. He did not feel much affection for them. He believed in his family—that was all. To remind him of the other goal of his thoughts hung round his private office pictures with such inscriptions as ‘S.S. *Indus* at the Cape of Good Hope,’ ‘The barque *Mary* in the Mozambique Channel,’ ‘The barque *Livingstone* at Port Said,’ and many more. Every rope was drawn accurately with a ruler, and here and there were added distant vessels sailing proudly by with all that indifference to perspective peculiar to the drawings of sailors. On every ship was the flag of the firm spread out to show the letters. [209]

No man cared for old Michael Sherman. Every one liked John. Both were silent, but the young man had sometimes a talkative fit. The old man lived for his ledger, the young man for his dreams. [210]

In spite of all these differences, the uncle was on the whole pleased with the nephew. He noticed a certain stolidity that was of the family. It sometimes irritated others. It pleased him. He saw a hundred indications besides that made him say, ‘He is a true Sherman. We Shermans begin that way and give up frivolity as we grow old. We are all the same in the end.’

Mrs. Sherman and her son had but a small round of acquaintances—a few rich people, clients

of the house of Sherman and Saunders for the most part. Among these was a Miss Margaret Leland who lived with her mother, the widow of the late Henry Leland, ship-broker, on the eastern side of St. Peter's Square. Their house was larger than the Shermans', and noticeable among its fellows by the newly-painted hall-door. Within on every side were bronzes and china vases and heavy curtains. In all were displayed the curious and vagrant taste of Margaret Leland: the rich Italian and mediæval draperies of pre-Raphaelite taste jostling the brightest and vulgarest products of more native and Saxon schools; vases of the most artistic shape and colour side by side with artificial flowers and stuffed birds. This house belonged to the Lelands. They had bought it in less prosperous days, and having altered it according to their taste and the need of their growing welfare could not decide to leave it. [211]

Sherman was an occasional caller at the Lelands, and had certainly a liking, though not a very deep one, for Margaret. As yet he knew little more about her than that she wore the most fascinating hats, that the late Lord Lytton was her favourite author, and that she hated frogs. It is clear that she did not know that a French writer on magic says the luxurious and extravagant hate frogs because they are cold, solitary, and dreary. Had she done so, she would have been more cautious about revealing her tastes.

For the rest, John Sherman was forgetting the town of Ballah. He corresponded indeed with Mary Carton, but his laborious letter-writing made his letters fewer and fewer. Sometimes, too, he heard from Howard, who had a curacy at Glasgow and was on indifferent terms with his parishioners. They objected to his way of conducting the services. His letters were full of it. He would not give in, he said, whatever happened. His conscience was involved. [212]

II

One afternoon Mrs. Leland called on Mrs. Sherman. She very often called—this fat, sentimental woman, moving in the midst of a cloud of scent. The day was warm, and she carried her too elaborate and heavy dress as a large caddis-fly drags its case with much labour and patience. She sat down on the sofa with obvious relief, leaning so heavily among the cushions that a clothes-moth fluttered out of an antimacassar, to be knocked down and crushed by Mrs. Sherman, who was very quick in her movements.

As soon as she found her breath, Mrs. Leland began a long history of her sorrows. Her daughter Margaret had been jilted and was in despair, had taken to her bed with every resolution to die, and was growing paler and paler. The hard-hearted man, though she knew he had heard, did not relent. She knew he had heard because her daughter had told his sister all about it, and his sister had no heart, because she said it was temper that ailed Margaret, and she was a little vixen, and that if she had not flirted with everybody the engagement would never have been broken off. But Mr. Sims had no heart clearly, as Miss Marriot and Mrs. Eliza Taylor, her daughter's friends, said, when they heard, and Lock, the butler, said the same too, and Mary Young, the housemaid, said so too—and she knew all about it, for Margaret used to read his letters to her often when having her hair brushed. [213]

'She must have been very fond of him,' said Mrs. Sherman.

'She is so romantic, my dear,' answered Mrs. Leland, with a sigh. 'I am afraid she takes after an uncle on her father's side, who wrote poetry and wore a velvet jacket and ran away with an Italian countess who used to get drunk. When I married Mr. Leland people said he was not worthy of me, and that I was throwing myself away—and he in business, too! But Margaret is so romantic. There was Mr. Walters, a gentleman-farmer, and Simpson who had a jeweller's shop—I never approved of him!—and Mr. Samuelson, and the Hon. William Scott. She tired of them all except the Hon. William Scott, who tired of her because someone told him she put belladonna in her eyes—and it is not true; and now there is Mr. Sims!' She then cried a little, and allowed herself to be consoled by Mrs. Sherman. [214]

'You talk so intelligently and are so well informed,' she said at parting. 'I have made a very pleasant call,' and the caddis-worm toiled upon its way, arriving in time at other cups of tea.

III

The day after Mrs. Leland's call upon his mother, John Sherman, returning home after his not very lengthy day in the office, saw Margaret coming towards him. She had a lawn-tennis racket under her arm, and was walking slowly on the shady side of the road. She was a pretty girl with quite irregular features, who though not really more than pretty, had so much manner, so much of an air, that every one called her a beauty: a trefoil with the fragrance of a rose.

'Mr. Sherman,' she cried, coming smiling to meet him, 'I have been ill, but could not stand the house any longer. I am going to the Square to play tennis. Will you come with me?'

'I am a bad player,' he said.

'Of course you are,' she answered; 'but you are the only person under a hundred to be found this afternoon. How dull life is!' she continued, with a sigh. 'You heard how ill I have been? What do you do all day?' [215]

'I sit at a desk, sometimes writing, and sometimes, when I get lazy, looking up at the flies. There are fourteen on the plaster of the ceiling over my head. They died two winters ago. I

sometimes think to have them brushed off, but they have been there so long now I hardly like to.'

'Ah! you like them,' she said, 'because you are accustomed to them. In most cases there is not much more to be said for our family affections, I think.'

'In a room close at hand,' he went on, 'there is, you know, Uncle Michael, who never speaks.'

'Precisely. You have an uncle who never speaks; I have a mother who never is silent. She went to see Mrs. Sherman the other day. What did she say to her?'

'Nothing.'

'Really! What a dull thing existence is!'—this with a great sigh. 'When the Fates are weaving our web of life some mischievous goblin always runs off with the dye-pot. Everything is dull and grey. Am I looking a little pale? I have been so very ill.'

'A little bit pale, perhaps,' he said, doubtfully.

The Square gate brought them to a stop. It was locked, but she had the key. The lock was stiff, but turned easily for John Sherman. [216]

'How strong you are,' she said.

It was an iridescent evening of spring. The leaves of the bushes had still their faint green. As Margaret darted about at the tennis, a red feather in her cap seemed to rejoice with its wearer. Everything was at once gay and tranquil. The whole world had that unreal air it assumes at beautiful moments, as though it might vanish at a touch like an iridescent soap-bubble.

After a little Margaret said she was tired, and, sitting on a garden-seat among the bushes, began telling him the plots of novels lately read by her. Suddenly she cried: 'The novel-writers were all serious people like you. They are so hard on people like me. They always make us come to a bad end. They *say* we are always acting, acting, acting; and what else do you serious people do? You act before the world. I think, do you know, *we* act before ourselves. All the old foolish kings and queens in history were like us. They laughed and beckoned and went to the block for no very good purpose. I daresay the headsman were like you.'

'We would never cut off so pretty a head.'

[217]

'Oh, yes, you would—you would cut off mine to-morrow.' All this she said vehemently, piercing him with her bright eyes. 'You would cut off my head to-morrow,' she repeated, almost fiercely; 'I tell you you would.'

Her departure was always unexpected, her moods changed with so much rapidity. 'Look!' she said, pointing where the clock on St. Peter's church showed above the bushes. 'Five minutes to five. In five minutes my mother's tea-hour. It is like growing old. I go to gossip. Good-bye.'

The red feather shone for a moment among the bushes and was gone.

IV

The next day and the day after, Sherman was followed by those bright eyes. When he opened a letter at his desk they seemed to gaze at him from the open paper, and to watch him from the flies upon the ceiling. He was even a worse clerk than usual.

One evening he said to his mother, 'Miss Leland has beautiful eyes.'

'My dear, she puts belladonna in them.'

'What a thing to say!'

'I know she does, though her mother denies it.'

[218]

'Well, she is certainly beautiful,' he answered.

'My dear, if she has an attraction for you, I don't want to discourage it. She is rich as girls go nowadays; and one woman has one fault, another another: one's untidy, one fights with her servants, one fights with her friends, another has a crabbed tongue when she talks of them.'

Sherman became again silent, finding no fragment of romance in such a discourse.

In the next week or two he saw much of Miss Leland. He met her almost every evening on his return from the office, walking slowly, her racket under her arm. They played tennis much and talked more. Sherman began to play tennis in his dreams. Miss Leland told him all about herself, her friends, her inmost feelings; and yet every day he knew less about her. It was not merely that saying everything she said nothing, but that continually there came through her wild words the sound of the mysterious flutes and viols of that unconscious nature which dwells so much nearer to woman than to man. How often do we not endow the beautiful and candid with depth and mystery not their own? We do not know that we but hear in their voices those flutes and viols playing to us of the alluring secret of the world. [219]

Sherman had never known in early life what is called first love, and now, when he had passed thirty, it came to him—that love more of the imagination than of either the senses or affections: it was mainly the eyes that followed him.

It is not to be denied that as this love grew serious it grew mercenary. Now active, now latent, the notion had long been in Sherman's mind, as we know, that he should marry money. A born loungeur, riches tempted him greatly. When those eyes haunted him from the fourteen flies on the ceiling, he would say, 'I should be rich; I should have a house in the country; I should hunt and shoot, and have a garden and three gardeners; I should leave this abominable office.' Then the eyes became even more beautiful. It was a new kind of belladonna.

He shrank a little, however, from choosing even this pleasant pathway. He had planned many futures for himself and learnt to love them all. It was this that had made him linger on at Ballah for so long, and it was this that now kept him undecided. He would have to give up the universe for a garden and three gardeners. How sad it was to make substantial even the best of his dreams. How hard it was to submit to that decree which compels every step we take in life to be a death in the imagination. How difficult it was to be so enwrapped in this one new hope as not to hear the lamentations that were going on in dim corners of his mind. [220]

One day he resolved to propose. He examined himself in the glass in the morning; and for the first time in his life smiled to see how good-looking he was. In the evening before leaving the office he peered at himself in the mirror over the mantelpiece in the room where customers were received. The sun was blazing through the window full on his face. He did not look so well. Immediately all courage left him.

That evening he went out after his mother had gone to bed and walked far along the towing-path of the Thames. A faint mist half covered away the houses and factory chimneys on the further side; beside him a band of osiers swayed softly, the deserted and full river lapping their stems. He looked on all these things with foreign eyes. He had no sense of possession. Indeed it seemed to him that everything in London was owned by too many to be owned by anyone. Another river that he did seem to possess flowed through his memory with all its familiar sights—boys riding in the stream to the saddle-girths, fish leaping, water-flies raising their small ripples, a swan asleep, the wallflowers growing on the red brick of the margin. He grew very sad. Suddenly a shooting star, fiery and vagabond, leaped from the darkness. It brought his mind again in a moment to Margaret Leland. To marry her, he thought, was to separate himself from the old life he loved so well. [221]

Crossing the river at Putney, he hurried homewards among the market-gardens. Nearing home, the streets were deserted, the shops closed. Where King Street joins the Broadway, entirely alone with itself, in the very centre of the road a little black cat was leaping after its shadow.

'Ah!' he thought, 'it would be a good thing to be a little black cat. To leap about in the moonlight and sleep in the sunlight, and catch flies, to have no hard tasks to do or hard decisions to come to, to be simple and full of animal spirits.'

At the corner of Bridge Road was a coffee-stall, the only sign of human life. He bought some cold meat and flung it to the little black cat. [222]

V

Some more days went by. At last, one day, arriving at the Square somewhat earlier than usual, and sitting down to wait for Margaret on the seat among the bushes, he noticed the pieces of a torn-up letter lying about. Beside him on the seat was a pencil, as though someone had been writing there and left it behind them. The pencil-lead was worn very short. The letter had been torn up, perhaps in a fit of impatience.

In a half-mechanical way he glanced over the scraps. On one of them he read: 'MY DEAR ELIZA,—What an incurable gossip my mother is. You heard of my misfortune. I nearly died—' Here he had to search among the scraps; at last he found one that seemed to follow. 'Perhaps you will hear news from me soon. There is a handsome young man who pays me attention, and—' Here another piece had to be found. 'I would take him though he had a face like the man in the moon, and limped like the devil at the theatre. Perhaps I am a little in love. Oh! friend of my heart—' Here it broke off again. He was interested, and searched the grass and the bushes for fragments. Some had been blown to quite a distance. He got together several sentences now. 'I will not spend another winter with my mother for anything. All this is, of course, a secret. I had to tell somebody; secrets are bad for my health. Perhaps it will all come to nothing.' Then the letter went off into dress, the last novel the writer had read, and so forth. A Miss Sims, too, was mentioned, who had said some unkind thing of the writer. [223]

Sherman was greatly amused. It did not seem to him wrong to read—we do not mind spying on one of the crowd, any more than on the personages of literature. It never occurred to him that he, or any friend of his, was concerned in these pencil scribblings.

Suddenly he saw this sentence: 'Heigho! your poor Margaret is falling in love again; condole with her, my dear.'

He started. The name 'Margaret,' the mention of Miss Sims, the style of the whole letter, all made plain the authorship. Very desperately ashamed of himself, he got up and tore each scrap of paper into still smaller fragments and scattered them far apart.

That evening he proposed and was accepted. [224]

VI

For several days there was a new heaven and a new earth. Miss Leland seemed suddenly impressed with the seriousness of life. She was gentleness itself; and as Sherman sat on Sunday mornings in his pocket-handkerchief of a garden under the one tree, with its smoky stem, watching the little circles of sunlight falling from the leaves like a shower of new sovereigns, he gazed at them with a longer and keener joy than heretofore—a new heaven and a new earth, surely!

Sherman planted and dug and raked this pocket-handkerchief of a garden most diligently, rooting out the docks and dandelions and mouse-ear and the patches of untimely grass. It was the point of contact between his new life and the old. It was far too small and unfertile and shaded-in to satisfy his love of gardener's experiments and early vegetables. Perforce this husbandry was too little complex for his affections to gather much round plant and bed. His garden in Ballah used to touch him like the growth of a young family. Now he was content to satisfy his barbaric sense of colour; right round were planted alternate hollyhock and sunflower, and behind them scarlet-runners showed their inch-high cloven shoots. [225]

One Sunday it occurred to him to write to his friends on the matter of his engagement. He numbered them over. Howard, one or two less intimate, and Mary Carton. At that name he paused; he would not write just yet.

VII

One Saturday there was a tennis party. Miss Leland devoted herself all day to a young Foreign Office clerk. She played tennis with him, talked with him, drank lemonade with him, had neither thoughts nor words for anyone else. John Sherman was quite happy. Tennis was always a bore, and now he was not called upon to play. It had not struck him there was occasion for jealousy.

As the guests were dispersing, his betrothed came to him. Her manner seemed strange.

'Does anything ail you, Margaret?' he asked, as they left the Square.

'Everything,' she answered, looking about her with ostentatious secrecy. 'You are a most annoying person. You have no feeling; you have no temperament; you are quite the most stupid creature I was ever engaged to.' [226]

'What is wrong with you?' he asked, in bewilderment.

'Don't you see,' she replied, with a broken voice, 'I flirted all day with that young clerk? You should have nearly killed me with jealousy. You do not love me a bit! There is no knowing what I might do!'

'Well, you know,' he said, 'it was not right of you. People might say, "Look at John Sherman; how furious he must be!" To be sure, I wouldn't be furious a bit; but then they'd go about saying I was. It would not matter, of course; but you know it is not right of you.'

'It is no use pretending you have feeling. It is all that miserable little town you come from, with its sleepy old shops and its sleepy old society. I would give up loving you this minute,' she added, with a caressing look, 'if you had not that beautiful bronzed face. I will improve you. To-morrow evening you must come to the opera.' Suddenly she changed the subject. 'Do you see that little fat man coming out of the Square and staring at me? I was engaged to him once. Look at the four old ladies behind him, shaking their bonnets at me. Each has some story about me, and it will be all the same in a hundred years.'

After this he had hardly a moment's peace. She kept him continually going to theatres, operas, parties. These last were an especial trouble; for it was her wont to gather about her an admiring circle to listen to her extravagancies, and he was no longer at the age when we enjoy audacity for its own sake. [227]

VIII

Gradually those bright eyes of his imagination, watching him from letters and from among the fourteen flies on the ceiling, had ceased to be centres of peace. They seemed like two whirlpools, wherein the order and quiet of his life were absorbed hourly and daily.

He still thought sometimes of the country house of his dreams and of the garden and the three gardeners, but somehow they had lost half their charm.

He had written to Howard and some others, and commenced, at last, a letter to Mary Carton. It lay unfinished on his desk; a thin coating of dust was gathering upon it.

Mrs. Leland called continually on Mrs. Sherman. She sentimentalized over the lovers, and even wept over them; each visit supplied the household with conversation for a week.

Every Sunday morning—his letter-writing time—Sherman looked at his uncompleted letter. Gradually it became plain to him he could not finish it. It had never seemed to him he had more than friendship for Mary Carton, yet somehow it was not possible to tell her of this love-affair. [228]

The more his betrothed troubled him the more he thought about the unfinished letter. He was a man standing at the cross roads.

Whenever the wind blew from the south he remembered his friend, for that is the wind that fills the heart with memory.

One Sunday he removed the dust from the face of the letter almost reverently, as though it were the dust from the wheels of destiny. But the letter remained unfinished.

IX

One Wednesday in June Sherman arrived home an hour earlier than usual from his office, as his wont was the first Wednesday in every month, on which day his mother was at home to her friends. They had not many callers. To-day there was no one as yet but a badly-dressed old lady his mother had picked up he knew not where. She had been looking at his photograph album, and recalling names and dates from her own prosperous times. As she went out Miss Leland came in. She gave the old lady in passing a critical look that made the poor creature very conscious of a threadbare mantle, and went over to Mrs. Sherman, holding out both hands. Sherman, who knew all his mother's peculiarities, noticed on her side a slight coldness; perhaps she did not altogether like this beautiful dragon-fly. [229]

'I have come,' said Miss Leland, 'to tell John that he must learn to paint. Music and society are not enough. There is nothing like art to give refinement.' Then turning to John Sherman—'My dear, I will make you quite different. You are a dreadful barbarian, you know.'

'What ails me, Margaret?'

'Just look at that necktie! Nothing shows a man's cultivation like his necktie! Then your reading! You never read anything but old books nobody wants to talk about. I will lend you three everyone has read this month. You really must acquire small talk and change your necktie.'

Presently she noticed the photograph-book lying open on a chair.

'Oh!' she cried, 'I must have another look at John's beauties.'

[230]

It was a habit of his to gather all manner of pretty faces. It came from incipient old bachelorhood, perhaps.

Margaret criticised each photograph in turn with, 'Ah! she looks as if she had some life in her!' or 'I do not like your sleepy eyelids,' or some such phrase. The mere relations were passed by without a word. One face occurred several times—a quiet face. As Margaret came on this one for the third time, Mrs. Sherman, who seemed a little resentful about something, said: 'That is his friend, Mary Carton.'

'He told me about her. He has a book she gave him. So that is she? How interesting! I pity these poor country people. It must be hard to keep from getting stupid.'

'My friend is not at all stupid,' said Sherman.

'Does she speak with a brogue? I remember you told me she was very good. It must be difficult to keep from talking platitudes when one is very good.'

'You are quite wrong about her. You would like her very much,' he replied.

'She is one of those people, I suppose, who can only talk about their relatives, or their families, or about their friends' children: how this one has got the whooping-cough, and this one is getting well of the measles!' She kept swaying one of the leaves between her finger and thumb impatiently. 'What a strange way she does her hair; and what an ugly dress!' [231]

'You must not talk that way about her—she is my great friend.'

'Friend! friend!' she burst out. 'He thinks I will believe in friendship between a man and a woman!'

She got up, and said, turning round with an air of changing the subject, 'Have you written to your friends about our engagement? You had not done so when I asked you lately.'

'I have.'

'All?'

'Well, not all.'

'Your great friend, Miss — what do you call her?'

'Miss Carton. I have not written to her.'

She tapped impatiently with her foot.

'They were really old companions—that is all,' said Mrs. Sherman, wishing to mend matters. 'They were both readers; that brought them together. I never much fancied her. Yet she was well enough as a friend, and helped, maybe, with reading, and the gardening, and his good bringing-up, to keep him from the idle young men of the neighbourhood.'

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'You must make him write and tell her at once—you must, you must!' almost sobbed out Miss Leland.

'I promise,' he answered.

Immediately returning to herself, she cried, 'If I were in her place I know what I would like to do when I got the letter. I know who I would like to kill!'—this with a laugh as she went over and looked at herself in the mirror on the mantelpiece.

[233]

THIRD PART JOHN SHERMAN REVISITS BALLAH

I

The others had gone, and Sherman was alone in the drawing-room by himself, looking through the window. Never had London seemed to him so like a reef whereon he was cast away. In the Square the bushes were covered with dust; some sparrows were ruffling their feathers on the side-walk; people passed, continually disturbing them. The sky was full of smoke. A terrible feeling of solitude in the midst of a multitude oppressed him. A portion of his life was ending. He thought that soon he would be no longer a young man, and now, at the period when the desire of novelty grows less, was coming the great change of his life. He felt he was of those whose granaries are in the past. And now this past would never renew itself. He was going out into the distance as though with strange sailors in a strange ship.

He longed to see again the town where he had spent his childhood: to see the narrow roads and mean little shops. And perhaps it would be easier to tell her who had been the friend of so many years of this engagement in his own person than by letter. He wondered why it was so hard to write so simple a thing.

[234]

It was his custom to act suddenly on his decisions. He had not made many in his life. The next day he announced at the office that he would be absent for three or four days. He told his mother he had business in the country.

His betrothed met him on the way to the terminus, as he was walking, bag in hand, and asked where he was going. 'I am going on business to the country,' he said, and blushed. He was creeping away like a thief.

II

He arrived in the town of Ballah by rail, for he had avoided the slow cattle-steamer and gone by Dublin.

It was the forenoon, and he made for the Imperial Hotel to wait till four in the evening, when he would find Mary Carton in the schoolhouse, for he had timed his journey so as to arrive on Thursday, the day of the children's practice.

As he went through the streets his heart went out to every familiar place and sight: the rows of tumble-down thatched cottages; the slated roofs of the shops; the women selling gooseberries; the river bridge; the high walls of the garden where it was said the gardener used to see the ghost of a former owner in the shape of a rabbit; the street corner no child would pass at nightfall for fear of the headless soldier; the deserted flour-store; the wharves covered with grass. All these he watched with Celtic devotion, that devotion carried to the ends of the world by the Celtic exiles, and since old time surrounding their journeyings with rumour of plaintive songs.

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He sat in the window of the Imperial Hotel, now full of guests. He did not notice any of them. He sat there meditating, meditating. Grey clouds covering the town with flying shadows rushed by like the old and dishevelled eagles that Maeldune saw hurrying towards the waters of life. Below in the street passed by country people, townspeople, travellers, women with baskets, boys driving donkeys, old men with sticks; sometimes he recognized a face or was recognized himself, and welcomed by some familiar voice.

'You have come home a handsomer gentleman than your father, Misther John, and he was a neat figure of a man, God bless him!' said the waiter, bringing him his lunch; and in truth Sherman had grown handsomer for these years away. His face and gesture had more of dignity, for on the centre of his nature life had dropped a pinch of experience.

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At four he left the hotel and waited near the schoolhouse till the children came running out. One or two of the elder ones he recognized but turned away.

III

Mary Carton was locking the harmonium as he went in. She came to meet him with a surprised and joyful air.

'How often I have wished to see you! When did you come? How well you remembered my habits to know where to find me. My dear John, how glad I am to see you!'

'You are the same as when I left, and this room is the same, too.'

'Yes,' she answered, 'the same, only I have had some new prints hung up—prints of fruits and leaves and bird-nests. It was only done last week. When people choose pictures and poems for children they choose out such domestic ones. I would not have any of the kind; children are such undomestic animals. But, John, I am so glad to see you in this old schoolhouse again. So little has changed with us here. Some have died and some have been married, and we are all a little older and the trees a little taller.'

[237]

'I have come to tell you I am going to be married.'

She became in a moment perfectly white, and sat down as though attacked with faintness. Her hand on the edge of the chair trembled.

Sherman looked at her, and went on in a bewildered, mechanical way: 'My betrothed is a Miss Leland. She has a good deal of money. You know my mother always wished me to marry some one with money. Her father, when alive, was an old client of Sherman and Saunders. She is much admired in society.' Gradually his voice became a mere murmur. He did not seem to know that he was speaking. He stopped entirely. He was looking at Mary Carton.

Everything around him was as it had been some three years before. The table was covered with cups and the floor with crumbs. Perhaps the mouse pulling at a crumb under the table was the same mouse as on that other evening. The only difference was the brooding daylight of summer and the ceaseless chirruping of the sparrows in the ivy outside. He had a confused sense of having lost his way. It was just the same feeling he had known as a child, when one dark night he had taken a wrong turning, and instead of arriving at his own house, found himself at a landmark he knew was miles from home.

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A moment earlier, however difficult his life, the issues were always definite; now suddenly had entered the obscurity of another's interest.

Before this it had not occurred to him that Mary Carton had any stronger feeling for him than warm friendship.

He began again, speaking in the same mechanical way: 'Miss Leland lives with her mother near us. She is very well educated and very well connected, though she has lived always among business people.'

Miss Carton, with a great effort, had recovered her composure.

'I congratulate you,' she said. 'I hope you will be always happy. You came here on some business for your firm, I suppose? I believe they have some connection with the town still.'

'I only came here to tell you I was going to be married.'

'Do you not think it would have been better to have written?' she said, beginning to put away the children's tea-things in a cupboard by the fireplace.

[239]

'It would have been better,' he answered, drooping his head.

Without a word, locking the door behind them, they went out. Without a word they walked the grey streets. Now and then a woman or a child curtseyed as they passed. Some wondered, perhaps, to see these old friends so silent. At the rectory they bade each other good-bye.

'I hope you will be always happy,' she said. 'I will pray for you and your wife. I am very busy with the children and old people, but I shall always find a moment to wish you well in. Good-bye now.'

They parted; the gate in the wall closed behind her. He stayed for a few moments looking up at the tops of the trees and bushes showing over the wall, and at the house a little way beyond. He stood considering his problem—her life, his life. His, at any rate, would have incident and change; hers would be the narrow existence of a woman who, failing to fulfil the only abiding wish she has ever formed, seeks to lose herself in routine—mournfullest of things on this old planet.

This had been revealed: he loved Mary Carton, she loved him. He remembered Margaret Leland, and murmured she did well to be jealous. Then all her contemptuous words about the town and its inhabitants came into his mind. Once they made no impression on him, but now the sense of personal identity having been disturbed by this sudden revelation, alien as they were to his way of thinking, they began to press in on him. Mary, too, would have agreed with them, he thought; and might it be that at some distant time weary monotony in abandonment would have so weighed down the spirit of Mary Carton that she would be merely one of the old and sleepy whose dulness filled the place like a cloud?

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He went sadly towards the hotel; everything about him, the road, the sky, the feet wherewith he walked seeming phantasmal and without meaning.

He told the waiter he would leave by the first train in the morning. 'What! and you only just come home?' the man answered. He ordered coffee and could not drink it. He went out and came in again immediately. He went down into the kitchen and talked to the servants. They told him of everything that had happened since he had gone. He was not interested, and went up to his room. 'I must go home and do what people expect of me; one must be careful to do that.'

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Through all the journey home his problem troubled him. He saw the figure of Mary Carton

perpetually passing through a round of monotonous duties. He saw his own life among aliens going on endlessly, wearily.

From Holyhead to London his fellow-travellers were a lady and her three young daughters, the eldest about twelve. The smooth faces shining with well-being became to him ominous symbols. He hated them. They were symbolic of the indifferent world about to absorb him, and of the vague something that was dragging him inch by inch from the nook he had made for himself in the chimney-corner. He was at one of those dangerous moments when the sense of personal identity is shaken, when one's past and present seem about to dissolve partnership. He sought refuge in memory, and counted over every word of Mary's he could remember. He forgot the present and the future. 'Without love,' he said to himself, 'we would be either gods or vegetables.'

The rain beat on the window of the carriage. He began to listen; thought and memory became a blank; his mind was full of the sound of rain-drops. [242]

FOURTH PART THE REV. WILLIAM HOWARD

I

After his return to London Sherman for a time kept to himself, going straight home from his office, moody and self-absorbed, trying not to consider his problem—her life, his life. He often repeated to himself, 'I must do what people expect of me. It does not rest with me now—my choosing time is over.' He felt that whatever way he turned he would do a great evil to himself and others. To his nature all sudden decisions were difficult, and so he kept to the groove he had entered upon. It did not even occur to him to do otherwise. He never thought of breaking this engagement off and letting people say what they would. He was bound in hopelessly by a chain of congratulations.

A week passed slowly as a month. The wheels of the cabs and carriages seemed to be rolling through his mind. He often remembered the quiet river at the end of his garden in the town of Ballah. How the weeds swayed there, and the salmon leaped! At the week's end came a note from Miss Leland, complaining of his neglecting her so many days. He sent a rather formal answer, promising to call soon. To add to his other troubles, a cold east wind arose and made him shiver continually. [243]

One evening he and his mother were sitting silent, the one knitting, the other half-asleep. He had been writing letters and was now in a reverie. Round the walls were one or two drawings, done by him at school. His mother had got them framed. His eyes were fixed on a drawing of a stream and some astonishing cows.

A few days ago he had found an old sketchbook for children among some forgotten papers, which taught how to draw a horse by making three ovals for the basis of his body, one lying down in the middle, two standing up at each end for flank and chest, and how to draw a cow by basing its body on a square. He kept trying to fit squares into the cows. He was half inclined to take them out of their frames and retouch on this new principle. Then he began somehow to remember the child with the swollen face who threw a stone at the dog the day he resolved to leave home first. Then some other image came. His problem moved before him in a disjointed way. He was dropping asleep. Through his reverie came the click, click of his mother's needles. She had found some London children to knit for. He was at that marchland between waking and dreaming where our thoughts begin to have a life of their own—the region where art is nurtured and inspiration born. [244]

He started, hearing something sliding and rustling, and looked up to see a piece of cardboard fall from one end of the mantelpiece, and, driven by a slight gust of air, circle into the ashes under the grate.

'Oh,' said his mother, 'that is the portrait of the *locum tenens*.' She still spoke of the Rev. William Howard by the name she had first known him by. 'He is always being photographed. They are all over the house, and I, an old woman, have not had one taken all my life. Take it out with the tongs.' Her son, after some poking in the ashes, for it had fallen far back, brought out a somewhat dusty photograph. 'That,' she continued, 'is one he sent us two or three months ago. It has been lying in the letter-rack since.'

'He is not so spick-and-span-looking as usual,' said Sherman, rubbing the ashes off the photograph with his sleeve. [245]

'By the by,' his mother replied, 'he has lost his parish, I hear. He is very mediæval, you know, and he lately preached a sermon to prove that children who die unbaptized are lost. He had been reading up the subject and was full of it. The mothers turned against him, not being so familiar with St. Augustine as he was. There were other reasons in plenty too. I wonder that anyone can stand that monkeyish fantastic family.'

As the way is with so many country-bred people, the world for her was divided up into families rather than individuals.

While she was talking, Sherman, who had returned to his chair, leant over the table and began

to write hurriedly. She was continuing her denunciation when he interrupted with: 'Mother, I have just written this letter to him:—

"MY DEAR HOWARD:

"Will you come and spend the autumn with us? I hear you are unoccupied just now. I am engaged to be married, as you know; it will be a long engagement. You will like my betrothed. I hope you will be great friends.

"Yours expectantly,
"JOHN SHERMAN."

'You rather take me aback,' she said. [246]

'I really like him,' he answered. 'You were always prejudiced against the Howards. Forgive me, but I really want very much to have him here.'

'Well, if you like him, I suppose I have no objection.'

'I do like him. He is very clever,' said her son, 'and knows a great deal. I wonder he does not marry. Do you not think he would make a good husband?—for you must admit he is sympathetic.'

'It is not difficult to sympathize with everyone if you have no true principles and convictions.'

Principles and convictions were her names for that strenuous consistency attained without trouble by men and women of few ideas.

'I am sure you will like him better,' said the other, 'when you see more of him.'

'Is that photograph quite spoilt?' she answered.

'No; there was nothing on it but ashes.'

'That is a pity, for one less would be something.'

After this they both became silent, she knitting, he gazing at the cows browsing at the edge of their stream, and trying to fit squares into their bodies; but now a smile played about his lips. [247]

Mrs. Sherman looked a little troubled. She would not object to any visitor of her son's, but quite made up her mind in no manner to put herself out to entertain the Rev. William Howard. She was puzzled as well. She did not understand the suddenness of this invitation. They usually talked over things for weeks.

II

Next day his fellow-clerks noticed a decided improvement in Sherman's spirits. He had a lark-like cheerfulness and alacrity breaking out at odd moments. When evening came he called, for the first time since his return, on Miss Leland. She scolded him for having answered her note in such a formal way, but was sincerely glad to see him return to his allegiance. We have said he had sometimes, though rarely, a talkative fit. He had one this evening. The last play they had been to, the last party, the picture of the year, all in turn he glanced at. She was delighted. Her training had not been in vain. Her barbarian was learning to chatter. This flattered her a deal.

'I was never engaged,' she thought, 'to a more interesting creature.' [248]

When he had risen to go, Sherman said: 'I have a friend coming to visit me in a few days; you will suit each other delightfully. He is very mediæval.'

'Do tell me about him; I like everything mediæval.'

'Oh,' he cried, with a laugh, 'his mediævalism is not in your line. He is neither a gay troubadour nor a wicked knight. He is a High Church curate.'

'Do not tell me anything more about him,' she answered; 'I will try to be civil to him, but you know I never liked curates. I have been an agnostic for many years. You, I believe, are orthodox.'

As Sherman was on his way home he met a fellow-clerk, and stopped him with: 'Are you an agnostic?'

'No. Why, what is that?'

'Oh, nothing! Good-bye,' he made answer, and hurried on his way.

III

The letter reached the Rev. William Howard at the right moment, arriving as it did in the midst of a crisis in his fortunes. In the course of a short life he had lost many parishes. He considered himself a martyr, but was considered by his enemies a clerical coxcomb. He had a habit of getting his mind possessed with some strange opinion, or what seemed so to his parishioners, and of preaching it while the notion lasted in the most startling way. The sermon on unbaptized children was an instance. It was not so much that he thought it true as that it possessed him for a day. It was not so much the thought as his own relation to it that allured him. Then, too, he loved [249]

what appeared to his parishioners to be the most unusual and dangerous practices. He put candles on the altar and crosses in unexpected places. He delighted in the intricacies of High Church costume, and was known to recommend confession and prayers for the dead.

Gradually the anger of his parishioners would increase. The rector, the washerwoman, the labourers, the squire, the doctor, the school-teachers, the shoemakers, the butchers, the seamstresses, the local journalist, the master of the hounds, the innkeeper, the veterinary surgeon, the magistrate, the children making mud pies, all would be filled with one dread—popery. Then he would fly for consolation to his little circle of the faithful, the younger ladies, who still repeated his fine sentiments and saw him in their imaginations standing perpetually before a wall covered with tapestry and holding a crucifix in some constrained and ancient attitude. At last he would have to go, feeling for his parishioners a gay and lofty disdain, and for himself that reverent approbation one gives to the captains who lead the crusade of ideas against those who merely sleep and eat. An efficient crusader he certainly was—too efficient, indeed, for his efficiency gave to all his thoughts a certain over-completeness and isolation, and a kind of hardness to his mind. His intellect was like a musician's instrument with no sounding-board. He could think carefully and cleverly, and even with originality, but never in such a way as to make his thoughts an illusion to something deeper than themselves. In this he was the reverse of poetical, for poetry is essentially a touch from behind a curtain. [250]

This conformation of his mind helped to lead him into all manner of needless contests and to the loss of this last parish among much else. Did not the world exist for the sake of these hard, crystalline thoughts, with which he played as with so many bone spilikins, delighting in his own skill? and were not all who disliked them merely—the many?

In this way it came about that Sherman's letter reached Howard at the right moment. Now, next to a new parish, he loved a new friend. A visit to London meant many. He had found he was, on the whole, a success at the beginning of friendships. [251]

He at once wrote an acceptance in his small and beautiful handwriting, and arrived shortly after his letter. Sherman, on receiving him, glanced at his neat and shining boots, the little medal at the watch-chain and the well-brushed hat, and nodded as though in answer to an inner query. He smiled approval at the slight elegant figure in its black clothes, at the satiny hair, and at the face, mobile as moving waters.

For several days the Shermans saw little of their guest. He had friends everywhere to turn into enemies and acquaintances to turn into friends. His days passed in visiting, visiting, visiting. Then there were theatres and churches to see, and new clothes to be bought, over which he was as anxious as a woman. Finally he settled down.

He passed his mornings in the smoking-room. He asked Sherman's leave to hang on the walls one or two religious pictures, without which he was not happy, and to place over the mantelpiece, under the pipe-rack, an ebony crucifix. In one corner of the room he laid a rug neatly folded for covering his knees on chilly days, and on the table a small collection of favourite books—a curious and carefully-chosen collection, in which Cardinal Newman and Bourget, St. Chrysostom and Flaubert lived together in perfect friendship. [252]

Early in his visit Sherman brought him to the Lelands. He was a success. The three—Margaret, Sherman, and Howard—played tennis in the Square. Howard was a good player, and seemed to admire Margaret. On the way home Sherman once or twice laughed to himself. It was like the clucking of a hen with a brood of chickens. He told Howard, too, how wealthy Margaret was said to be.

After this Howard always joined Sherman and Margaret at the tennis. Sometimes, too, after a little, on days when the study seemed dull and lonely, and the unfinished essay on St. Chrysostom more than usually laborious, he would saunter towards the Square before his friend's arrival, to find Margaret now alone, now with an acquaintance or two. About this time also press of work, an unusual thing with him, began to delay Sherman in town half-an-hour after his usual time. In the evenings they often talked of Margaret—Sherman frankly and carefully, as though in all anxiety to describe her as she was; and Howard with some enthusiasm: 'She has a religious vocation,' he said once, with a slight sigh. [253]

Sometimes they played chess—a game that Sherman had recently become devoted to, for he found it drew him out of himself more than anything else.

Howard now began to notice a curious thing. Sherman grew shabbier and shabbier, and at the same time more and more cheerful. This puzzled him, for he had noticed that he himself was not cheerful when shabby, and did not even feel upright and clever when his hat was getting old. He also noticed that when Sherman was talking to him he seemed to be keeping some thought to himself. When he first came to know him long ago in Ballah he had noticed occasionally the same thing, and set it down to a kind of suspiciousness and over-caution, natural to one who lived in such an out-of-the-way place. It seemed more persistent now, however. 'He is not well-trained,' he thought; 'he is half a peasant. He has not the brilliant candour of the man of the world.'

All this while the mind of Sherman was clucking continually over its brood of thoughts. Ballah was being constantly suggested to him. The grey corner of a cloud slanting its rain upon Cheapside called to mind by some remote suggestion the clouds rushing and falling in cloven surf on the seaward steep of a mountain north of Ballah. A certain street-corner made him remember an angle of the Ballah fish-market. At night a lantern, marking where the road was fenced off for [254]

mending, made him think of a tinker's cart, with its swing-can of burning coals, that used to stop on market days at the corner of Peter's Lane at Ballah. Delayed by a crush in the Strand, he heard a faint trickling of water near by; it came from a shop window where a little water-jet balanced a wooden ball upon its point. The sound suggested a cataract with a long Gaelic name, that leaped crying into the Gate of the Winds at Ballah. Wandering among these memories a footstep went to and fro continually, and the figure of Mary Carton moved among them like a phantom. He was set dreaming a whole day by walking down one Sunday morning to the border of the Thames—a few hundred yards from his house—and looking at the osier-covered Chiswick eyot. It made him remember an old day-dream of his. The source of the river that passed his garden at home was a certain wood-bordered and islanded lake, whither in childhood he had often gone blackberry-gathering. At the further end was a little islet called Innisfree. Its rocky centre, covered with many bushes, rose some forty feet above the lake. Often when life and its difficulties had seemed to him like the lessons of some elder boy given to a younger by mistake, it had seemed good to dream of going away to that islet and building a wooden hut there and burning a few years out, rowing to and fro, fishing, or lying on the island slopes by day, and listening at night to the ripple of the water and the quivering of the bushes—full always of unknown creatures—and going out at morning to see the island's edge marked by the feet of birds.

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These pictures became so vivid to him that the world about him—that Howard, Margaret, his mother even—began to seem far off. He hardly seemed aware of anything they were thinking and feeling. The light that dazzled him flowed from the vague and refracting regions of hope and memory; the light that made Howard's feet unsteady was ever the too-glaring lustre of life itself.

IV

On the evening of the 20th of June, after the blinds had been pulled down and the gas lighted, Sherman was playing chess in the smoking-room, right hand against left. Howard had gone out with a message to the Lelands. He would often say, 'Is there any message I can deliver for you? I know how lazy you are, and will save you the trouble.' A message was always found for him. A pile of books lent for Sherman's improvement went home one by one.

[256]

'Look here,' said Howard's voice in the doorway, 'I have been watching you for some time. You are cheating the red men most villainously. You are forcing them to make mistakes that the white men may win. Why, a few such games would ruin any man's moral nature.'

He was leaning against the doorway, looking, to Sherman's not too critical eyes, an embodiment of all that was self-possessed and brilliant. The great care with which he was dressed and his whole manner seemed to say: 'Look at me; do I not combine perfectly the zealot with the man of the world?' He seemed excited to-night. He had been talking at the Lelands, and talking well, and felt that elation which brings us many thoughts.

'My dear Sherman,' he went on, 'do cease that game. It is very bad for you. There is nobody alive who is honest enough to play a game of chess fairly out—right hand against left. We are so radically dishonest that we even cheat ourselves. We can no more play chess than we can think altogether by ourselves with security. You had much better play with me.'

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'Very well, but you will beat me; I have not much practice,' replied the other.

They reset the men and began to play. Sherman relied most upon his bishops and queen. Howard was fondest of the knights. At first Sherman was the attacking party, but in his characteristic desire to scheme out his game many moves ahead, kept making slips, and at last had to give up, with his men nearly all gone and his king hopelessly cornered. Howard seemed to let nothing escape him. When the game was finished he leant back in his chair and said, as he rolled a cigarette: 'You do not play well.' It gave him satisfaction to feel his proficiency in many small arts. 'You do not do any of these things at all well,' he went on, with an insolence peculiar to him when excited. 'You have been really very badly brought up and stupidly educated in that intolerable Ballah. They do not understand there any, even the least, of the arts of life; they only believe in information. Men who are compelled to move in the great world, and who are also cultivated, only value the personal acquirements—self-possession, adaptability, how to dress well, how even to play tennis decently—you would be not so bad at that, by the by, if you practised—or how to paint or write effectively. They know that it is better to smoke one's cigarette with a certain charm of gesture than to have by heart all the encyclopedias. I say this not merely as a man of the world, but as a teacher of religion. A man when he rises from the grave will take with him only the things that he is in himself. He will leave behind the things that he merely possesses, learning and information not less than money and high estate. They will stay behind with his house and his clothes and his body. A collection of facts will no more help him than a collection of stamps. The learned will not get into heaven as readily as the flute-player, or even as the man who smokes a cigarette gracefully. Now, you are not learned, but you have been brought up almost as badly as if you were. In that wretched town they told you that education was to know that Russia is bounded on the north by the Arctic Sea, and on the west by the Baltic Ocean, and that Vienna is situated on the Danube, and that William the Third came to the throne in the year 1688. They have never taught you any personal art. Even chess-playing might have helped you at the day of judgment.'

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'I am really not a worse chess-player than you. I am only more careless.'

There was a slight resentment in Sherman's voice. The other noticed it, and said, changing his manner from the insolent air of a young beauty to a self-depreciatory one, which was wont to give him at times a very genuine charm: 'It is really a great pity, for you Shermans are a deep people, much deeper than we Howards. We are like moths or butterflies, or rather rapid rivulets, while you and yours are deep pools in the forest where the beasts go to drink. No! I have a better metaphor. Your mind and mine are two arrows. Yours has got no feathers, and mine has no metal on the point. I don't know which is most needed for right conduct. I wonder where we are going to strike earth. I suppose it will be all right some day when the world has gone by and they have collected all the arrows into one quiver.'

He went over to the mantelpiece to hunt for a match, as his cigarette had gone out. Sherman had lifted a corner of the blind and was gazing over the roofs shining from a recent shower, and thinking how on such a night as this he had sat with Mary Carton by the rectory fire listening to the rain without and talking of the future and of the training of village children. [260]

'Have you seen Miss Leland in her last new dress from Paris?' said Howard, making one of his rapid transitions. 'It is very rich in colour, and makes her look a little pale, like Saint Cecilia. She is wonderful as she stands by the piano, a silver cross round her neck. We have been talking about you. She complains to me. She says you are a little barbarous. You seem to look down on style, and sometimes—you must forgive me—even on manners, and you are quite without small talk. You must really try and be worthy of that beautiful girl, with her great soul and religious genius. She told me quite sadly, too, that you are not improving.'

'No,' said Sherman, 'I am not going forward; I am at present trying to go sideways like the crabs.'

'Be serious,' answered the other. 'She told me these things with the most sad and touching voice. She makes me her confidant, you know, in many matters, because of my wide religious experience. You must really improve yourself. You must paint or something.'

'Well, I will paint or something.'

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'I am quite serious, Sherman. Try and be worthy of her, a soul as gentle as Saint Cecilia's.'

'She is very wealthy,' said Sherman. 'If she were engaged to you and not to me you might hope to die a bishop.'

Howard looked at him in a mystified way and the conversation dropped. Presently Howard got up and went to his room, and Sherman, resetting the chess-board, began to play again, and, letting longer and longer pauses of reverie come between his moves, played far into the morning, cheating now in favour of the red men, now in favour of the white.

V

The next afternoon Howard found Miss Leland sitting, reading in an alcove in her drawing-room, between a stuffed parroquet and a blue De Morgan jar. As he was shown in he noticed, with a momentary shock, that her features were quite commonplace. Then she saw him, and at once seemed to vanish wrapped in an exulting flame of life. She stood up, flinging the book on to the seat with some violence.

'I have been reading the "Imitation of Christ," and was just feeling that I should have to become a theosophist or a socialist, or go and join the Catholic Church, or do something. How delightful it is to see you again! How is my savage getting on? It is so good of you to try and help me to reform him.'

[262]

They talked on about Sherman, and Howard did his best to console her for his shortcomings. Time would certainly improve her savage. Several times she gazed at him with those large dark eyes of hers, of which the pupils to-day seemed larger than usual. They made him feel dizzy and clutch tightly the arm of his chair. Then she began to talk about her life since childhood—how they got to the subject he never knew—and made a number of those confidences which are so dangerous because so flattering. To love—there is nothing else worth living for; but then men are so shallow. She had never found a nature deep as her own. She would not pretend that she had not often been in love, but never had any heart rung back to her the true note. As she spoke her face quivered with excitement. The exulting flame of life seemed spreading from her to the other things in the room. To Howard's eyes it seemed as though the bright pots and stuffed birds and plush curtains began to glow with a light not of this world—to glimmer like the strange and chaotic colours the mystic Blake imagined upon the scaled serpent of Eden. The light seemed gradually to dim his past and future, and to make pale his good resolves. Was it not in itself that which all men are seeking, and for which all else exists?

[263]

He leant forward and took her hand, timidly and doubtfully. She did not draw it away. He leant nearer and kissed her on the forehead. She gave a joyful cry, and, casting her arms round his neck, burst out, 'Ah! you—and I. We were made for each other. I hate Sherman. He is an egotist. He is a beast. He is selfish and foolish.' Releasing one of her arms she struck the seat with her hand, excitedly, and went on, 'How angry he will be! But it serves him right! How badly he is dressing. He does not know anything about anything. But you—you—I knew you were meant for me the moment I saw you.'

That evening Howard flung himself into a chair in the empty smoking-room. He lighted a

cigarette; it went out. Again he lighted it; again it went out. 'I am a traitor—and that good, stupid fellow, Sherman, never to be jealous!' he thought. 'But then, how could I help it? And, besides, it cannot be a bad action to save her from a man she is so much above in refinement and feeling.' He was getting into good-humour with himself. He got up and went over and looked at the photograph of Raphael's Madonna, which he had hung over the mantelpiece. 'How like Margaret's are her big eyes!' [264]

VI

The next day when Sherman came home from his office he saw an envelope lying on the smoking-room table. It contained a letter from Howard, saying that he had gone away, and that he hoped Sherman would forgive his treachery, but that he was hopelessly in love with Miss Leland, and that she returned his love.

Sherman went downstairs. His mother was helping the servant to set the table.

'You will never guess what has happened,' he said. 'My affair with Margaret is over.'

'I cannot pretend to be sorry, John,' she replied. She had long considered Miss Leland among accepted things, like the chimney-pots on the roof, and submitted, as we do, to any unalterable fact, but had never praised her or expressed liking in any way. 'She puts belladonna in her eyes, and is a vixen and a flirt, and I dare say her wealth is all talk. But how did it happen?'

Her son was, however, too excited to listen.

He went upstairs and wrote the following note: [265]

MY DEAR MARGARET:

I congratulate you on a new conquest. There is no end to your victories. As for me, I bow myself out with many sincere wishes for your happiness, and remain,

Your friend,
JOHN SHERMAN.'

Having posted this letter he sat down with Howard's note spread out before him, and wondered whether there was anything mean and small-minded in neatness—he himself was somewhat untidy. He had often thought so before, for their strong friendship was founded in a great measure on mutual contempt, but now immediately added, being in good-humour with the world, 'He is much cleverer than I am. He must have been very industrious at school.'

A week went by. He made up his mind to put an end to his London life. He broke to his mother his resolve to return to Ballah. She was delighted, and at once began to pack. Her old home had long seemed to her a kind of lost Eden, wherewith she was accustomed to contrast the present. When, in time, this present had grown into the past it became an Eden in turn. She was always ready for a change, if the change came to her in the form of a return to something old. Others place their ideals in the future; she laid hers in the past. [266]

The only one this momentous resolution seemed to surprise was the old and deaf servant. She waited with ever-growing impatience. She would sit by the hour wool-gathering on the corner of a chair with a look of bewildered delight. As the hour of departure came near she sang continually in a cracked voice.

Sherman, a few days before leaving, was returning for the last time from his office when he saw, to his surprise, Howard and Miss Leland carrying each a brown-paper bundle. He nodded good-humouredly, meaning to pass on.

'John,' she said, 'look at this brooch William gave me—a ladder leaning against the moon and a butterfly climbing up it. Is it not sweet? We are going to visit the poor.'

'And I,' he said, 'am going to catch eels. I am leaving town.'

He made his excuses, saying he had no time to wait, and hurried off. She looked after him with a mournful glance, strange in anybody who had exchanged one lover for another more favoured.

'Poor fellow,' murmured Howard, 'he is broken-hearted.'

'Nonsense,' answered Miss Leland, somewhat snappishly. [267]

FIFTH PART JOHN SHERMAN RETURNS TO BALLAH

I

This being the homeward trip, SS. *Lavinia* carried no cattle, but many passengers. As the sea was smooth and the voyage near its end, they lounged about the deck in groups. Two cattle-merchants were leaning over the taffrail smoking. In appearance they were something between betting-men and commercial travellers. For years they had done all their sleeping in steamers and trains. A short distance from them a clerk from Liverpool, with a consumptive cough, walked

to and fro, a little child holding his hand. Shortly he would be landed in a boat putting off from the shore for the purpose. He had come hoping that his native air of Teeling Head would restore him. The little child was a strange contrast—her cheeks ruddy with perfect health. Further forward, talking to one of the crew, was a man with a red face and slightly unsteady step. In the companion-house was a governess, past her first youth, very much afraid of sea-sickness. She had brought her luggage up and heaped it round her to be ready for landing. Sherman sat on a pile of cable looking out over the sea. It was just noon; SS. *Lavinia*, having passed by Tory and Rathlin, was approaching the Donegal cliffs. They were covered by a faint mist, which made them loom even vaster than they were. To westward the sun shone on a perfectly blue sea. Seagulls came out of the mist and plunged into the sunlight, and out of the sunlight and plunged into the mist. To the westward gannets were striking continually, and a porpoise showed now and then, his fin and back gleaming in the sun. Sherman was more perfectly happy than he had been for many a day, and more ardently thinking. All nature seemed full of a Divine fulfilment. Everything fulfilled its law—fulfilment that is peace, whether it be for good or for evil, for evil also has its peace, the peace of the birds of prey. Sherman looked from the sea to the ship and grew sad. Upon this thing, crawling slowly along the sea, moved to and fro many mournful and slouching figures. He looked from the ship to himself and his eyes filled with tears. On himself, on these moving figures, hope and memory fed like flames.

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Again his eyes gladdened, for he knew he had found his present. He would live in his love and the day as it passed. He would live that his law might be fulfilled. Now, was he sure of this truth—the saints on the one hand, the animals on the other, live in the moment as it passes. Thitherward had his days brought him. This was the one grain they had ground. To grind one grain is sufficient for a lifetime.

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II

A few days later Sherman was hurrying through the town of Ballah. It was Saturday, and he passed down through the marketing country people, and the old women with baskets of cakes and gooseberries and long pieces of sugarstick shaped like walking-sticks, and called by children 'Peggie's leg.'

Now, as two months earlier, he was occasionally recognized and greeted, and, as before, went on without knowing, his eyes full of unintelligent sadness because the mind was making merry afar. They had the look we see in the eyes of animals and dreamers. Everything had grown simple, his problem had taken itself away. He was thinking what he would say to Mary Carton. Now they would be married, they would live in a small house with a green door and new thatch, and a row of beehives under a hedge. He knew where just such a house stood empty. The day before he and his mother had discussed, with their host of the Imperial Hotel, this question of houses. They knew the peculiarities of every house in the neighbourhood, except two or three built while they were away. All day Sherman and his mother had gone over the merits of the few they were told were empty. She wondered why her son had grown so unpractical. Once he was so easily pleased—the row of beehives and the new thatch did not for her settle the question. She set it all down to Miss Leland and the plays, and the singing, and the belladonna, and remembered with pleasure how many miles of uneasy water lay between the town of Ballah and these things.

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She did not know what else beside the row of beehives and the new thatch her son's mind ran on as he walked among the marketing country people, and the gooseberry sellers, and the merchants of 'Peggie's leg,' and the boys playing marbles in odd corners, and the men in waistcoats with flannel sleeves driving carts, and the women driving donkeys with creels of turf or churns of milk. Just now she was trying to remember whether she used to buy her wool for knitting at Miss Peter's or from Mrs. Macallough's at the bridge. One or other sold it a halfpenny a skein cheaper. She never knew what went on inside her son's mind, she had always her own fish to fry. Blessed are the unsympathetic. They preserve their characters in an iron bottle while the most of us poor mortals are going about the planet vainly searching for any kind of a shell to contain us, and evaporating the while.

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Sherman began to mount the hill to the vicarage. He was happy. Because he was happy he began to run. Soon the steepness of the hill made him walk. He thought about his love for Mary Carton. Seen by the light of this love everything that had happened to him was plain now. He had found his centre of unity. His childhood had prepared him for this love. He had been solitary, fond of favourite corners of fields, fond of going about alone, unhuman like the birds and the leaves, his heart empty. How clearly he remembered his first meeting with Mary. They were both children. At a school treat they watched the fire-balloon ascend, and followed it a little way over the fields together. What friends they became, growing up together, reading the same books, thinking the same thoughts!

As he came to the door and pulled at the great hanging iron bell-handle, the fire-balloon reascended in his heart, surrounded with cheers and laughter.

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III

He kept the servant talking for a moment or two before she went for Miss Carton. The old rector, she told him, was getting less and less able to do much work. Old age had come almost suddenly upon him. He seldom moved from the fireside. He was getting more and more absent-

minded. Once lately he had brought his umbrella into the reading-desk. More and more did he leave all things to his children—to Mary Carton and her younger sisters.

When the servant had gone, Sherman looked round the somewhat gloomy room. In the window hung a canary in a painted cage. Outside was a narrow piece of shaded ground between the window and the rectory wall. The laurel and holly bushes darkened the window a good deal. On a table in the centre of the room were evangelistic books with gilded covers. Round the mirror over the mantelpiece were stuck various parish announcements, thrust between the glass and the gilding. On a small side-table was a copper ear-trumpet.

How familiar everything seemed to Sherman! Only the room seemed smaller than it did three years before, and close to the table with the ear-trumpet, at one side of the fireplace before the arm-chair, was a new threadbare patch in the carpet. [273]

Sherman recalled how in this room he and Mary Carton had sat in winter by the fire, building castles in the air for each other. So deeply meditating was he that she came in and stood unnoticed beside him.

'John,' she said at last, 'it is a great pleasure to see you so soon again. Are you doing well in London?'

'I have left London.'

'Are you married, then? You must introduce me to your wife.'

'I shall never be married to Miss Leland.'

'What?'

'She has preferred another—my friend William Howard. I have come here to tell you something, Mary.' He went and stood close to her and took her hand tenderly. 'I have always been very fond of you. Often in London, when I was trying to think of another kind of life, I used to see this fireside and you sitting beside it, where we used to sit and talk about the future. Mary—Mary,' he held her hand in both his—'you will be my wife?'

'You do not love me, John,' she answered, drawing herself away. 'You have come to me because you think it your duty. I have had nothing but duty all my life.' [274]

'Listen,' he said. 'I was very miserable; I invited Howard to stay with us. One morning I found a note on the smoking-room table to say that Margaret had accepted him, and I have come here to ask you to marry me. I never cared for anyone else.'

He found himself speaking hurriedly, as though anxious to get the words said and done with. It now seemed to him that he had done ill in this matter of Miss Leland. He had not before thought of it—his mind had always been busy with other things. Mary Carton looked at him wonderingly.

'John,' she said at last, 'did you ask Mr. Howard to stay with you on purpose to get him to fall in love with Miss Leland, or to give you an excuse for breaking off your engagement, as you knew he flirted with everyone?'

'Margaret seems very fond of him. I think they are made for each other,' he answered.

'Did you ask him to London on purpose?'

'Well, I will tell you,' he faltered. 'I was very miserable. I had drifted into this engagement I don't know how. Margaret glitters and glitters and glitters, but she is not of my kind. I suppose I thought, like a fool, I should marry someone who was rich. I found out soon that I loved nobody but you. I got to be always thinking of you and of this town. Then I heard that Howard had lost his curacy, and asked him up. I just left them alone and did not go near Margaret much. I knew they were made for each other. Do not let us talk of them,' he continued, eagerly. 'Let us talk about the future. I will take a farm and turn farmer. I dare say my uncle will not give me anything when he dies because I have left his office. He will call me a ne'er-do-weel, and say I would squander it. But you and I—we will get married, will we not? We will be very happy,' he went on, pleadingly. 'You will still have your charities, and I shall be busy with my farm. We will surround ourselves with a wall. The world will be on the outside, and on the inside we and our peaceful lives.' [275]

'Wait,' she said; 'I will give you your answer,' and going into the next room returned with several bundles of letters. She laid them on the table; some were white and new, some slightly yellow with time.

'John,' she said, growing very pale, 'here are all the letters you ever wrote me from your earliest boyhood.' She took one of the large candles from the mantelpiece, and, lighting it, placed it on the hearth. Sherman wondered what she was going to do with it. 'I will tell you,' she went on, 'what I had thought to carry to the grave unspoken. I have loved you for a long time. When you came and told me you were going to be married to another I forgave you, for man's love is like the wind, and I prayed that God might bless you both.' She leant down over the candle, her face pale and contorted with emotion. 'All these letters after that grew very sacred. Since we were never to be married they grew a portion of my life, separated from everything and everyone—a something apart and holy. I re-read them all, and arranged them in little bundles according to their dates, and tied them with thread. Now I and you—we have nothing to do with each other [276]

any more.'

She held the bundle of letters in the flame. He got up from his seat. She motioned him away imperiously. He looked at the flame in a bewildered way. The letters fell in little burning fragments about the hearth. It was all like a terrible dream. He watched those steady fingers hold letter after letter in the candle flame, and watched the candle burning on like a passion in the grey daylight of universal existence. A draught from under the door began blowing the ash about the room. The voice said—

'You tried to marry a rich girl. You did not love her, but knew she was rich. You tired of her as you tire of so many things, and behaved to her most wrongly, most wickedly and treacherously. When you were jilted you came again to me and to the idleness of this little town. We had all hoped great things of you. You seemed good and honest.'

'I loved you all along,' he cried. 'If you would marry me we would be very happy. I loved you all along,' he repeated—this helplessly, several times over. The bird shook a shower of seed on his shoulder. He picked one of them from the collar of his coat and turned it over in his fingers mechanically. 'I loved you all along.'

'You have done no duty that came to you. You have tired of everything you should cling to; and now you have come to this little town because here is idleness and irresponsibility.'

The last letter lay in ashes on the hearth. She blew out the candle, and replaced it among the photographs on the mantelpiece, and stood there as calm as a portion of the marble.

'John, our friendship is over—it has been burnt in the candle.'

He started forward, his mind full of appeals half-stifled with despair, on his lips gathered incoherent words: 'She will be happy with Howard. They were made for each other. I slipped into it. I always thought I should marry someone who was rich. I never loved anyone but you. I did not know I loved you at first. I thought about you always. You are the root of my life.'

Steps were heard outside the door at the end of a passage. Mary Carton went to the door and called. The steps turned and came nearer. With a great effort Sherman controlled himself. The door opened, and a tall, slight girl of twelve came into the room. A strong smell of garden mould rose from a basket in her hands, Sherman recognized the child who had given him tea that evening in the schoolhouse three years before.

'Have you finished weeding the carrots?' said Mary Carton.

'Yes, Miss.'

'Then you are to weed the small bed under the pear-tree by the tool-house. Do not go yet, child. This is Mr. Sherman. Sit down a little.'

The child sat down on the corner of a chair with a scared look in her eyes. Suddenly she said—

'Oh, what a lot of burnt paper!'

'Yes; I have been burning some old letters.'

'I think,' said John, 'I will go now.' Without a word of farewell he went out, almost groping his way.

He had lost the best of all the things he held dear. Twice he had gone through the fire. The first time worldly ambition left him; the second, love. An hour before the air had been full of singing and peace that was resonant like joy. Now he saw standing before his Eden the angel with the flaming sword. All the hope he had ever gathered about him had taken itself off, and the naked soul shivered.

IV

The road under his feet felt gritty and barren. He hurried away from the town. It was late afternoon. Trees cast bands of shadow across the road. He walked rapidly as if pursued. About a mile to the west of the town he came on a large wood bordering the road and surrounding a deserted house. Some local rich man once lived there, now it was given over to a caretaker who lived in two rooms in the back part. Men were at work cutting down trees in two or three parts of the wood. Many places were quite bare. A mass of ruins—a covered well, and the wreckage of castle wall—that had been roofed with green for centuries, lifted themselves up, bare as anatomies. The sight intensified, by some strange sympathy, his sorrow, and he hurried away as from a thing accursed of God.

The road led to the foot of a mountain, topped by a cairn supposed in popular belief to be the grave of Maeve, Mab of the fairies, and considered by antiquarians to mark the place where certain prisoners were executed in legendary times as sacrifices to the moon.

He began to climb the mountain. The sun was on the rim of the sea. It stayed there without moving, for as he ascended he saw an ever-widening circle of water.

He threw himself down upon the cairn. The sun sank under the sea. The Donegal headlands mixed with the surrounding blue. The stars grew out of heaven.

Sometimes he got up and walked to and fro. Hours passed. The stars, the streams down in the valley, the wind moving among the boulders, the various unknown creatures rustling in the silence—all these were contained within themselves, fulfilling their law, content to be alone, content to be with others, having the peace of God or the peace of the birds of prey. He only did not fulfil his law; something that was not he, that was not nature, that was not God, had made him and her he loved its tools. Hope, memory, tradition, conformity, had been laying waste their lives. As he thought this the night seemed to crush him with its purple foot. Hour followed hour. At midnight he started up, hearing a faint murmur of clocks striking the hour in the distant town. His face and hands were wet with tears, his clothes saturated with dew.

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He turned homeward, hurriedly flying from the terrible firmament. What had this glimmering and silence to do with him—this luxurious present? He belonged to the past and the future. With pace somewhat slackened, because of the furze, he came down into the valley. Along the northern horizon moved a perpetual dawn, travelling eastward as the night advanced. Once, as he passed a marsh near a lime-kiln, a number of small birds rose chirruping from where they had been clinging among the reeds. Once, standing still for a moment where two roads crossed on a hill-side, he looked out over the dark fields. A white stone rose in the middle of a field, a score of yards in front of him. He knew the place well; it was an ancient burying-ground. He looked at the stone, and suddenly filled by the terror of the darkness children feel, began again his hurried walk.

He re-entered Ballah by the southern side. In passing he looked at the rectory. To his surprise a light burned in the drawing-room. He stood still. The dawn was brightening towards the east, but all round him was darkness, seeming the more intense to his eyes for their being fresh from the unshaded fields. In the midst of this darkness shone the lighted window. He went over to the gate and looked in. The room was empty. He was about to turn away when he noticed a white figure standing close to the gate. The latch creaked and the gate moved slowly on its hinges.

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'John,' said a trembling voice, 'I have been praying, and a light has come to me. I wished you to be ambitious—to go away and do something in the world. You did badly, and my poor pride was wounded. You do not know how much I had hoped from you; but it was all pride—all pride and foolishness. You love me. I ask no more. We need each other; the rest is with God.'

She took his hand in hers, and began caressing it. 'We have been shipwrecked. Our goods have been cast into the sea.' Something in her voice told of the emotion that divides the love of woman from the love of man. She looked upon him whom she loved as full of a helplessness that needed protection, a reverberation of the feeling of the mother for the child at the breast.

I

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LONG ago, before the earliest stone of the Pyramids was laid, before the Bo tree of Buddha unrolled its first leaf, before a Japanese had painted on a temple wall the horse that every evening descended and trampled the rice-fields, before the ravens of Thor had eaten their first worm together, there lived a man of giant stature and of giant strength named Dhoya. One evening Fomorian galleys had entered the Bay of the Red Cataract, now the Bay of Ballah, and there deserted him. Though he rushed into the water and hurled great stones after them, they were out of reach. From earliest childhood the Fomorians had held him captive and compelled him to toil at the oar, but when his strength had come his fits of passion made him a terror to all on board. Sometimes he would tear the seats of the galley from under the rowers, and drive the rowers up into the shrouds, where they would cling until the passion left him. 'The demons,' they said, 'have made him their own.' So they enticed him on shore, he having on his head a mighty stone pitcher to fill with water, and deserted him.

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When the last sail had dropped over the rim of the world, he rose from where he had flung himself down on the sands and hurried through the forest eastward. After a time he reached that lake among the mountains where in later times Diarmuid drove down four stakes and made thereon a platform with four flags in the centre for a hearth, and placed over all a roof of wicker and skins, and hid his Grania, islanded thereon. Still eastward he went, what is now Bulben on one side, Cope's mountain on the other, until at last he threw himself at full length in a deep cavern and slept. Henceforward he made this cavern his lair, issuing forth to hunt the deer or the bears or the mountain oxen. Slowly the years went by, his fits of fury growing more and more frequent, though there was no one but his own shadow to rave against. When his fury was on him even the bats and owls, and the brown frogs that crept out of the grass at twilight, would hide themselves—even the bats and owls and the brown frogs. These he had made his friends, and let them crawl and perch about him, for at times he would be very gentle, and they too were sullen and silent—the outcasts from they knew not what. But most of all, things placid and beautiful feared him. He would watch for hours, hidden in the leaves, to reach his hand out slowly and carefully at last, and seize and crush some glittering halcyon.

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Slowly the years went by and human face he never saw, but sometimes, when the gentle mood was on him and it was twilight, a presence seemed to float invisibly by him and sigh softly, and once or twice he awoke from sleep with the sensation of a finger having rested for a moment on his forehead, and would mutter a prayer to the moon that glimmered through the door of his cave before turning to sleep again. 'O moon,' he would say, 'that wanderest in the blue cave of the sky, more white than the beard of Partholan, whose years were five hundred, sullen and solitary, sleeping only on the floor of the sea: keep me from the evil spirits of the islands of the lake southward beyond the mountains, and the evil spirits of the caves northward beyond the mountains, and the evil spirits who wave their torches by the mouth of the river eastward beyond the valley, and the evil spirits of the pools westward beyond the mountains, and I will offer you a bear and a deer in full horn, O solitary of the cave divine, and if any have done you wrong I will avenge you.'

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Gradually, however, he began to long for this mysterious touch.

At times he would make journeys into distant parts, and once the mountain bulls gathered together, proud of their overwhelming numbers and their white horns, and followed him with great bellowing westward, he being laden with their tallest, well-nigh to his cave, and would have gored him, but, pacing into a pool of the sea to his shoulders, he saw them thunder away, losing him in the darkness. The place where he stood is called Pooldhoya to this day.

So the years went slowly by, and ever deeper and deeper came his moodiness, and more often his fits of wrath. Once in his gloom he paced the forests for miles, now this way, now that, until, returning in the twilight, he found himself standing on a cliff southward of the lake that was southward of the mountains. The moon was rising. The sound of the swaying of reeds floated from beneath, and the twittering of the flocks of reed-wrens who love to cling on the moving stems. It was the hour of votaries. He turned to the moon, then hurriedly gathered a pile of leaves and branches, and making a fire cast thereon wild strawberries and the fruit of the quicken-tree. As the smoke floated upwards a bar of faint purple clouds drifted over the moon's face—a refusal of the sacrifice. Hurrying through the surrounding woods he found an owl sleeping in the hollow of a tree, and returning cast him on the fire. Still the clouds gathered. Again he searched the woods. This time it was a badger that he cast among the flames. Time after time he came and went, sometimes returning immediately with some live thing, at others not till the fire had almost burnt itself out. Deer, wild swine, birds, all to no purpose. Higher and higher he piled the burning branches, the flames and the smoke waved and circled like the lash of a giant's whip. Gradually the nearer islands passed the rosy colour on to their more distant brethren. The reed-wrens of the furthest reed beds disturbed amid their sleep must have wondered at the red gleam reflected in each other's eyes. Useless his night-long toil; the clouds covered the moon's face more and more, until, when the long fire-lash was at its brightest, they drowned her completely in a surge of unbroken mist. Raging against the fire he scattered with his staff the burning branches, and trampled in his fury the sacrificial embers beneath his feet. Suddenly a voice in the surrounding darkness called him softly by name. He turned. For years no articulate voice had sounded in his ears. It seemed to rise from the air just beneath the verge of

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the precipice. Holding by a hazel bush he leaned out, and for a moment it seemed to him the form of a beautiful woman floated faintly before him, but changed as he watched to a little cloud of vapour; and from the nearest of the haunted islands there came assuredly a whiff of music. Then behind him in the forest said the voice, 'Dhoya, my beloved.' He rushed in pursuit; something white was moving before him. He stretched out his hand; it was only a mass of white campion trembling in the morning breeze, for an ashen morning was just touching the mists on the eastern mountains. Beginning suddenly to tremble with supernatural fear Dhoya turned homewards. Everything was changed; dark shadows seemed to come and go, and elfin chatter to pass upon the breeze. But when he reached the shelter of the pine woods all was still as of old. He slackened his speed. Those solemn pine-trees soothed him with their vast unsociability—many and yet each one alone. Once or twice, when in some glade further than usual from its kind arose a pine-tree larger than the rest, he paused with bowed head to mutter an uncouth prayer to that dark outlaw. As he neared his cave and came from the deep shade into the region of mountain-ash and hazel, the voices seemed again to come and go, and the shadows to circle round him, and once a voice said, he imagined, in accents faint and soft as falling dew, 'Dhoya, my beloved.' But a few yards from the cave all grew suddenly silent.

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II

Slower and slower he went, with his eyes on the ground, bewildered by all that was happening. A few feet from the cave he stood still, counting aimlessly the round spots of light made by the beams slanting through trees that hid with their greenness, as in the centre of the sea, that hollow rock. As over and over he counted them, he heard, first with the ear only, then with the mind also, a footstep going to and fro within the cave. Lifting his eyes he saw the same figure seen on the cliff—the figure of a woman, beautiful and young. Her dress was white, save for a border of feathers dyed the fatal red of the spirits. She had arranged in one corner the spears, and in the other the brushwood and branches used for the fire, and spread upon the ground the skins, and now began pulling vainly at the great stone pitcher of the Fomorians.

Suddenly she saw him and with a burst of laughter flung her arms round his neck, crying, 'Dhoya, I have left my world far off. My people—on the floor of the lake they are dancing and singing, and on the islands of the lake; always happy, always young, always without change. I have left them for thee, Dhoya, for they cannot love. Only the changing, and moody, and angry, and weary can love. I am beautiful; love me, Dhoya. Do you hear me? I left the places where they dance, Dhoya, for thee!' For long she poured out a tide of words, he answering at first little, then more and more as she melted away the silence of so many inarticulate years; and all the while she gazed on him with eyes, no ardour could rob of the mild and mysterious melancholy that watches us from the eyes of animals—sign of unhuman reveries.

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Many days passed over these strangely-wedded ones. Sometimes when he asked her, 'Do you love me?' she would answer, 'I do not know, but I long for your love endlessly.' Often at twilight, returning from hunting, he would find her bending over a stream that flowed near to the cave, decking her hair with feathers and reddening her lips with the juice of a wild berry.

He was very happy secluded in that deep forest. Hearing the faint murmurs of the western sea, they seemed to have outlived change. But Change is everywhere, with the tides and the stars fastened to her wheel. Every blood-drop in their lips, every cloud in the sky, every leaf in the world changed a little, while they brushed back their hair and kissed. All things change save only the fear of change. And yet for his hour Dhoya was happy and as full of dreams as an old man or an infant—for dreams wander nearest to the grave and the cradle.

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Once, as he was returning home from hunting, by the northern edge of the lake, at the hour when the owls cry to each other, 'It is time to be abroad,' and the last flutter of the wind has died away, leaving under every haunted island an image legible to the least hazel branch, there suddenly stood before him a slight figure, at the edge of the narrow sand-line, dark against the glowing water. Dhoya drew nearer. It was a man leaning on his spear-staff, on his head a small red cap. His spear was slender and tipped with shining metal; the spear of Dhoya of wood, one end pointed and hardened in the fire. The red-capped stranger silently raised that slender spear and thrust at Dhoya, who parried with his pointed staff.

For a long while they fought. The last vestige of sunset passed away and the stars came out. Underneath them the feet of Dhoya beat up the ground, but the feet of the other as he rushed hither and thither, matching his agility with the mortal's mighty strength, made neither shadow nor footstep on the sands. Dhoya was wounded, and growing weary a little, when the other leaped away, and, crouching down by the water, began: 'You have carried away by some spell unknown the most beautiful of our bands—you who have neither laughter nor singing. Restore her, Dhoya, and go free.' Dhoya answered him no word, and the other rose and again thrust at him with the spear. They fought to and fro upon the sands until the dawn touched with olive the distant sky, and then his anger-fit, long absent, fell on Dhoya, and he closed with his enemy and threw him, and put his knee on his chest and his hands on his throat, and would have crushed all life out of him, when lo! he held beneath his knee no more than a bundle of reeds.

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Nearing home in the early morning he heard the voice he loved, singing:

Full moody is my love and sad,
His moods bow low his sombre crest,
I hold him dearer than the glad,
And he shall slumber on my breast.

My love hath many an evil mood,
Ill words for all things soft and fair,
I hold him dearer than the good,
My fingers feel his amber hair.

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No tender wisdom floods the eyes
That watch me with their suppliant light—
I hold him dearer than the wise,
And for him make me wise and bright.

And when she saw him she cried, 'An old mortal song heard floating from a tent of skin, as we rode, I and mine, through a camping-place at night.' From that day she was always either singing wild and melancholy songs or else watching him with that gaze of animal reverie.

Once he asked, 'How old are you?'

'A thousand years, for I am young.'

'I am so little to you,' he went on, 'and you are so much to me—dawn, and sunset, tranquillity, and speech, and solitude.'

'Am I so much?' she said; 'say it many times!' and her eyes seemed to brighten and her breast heaved with joy.

Often he would bring her the beautiful skins of animals, and she would walk to and fro on them, laughing to feel their softness under her feet. Sometimes she would pause and ask suddenly, 'Will you weep for me when we have parted?' and he would answer, 'I will die then'; and she would go on rubbing her feet to and fro in the soft skin.

And so Dhoya grew tranquil and gentle, and Change seemed still to have forgotten them, having so much on her hands. The stars rose and set watching them smiling together, and the tides ebb and flowed, bringing mutability to all save them. But always everything changes, save only the fear of Change.

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III

One evening as they sat in the inner portion of the cave, watching through the opening the paling of the sky and the darkening of the leaves, and counting the budding stars, Dhoya suddenly saw stand before him the dark outline of him he fought on the lake sand, and heard at the same instant his companion sigh.

The stranger approached a little, and said, 'Dhoya, we have fought heretofore, and now I have come to play chess against thee, for well thou knowest, dear to the perfect warrior after war is chess.'

'I know it,' answered Dhoya.

'And when we have played, Dhoya, we will name the stake.'

'Do not play,' whispered his companion at his side.

But Dhoya, being filled with his anger-fit at the sight of his enemy, answered, 'I will play, and I know well the stake you mean, and I name this for mine, that I may again have my knee on your chest and my hands on your throat, and that you will not again change into a bundle of wet reeds.' His companion lay down on a skin and began to cry a little. Dhoya felt sure of winning. He had often played in his boyhood, before the time of his anger-fits, with his masters of the galley; and besides, he could always return to his hands and his weapons once more.

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Now the floor of the cave was of smooth, white sand, brought from the seashore in his great Fomorian pitcher, to make it soft for his beloved to walk upon; before it had been, as it now is, of rough clay. On this sand the red-capped stranger marked out with his spear-point a chess-board, and marked with rushes, crossed and recrossed each alternate square, fixing each end of the rush in the sand, until a complete board was finished of white and green squares, and then drew from a bag large chessmen of mingled wood and silver. Two or three would have made an armful for a child. Standing each at his end they began to play. The game did not last long. No matter how carefully Dhoya played, each move went against him. At last, leaping back from the board, he cried, 'I have lost!' The two spirits were standing together at the entrance. Dhoya seized his spear, but slowly the figures began to fade, first a star and then the leaves showed through their forms. Soon all had vanished away.

[298]

Then, understanding his loss, he threw himself on the ground, and rolling hither and thither, roared like a wild beast. All night long he lay on the ground, and all the next day till nightfall. He had crumbled his staff unconsciously between his fingers into small pieces, and now, full of dull

rage, the pointed end of the staff still in his hand, arose and went forth westward. In a ravine of the northern mountain he came on the tracks of wild horses. Soon one passed him fearlessly, knowing nothing of man. He drove the pointed end of the staff deep in the flank, making a great wound, sending the horse rushing with short screams down the mountain. Other horses passed him one by one, driven southward by a cold wind laden with mist, arisen in the night-time. Towards the end of the ravine stood one black and huge, the leader of the herd. Dhoya leaped on his back with a loud cry that sent a raven circling from the neighbouring cliff, and the horse, after vainly seeking to throw him, rushed off towards the north-west, over the heights of the mountains where the mists floated. The moon, clear sometimes of the flying clouds, from low down in the south-east, cast a pale and mutable light, making their shadow rise before them on the mists, as though they pursued some colossal demon, sombre on his black charger. Then leaving the heights they rushed down that valley where, in far later times, Diarmuid hid in a deep cavern his Grania, and passed the stream where Muadhan, their savage servant, caught fish for them on a hook baited with a quicken-berry. On over the plains, on northward, mile after mile, the wild gigantic horse leaping cliff and chasm in his terrible race; on until the mountains of what is now Donegal rose before them—over these among the clouds, driving rain blowing in their faces from the sea, Dhoya knowing not whither he went, or why he rode. On—the stones loosened by the hoofs rumbling down into the valleys—till far in the distance he saw the sea, a thousand feet below him; then, fixing his eyes thereon, and using the spear-point as a goad, he roused his black horse into redoubled speed, until horse and rider plunged headlong into the Western Sea. [299]

Sometimes the cotters on the mountains of Donegal hear on windy nights a sudden sound of horses' hoofs, and say to each other, 'There goes Dhoya.' And at the same hour men say if any be abroad in the valleys they see a huge shadow rushing along the mountain.

Transcriber's Notes:

Repeated story titles were removed to avoid redundancy. Obvious punctuation errors repaired. Varied hyphenation was retained.

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