EVELYN INNES (1901)
By George Moore
Edited by Robert Becker

George Moore (1852-1933) was a creative Irish writer of modernist fiction, memoir, essay, drama and poetry. He was a contributor to several "movements" and is fondly remembered as a purist who made art for art's sake.

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Preface to *Evelyn Innes* (1901)

After being engaged for two years on the history of *Evelyn Innes*, I found I had completed a great pile of MS., and one day it occurred to me to consider the length of this MS. To my surprise I found I had written about 150,000 words, and had only finished the first half of my story. I explained my difficulties to my publisher, suggesting that I should end the chapter I was then writing, on what musicians would call "a full close," and that half the story should be published under the title of *Evelyn Innes* and half under the title of *Sister Teresa*. My publisher consented, frightened at the thought of a novel of a thousand pages — 300,000 words.

I was wrong to yield to the temptation, but the pile of MS. was already high, and I thought how much higher it would be in two more years. True it is that Tolstoi waited until he had finished *War and Peace* before he published it; he even withheld the central idea of the book — the idea which gives it unity — till the last volume. But though we may admire and envy self-restraint and self-confidence, it does not follow that we possess them. I confess that I was not in possession of them at that time, and I may be so unfortunate that no readers may have the patience to study the book in the sequence that I originally designed. But I will not anticipate such ill-luck. I will hope that it will be understood that this is really the second volume of a novel which is meant to be read under one name and within one cover, and which will perhaps be ultimately presented to the public under the single title of *Evelyn Innes*.

The penalty I am paying for the premature publication of *Evelyn Innes* did not end with the division of my story into two parts. After having written for a couple of years on the second part of my book, the first part struck me as singularly diffuse; it read to me more like a sketch for a book than a book, and I appreciated Mr. Unwin's idea of a sixpenny edition more than ever, for it has allowed me to remould *Evelyn Innes*. The story of course has not been altered, but the text is almost entirely new. No one, perhaps, has rewritten a book so completely. I am aware that the alteration of a published text is deprecated in the Press, but it is difficult to understand why, for have not Shakespeare and Balzac and Goethe and Wagner and Fitzgerald rewritten their works? Among my contemporaries, Mr. George Meredith and Mr. W. B. Yeats have followed the example of their illustrious predecessors. And let the weary reviewer be indulgent for my weakness or my strength, whichever it may be. In either case I have lightened his labour, for the new version, notwithstanding many additions, is 90 pages shorter than the original.

I

An Elizabethan virginal had come to him to be repaired, and he had worked all the afternoon, and when overtaken by the dusk he had impatiently sought a candle, and he placed it so that its light fell upon the jacks.... Only one more remained to be adjusted. He picked it up, touched the quill and dropped it into its place, and when he had tuned the instrument his moment had come, and he sat running his fingers over the keys.

His face was in his eyes: they reflected the flame of faith and of mission; they were the eyes of one whom fate had thrown on an obscure wayside of dreams, the face of a dreamer and propagandist of old-time music and its instruments. He sat at the virginal like one who loved its old design and sweet tone, in such strict keeping with the music he was playing — a piece by W. Byrd, “John, come kiss me now” — and, when it was finished, his fingers strayed into another, “Nancie," by Thomas Morley. His hands moved over the keyboard softly, as if they loved it, and his thoughts, though deep in the gentle music, entertained casual admiration of the sixteenth-century organ which had lately come into his possession, and which he could see at the end of the room on a slightly raised platform. Its beautiful shape, and the shape of the old instruments, vaguely perceived, lent an enchantment to the darkness. In the corner was a viola da gamba, and against the walls a harpsichord and a clavichord.

Above the virginal on which Mr. Innes was playing there hung a portrait of a woman, and, happening to look up, a sudden memory came upon him, and he began to play an aria out of *Don Giovanni*. But he stopped before many bars, and holding the candle end high, so that he could see the face, continued the melody with his right hand. To see her lips and to strike the notes was almost like hearing her sing it again. Her voice came to him through many years, from the first evening he had heard her sing at La Scala. Then he was a young man spending a holiday in Italy, and she had made his fortune for the time by singing one of his songs. They were married in Italy, and at the end of some months they had gone to Paris and to Brussels, where Mrs. Innes had engagements to fulfil. It was in Brussels that she had lost her voice. For a long while it was believed that she might recover it, but these hopes proved illusory, and, in trying to regain what she had lost irrevocably, the money she had earned dwindled to a last few hundred pounds. The Inneses had returned to London, and, with a baby-daughter, settled in Dulwich. Mr. Innes accepted the post of organist at St. Joseph’s, the parish church in Southwark, and Mrs. Innes had begun her singing classes.

Her reputation as a. singer favoured her, and an aptitude for teaching enabled her to maintain, for many years, a distinguished position in the musical world. Mr. Innes’s abilities contributed to their success, and he might have become a famous London organist if he had devoted himself to the instrument. But one day seeing in a book the words "viola d’amore," he fancied he would

like to possess an instrument with such a name. The instrument demanded the music that had been written for it. Byrd's beautiful vocal Mass had led him to Palestrina and Vittoria, and these wakened in him dreams of a sufficient choir at St. Joseph's for a revival of their works.

So when Evelyn clambered on her father's knee, it was to learn the chants that he hummed from old manuscripts and missals, and it was the contrapuntal fancies of the Elizabethan composers that he gave her to play on the virginal, or the preludes of Bach on the clavichord. Her infantile graces at these instruments were the delight and amazement of her parents. She warbled this old-time music as other children do the vulgar songs of the hour; she seemed less anxious to learn the operatic music which she heard in her mother's class-rooms, and there was a shade of uneasiness in Mrs. Innes's admiration of the beauty of Evelyn's taste; but Mr. Innes said that it was better that her first love should be for the best, and he could not help hoping that it would not be with the airs of *Lucia* and *Traviata* that she would become famous. As if in answer, the child began to hum the celebrated waltz a moment after a beautiful Ave Maria, composed by a Fleming at the end of the fifteenth century, a quick, sobbing rhythm, expressive of naïve petulance at delay in the Virgin's intercession. Mr. Innes called it natural music — music which the modern Church abhorred and shamefully ostracised; and the conversation turned on the incurably bad taste and the musical misdeeds of a certain priest, Father Gordon, whom Mr. Innes judged to be responsible for all the bad music to be heard at St. Joseph's.

For Mr. Innes's ambition was to restore the liturgical chants of the early centuries, from John Ockeghem, the Flemish silversmith of Louis XI., whose recreation it was to compose motets, to Thomas da Vittoria; and, after having made known the works of Palestrina and of those who gravitated around the great Roman composer, he hoped to disinter the masses of Orlando di Lasso, of Goudimel and Josquin des Près, the motets of Nannini, of Felice Anerio, of Clemens non Papa.... He would go still further back. For before this music was the plain chant or Gregorian, bequeathed to us by the Early Church, coming down to her, perhaps, from Egyptian civilisation, the mother of all art and all religion, an incomparable treasure which unworthy inheritors have mutilated for centuries. It was Mr. Innes's belief that the supple, free melody of the Gregorian was lost in the shouting of operatic tenors and organ accompaniments. The tradition of its true interpretation had been lost, and the text itself, but, by long study of ancient missals, Mr. Innes had penetrated the secret of the ancient notation, vague as the eyeballs of the blind; and, in the absence of a choir that could read this strange alphabet of sound, he cherished a plan for an edition of these old chants, rewritten by him into the ordinary notation of our day. But impassable obstacles intervened: the apathy and indifference of the Jesuits, and their fear lest such radical innovations should prove unpopular and divert the congregation of St. Joseph's elsewhere. He had abandoned hope of converting them from their error, but he was confident that reaction was preparing against the jovialities of Rossini, whose *Stabat Mater*, he said, still desecrated Good Friday, and against the erotics of M. Gounod and his suite. And this inevitable reaction Mr. Innes strove to advance by his pupils. Many became disciples and

helped to preach the new musical gospel. He induced them to learn the old instruments, and among them found material for his concerts. Though a weak man in practical conduct, he was steadfast in his ideas. His concerts had begun to attract a little attention; he was receiving support from some rich amateurs, and was able to continue his propaganda under the noses of the worthy fathers in whose church he was now serving, but where he knew that one day he would be master.

But, unfortunately, Mr. Innes could only give a small part of his time to these concerts. Notwithstanding his persuasiveness, there remained on his hands some intractable pupils who would not hear of viol or harpsichord, who insisted upon being taught to play modern Masses on the organ, and these he could not afford to refuse. For of late years his wife's failing health had forced her to relinquish teaching, and the burden of earning their living had fallen entirely upon him. She hoped that a long rest might improve her in health, and that in some months — six, she imagined as a sufficient interval — she would be able to undertake in full earnestness her daughter's education. To do this had become her dearest wish; for there could now be little doubt that Evelyn had inherited her voice, the same beautiful quality and fluency in vocalisation; and, thinking of it, Mrs. Innes held out her hands and looked at them, striving to read in them the progress of her illness. Evelyn wondered why, just at that moment, her father had turned from the bedside overcome by sudden tears; and, when they met in the parlour, Evelyn asked why her mother had looked at her hands so significantly.

He said that it was thus her mother foreshadowed Violetta's death, when Armand's visit is announced to her.

This was three years ago; but since Mrs. Innes's death very little had been done with Evelyn's voice. The Jesuits had spent money in increasing their choir and orchestra, and Mr. Innes was constantly rehearsing the latest novelties in religious music. All his spare time was occupied with private teaching; and discovering in his daughter a real aptitude for the lute, he had taught her that instrument, likewise the viola da gamba, for which she soon displayed even more original talent. She played both instruments at his concerts, and, as several pupils offered themselves, he encouraged her to give lessons — he had made of her an excellent musician, able to write fugue and counterpoint; only the production of the voice he had neglected. Now and again, in a fit of repentance, he had insisted on her singing some scales, but his heart was not in the lesson, and it fell through.

He was suspicious that she knew she could not learn singing from him; but an avowal of his inability to teach her would necessitate some departure from his own ideas, and, like all men with a mission, Mr. Innes was deficient in moral courage, and in spite of himself he evaded all that did not coincide with the purpose of his life. He loved his daughter above everything, except his music, and the thought that he was sacrificing her to his ambition afflicted him with

cruel assaults of conscience. Often he asked himself if he were capable of redeeming his promise to his dead wife, or if he shirked the uncongenial labour it entailed? And it was this tormenting question that had impelled him to light the candle, and raise it so that he could better see his wife's face.

Though an indifferent painting, the picture was obviously very like the sitter. The likeness was in the cold blue eyes, steeped in determination; the jaws, too, were nearly as significant as the cold eyes. This woman's will must have been almost unconscious, like some deep mysterious instinct, and. it must have made everyone obey her. No one had ever questioned the desires of this woman, and Mr. Innes had found the happiness of his life in submission to her will. As he looked at the portrait he thought of her firm step as she passed towards her classrooms and the loving obedience she obtained from her pupils. He considered the tight, small mouth and thought of the calm, even voice, and then he thought of Evelyn's mouth, which was as small, but vaguer in outline. Her face was more oval than her mother's, and in the photograph which he took from the chimney-piece the line of the chin deflected, giving the face a beautiful wistfulness. He was still looking at the photograph when his daughter entered. Her walk was the undulating walk of a thin girl, with long arms and long slender legs. She was two- or three-and-twenty, and her eyes were full of energy and wistfulness, and they shed a charm upon her face. Her hair was bright and reddish, and harmonised well with her complexion, which was bright in the cheeks, and there were freckles under her ears. When she unpinned her black straw hat and laid it on the table her father admired her long beautiful hands, and the rich thick hair which slipped over her neck. She was dressed in a woollen material, the colour of the blackberry when it begins to ripen, and the colour suited her.

Her father, though he was fifty-five, had lost little of the original grace of a well-knit figure. He was not a tall man, and he was dressed in rough clothes like a workman, and Evelyn looked at him as if she liked him in his working-clothes. His hair and his beard were short, and the pointed beard suited the long, delicately-shaped nose. His grey eyes were mild and beautiful, and he stood rolling a cigarette, and his way of rolling it betrayed the dandy in him. For Mr. Innes was in his heart a dandy, though not in his clothes — though even in his clothes there was a certain consciousness; he was not dressed anyhow, though he was dressed roughly.

"Well," she said, "have you finished the virginal?"

"Yes, I have finished it. Try it."

She ran her fingers down the keys.

"Yes, it goes admirably; but I can't stand this gloom," she said, looking round, "I must have some light. Besides, it must be getting late. I wonder what kind of a dinner Margaret has got for us. I left it to her. A good one, I hope. I'm ravenous."

A few minutes after, she appeared in the doorway, holding a lamp high, the light showing over her white skin and reddish hair. "Margaret has excelled herself — boiled haddock, melted butter, a neck of mutton, and a rice pudding. And I have brought back a bag of oranges. Now come, darling. You've done enough to that virginal. Run upstairs and wash your hands, and remember that the fish is getting cold."

She was waiting for him in the little back room — the lamp was on the table — and when they sat down to dinner she began the tale of her day's doings. But she hadn't got further than the fact that they had
asked her to stay to tea at Queen's Gate, when her tongue, which always went quite as fast as her thoughts, betrayed her, and, before she was aware, she had said that her pupil's sister was in delicate health and that the family was going abroad for the winter. This was equivalent to saying she had lost a pupil. So she rattled on, hoping that her father would not perceive the inference.

"There doesn't seem to be much luck about at present," he said. "That's the third pupil you've lost this month."

"It is unfortunate… and just as I was beginning to save a little money." A moment after her voice had recovered its habitual note of cheerfulness. "Then what do you think I did? An idea struck me; I took the omnibus and went straight to St. James's Hall."

"To St. James's Hall!"

"Yes, M. Desjardin, the French composer, has come over to give a series of concerts. I thought I should like him to try my voice."

"You didn't see him?"

"Yes, I did. He was coming down the stairs. The clerk said, 'That is Monsieur Desjardin,' and we went into the hall and I sang to him."

"What did you sing to him?"

"'Have you seen but a white lily grow?' and 'Que vous me coûtez cher, mon occur, pour vos plaisirs.'"

"Ah! that music must have surprised him. What did he say?”

"I don’t think I sang very well, but he seemed pleased. He said I had a very fine voice and sang the old music beautifully, but that it would be impossible for me to sing modern music without ruining my voice, until I had been taught. I asked him if it would not be well to try to earn a little money by concert singing, so that I might go abroad later on. He said, ‘I am glad that all my arrangements are made, otherwise I might be tempted to offer you an engagement. One engagement leads to another, and if you sing before your voice is properly placed' — "posée" was the word he used — ‘you will ruin it.’”

“Is that all?”

“Yes, that’s all." Then, noticing the pained look that had come into her father’s face, she added, “It was nice to hear that he thought well of my voice.”

But she could tell what he was thinking of, and, regretting her tongue’s indiscretion, she tried to divert his thoughts from herself. His brooding look continued, and to remove it she had to fetch his pipe and tobacco. When he had filled it for the third time he said —

"There is the Bach and the Handel sonata waiting for us; we ought to be getting to work.”

"I’m quite ready, father. I suppose I must not eat any more oranges," and she surveyed her plate full of skins.

Mr. Innes took up the lamp, Evelyn called to the servant to get another, and followed him into the music-room. The lamps were placed on the harpsichord. She lighted some candles, and in the moods and aspirations of great men they found a fairyland, and the lights disappeared from the windows opposite, leaving them still there.

II

The name was no indication. None remembered that Dowlands was the name of a famous sixteenth century lutenist, and there was nothing in the snug masonry to suggest an aestheticism of any kind. The viols and virginals surprised the visitor coming in from the street, and he stayed his steps as he might on the threshold of a fairy land.

The villas, of which Dowlands was one, were a builder's experiment. They had been built in the hopes of attracting wealthy business West End shopkeepers; but Dulwich had failed to become a fashionable suburb. Many had remained empty, and when Mr. Innes had entered into negotiations with the house agents, they declared themselves willing to entertain all his proposals, and finally he had acquired a lease at a greatly reduced rental.

In accordance with his and Mrs. Innes's wishes, the house had been considerably altered. Partition walls had been taken away, and practically the whole ground door converted into class-rooms, leaving free only one little room at the back where they had their meals. During his wife's lifetime the house suited their requirements. The train service from Victoria was frequent, and on the back of their notepaper was printed a little map, whereby pupils coming and going from the station could find their way. On the second floor was Mr. Innes's workshop, where he restored the old instruments or made new ones after the old models. There was Evelyn's bedroom — her mother had refurnished it before she died — and she often sat there; it was, in truth, the most habitable room in the house. There was Evelyn's old nursery, now an unoccupied room; and there were two other empty rooms. She had tried to convert one into a little oratory. She had placed there a statue of the Virgin, and hung a crucifix on the wall, and bought a *prie-dieu* and put it there. But the room was too lonely, and she found she could say her prayers more fervently by her bedside. Their one servant slept downstairs in a room behind the kitchen. So the house often had the appearance of a deserted house; and Evelyn, when she returned from London, where she went almost daily to give music lessons, often paused on the threshold, afraid to enter till her ear detected some slight sound of her servant at work. Then she cried, "Is that you, Margaret?" and she advanced cautiously, till Margaret answered, "Yes, miss."

The last summer and autumn had been the pleasantest in her life since her mother's death. Her pupils interested her — she had some six or seven. Her flow of bright talk, her eager manner, her beautiful playing of the viola da gamba, her singing of certain old songs, her mother's fame, and the hopes she entertained of one day achieving success on the stage, made her a heroine among her little circle of friends. Her father was a remarkable man, but he seemed to her the most wonderful of men. It was exciting to go to London with him, to bid him good-bye at Victoria — she to her lessons, he to his — to meet him in the evenings, and in conjunction to

arrange the programme of their next concert. These interests and ambitions had sufficed to fill her life, and to keep the greater ambition out of sight; and since her mother's death she had lived happily with her father, helping him in his work. But lately things had changed. Some of her pupils had gone abroad, others had married, and interest in the concerts declined. For a little while the old music had seemed as if it were going to attract sufficient attention, but already their friends had heard enough, and Mr. Innes had been compelled to postpone the next, which had been announced for the beginning of February. There would be no concert now till March, perhaps not even then; so there was nothing for her to look forward to, and the wet windy weather which swept the suburb contributed to her disheartenment. The only event of the day seemed to be her father's departure in the morning. Immediately after breakfast he tied up. his music in a brown paper parcel and put his violin into its case; he spoke of missing his train, and, from the windows of the music-room, she saw him hastening down the road. She had asked him if there were any MSS. he wished copied in the British Museum; absent-mindedly he had answered "No"; and, drumming on the glass with her fingers, she wondered how the day would pass. There was nothing to do; there was nothing even to think about. She was tired of thinking that a pupil might come back — that a new pupil might at any moment knock at the door. She was tired of wondering if her father's concerts would ever pay — if the firm of music publishers with whom he was now in treaty would come to terms and enable him to give a concert in their hall, or if they would break off negotiations, as many had done before. And, more than of everything else, she was
tired of thinking if her father would ever have money to send her abroad, or if she would remain in Dulwich always.

One morning, as she was returning from Dulwich, where she had gone to pay the weekly bills, she discovered that she was no longer happy. She stopped, and, with an empty heart, saw the low-lying fields with poultry pens, and the hobbled horse grazing by the broken hedge. The old village was her prison. She had trundled her hoop there; she ought to love it, but she didn't, and, looking on its too familiar aspect, she asked if it would never pass from her. It seemed to her that she had not strength or will to return home. A little farther on she met the vicar. He bowed, and she wondered how he could have thought that she could care for him. Oh, to live in that Rectory with him! She pitied the young man who wore brown clothes, and whose employment in a bank prevented him from going abroad for his health. These people were well enough, but they were not for her. She seemed to see beyond London, beyond the seas, whither she could not say, and she could not quell the yearning which rose to her lips like a wave, and over them.

Formerly, when there was choir practice at St. Joseph's, she used to go there and meet her father, but lately, for some reason which she could not explain to herself, she had refrained. The thought of this church had become distasteful to her, and she returned home indifferent to everything, to music and religion alike. Her eyes turned from the pile of volumes — part of

Bach's interminable works — and all the old furniture, and she stood at the window and watched the rain dripping into the patch of black garden in front of the house, surrounded by a low stone wall. The villas opposite suggested a desolation which found a parallel in her heart; the sloppy road and the pale brown sky frightened her, so menacing seemed their monotony. She knew all this suburb; it was all graven on her mind, and all that ornamental park where she must go, if it cleared a little, for her afternoon walk. She must tramp round that park once more. She strove to keep out of her mind its symmetrical walls, its stone basins, where the swans floated like white china ornaments, almost as lifeless. But worse even than these afternoons were the hours between six and eight. For very often her father was detained, and if he missed the halfpast six train he had to come by the half-past seven, and in those hours of waiting the dusk grew oppressive and fearful in the music-room. Startled by a strange shadow, she crouched in her arm-chair, and when the feeling of dread passed she was weak from want of food. Why did her father keep her waiting? Hungry, faint, and weary of life, she opened a volume of Bach; but there was no pleasure for her in the music, and if she opened a volume of songs she had neither strength nor will to persevere even through the first, and, rising from the instrument, she walked across the room, stretching her arms in a feverish despair. She had not eaten for many hours, and out of the vacuity of the stomach a dimness rose into her eyes. Pressing her eyes with her hand, she leaned against the door.

One evening she walked into the garden. The silence and damp of the earth revived her, and the sensation of the cold stone against which she was leaning, was agreeable. Little stars speckled a mauve and misty sky, and out of the mysterious spring twilight there came a strange and ultimate yearning, a craving which nothing she had ever known could assuage. But those stars — could they tell her nothing? One, large almost as the moon itself, flamed up in the sky, and a voice within her whispered that that was her star, that it held the secret of her destiny. She gazed till her father called to her from the gate; and all that evening she could think of nothing else. The conviction flowed within her that the secret of her destiny was there; and as she lay in bed the star seemed to take a visible shape.

A face rose out of the gulf beneath her. She could not distinguish whether it was the face of man or woman; it was an idea rather than a face. The ears were turned to her for her to take the earrings, the throat was deeply curved, the lips were large and rose-red, the eyes were nearly closed, and the hair was curled close over a straight, low forehead. The face rose up to hers. She looked into the subtle eyes, and the thrill of the lips, just touching hers, awakened a sense of sin, and her eyes when they opened were frightened and weary. And as she sat up in her bed, trembling, striving vainly to separate the real from the unreal, she saw the star still shining. She hid her face in the pillow, and was only calmed by the thought that it was watching her.

She went into the garden every evening to see it rise, and a desire of worship grew up in her heart; and, thinking of the daffodils, it occurred to her to lay these flowers on the wall as an

offering. Even wilder thoughts passed through her brain; she could not keep them back, and more than once asked herself if she were giving way to an idolatrous intention. If so, she would have to tell the foolish story to her confessor. But she could hardly bring herself to tell him such nonsense.... If she didn't, the omission might make her confession a false one; and she was so much perplexed that it seemed to her as if the Devil took the opportunity to insinuate that she might put off going to confession. This decided her. She resolved to combat the Evil One. To-day was Thursday. She would confess on Saturday, and go to Communion on Sunday.

Till quite lately her confessor had been Father Knight — a tall, spare, thin-lipped, aristocratic ecclesiastic, in whom Evelyn had expected to find a romantic personality. She had looked forward to thrilling confessions, but had been disappointed. The romance his appearance suggested was not borne out; he seemed unable to take that special interest in her which she desired; her confessions were barren of spiritual adventure, and after some hesitations her choice dropped upon Father Railston. In this selection the law of contrast played an important part. The men were very opposites. One walked erect and tall, with measured gait; the other walked according to the impulse of the moment, wearing his biretta either on one side of the head or the other. One was reserved; the other voluble in speech. One was of handsome and regular features; the other's face was plain but expressive. Evelyn had grown interested in Father Railston's dark, melancholy eyes; and his voice was a human voice vibrant with the terror and suffering of life. In listening to her sins he seemed to remember his own. She had accused herself of impatience at the circumstances which kept her at home, of even nourishing, she would not say projects, but thoughts, of escape.

"Then, my child, are you so anxious to change your present life for that of the stage?"

"Yes, Father."

"You weary of the simplicity of your present life, and sigh for the brilliancy of the stage?"

"I'm afraid I do." It was thrilling to admit so much, especially as the life of an actress was not in itself sinful. "I feel that I should die very soon if I were to hear I should never leave Dulwich."

The priest did not speak for a long while, and, raising her eyes, she watched his expression. It seemed to her that her confession of her desire of the world had recalled memories, and she wondered what they were.

"I am more than forty — I'm nearly fifty — and my life has passed like a dream."

He seemed about to tell her the secret of life, and had stopped. But the phrase lingered through her whole life, and eventually became part of it. "My life has passed like a dream." She did not

remember what he had said after, and she had gone away wondering if life seemed to everyone like a dream when they were forty, and if his life would have seemed more real to him if he had given it to the world instead of to God?

Her subsequent confessions seemed trite and commonplace. Not that Father Railston failed to listen with kind interest to her; not that he failed to divine that she was passing through a physical and spiritual crisis. His admonitions were comforting in her weariness of mind and body; but, notwithstanding her affection for him, she felt that beyond that one phrase he had no influence over her. She almost felt that he was too gentle and indulgent, and she thought she would have liked a confessor who was severe, who would have inflicted heavier penances, compelled her to fast and pray, who would have listened in deeper sternness to the sins of thought which she with averted face shamefully owned to having entertained. She was disappointed that he did not warn her with the loss of her soul, that he did not invent specious expedients for her use, whereby the Evil One might be successfully checked.

One Sunday morning the servant told Mr. Innes that Miss Evelyn had left a little earlier, as she was going to Communion. She remained in church for High Mass, and, when chided for such long abstinence, she smiled sadly and said that she did not think that it would do her much harm. During the following week he noticed that she hardly touched breakfast, and the only reason she gave was that she thought she would like to fast. No, she had not obtained leave from her confessor; she had not even consulted him. She was not doing any work; she had no pupils; the concert had been postponed; she thought she would like to fast. Father and daughter looked at each other, and they felt that something was going to happen. They felt as if they had gone far along a certain road and could go no farther. He sighed as he put his fiddle into its case, and he went to London deeply concerned about his daughter, but unable to arrive at any conclusion. As for Evelyn, she felt that something must happen to her, or she must die.

Sometimes she felt as if she were going mad. She fasted, and she broke through her fast, and as Lent drew to a close she asked her father if she might make a week's retreat in a convent at Wimbledon where she had some friends. There was no need for her at home; it would be at least change of air, and she pressed him to allow her to go. He feared the influence the convent might have upon her, and admitted that his selfishness was largely accountable for this religious reaction. No doubt she wanted change, she was looking very poorly. He spoke of the sea, but who was to take her to Brighton or Margate? The convent seemed the only solution of the difficulty, and he had to consent to her departure.

The retreat was to last four days, but Evelyn begged that she might stay on till Easter Tuesday. This would give her a clear week away from home, and the improvement that this little change wrought in her was surprising. The convent had made her cheeks fair as roses, and given her back all her sunny happiness and abundant conversation. She delighted in telling her father of

her week's experience. For four days she had not spoken (perhaps that was the reason she was talking so much now), and during these four days they were nearly always in chapel; but somehow it hadn't seemed long, the services were so beautiful. The nuns wore grey serge robes and head-dresses, the novices white head-dresses; what had struck her most was the expression of happy content on their faces.

"I wish, father, you had seen them come into church — their long robes and beautiful white faces. I don't think there is anything so beautiful as a nun."

The mother prioress was a small woman, with an eager manner. She looked so unimportant that Evelyn had wondered why she had been chosen, but the moment she spoke you came under the spell of her keen grey eyes and clear voice.... Mother Philippa, the mistress of the novices, was quite different — stout and middle-aged, and she wore spectacles. She was beautiful notwithstanding; her goodness was like a soft light upon her face.... Evelyn paused. She could not find words to describe her; at last she said —

"When she comes into the room I always feel happy."

She could not say which she liked the better, but branched off into a description of the Carmelite who had given the retreat — a strong, eagle-faced man, with thin hair drawn back from his forehead, and intense eyes. He wore sandals, and his white frock was tied with a leather belt, and every word he spoke had entered into her heart. He gave the meditations, which were held in the darkened library. They could not see each other's faces; they could only see the white figure at the end of the room.

She had had her meals in the parlour with two other ladies who had come to the convent for the retreat. They were both elderly women, and Evelyn fancied that they belonged to the grandest society. She could tell that by their voices. The one she liked best had quite white hair, and her expression was almost that of a nun. She was tall, very stout, and walked with a stick. Oh Easter Sunday this old lady had asked her if she would care to come into the garden with her. It was such a beautiful morning, she said, that it would do both of them good. The old lady walked very slowly with her stick. But though Evelyn thought that she must be at least a countess, she did not think she was very rich — she had probably lost her money. The black dress she wore was thin and almost threadbare, and it was a little too long for her; she held it up in her left hand as she walked — a most beautiful hand for an old woman. Both these ladies had been very kind to her; she had often walked with them in the garden — a fine old garden. There were tall shady trees; these were sprinkled with the first tiny leaves; and the currant and raspberry bushes were all out. And there was a fish pond swarming with gold fish, and they were so tame that they took bread from the novices' hands.

The conversation had begun about the convent, and, after speaking of its good sisters, the old lady, whose hair was quite white, had asked Evelyn about herself. Had she ever thought of being a nun? Evelyn had answered that she had not. She had never considered the question whether she had a vocation.... She had been brought up to believe that she was going on the stage to sing grand opera.

“It is hardly for me to advise you. But I know how dangerous the life of an opera singer is. I shall pray God that He may watch over you. Promise me always to remember our holy religion. It is the only thing we have that is worth having; all the rest passes.”

"Father, we were close by the edge of the fish pond, and all the greedy fish swarmed to the surface, thinking we had come to feed them. She said, ‘I cannot walk farther without resting; come, my dear, let me sit down on that bench, and do you sing me a little song, very low, so that no one shall hear you but me.’ I sang her ‘John, come kiss me now,’ and she said, ‘My dear, you have a beautiful voice, I pray that you make good use of it.’”

But not in one day could all Evelyn’s convent experiences be related, and it was not until the end of the week that Evelyn told how Mother Philippa, at the end of a long talk in which she had spoken to Evelyn about the impulses which had led her to embrace a religious life (she had been twenty years in this convent), had taken her upstairs to the infirmary to see Sister Bonaventure, an American girl, only twenty-one, who was dying of consumption. She lay on a couch in grey robes, her hands and face waxen white, and a smile of happy resignation on her lips and in her eyes.

"But," exclaimed Evelyn, "they told me she would die within the fortnight, so she may be dead now; if not to-day, to-morrow or after. I hadn’t thought of that.... I shall never forget her; every few minutes she coughed — that horrible cough! I thought she was going to die before my eyes, but in the intervals she chattered and even laughed, and no word of complaint escaped her. She was only twenty-one... had known nothing of life; all was unknown to her, except God, and she was going to heaven. She seemed quite happy, yet to me it seemed the saddest sight in the world.... She’ll be buried in a few days in the sunniest corner of the garden, away from the house — that is their graveyard. The mother prioress, the founder of the convent, is buried there; a little dedicatory chapel has been built, and on the green turf tall wooden crosses mark the graves of six nuns; next week there’ll be one more cross.”

The conversation flagged, and Evelyn sat looking into the corner of the room, her large clear eyes wide open and fixed. Presently she said —

"Father, I’ve often thought I should like to be a nun.”

“You a nun! And with that voice!”

She looked at him, smiling a little.

"What matter?”

"What matter! Have you not thought — but I understand; you mean that your voice is wasted here, that we shall never have the means to go abroad.... But we shall.”

"Father, dear, I wasn’t thinking of that. I do believe that means will be found to send me abroad to study. But what then? Shall I be happy?”

"Fame, fortune, art!”

“Those nuns have none of those things, and they are happy. As that old lady said, their happiness comes from within.”

“And you’ll be happy with those things, as happy as they are without them. You’re in a melancholy mood; come, we’ll think of the work before us. I’ve decided that we give our concert the week after next. That will give us ten clear days.”

III

Jesuits from St. Joseph's were not infrequently seen at Mr. Innes's concerts. The worthy fathers, although they did not see their way to guaranteeing a yearly grant of money sufficient to ensure adequate performances of Palestrina's finest works, were glad to support, with occasional guineas, their organist's concerts. Painters and men of letters were attracted by them; musicians seldom. Nor did Mr. Innes encourage their presence. Musicians were of no use to him. They were, he said, divided into two classes — those who came to scoff, and those who came to steal. He did not want either sort.

The rare music interested but a handful, and the audience that had come from London shivered in remembrance of the east wind which had accompanied their journey. But this little martyrdom did not seem to be entirely without its satisfactions, and, conscious of superiority, they settled themselves to listen to the few words of explanation with which Mr. Innes was accustomed to introduce the music that was going to be played. He was speaking when he was interrupted by the servant-maid, who whispered and gave him a card: "Sir Owen Asher, 27 Berkeley Square." He left the room hurriedly, and his audience surmised from his manner that something important had happened.

Sir Owen, seemingly a tall man, certainly above the medium height, was waiting for him in the passage. His thin figure was wrapped tightly in an overcoat, most of his face was concealed in the collar, and the pale gold-coloured moustache showed in contrast to the dark brown fur. The face, wide across the forehead, acquired an accent in the pointed chin and strongly marked jaw. The straight nose was thin and well shaped in the nostrils. "An attractive man of forty" would be the criticism of a woman. Sir Owen's attractiveness concentrated in his sparkling eyes and his manner, which was at once courteous and manly. He told Mr. Innes that he had heard of his concerts that morning at the office of the *Wagnerian Review*, and Mr. Innes indulged in his habitual dream of a wealthy patron who would help him to realise his musical ambitions. Sir Owen had just bought the periodical; he intended to make it an organ of advanced musical culture, and would like to include a criticism of these concerts. Mr. Innes begged Sir Owen to come into the concert-room. But, while taking off his coat, Sir Owen mentioned what he had heard regarding Mr. Innes's desire to revive the vocal Masses of the sixteenth century at St. Joseph's, and the interest of this conversation delayed them a little in the passage.

The baronet's evening clothes were too well cut for those of a poet, a designer of wall paper, or a journalist, and his hands were too white and well cared for at the nails. His hair was pale brown, curling a little at the ends, and carefully brushed and looking as if it had been freshened by some faintest application of perfumed essence. Three pearl studs fastened his shirt front, and his necktie was tied in a butterfly bow. He displayed some of the nonchalant ease which wealth

and position create, smiled a little on catching sight of the jersey worn by a lady who had neglected to fasten the back of her bodice, and strove to decipher the impression the faces conveyed to him. He grew aware of that flitting anxiety which is inseparable from the task of finding a daily living, and that pathos which tells of fidelity to ideal and abstinence from gross pleasure. A young man, who stood apart, in a carefully studied attitude, a dark lock of hair falling over his forehead, amused him, and the young man in the chair next Sir Owen wore a threadbare coat and clumsy boots, and sat bolt upright. Sir Owen pitied him, and imagined him working all day in some obscure employment, finding his life's pleasure once a week in a score by Bach. Catching sight of a priest's profile, a look of contempt appeared on his face.

He was of his class; he had lived its life and lived it still, in a measure; but from the beginning his ideas and tastes had been superior to those of a merely fashionable man. At five-and-twenty he had purchased a Gainsborough, and at thirty he had spent a large sum of money in exhuming some sonatas of Bach from the dust in which they were lying. At three-and-thirty he had wrecked the career of a fashionable soprano by inspiring her with the belief that she might become a great singer, a great artist; at five-and-thirty Bayreuth and its world of musical culture and ideas had interested him in spite of his unconquerable aversion to long hair and dirty hands. After some association with geniuses he withdrew from the art-world, confessing himself unable to bear the society of those who did not dress for dinner; but, while repudiating, he continued to spy the art-world from a distance. An audience is, however, necessary to a cello player, and the Turf Club and the Royal Yacht Club contained not a dozen members, he said, who would recognise the Eroica Symphony if they happened to hear it, which was not likely. Lately he had declared openly that he was afraid of entering any of his clubs, lest he should be asked once more what he thought of the Spring Handicaps, and if he intended sailing the Medusa in the Solent this season. Nevertheless, his journey to Bayreuth could not but produce an effect. He had purchased the *Wagnerian Review*; it had led him to Mr. Innes's concerts, and he was already interested in the prospect of reviving the early music and its instruments. That this new movement should be begun in Dulwich, a suburb he would never have heard of if it had not been for its picture gallery, stimulated his curiosity.

It is the variation, not the ordinary specimen, that is most typical, for the variation contains the rule in essence, and the deviation elucidates the rule. So in his revolt against the habitual pleasures and ideas of his class, Sir Owen became more explanatory of that class than if he had acquiesced in the usual ignorance of £20,000 a year. To the ordinary eye he was merely the conventional standard of the English upper classes, but more intimate observation revealed the slight glaze of Bohemianism which natural inclination and many adventures in that land had left upon him. He listened without parade, his grey eyes following the music — they, not the head, seeming to nod to it; and when Mr. Innes approached to ask him his opinion, he sprang to his feet to tell him.

One of the pieces they had heard was a pavane for five viols and a harpsichord, composed by Ferrabosco, son of the Italian musician who had settled in Greenwich at the end of the sixteenth century. Sir Owen was extraordinarily pleased and interested, and declared the pavane to be as complete as a sonata by Bach or Beethoven; but his appreciation was suddenly interrupted by someone looking at him.

At a little distance Evelyn stood looking at him. Though he represented to her the completely unknown, she seemed to have known him always in her heart; she seemed to have been waiting for knowledge of this unknown, and the rumour of the future grew loud in her ears.

In the little while which he took to decide whether he would take tea or coffee, he thought that something could be said for her figure, and he liked her hair, but, on the whole, he did not think he cared for her. He said he would take tea, and then he changed his mind and said he would have coffee, but Evelyn came back with a cup of tea, and, perceiving her mistake, she laughed abstractedly.

"You are going to sing two songs, Miss Innes. I'm glad; I hear you have a beautiful voice."

The sound of his voice startled a new delight in her. It was the same delight which the very sight of him had awakened in her, only more intense. She hardly heard what he was saying; she seemed to lose all sense of time or place, nor was there any circumstance, only an increasing sense of delight. The sensation was the most delicious she had ever experienced, and when her father called her it was like returning after a long absence.

She sang better than he had expected, and during the preludes and fugues and the sonatas by Bach, which finished the programme, he thought of her voice, occasionally questioning himself regarding his taste for her. She had beautiful teeth and hair, and he liked her figure, and her eyes were unlike any eyes he had ever seen. They were full of meaning, but he could not define their meaning. He was not even certain of the colour of her eyes; he had thought they were blue, but while talking to him they seemed to have changed to mauve.

He noticed, whether her eyes wandered or remained fixed, that they returned to him, and that their glance was one of interrogation, as if all depended upon him. When the concert was over he was anxious to speak to her, so that he grew impatient with the people who stopped his way. The back room was filled with musical instruments — there were two harpsichords, a clavichord, and an organ, and Mr. Innes insisted on explaining these instruments to him. He seemed to Owen to pay too slight a heed to his daughter's voice. That she played the viola da gamba very well was true enough, but what sense was there in a girl like that playing an instrument? Her voice was her instrument.

And when he was able to get a few words with her, he told her about Madame Savelli. There was no one else, he said, who could teach singing. She must go to France at once, and he seemed to take it for granted that she might start at the end of the week, if she only made up her mind. She did not know what answer to make, and was painfully conscious how silly she must look standing before him unable to say a word. It was no longer the same; some of the dream had been swept aside, and reality had begun to look through it. Her intense consciousness of this tall, aristocratic man frightened her. She saw the embroidered waistcoat, the slight hips, the gold moustache; and the sparkling grey eyes asked her questions, to which her whole nature responded violently, and, though her feelings were inexplicable to herself, she was overcome with physical shame. She hoped he would not come to the concerts again — and then she knew he would come again, and she could hear her heart throbbing.

A few days after he walked into the music-room, just as she had expected he would.

The *Review*, he said, could not go to press without an article on the concert, but to do this article he must consult Mr. Innes, for in the first piece, “La My," the viols had seemed to him out of tune. Of course this was not so — perhaps one of the players had played a wrong note; that might be the explanation. But on referring to the music, Mr. Innes discovered a better one. "From the twelfth to the fifteenth century, writers," he said, “did not consider their music as moderns do. Now we watch the effect of a chord, a combination of notes heard at the same moment, the top note of which is the tune, but the older writers used their skill in divining musical phrases which could be followed simultaneously, each one going logically its own way, irrespective of some temporary clashing. They considered their music horizontally, as the parts went on; we consider it vertically, each chord producing its impression in turn. To them all the parts were of equal importance. Their music was a purely decorative interweaving of melodies. Now we have a tune with accompanying parts.”

“What a wonderful knowledge of music your father has, Miss Innes!”

“Yes, father reads old MSS. that no one else can decipher.”

"These discords happened," Mr. Innes said, as he went to the harpsichord, "when a composition was based upon some old plain song melody, the notes of which could not be altered. Then the musician did not scruple to write in one of the other parts the same note, altered by a sharp or a flat, to suit the passing requirement of the musical phrase allotted to that part. You could thus have together, say an F natural in one part and an F sharp in another. This to modern ears, not trained to understanding the meaning of the two parts, is intolerable.”

While he spoke of the relative fineness of the ancient and modern ear, maintaining that the reason ancient singers could sing without an accompaniment was that they were trained to sing

from the monochord, Owen considered the figure of this tall fair girl, and wondered if she would elect to remain with her father, playing the viola da gamba in Dulwich, or bolt with a manager — that was what generally happened. Her father was a most interesting old man, a genius in his way, but just such an one as might prove his daughter's ruin. He would keep her singing this music, perhaps marry her to a clerk, and she would be a fat, prosaic mother of three in five years.

However this might be, he, Owen, was interested in her voice, and, if he had never met Georgina, he might have liked this girl. It would be better that he should take her away than that she should go away with a manager who would rob and beat her. But, if he were to take her away, he would be tied to her; it would be like marrying her. Far better stick to married women, and he remembered his epigram of last night. It was at Lady Ascott's dinner-party, the conversation had turned on marriage, and its necessity had been questioned. "But, of course, marriage is necessary," he had answered. "You can't have husbands without marriage, and if there were no husbands, who would look after our mistresses?" A lot of hypocrites had chosen to look shocked; Georgina had said it was a horrid remark, and had hardly spoken to him all the evening; and this afternoon she had said she should not come and see him any more — she was afraid her husband suspected, her children were growing up, etc. When women cease to care for one, how importunate their consciences are! A little terror took him, and he wondered if he were about to lose Georgina, or if she were only trying to make him jealous. Perhaps he could not do better than make her jealous. For that purpose this young girl was just the thing.

Moreover, he was interested in the revival of Palestrina at St. Joseph's, and he liked Ferrabosco's pavane. He would like to have a harpsichord; even if he did not play on it much, it would be a beautiful, characteristic piece of furniture.... And it would be a good idea to ask Mr. Innes to bring all his queer instruments to Berkeley Square, and give a concert to-morrow night after his dinner-party. His friends had bored him with Hungarian bands, and the improvisations the bands had been improvising for the last ten years, and he saw no reason why he should not bore them, just for a change, with Mr. Innes.

At this moment his reflections were interrupted. It was Mr. Innes, who wanted to know if he did not agree with him regarding the necessity for the reintroduction of the monochord, if the sixteenth-century Masses were ever to be sung again properly. All this was old story to Evelyn, and she put her father out of her mind and began to dream. Her dream filled her — life seemed without limitation, and she was happy, like one who waits, certain of the fulfilment of her desire. Owen had come to see her, not her father, and he was inviting her father to give a concert on the old music in his house, for her sake. And she did not awake from her dream till her father said he would arrive with the big harpsichord and Evelyn about nine.

She had two evening gowns — a pale green silk and a white. The pale green looked very nice; it had cost her three pounds. The white had nearly ruined her, but it had seemed to suit her so well that she had not been able to resist, and had paid five pounds ten, a great deal for her to spend on a dress. Its great fault was that it soiled at the least touch. She had worn it three times, and could not wear it again till it had been cleaned. It was a pity, but there was no help for it. She would have to wear the green, and to console herself she thought of the compliments she had had for it at different parties. But these seemed insignificant when she thought of the party she was going to to-night.

She had never been to Berkeley Square, and expected to be surprised. But it lay in a hollow, a dignified, secluded square, exactly as she had imagined it. Nor did the great doorway, and the carpet that stretched across the pavement for her to walk upon, surprise her, nor the lines of footmen, nor the natural grace of the wide staircase. She seemed to have seen it all before, only she could not remember where. It came back to her like a dream. She seemed to recognise the pictures of the Goddesses, the Holy Families, and the gold mirrors; and, lifting her eyes, she saw Owen at the head of the stairs, and he smiled so familiarly that it seemed strange to think that this was only the third time she had seen him.

He introduced her father to a fashionable musician, whose symphonies and sonatas were composed with that lack of matter and excess of erudition which delight the amateur and irritate the artist, and he walked down the room looking for seats where they could talk undisturbed for a few minutes. He was nervous lest Georgina should find him sitting with this girl in an intimate corner, but he did not expect her for another half-hour, and was curious to know how far Evelyn acquiesced in the obscure lot which her father imposed upon her — to play the viola da gamba, and sing old music, instead of singing for her own fame upon the stage. Above all, he was also curious to find out if she were the innocent maiden she appeared to be, or if she had had flirtations with the clerks in the neighbourhood.

From the other room they would seem very intimate, sitting on a sofa together, and he was expecting Georgina every minute. If she were to see them, it would lead to further discussion, and supply her with an excuse. But his curiosity was kindled, and while he considered how he could lead Evelyn into confidences, he saw her arm trembling through the gauze sleeve, for it seemed to her that all that was happening now had happened before. The walls covered with red pleated silk, the bracket-clocks, the brocade-covered chairs: where had she seen them? And Owen's grey eyes fixed upon her: where had she seen them? In a dream, perhaps. She asked him if he had ever experienced the sensation of having already lived through a scene that was happening at the very moment. He did not seem to hear; he seemed expecting someone; and then the vision returned to her again, and she could not but think that she had known Sir Owen long ago, but how and where she could not tell.

At that moment she noticed his absent-mindedness, and it suddenly occurred to her that he was in love with some woman and was waiting for her, and almost at the same moment she saw a tall, red-haired woman cross the farther room. The woman paused in the doorway, as if looking for someone. She nodded to Owen, and engaged in conversation with a group of men standing by the fireplace. Something told Evelyn that that smooth, cream-coloured neck was the woman Owen was in love with, and the sudden formality of his manner convinced her that she was right. He said that he must go and see after his other guests, and, as she expected, he went straight to the woman with the red hair. But she did not leave her friends. After shaking hands with Owen, she continued talking to them, and he was left out of the conversation.

The concert began with a sonata for the harpsichord and the viola da gamba, and then Evelyn sang her two songs. She sang for Owen, and it seemed to her that she was telling him that she was sorry that it had all happened as it had happened, and that he must go away and be happy with the woman he loved. She did not think that she sang particularly well, but Owen came and told her that she had sung charmingly, and in their eyes were strange questions and excuses, and an avowal of regret that things were not different.

Slim women in delicate gowns glided up and praised her,. but she did not think that they had been as much impressed by her singing as they said; distinguished men were introduced to her, and she felt she had nothing to say to them; and looking round the circle of men and women she saw Owen in the doorway, and noticed that his eyes were restless and constantly wandered in the direction of the tall woman with the red hair, who sat calmly talking to her friends, never noticing him. He seemed waiting for a look that never came; his glances were furtive and quickly withdrawn, as if he feared he was being watched. When she got up to leave, Owen came forward and spoke to her, but she barely replied. And Evelyn saw all this, and she was surprised when Owen came rapidly through the room and sat down by her. He was painfully absent-minded, and so nervous that he did not seem to know what he was saying; indeed, that was the only excuse she could make for his remarks. She hardly recognised this man as the man she had hitherto known. She hated all his sentiments and his ideas; she thought them horrid, and was glad when her father came to tell her it was time for her to go.

“You didn’t sing well," he said, as they went home. “What was the matter with you?”

IV

On Sunday morning she came downstairs singing, and Mr. Innes heard a future prima donna in her voice.

"Do you think so, father? It is strange you should say so, for I feel today as if I were going to succeed. I seem to see the stage, and I seem nearer to it than I ever was before. You think I'm talking nonsense. Very likely I am. Ah, I don't like you in your frock-coat and silk hat. You're much nicer in your walking-clothes. Whose Mass are we going to have to-day? "

"A Mass by Hummel, in B; on Thursday, a Mass by Dr. Gladstone; and next Sunday, Mozart's Twelfth, beloved of Father Gordon and village choirs. I wonder if he will allow the Reproaches to be sung in Holy Week? He will insist on the expense of the double choir."

"But, father, do you think that the congregation of St. Joseph's is one that would care for the refinement of Palestrina? Would you not require a cultivated West End audience — the Oratory or Farm Street? "

"That is Sir Owen's opinion."

"I never heard him say so."

How had she come to repeat anything she had heard him say? Moreover, why had she said that she had not heard him say so? And Evelyn argued with herself until the train reached their station — it was one of those absurd little mental complications, the infinitesimal life that flourishes deep in the soul.

A little way down a side street, a few yards from the main thoroughfare, where the roads branched, the great gaunt facade of St. Joseph's pointed against a yellow sky. Its foundations had been laid and its walls built by a priest, who had collected large sums of money in America, and whose desire had been to have the largest church that could be built for the least money, in the shortest possible time. The result was the great, sprawling grey stone building with a desolate spire, now fading into the darkness of the snow-storm. Money had run short. The church had not been completed when its founder died; then another energetic priest had raised another subscription. Doors and stained glass had been added, and, for a while, St. Joseph's had become a flourishing parish church, supported by various suburbs; and projects for the completion of its interior decoration had begun to be entertained; but, while these projects were under consideration, the suburbs had acquired churches of their own, and the congregation of St. Joseph's had dwindled until it had lost all means of support, except the meagre assistance it

received from the poor Irish and Italians of the neighbourhood. There had been talk of closing the church, and it would have had to be closed if the Jesuits had not accepted the mission. Another subscription had been started, but the greater part of this third subscription the Jesuits spent upon their schools, so the fate of St. Joseph's seemed to be to remain, as someone had said, an unfinished ruin. Their resources were exhausted, and they surveyed the barren aisles, dreaming of the painting and mosaics they would put up when the promises of Father Gordon were realised. For it was understood that their fortunes should be retrieved by his musical abilities, and his competence to select the most attractive Masses. Father Gordon was a type often found among amateur musicians — a man with a slight technical knowledge, a good ear, a nice voice, and absolutely no taste whatever. His natural ear was for obvious rhythm, his taste coincided with the popular taste, and as the necessity of attracting a congregation was paramount, it is easy to imagine how easily he conceded to his natural inclinations. And the arguments with which. he rebutted those of his opponents were unanswerable — that whatever moved the heart to the love of God was right; that if the plain chant failed to help the soul to aspiration, we were justified in substituting Rossini's *Stabat Mater*, or whatever other musical idiom the neighbourhood craved for.

Religious rite, according to Father Gordon, should conform to the artistic taste of the congregation, and he urged, with some force, that the artistic taste of Southwark stood on quite as high a level as that of Mayfair. To get a Mayfair audience they had only to follow the taste of Southwark. And so, under his guidance, the Jesuits had increased their orchestra and employed the best tenors that could be hired. Nevertheless, their progress was slow. Father Gordon pleaded patience. The neighbourhood was unfashionable; it was difficult to persuade their friends to come so far. Mr. Innes answered that if they gave him a choir of forty-five voices — he could do nothing with less — the West End would come at once to hear Palestrina. The distance, and the fact of the church being in a slum, he maintained, would not be in itself a drawback. Half the success of Bayreuth, he urged, is owing to its being so far off. And this plan, too, seemed to possess some elements of success, and so the Jesuits hesitated between very divergent methods by which the same result might be attained.

A few flakes of snow were falling, and Evelyn and her father put up their umbrellas as they crossed the road to the church. Three steps led to the pointed door, above which was the figure of the patron saint.

The nakedness of the unfinished and undecorated church was hidden in the twilight of the approaching storm, and Evelyn trembled as she walked up the aisle, so menacing seemed the darkness that descended from the sky. The stained glass, blackened by the smoke of the factory chimneys, let in but little light, the aisles were plunged in darkness, and kneeling in her favourite place the ineffectual gaslight seemed to her like painted flames on a dark background.

The side chapels which opened on to the aisles were shut off by no ornamental screens; indeed, the only piece of decoration seemed to be the fine modern ironwork which veiled the sanctuary.

She opened her prayer-book, but in the shadow of the pillar where she was kneeling there was not sufficient light for her to read, so she bent her face upon her hands, intent upon losing herself in prayer. She abased herself before her Father in heaven; attaining once more the wonderful human moment when the creature who crouches on this rim of earth implores pardon for her trespass from the beneficent Creator of all things. But to-day her devotional mood was interrupted by sudden thought and sensation of Owen's presence; she was forced to look up, and, convinced that he was very near her, she sought him amid the crowd of people who sat and knelt in front of her, blackening the dusk, a vague darkness in which she could at first distinguish nothing but an occasional white plume and a bald head. But her eyes grew accustomed to the darkness, and above the uninteresting backs of middle-aged men she recognised his thin sharp shoulders. She had been compelled to look up from her prayers, and she wondered if he had been thinking of her. A sensation of pleasure arose spontaneously in her, and at the same moment he had to remove his hat from the chair on which he had placed it, and she noticed the gold stud-links in his large shirt-cuffs, the rough material of which the coat was made, and how well it lay along the thin arm. And she imagined the look of vexation on the grave, interesting face, and laughed a little to herself. But what was the poor woman to do? She had a right to her chair. But she did look so frightened, and was visibly perturbed by the presence of so fine a gentleman. Evelyn knew the woman by sight — a curious thin and crooked creature, who wore a strange bonnet and a little black mantle, and walked up the church, her hands crossed like a doll….

No doubt he had driven all the way from Berkeley Square. She could see him leaning back in his brougham, humming various music, or plaintively thinking about the lady with the red hair, who did not care for him. Her breath caught her in the throat. That was the reason why he had come to St. Joseph's. It was all over with the red-haired lady, and it was for her that he had come to St. Joseph's!

At that moment the priests entered; Mass began. She opened her prayerbook, but, however firmly she fixed her thoughts in prayer, they sprang back, and it was such a delight to think of him that she could not refrain. His chair was the last on the third line from the altar rail, and she noticed that he wore patent leather shoes; the hitching of the dark grey trousers displayed a silk sock; but he suddenly uncrossed his legs, and assumed a less negligent attitude. She wondered if he could think of her as vividly as she could of him, as she settled herself in the corner of her pew, resolved from the beginning not to hear a word of the sermon, but to think of Owen the whole time. She wanted to hear why he had left England so suddenly, and why he had returned so suddenly. She was sure that she and the red- haired lady were the cause of one or the other, and that neither was the cause of both. These two facts served for a warp upon which she could

weave endless mental embroideries, tales as real as the tales of old tapestry, tales of love and jealousy, and unexpected meetings, in which she and Owen and the red-haired lady met and remet. Whilst Father Railston was preaching, these tales flowed on and on, subtle as silk, illusive as evening-tinted clouds; and Owen had not exhausted her fancy when the bell rang for the Elevation. She bowed her head and became aware of the Real Presence, and when the Book was carried from the right to the left side of the altar, and when the priest had read the Gospel, she began once more to ask herself the reason that had brought Sir Owen to St. Joseph's. The manner in which he genuflected before the altar told her that he was a Catholic; perhaps he had come to St. Joseph's merely to hear Mass.

V

The music dropped from her hand, and she stood looking at him, for he stood before her like an ancient seafarer. His grey tweed suit, buttoned tightly about him, set off every line of his spare figure. His light-brown hair was tossed all over his head, and she could not reconcile this rough traveller with the elegant fribble whom she had hitherto known as Sir Owen. But she liked him in this grey suit, dusty after long travel. He was picturesque and remote as a legend. A smile was on his lips; it showed through the frizzled moustache, and his eyes sparkled with pleasure at sight of her.

"But why did you travel straight through? You might have slept at Marseilles or Paris."

"One of these days I will tell you about the gale. I wonder I am not at the bottom of that treacherous sea; it did blow my poor old yacht about — I thought it was her last cruise; and when we got to the hotel I was handed your father's letter. As I did not want to miss the concert, I came straight through."

"But you must be tired, you've not had a proper night's sleep... for a week."

"I'm not very tired, I slept in the train, but I'm hungry. I've not had anything since ten o'clock this morning. There was no time to get anything at Victoria. I was told that the next train for Dulwich started in five minutes. I left my valet to take my trunks home; he will bring my evening clothes on here for the concert. Can you let me have a room to dress in?"

"Of course; but you must have something to eat."

"I thought of going round to the inn and having a chop."

"We had a beefsteak pudding for dinner; I wonder if you could eat beefsteak pudding?"

"There's nothing better."

"Warmed up?"

"Yes, warmed up."

"Then I may run and tell Margaret?"

"I shall be much obliged if you will."

She liked to wait upon him, and her pleasure. quickened when she handed him bread or poured out ale, making it foam in the glass, for refreshment after his long journey; and when she sat opposite, her eyes fixed on him, and he told her his tale of adventure, her happy flushed face reminded him of that exquisite promise, the pink almond blossom showing through the wintry wood.

"I came back to hear you sing."

Evelyn suddenly felt as if she were being borne forward, but at that moment her father entered.

"Father, Sir Owen was famishing when he arrived. He wanted to go to the inn and eat a chop, but I persuaded him to stop and have some beefsteak pudding."

"I am so glad... you've arrived just in time, Sir Owen. The concert is to-night."

"He came straight through without stopping; he has not been home. So, father, you will never be able to say again that your concerts are not appreciated."

"Well, this is one of the most interesting programmes we have had. You remember Ferrabosco's pavane which you liked so much" —

Margaret announced the arrival of Sir Owen's valet, and, while Mr. Innes begged of Sir Owen not to put himself to the trouble of dressing, Owen wondered at his own folly in yielding to a sudden caprice to see the girl. However, he did not regret; she was a prettier girl than he thought, and her welcome was the pleasantest thing that had happened to him for many a day.

"My poor valet, I am afraid, is quite *hors de combat*. He was dreadfully ill while we were beating up against that gale, and the long train journey has about finished him. At Victoria he looked more dead than alive."

"I must go, they're waiting for me," and she took her place among the viol players. Except for her father's sake she cared very little how she played; she tried to play well to please him, but she was anxious to sing well — she was singing for herself and for Owen, which was the same thing — and she sang beautifully in the King's madrigal and the two songs accompanied by the lute — "I loathe what I did love," and "My lytell pretty one," both anonymous, composed in 1520, and discovered by Mr. Innes in the British Museum. The musical interest of these two songs was slight, and Owen reflected that all Mr. Innes's discoveries at the British Museum were not of equal importance. But she had sung divinely, and he thought how he should praise her at the end of the concert.

She was not playing in the next two pieces — fantasies for treble and tenor viols — and she sat in the background, catching glimpses of Owen between the hands and the heads of the viol players, and over the rims of their instruments, hoping that he would tell her that she had sung better than she had sung at his party. She waited for him to speak, and he told her, as she expected he would, that she had sung to-night much better than she had sung at his party. But they were surrounded by people seeking their coats and umbrellas; it was impossible to speak without being overheard; he had told her that she had sung to his satisfaction; that was sufficient, and he had whispered, "I'll come to see you to-morrow."

Her father was there all the time, but to hear and see him was almost enough for her. When he had gone away she remembered the smile which had lit up some pretty thought of her; her ears were full of his voice, and she heard the lilt that charmed her whenever she pleased. Then she asked herself the meaning of some casual remark, and her mind repeated all he had said like a phonograph. She already knew his habitual turns of speech; they had begun to appear in her own conversation, and all that was not connected with him lost interest for her. Once or twice during the week she went to bed early so that she might not fancy her father was looking at her while she thought of Owen.

VI

An idea suddenly struck him one day as he walked about St. James's Street, uncertain if he would go into Christie's to see if there were any pictures on view. He put up his stick, stopped a hansom, and drove to Georgina. He was curious to see what impression she would make upon him, and he spent an hour with her, and returned to Berkeley Square to dine alone, sure that he cared no more for her, that she was less to him than a shadow. And, dismissing her from his thoughts, he fixed them on Evelyn. He had said he would send her a book. It stood next to his hand, on the shelf by the round table where he wrote. After dinner he would walk from the dining-room into the library, take down the volume and pack it up, leaving orders that it should be sent off by the first post.

When man ceased to capture women, he reflected, man invented art whereby he might win them. The first melody blown through a reed pipe was surely intended for woman's ears. The first verses were composed in a like intention. Afterwards man began to take an interest in art for its own sake…. Women, having no necessity for art, have not been artists. The idea amused him, and he remembered that while Evelyn's romantic eyes and gold hair were sufficient to win his regard, he had availed himself of a dozen devices to tempt her. Suddenly his face grew grave, and he asked himself how this flirtation was to end. As a sufficient excuse for seeing her he was taking music lessons; he wrote to her every other day, and often sent her books and music. They had met in London.... He had been observed walking with her, and at Lady Ascott's lunch the conversation had suddenly turned on a tall girl with gold hair and an undulating walk. Pointed observations had been made.... Lady Lovedale had looked none too well pleased. He didn't wish to be cynical, but he did want to know whether he was going to fall in love?... They had now arrived at that point when love-making or an interruption in their intimacy was imperative. He did not regret having offered her the money to go abroad to study — it was well he should have done so; but he should not have said, "But *I'll* go to see you in Paris." She was a clever girl, and knew as well as he how such adventures must end.... She was a religious girl, a devout Catholic, and as he had himself been brought up in that religion, he knew how it restrained the sexual passion or fashioned it in the mould of its dogma. But we are animals first, we are religious animals afterwards. Religious defences must yield before the pressure of the more original instinct, unless, indeed, hers was a merely sexual conscience. The lowest forms of Anglicanism are reduced to perceiving conscience nowhere except in sex. The Catholic was more concerned with matters of faith. Not in France, Italy, or Spain did Catholicism enter so largely into the private life of the individual as it did in England. The foreign, or to be more exact, the native Catholic had worn the yoke till it fitted loose on his shoulders. His was a more eclectic Christianity; he took what suited him and left the rest. But in England Romanism had never shaken itself free from the Anglican conscience. The convert never acquired the humanities of Rome, and in addition the lover had to contend against the

confessional. But in Evelyn's case he could set against the confessional the delirium of success, the joy of art, the passion of emulation, jealousy, and ambition, and last, but far from least, the ache of her own passionate body. Remembering the fear and humility with which he had been used to approach the priest, and the terror of eternal fire in which he had waited for him to pronounce absolution, Owen paused to think, how far such belief was from him now. Yet he had once believed — in a way. He wondered at the survival of such a belief in the nineteenth century, and asked himself if confession were not inveterate in man. The artist in his studio, the writer in his study, strive to tell their soul's secret; the peasant throws himself at the feet of the priest, for, like them, he would unburden himself of that terrible weight of inwardness which is man. Is not the most mendacious mistress often taken with the desire of confession... the wish to reveal herself? Upon this bed-rock of human nature the confessional has been built. And Owen admired the humanity of Rome. Rome was terribly human. No Church, he reflected, was so human. Her doctrine may seem at times quaint, mediaeval, even gross, but when tested by the only test that can be applied, power to reach to human needs, and administer consolation to the greatest number, the most obtuse-minded cannot fail to see that Rome easily distances her rivals. Her dogma and ceremonial are alike conceived in extraordinary sympathy with man's common nature....

Our lives are enveloped in mystery, the scientist concedes that, and the woof of which the stuff of life is woven is shot through with many a thread of unknown origin, untraceable to any earthly shuttle. There is a mystery, and in the elucidation of that mystery man never tires; the Sovereign Pontiff and the humblest crystal-gazer are engaged in the same adventure. The mystery is so intense, and lives so intimately in all, that Rome dared to come forward with a complete explanation. And her necessarily perfunctory explanation she drapes in a ritual so magnificent, that even the philosopher ceases to question, and pauses abashed by the grandeur of the symbolism. High Mass in its own home, under the arches of a Gothic cathedral, appealed alike to the loftiest and humblest intelligence. Owen paused to think if there was not something vulgar in the parade of the Mass. A simple prayer breathed by a burdened heart in secret awakened a more immediate and intimate response in him. That was Anglicanism. Perhaps he preferred Anglicanism. The truth was, he was deficient in the religious instinct.

Awakening from his reverie, he raised himself from the mantelpiece against which he was leaning. Never had he thought so brilliantly, and he regretted that no magical stenographer should be there to register his thoughts as they passed. But they were gone.... Resuming his position against the mantelpiece, he continued his interrupted train of thought.

There would be the priest's interdiction... unless, indeed, he could win Evelyn to agnosticism. In his own case he could imagine a sort of religious agnosticism. But is a woman capable of such a serene contemplation and comprehension of the mystery, which perforce we must admit envelops us, and which often seems charged with murmurs, recollections, and warnings of the

under world? Does not woman need the grosser aid of dogma to raise her sensual nature out of complete abjection? But all this was very metaphysical. The probability was that Evelyn would lead the life of the ordinary prima donna until she was fifty, that she would then retire to a suburb in receipt of a handsome income, and, having nothing to do, she would begin to think again of the state of her soul. The line of her chin deflected; some would call it a weak chin, but he had observed the same in men of genius — her father, for instance. None could be more resolute than he in the pursuance of his ideas. The mother's thin, stubborn mouth must find expression somewhere in her daughter. But where? Evelyn's mouth was thin, and it drooped at the ends... . But she was only twenty; at five-and-twenty, at thirty, she might be possessed by new ideas, new passions.... The moment we look into life and examine the weft a little, what a mystery it becomes, how occult the design, and out of what impenetrable darkness the shuttle passes, weaving a strange pattern, harmonious in a way, and yet deducible to none of our laws! This little adventure, the little fact of his becoming Evelyn's lover, was sown with every eventuality.... If, instead of his winning her to agnosticism, she should win him to Rome! Then they would have to separate or marry, otherwise they would burn in hell for ever.

But he would never be fool enough as to accept such a story as that again. That God should concern Himself at all in our affairs was strange enough, that He should do so seemed little creditable to Him, but that He should manage us to the extent of the mere registration of a cohabitation in the parish books was — Owen flung out his arms in an admirable gesture of despair, and crossed the room. After a while he returned to the fireplace calmer, and he considered the question anew. By no means did he deny the existence of conscience; his own was particularly exact on certain points. In money matters he believed himself to be absolutely straight. He had never even sold a friend a horse, knowing it to be unsound; and he had always avoided — no, not making love to his friends' wives (to whose wives are you to make love if not to your friends'?) — he had avoided making women unhappy. But much more than in morals his conscience found expression in art. That Evelyn should use her voice except for the interpretation of masterpieces would shock him quite as much as an elopement would shock the worthy fathers of St. Joseph's. He smiled at his thoughts, and remembered that it was through fear of not making a woman happy that he had not married. He hated unhappiness. His wish had always been to see people happy. Was not that why he wished to go away with Evelyn? A particularly foolish woman had once told him that she liked going out hunting because she liked to see people amused.... He did not pretend to such altruism as hers, and he remembered how he used to watch for her at the window as she came across the square with her dog. But Evelyn was quite different. He could not have her to luncheon or tea, and send her back to her father. Somehow, it would not seem fair to her. No; he must break with her, or they must go away together. Which was it to be? Mrs. Hartrick had written three times that week! And there was Lady Lovedale. She had promised to come to tea on Friday. Was he going to renounce the list, or was he going to put all his eggs in one basket? The list promised much agreeable intercourse, but it was wholly lacking in unexpectedness. He had been through it all

before, and knew how each story would end. In mutual indifference or in a tiff because he wearied of accompanying her to all racecourses and all theatres. Another would pretend that her husband was jealous, and that she daren't come to see him any more. But Evelyn would be quite different. In her case he could not see farther than driving to Charing Cross and getting into the mail train for Paris. She was worth the list, not a doubt of it. If he were only sure that he loved her, he would not hesitate. He was interested in her, he admired her, but did he love her? A genuine passion alone would make an elopement excusable.

One of his moralities was, that a man who did not love his mistress was a beast, and that a man who loved a woman who wasn't, was a fool, Another was, that although every man of the world knew a liaison would not last for ever, he should not begin one unless it seemed as if it were going to. In other words, you should not be able to see the end before you began. But he had never even kissed Evelyn, and it was impossible even to guess, even approximately, if you were going to like a girl before you had kissed her. There could be no harm in kissing her. Then, if he were sure he loved her, they might go away together. Of course, there were hypocrites who would say that he had seduced her, that he had ruined her, robbed Mr. Innes of his only daughter. But he was not concerned with conventional, but with real morality. If he did not go away with her, what would happen? He had told her the truth in the Park that morning, and he believed every word he had said.... If she did not leave her father she would learn to hate him. It was terrible to think of, but it was so, and nothing could change it. He tried to recall his exact words, and easily imagined her father stricken with remorse, and Evelyn looking across the table, hating him in spite of herself. But if he could persuade her to leave him for two years he would engage to bring her back a great singer. And what an interest it would be to watch the development of that voice, surely the most beautiful soprano he had ever heard! She might begin with Margaret and Norma, if she liked, for in singing these popular operas she would acquire the whole of her voice, and also the great reputation which should precede and herald the final stage of her career. Isolde, Brunhilda, Kundry, Wagner's finest works, had remained unsung — they had been merely howled. Evelyn should be the first to sing them. His eyes glowed with subdued passion as he thought of an afternoon, some three years hence, in the great theatre planned by the master himself, when he should see her rush in as the Witch Kundry. The marvellous evocation of Arabia flashed upon him.... Would he ever hear her sing it?... Yes, if she would consent to go away with him he would hear her sing it. But would she go away with him? Her love of her father, and her religion, might prevent her.... She might not even care for him.... She might be thinking of marrying him. Was it possible that she was such a fool? What good would it do her to marry him? She could not go on the stage as Lady Asher. Lady Asher as Kundry! Could anything be more grotesque? How beset life was with difficulties! Without her vocation she was no longer the Evelyn Innes he was in love with.... Someone else, a pretty, interesting girl, the daughter of a suburban organist. To marry her now would be to ruin her. But he might marry her five or six years hence, for there was no reason why she should continue singing Isolde and Brunhilda till she had no shred of voice left. When

she had established a standard she would have achieved her mission, then it would be for others to maintain the standard. In the full blaze of her glory she might become Lady Asher. He would have to end his life somehow, that way as well as another. Five years are a long while — anything might happen. She might leave him for someone else... anything — anything — anything might happen. It was impossible to divine the turn human lives would take. The simple fact of his elopement contained a dozen different stories in germ. Each would find opportunities of development; they would struggle for mastery; which would succeed?... Keep women you couldn't; he had long ago found out that. Marry them, and they came to hate the way you walked across the room; remain their lover, and they jilted you at the end of six months. He had hardly ever heard of a liaison lasting more than a year or eighteen months, and Evelyn would meet all the nicest men in Europe. All Europe would be his rival — really it would be better to give her up.... She was the kind of woman who, if she once let herself go, would play the devil. Turning from the fire he looked into the glass.... He admitted to eight-and-thirty, he was forty — a very well-preserved forty. There were times when he did not look more than five-and-thirty. His hair was paler than it used to be; it was growing a little thin on the forehead, otherwise he was the same as when he was five-and-twenty. But he was forty, and a man of forty cannot marry a prima donna of twenty. Five pleasant years they might have together, five delicious years; it were vain to expect more. But he would not get her to go away with him under a promise of marriage; all such deception he held to be as dishonourable as cheating at cards. So in their next interview it would have to be suggested that there could be no question of marriage, at least for the present. At the same time he would have her understand that he intended to shirk no responsibility. But if he were to tire of her! That was another possibility, and a hateful one; he would prefer that she should jilt him. Perhaps it would be better to give her up, and throw his fate in with the list. But he was tired of country houses, with or without a *liaison*, and felt that he could not go through another season's hunting; he had no horses that suited him, and didn't seem to be able to find any. To go abroad with Evelyn, watch over the cultivation of her voice, see her fame rising, that was his mission! The only question to decide was whether he was in love with her. He would not hesitate a moment if he were only sure of that. He thought of the women he knew. Georgina was the first to come up in his mind. He had been to see her, and had come away at a loss to understand what he had ever seen in her. She had struck him as vulgar and middle-class, sly, with a taste for intrigue. He remembered that was how she had struck him when he first saw her. But if anyone had described her as vulgar and middle-class six months ago. Good heavens!

VII

She abandoned herself to memories of the afternoon. She had been with Owen to the Carmelite Church in Kensington to hear the music of a new and very realistic Belgian composer; and, walking down the High Street after Mass, she and Owen had argued the Belgian's intentions. At the end of the High Street he had proposed that they should walk in the Gardens. The broad walk was full of the colour of spring and its perfume, the thick grass was like a carpet beneath their feet. The Albert Hall curved over the tops of the trees, and sheep strayed through the deep May grass in Arcadian peacefulness; but the most vivid impression was when they had come upon a lawn stretching gently to the water's edge. Owen had feared the day was too cold for sitting out, but at that moment the sun contradicted him with a broad, warm gleam. He had fetched two chairs from a pile stacked under a tree, and sitting on that lawn, swept by the shadow of softly moving trees, they had talked an hour or more. The scene came back to her as she sat looking into the fire. She saw the spring, easily victorious amid the low bushes, capturing the rough branches of the elms one by one, and the distant slopes of the Park, grey like a piece of faded tapestry. And, as in a tapestry, the ducks came through the mist in long, pulsing flight, and when the day cleared the pea-fowl were seen across the water, sunning themselves on the high branches. While watching the spectacle of the spring, Owen had talked to her a long while about herself, telling her that he wanted her life to be a great success, and that he wished to bring about her success and to watch over it. He would not admit that there was any doubt her voice was one of the most beautiful, and as for her acting, there could be no doubt about that either.

"I have never acted, but I know I can act. I daresay others have said the same who cannot act at all, but they do not feel it moving in them as it moves in me sometimes."

And he had spoken of himself as of one who has discovered a priceless jewel, and the pleasure it would give him to make it known to the world, and she had given him a tender look when he said —

"I should like to be the humble case in which the jewel lies when others are not admiring it — for the greatest jewel in the world may lie in the humblest case."

And when she had told him of her loneliness at home, and the long hours she spent waiting for her father, and how she had lost all her pupils that winter, and of her yearnings for the world beyond her village, and of the instinct in her which led her sometimes to walk as far as Westminster Bridge, he had spoken of the instinct which takes birds at certain moments and carries them to lands over seas that they had never seen before.

"They rise up in the misty autumn air," he had said, "divining the sunset that awaits them."

They had talked on and on, and she could not help wondering at her dread lest he should ask her to marry him. She had thought it would come to that, for he had said it was necessary for her to go to Paris to study, and she had been obliged to answer that she had not the money to go there. "The concerts will never pay, at least not sufficiently to send me to Paris; even if they did, I could not go and live in Paris for one or two, perhaps three years, by myself, and how could I get sufficient money to pay for anyone to go with me?"

And he had offered to lend the money! She had thanked him and declined it, and then he had begun to argue that we serve others best when we consider our own interests. He had drawn a picture of what her life would be if she were to sacrifice it to her father's by remaining at Dulwich playing the viola da gamba and looking after domestic duties. At thirty-five she would look back upon her wasted life. She had answered him, mechanically, that "no one looks back upon their life as wasted who has done their duty." And he had answered, that if she did not regret her praiseworthy self-denial, her father would; that it was only by leaving him and by serving her own interests that she could save him from self-reproach.... They had spoken of the peacocks. The birds were sunning themselves on the other side of the Long Water, and they wondered that a bird with so unwieldy a tail could fly — one of the birds had just flown across the water. But when he had told her that last night he had been thinking of her, and had spent hours trying to arrive at a conclusion, she was certain he was going to ask her to marry him, but instead he had asked her to go away and live with him, giving as his reason that she would not be able to go on the stage as Lady Asher! Musing over his words, she thought she could repeat them correctly: "As my wife you would have to live at Riversdale and Berkeley Square, and entertain the best people. You would have no time to cultivate your voice — and, Evelyn dear, without your voice you would not be yourself — you would not be yourself without your stage career "; and she felt this to be true.

And that he did not wish to marry her was a great weight off her mind. She was drawn towards him, but she knew that she could not marry him. She could see her life with him in Paris — she could see her life on the stage; but she was unable to think of herself as his wife. She knew it would be a great sin to go away and live with him without being married to him, for she believed in her religion, and yet she was drawn irresistibly to do what her religion forbade her to do. She was aware that if she looked at the matter from a worldly side, she was putting aside an extraordinary good fortune, for he would marry her if she wished it, and she was asking herself what could she do better than to marry Owen Asher? But there was no answer to this question. She only knew that she did not desire Riversdale, or Berkeley Square, or the diamonds, or the title. Was it then her artistic instincts that impelled her to discard all worldly advantages and her religion? She wanted to sing, she wanted to be a great artist. She wanted these things much more than she wanted to be Lady Asher, and yet it did not seem to be her

desire of art that made her feel she could never marry the man whom she already foresaw she would go away with — for how long? She could not say for how long, but she felt it would not be for always.

She seemed to know everything, — things came unnaturally clear to her as she sat over the fire and sipped her coffee; and when she put the cup aside, and looked into the fire, her fate seemed close by her, and she felt like one who is being propelled forward.

She was waked from her dream of self by the opening of the door, and before she could turn round she heard the servant say, "Sir Owen Asher, miss."

And when the servant had closed the door, he took her hand. He was trembling and could hardly speak.

"I came," he said hurriedly, "because I have something very important to say to you — the truth is, I did not know I loved you so much. As I walked home I felt I must see you again. This matter must be decided between us."

Now it was she who was cold; she looked at him strangely, and he was taken with a little dread lest he had offended her irrevocably by telling her that he could not marry her. But she was not in the least annoyed at that. She was thinking that perhaps he had come to ask her to marry him, and had become suddenly mysteriously afraid of him.

"Are you angry with me?" he said.

"No, I am not angry with you; why should you think that?"

"I don't know; you looked angry, you seemed angry, perhaps not; and then, I am in love with you."

"Is that really true?" she said, and her eyes lit up, turning from blue to mauve.

"I thought you were angry because I had said I thought it better not to marry you yet awhile, that it would spoil your artistic career."

"Oh no, I was not angry at that: I suppose I should have been."

She said that the vicar had wanted to marry her, and there was a young man in the village who went up to the City every day who had proposed to her, but she had never thought of either.

It was difficult to know what to say next, and he said if she had married the young man who went up to the City she would have had three children in as many years; he spoke of wealth and riches and fame, but in a way she did not like at all. She did not care to hear theories of life which did not seem like him, and she could not believe he was speaking his own thoughts when he said that if she were to marry anyone it must be a duke — that life is a battle, and that Society gets the better of us unless we get the better of Society. "Everyone must realise that — every young man and every young woman. We must conquer or be conquered." He had seemed to her much nicer just now when he had come in, and told her tremblingly that he had come all the way from London to tell her something he had forgotten to tell her in Kensington Gardens.

Society, he argued, did not require a chaperon from her; Society would, indeed, resent a chaperon if she were to appear with one. Society not only granted her freedom, but demanded that she should exercise it. As a freelance she would be taken notice of; as a respectable, marriageable girl she would be passed over. The cradle and the masterpiece were irreconcilable ideals; and he drew an amusing picture of the prima donna's husband, the fellow who waits with a scarf ready to wind it round the throat of his musical instrument; the fellow who is always on the watch lest someone should walk off with his means of subsistence. She knew that he was trying to influence her with argument, and his presence continued to influence her, though his arguments were repellent to her.

She told him her father was dining with the Jesuits — they would have the whole day to themselves, would he like to spend it with her? She asked him if he would like to walk with her in the lanes, and they turned into a lane which looked almost like country. There were hedges and fields, and the sunlight dozed amid the cows, and over the high elms Spring was already shaking a soft green dust. There were nests in the bare boughs, whether last year's or this year's she was not certain. Farther on there was a stile, and she thought she would like to lean upon it and look straight through the dim fields, gathering the meaning which they seemed to express.

The sunlight seemed more beautiful than it had ever seemed before, and she wondered if he noticed the little round white spots of light on the roadway.

"This is the Picture Gallery," Evelyn said, pointing to a low brick building almost hidden in the back of a well-kept garden. The doorway was covered with a massive creeper just beginning to waken from its winter rest. "Do you care to go in?"

"You know the pictures so well, I am afraid they will bore you."

"No, I should like to see them with you."

There was an official who took her parasol and his cane, and they were impressed by the fact of having to write their names side by side in the book — Sir Owen Asher, Evelyn Innes.

On pushing through the swing-door, they found themselves in a small room hung with the Dutch School. There were other rooms, some four or five, opening one into the other, and lighted so that the light fell sideways on to the pictures. Owen praised the architecture. It was, he said, the most perfectly constructed little gallery he had ever seen, and he ought to know, for he had seen every gallery in Europe. But he had not been here for many years, and had quite forgotten it. “A veritable radiation of masterpieces," he said, stepping aside to see one. But the girl was the greater attraction, and, only half satisfied, he returned to her, and when the attraction of the pictures grew irresistible, he tried to engage her attention in their beauties, so that he might be allowed to enjoy them. To his surprise and pleasure, the remarks he had hazarded provoked an extraordinary interest in her, and she begged of him to tell her more about the paintings. He was not without a suspicion that the pictures were a secondary interest; but as it was clear that to hear him talk excited her admiration, he favoured her with all he knew regarding the Dutch School. She followed attentive as a pea-hen, he spreading a gorgeous tail of accumulated information. He asked if the dark background in Cuyp’s picture, "The White Horse and the Riding School," was not admirable. And that old woman peeling onions in her little kitchen, painted by a modern would be realistic and vulgar; but the Dutchman knew that by light and shade the meanest subject could be made as romantic as a fairy tale. As dreamers and thinkers they did not compare with the Italians, but as painters they were equal to any. They were the first to introduce the trivialities of daily life into Art — the toil of the field, the gross pleasures of the tavern. "Look at these boors drinking; they are by Ostade. Are they not admirably drawn and painted? ‘Brick-making in a Landscape, by Teniers the younger.’ Won’t you look at this? How beautiful! How interesting is its grey sky! Here are a set of pictures by Wouvermans — pictures of hawking. Here is a Brouwer, a very rare Dutch master, a very fine example too. And here is a Gerard Douw. Miss Innes, will you look at this composition? Is it not admirable? That rich curtain hung across the room, how beautifully painted, how sonorous in colour!”

"Ah! she’s playing a virginal!" said Evelyn suddenly. "She is like me. You can see she is not thinking of the music. She is thinking... she is thinking of the world outside.”

This pleased him, and he said, “Yes, I suppose it is like your life; it is full of the same romance and mystery.”

"What romance, what mystery? Tell me.”

They sat down on the bench in the Third Room, opposite the Colonnade by Watteau, and, while telling her how, when cruising among the Greek Islands, he had often seen her, sometimes

sitting in the music-room playing the virginal, sometimes walking in the ornamental park under a wet grey sky, a somewhat desolate figure hurrying through shadows of storm.

"How strange you should think all that! It is quite true. I often walked in that hateful park."

"You will never be able to stand another winter in Dulwich."

She raised her eyes, and he noticed with an inward glee their little frightened look.

"I thought of you in that ornamental park watching London from the crest of the hill; and I thought of London — great, unconscious London — waiting for you."

"You must not say such things to me. How you do know how to praise!"

"I thought less and less of that horrid, red-haired woman; your face, dim at first, grew clearer and clearer. All my thoughts, all things converged to you and were absorbed in you, until, one day on the deck, I felt that you were unhappy; the knowledge came, how and whence I know not; I only know that the impulse to return was irresistible. I called to the skipper, and told him to put her head about."

"Then you did think of me whilst you were away?"

And she looked at him with her soft female eyes, and meeting his keen bright male eyes, she drew away from him with a little dread. Immediately after, this sensation of dread gave way to a delicious joy — an irresponsible joy deep down in her heart, a joy so intimate that she was thankful to know that none could know it but herself.

Her woman's instinct told her that many women had loved him. She suspected that the little lilt in his voice, and the glance that accompanied it, were the relics of an old love affair.

"It must be nearly five o'clock. It is time for you to come to talk to father about the Greek hymn."

"Let's look at this picture first — 'The Fête beneath the Colonnade' — it is one of the most beautiful things in the world."

VIII

As they returned through the flowery village street, the faint May breeze shed the white chestnut bloom about their feet. They were walking under the trees of the old Dulwich street, and so charming were the old hedge-hidden gardens, and the eighteenth-century house with white porticoes, that Owen could not but think Dulwich at that moment seemed the natural nativity of the young girl's career.

She had tried to bid him good-bye without giving him her hand, but he had taken her hand; she had had to ask him in to tea. She was afraid, for if he were to ask her to promise to go away with him, it seemed to her that she would not have the courage to refuse. Or would she have the strength to resist if he were to kiss her? But she must know what was going to happen. "As well this afternoon as another," and, startled by her own determination, she waited for him to leave the harpsichord; he had gone to it and was playing the love music out of *Tristan*, and he asked her what she thought of this motif and the next motif. But she could not listen to that music, nor could she talk about it, and letting her hand slip towards him, she said, with a beseeching look —

"I cannot go on talking, I am too tired."

It seemed as if she were going to faint, and this made it easy and natural for him to take her hand, to put his arm about her, and to whisper —

"Evelyn, dear, what is the matter? Dearest," he said, and bending over her he kissed her on the cheek.

"This is very foolish of me," she said; and throwing her arm about his neck she kissed him on the mouth. "But you are fond of me," she said impulsively, laying her hand on his shoulder, and the movement was full of affectionate intimacy.

"Yes," he said, moving her face again towards him. "I love you, I've always loved you."

"No,"she said, "not always. I know when you began to care for me. No," she said, "you must not kiss me again."

She got up from the low wicker chair; he followed her, and they sat close together on two low seats. He put his arm round her and said —

"I love to kiss you.... Why do you turn away your head?"

"Because it is wrong; I shall be miserable to-night."

"You don't think it wrong to kiss me?"

"Yes, I do."

Then, turning her face to him, she kissed him.

"Who taught you to kiss like that?"

"No one; I never kissed anyone before — father, of course. You know what I mean."

She asked him what he was thinking about, and he answered of the happiness he had begun to feel was in store for them.

"What happiness?" she asked; and he answered —

"The happiness of seeing each other constantly — the happiness of lovers. Now we must see each other more often."

"How often? Every day?"

He wondered what was the exact colour of her eyes, and he pressed her to answer. At last she said —

"You cannot come here oftener than you do at present. I'm deceiving father about these lessons. What will you do if he asks you to play to him? What excuse will you give? You daren't attempt the simplest exercise; you haven't got over the difference of the bowing; you'd play false notes all the time."

"But, Evelyn, you are not going to waste your life in Dulwich. Come and see me to-morrow and, if you like, we'll decide."

"On what?"

"You know what I mean, dearest."

"Yes, I think I do," she said, smiling at once sadly and ardently; "but I'm afraid it wouldn't succeed. Something whispers that it wouldn't succeed. When you go away I shall be miserable;

I shall repent all this.... I'm horrid." She covered her face with her hands. "I didn't know I was like this."

A moment after she reached out her hand to him, saying —

"Suppose I did go away, and repented and left you. Where should I go? I could not come back here. Father would forgive me, I daresay, but I could not come back here."

Her head was on his shoulder, and she stood looking at him a long while without speaking.

"I think you're fond of me."

"You don't think about it — you know I am."

She followed him to the gate of the little garden. The lamps were lighted far away in the suburbs. Again he asked her to come and see him.

"I cannot to-morrow; to-morrow will be Sunday."

IX

The agonising question continued at every moment to present itself. Whatever she was doing or saying, she was always conscious of it. It beat in her brain, and though she laughed and talked a great deal, her father noticed that her animation was strained and nervous, and he noticed, too, that in no part of their conversation was she ever entirely with him, and he wondered what were the sights and scenes he faintly discerned in her changing eyes.

There were times when the temptation seemed to have left her, when she smiled at her own weakness and folly; and, having reproved herself sufficiently, she thought of other things. It seemed to her extraordinary that she should argue and trouble about a thing which she really had no intention of doing.

It was quite clear that it was wrong for her to go, and it seemed settled that she was not going; but at the bottom of her heart something over which she had no kind of control told her that in the end nothing could prevent her from going to meet him. She stopped, amazed and terrified, asking herself why she was going to do a thing which she seemed no longer even to desire.

In the afternoon some girl friends came to see her. She played and sang and talked to them, but they, too, noticed that she was never really with them, and her friends could see that she saw and heard things invisible and inaudible to them, and when the conversation flagged she was often taken with an extraordinary inward trembling.

In the middle of some trifling chatter — whether one colour or another was likely to be fashionable in the coming season — she had to put her hand in her pocket for her handkerchief, and happened to meet the key of the square, and it brought back to her in a moment the entire drama of her destiny. Was she going to take the three o'clock train to London, or to remain in Dulwich with her father? She thought that she would not mind whatever happened, if she only knew what would happen. Either lot seemed better to her than the uncertainty, and in the midst of these thoughts her tongue rattled on, talking with fictitious gaiety about the colour of bonnets and a party at which Julia had sung, not even hearing what she was saying.

Wednesday evening passed with an inward vision so intense that all the outer world had receded from her, and she ate without tasting, saw without seeing what she looked at, spoke without knowing what she was saying, heard without hearing what was said to her, and moved without knowing where she was going.

On Thursday morning the obsession of her destiny took all colour from her cheek, and her eyes wandered.

"What is it, my girl?" her father said, taking her hand, and the music he was tying up dropped on the floor. "Tell me, Evelyn; something, I can see, is the matter."

"I am very unhappy. I wish I were dead."

He strove to raise her from her knees, but the attitude expressed her feelings, and she remained, leaning her face against him. At last she said, raising her tearful eyes —

"If I were to leave you, father, you would never forgive me? But you would forgive me; whatever happened, we should always love one another. But if I loved someone? I don't mean as I love you. I could never love anyone so tenderly; I mean quite differently. Don't make me say more. I am so ashamed of myself."

"You are in love with him?"

"Yes, and he has asked me to go away with him." And, as she answered, she wondered at the quickness with which her father had guessed that it was Owen. He was such a clever man; the moment his thoughts were diverted from his music, he understood things as well as the most worldly, and she felt that he would understand her, that she must open her heart to him.

"If I don't go away with him I shall die, or kill myself, or go mad. It is terrible to have to tell you these things, father, I know, but I must tell you; I cannot go away without telling you.... I daresay I could get him to marry me if I wanted to, but that's just it, I don't want to marry him."

"Yet you want to go away and live with him?"

"Yes, father, I do. I don't understand why this should be. I have asked myself. I only know that it is so."

"And you a religious girl; a few months ago you told me you wanted to be a nun."

"Yes, that was quite true, too, when I said it. I don't know myself, father. It seems like an enchantment!"

"You lost your mother very early, and I have neglected you."

"No, it is nothing to do with you, father. It is all far away — I mean that it comes from far away. There, mother is looking at us. It is more to do with mother than with anyone, and I'm not sure it has much to do with her. But she was a great singer, and I want to be a great singer."

"Is that why you're going away?"

"Yes, I think so."

"But it is not the real reason?"

"It is as real as any reason I know of; it is the nearest to me. Owen said that he would be doing me a great wrong by marrying me. As his wife I could not go on the stage. He said that you would understand that."

"And that is why you won't marry him?"

"I feel that I must learn to sing."

"If you had only patience, Evelyn — ah! you have heard what I am going to say so often, but I don't blame your incredulity. That was why I did not tell you before."

"What has happened?" she asked eagerly; for she, too, wished for a lull in this stress of emotion.

"Well," he said, "Monsignore Mostyn, the great Roman prelate, who has just arrived from Rome, and is staying with the Jesuits, shares all my views regarding the necessity of a musical reformation. He believes that a revival of Palestrina and Vittoria would be of great use to the Catholic cause in England. He says that he can secure the special intervention of the Pope, and, what is much more important, he will subscribe largely, and has no doubt that sufficient money can be collected."

A feeling of shame came upon her that at such a time they should be engaged in speaking of such singularly irrelevant topics, and she could see that the same thought had come upon him; and she noticed his trim, square figure, and the old blue jacket which she had known so many years, as he walked up and down the room. He was getting very grey lately, and when she returned he might be quite white.

"Oh, father, father," she exclaimed, covering her face with her hands, "how unhappy I am!"

"I shall send a telegram to Monsignore saying I can't see him this morning."

"Ah! you have to see him this morning."

She did not know whether she was glad or sorry. Perhaps she was more frightened than either, for the appointment left her quite free to go to London by the three o'clock train.

"I can't leave you alone."

"If I had wanted to deceive you, I should have told you; and, however you were to watch me, I could always get away if I chose." They stood looking at each other, and she was compelled to speak.

"I used to be religious," she said, "but I am religious no longer. I can hardly say my prayers now. I said them last night, but this morning I couldn't."

Passing his hand across his eyes, he said —

"It seems all like a bad dream."

And he felt he ought to stay with her, and at the same time he felt that she was right; that his intervention would be unavailing, for the struggle was in herself. But if she should learn from Sir Owen to forget him; if he were to lose her altogether; if she should never return? The thought of such a calamity was the hardest blow of all, and the possibility of her going away for a time, shocking as it was, seemed almost light beside it. But he could not keep her by force. He could not lock her up. He could not beat her. What was he to do? He could do nothing. His daughter was drawn away from him by some impulse which she could neither explain nor resist. And he, too, was moved to acquiesce, for he too experienced a sense of the folly of resisting what has to be.

He stood looking at her, twisting his beard into a point, and while she wondered whether he would go or stay, she admired the delicacy of his hand.

"No, Evelyn, I shan't go; I will stay here, I will stay by you."

"But I don't know that I am going away with Sir Owen."

"You said just now that you were."

"Did I say so? Father, you must keep your appointment with Monsignore, and you must say nothing to Owen if you should meet him; you promise me that? It rests with me, father — it is all in the heart."

She threw herself into his arms, begging him to forgive her. She wanted to stay with him. She loved him better than her voice, better than anything in the world. He did not answer, and when she raised her eyes she caught a slight look of doubt upon his face, and wondered what it could mean. At the very moment she had determined to stay with him, and forfeit her love and her art for his sake, a keen sense of his responsibility towards her was borne in upon him, and the feeling within him crushed like a stone that he could never do anything for her, or anything else except, perchance, achieve that reformation of Church music upon which his heart was set. He understood in that instant that she was sacrificing all her life to his, and he feared the sacrifice she was making, and anticipated in some measure the remorse he would suffer. But he dared not think that she had better go and achieve her destiny in the only way that was open to her, and he urged himself to believe that she was acting rightly by remaining with him; it was impossible for him to hold any other opinion; and the thoughts that came upon him he strove to think were merely nervous accidents, and he forced himself to accept the responsibility of the sacrifice.

He wished not to be selfish, but, however he acted, he always seemed to be acting in his own interest. Since she had promised him not to go away with Sir Owen, he was quite free to keep his appointment with Monsignore, and he gathered up his music, and then he let it fall again, fearing that she would interpret his action to mean that he was glad to get away.

But she besought him to go; she said she was tired and wanted to lie . down, and all the while he spoke she was tortured with an uncertainty as to whether she was speaking the truth or not; and he had not been gone many minutes when she remembered that she had not told him that Owen had asked her to meet him that very afternoon in Berkeley Square, and that the key of the square lay in her pocket.

To increase her difficulties, she remembered that she had betrayed Owen's confidence. She could not quite admit to herself that she had a right to tell her father that it was he. But he had guessed it.... It seemed impossible to do right. Perhaps there was no right and no wrong. Owen said there was none; and a wish rose from the bottom of her heart that it might be so, and then she feared she had been guilty of blasphemy. Perhaps she should warn Owen of her indiscretion, and she thought of herself going to London for this purpose, and smiled as she detected the deception which she was trying to practise on herself.

There was nothing for her to do in the house, and when she had walked an hour in the ornamental park, she strayed into the Picture Gallery, and she was soon drawn to the Watteau, where a rich evening hushes about a beautiful carven colonnade, under which the Court is seated; where gallants wear deep crimson and azure cloaks, and the ladies striped gowns of dainty refinement; where all the rows are full of amorous intrigue, and vows are being pleaded, and mandolines are playing; where a fountain sings in the garden and dancers perform their

pavane or minuet, the lady holding out her striped skirt, and the gentleman bowing to her with a deference that seems a little mocking. She went to this hour of pensive attitudes and whispered confidences, where every face wonders if there be truth in love.

And the life in this picture would be hers if she took the three o'clock train and went to Berkeley Square!

When she got home she did not take off her hat; and her thoughts were loud as the clock which ticked out the last minutes she was to remain at home, and though she would have given anything to stop thinking, she could not, and it was almost a relief when the clock pointed to the time when she would have to go to the station; and as she went down the street she tried to think that she was going to Owen to tell him she had told her father that she was resolved to give him up.

In the railway carriage the passengers noticed her pallor, and they wondered what her trouble was, and at Victoria the omnibus conductor just saved her from being run over. The omnibus jogged on, stopping now and then for people to get in and out, and Evelyn wondered at the extraordinary mechanism of life, and she took note of everyone's peculiarities, wondering what were their business and desires, and wondering also at the conductor's voice shouting out the different parts of the town the omnibus would pass through.

"This is Berkeley Street, miss, if you are getting out here."

She waited a few minutes at the corner, and then wandered down the street, asking herself if it was yet too late to turn back.

The sun glanced through the foliage, and glittered on the cockades of the coachmen and on the shining hides of the horses. It was the height of the season, and the young beauties of the year, and the fashionable beauties of the last decade, lay back, sunning themselves under the shade of their parasols. The carriages came round the square close to the curb, under the waving branches, and, waiting for an opportunity to cross, Evelyn's eyes followed an unusually beautiful carriage, drawn by a pair of chestnut horses. She did not see the lady's face, but she wore a yellow dress, and the irises in her bonnet nodded over the hood of the carriage. This lady, graceful and idle, seemed to mean something, but what? Evelyn thought of the picture of the Colonnade in the Gallery.

The men to whom the stately servants opened the doors wore long frock-coats pinched at the waist, and they swung their canes and carried their thick, yellow gloves in their hands. They were all like Owen. They all lived as he lived, for pleasure; they were all here for the season, for balls and dinner-parties, for love-making and the opera.

She was at the gate, and the square looked green and cool. The gate swung to and closed with a snap; and she was glad of this, and she walked aimlessly about the grass plots. There was no one in the square, so if he were watching for her he could not fail to see her. He might not see her. She might have to go back to Dulwich! But she exulted, seeing Owen coming through the trees; and as he approached, her exultation seemed to rise out of the ends of her being.

"I am glad you have come," he said. "You are coming in to tea?"

She did not answer, and thinking it safer to take things for granted, he walked towards the gate. He could not get the gate open, and while he wrenched at the lock he dreaded the delay might give her time to change her mind.

"The brougham will be round in half an hour. There is a train at six to Dover. It gets there at nine. So we shall have time to dine at the Lord Warden, and get on board the boat before the mail arrives."

"But I have no clothes."

"The night is fine; we shall have a lovely crossing; you will only want a shawl and a rug. This is the happiest moment of my life. I have spent two terrible days wondering if you would come."

"Did you, dear? Did you think of me? Are you fond of me?"

Her grave eyes delighted him, and as she stood by him, her hand laid on his shoulder, he wondered how it was that she had come to him. His luck seemed incredible, and this adventure did not seem like her.

X

From Dover they telegraphed to Mr. Innes — "Your daughter is safe. She has gone abroad to study singing"; and at midnight they were on board the boat. The night was calm and blue; a little mist was about, and they stood watching the circle of light which the vessel shed upon the water.

"Father will be lonely without me. Who will play the viola da gamba at his concerts?"

"When I bring you back a great singer... there'll be substantial consolation in that."

"Do you think there will" —

"You don't think it wrong, you are not sorry?"

"It is wrong, but I do not feel it to be wrong, and that is why it is so strange. But I'm sorry for poor father — all by himself — his lonely dinner."

Spectral ships loomed up and vanished in the spectral stillness; and only within the little circle of light could they perceive the waves over which they floated. The moon drifted, and a few stars showed through the white wrack. Whither were their lives tending? She had thought that her life in Dulwich must endure for ever, but it had passed from her like a dream; it had snapped suddenly, and she floated on another voyage, and still the same mystery encircled her as before.

All she had ever known was behind her, had floated into the darkness as easily as those spectral ships; her religion, her father, her home — all had vanished, and all she knew was that she was sailing through the darkness without them. Seen for a moment in the light of the high moon, and then in shrouded blue night, a great ship came and went, and Evelyn clung to the arm of her lover. He folded the rough shawl he had bought at Charing Cross about her shoulders. The lights of Calais harbour grew larger, the foghorn snorted, the vessel veered, and there was preparation on board; the crowd thickened, and as the night grew fainter they saw between the dawn and the silvery moon the long low sandhills of the French coast. The vessel veered and entered the harbour, and the mystery with which a moonlit sea had filled their hearts passed, and they were taken in an access of happiness; and they called to each other for sheer joy as they struggled up the gangway.

Owen was known on the line, and the obsequiousness shown to him flattered her, and it was thrilling to read his name on the window of their carriage.

The part he had to play was a difficult one, and on board the boat, in the pauses of their conversation, he had felt that his future influence over Evelyn depended upon his conduct during the forthcoming week. It was his temperament to suggest and to lead, and as he talked to her of Madame Savelli, the great singing-mistress, and Lady Duckle, a lady whom he hoped to induce to come to Paris to chaperon her, he saw the hotel sitting-room at the moment when the waiter, having brought in the coffee, and delayed his departure as long as he possibly could, would finally close the door. He had often to catch his breath, and he quailed before the dread interrogation which often looked out of her eyes, for they had passed Boulogne, and through the dawn, vague as an opal, appeared a low range of hills, and, as these receded, the landscape flattened out into a bleak, morose plain.

What lives were lived yonder in that low grange, crouching under the five melancholy poplars? An hour later father and son would go forth in that treacherous quaking boat, lying amid the sedge, and cast their net into one of those black pools. But these pictures of primeval simplicities which the landscape evoked were not in accord with a journey towards love and pleasure. Evelyn and Owen did not dare to contrast their lives with those of the Picardy peasants, and that they should see not roses and sunshine, but a broken and abandoned boat amid the sedge, and mournful hills faintly outlined against the heavy lowering sky seemed to them significant. They watched the filmy, diffused opal light of the dawn, and they were filled with nervous expectation. The man who appeared at the end of the plain in his primitive guise of a shepherd driving his flock toward the hard thin grass of the uplands seemed menacing and hostile. His tall felt hat seemed like a helmet in the dusk, his crook like a lance, and Owen understood that the dawn was the end of the truce, that the battle with Nature was about to begin again. At that moment she was thinking that if she had done wrong in leaving home, the sin was worth all the scruples she might endure, and she rejoiced that she endured none. He folded her in his rug. The train seemed to stop, and the name of the stations sounded dim in her ears, and when she opened her eyes Owen stood leaning over her, telling her that they had passed the fortifications, that they were in Paris.

He had brought with him only his dressing-bag, so they were not detained at the Customs. His valet was following with the rest of his luggage, and as soon as she had had a few hours' sleep he would take her to different shops. Paris seemed very cold and cheerless, and she did not like the tall, haggard houses, nor the slattern waiter arranging chairs in front of an early café, nor the humble servant clattering down the pavement in wooden shoes. She saw these things with tired eyes, and she was dimly aware of a decrepit carriage drawn by two decrepit horses, and then of a great hotel built about a courtyard. The only thing that concerned her really was whether Owen was coming to her bedroom. She had heard him say he wanted two bedrooms and a sitting-room on the second floor.

The chambermaid brought her a cup of chocolate, and when she had drunk it she fell asleep, seeing the wood fire burning; and two hours later, as she brushed out her hair with his brushes, she admired his discretion in not coming to her room.

She was pinning on her hat when he knocked, and the rest of the day was spent getting in and out of cabs.

They took the shops as they came. The first was a boot and shoe maker, and in a few moments between four and five hundred francs had been spent. Two of her dresses were bought ready-made. A saleswoman held out the skirt of a flowered silk, which she was to wear that night at the opera; another stood by, waiting for her and Owen to approve of the stockings she held in her hands. Some were open work and embroidered, and the cheapest were fifteen francs a pair. It had to be decided whether these should be upheld by suspenders or by garters. Owen's taste was for garters, and the choice of a pair filled them with a pleasurable embarrassment. In the next shop — it was a glove shop — as she was about to consult him regarding the number of buttons, she remembered, in a sudden moment of painful realisation, the end for which they had met. He too seemed unable to fix his attention upon the present moment, and he avoided her eyes, for behind their almost nervous intensity he perceived the spiritual life.

When they returned to the hotel, the gown she was to wear that night at the opera had arrived.

"This gown must have cost twenty pounds, and I never used to spend much more than that in a whole year on my clothes.

XI

While Elsa sang her dream, he realised the depth of his folly. If something were to happen? If they were to find Mr. Innes waiting at the door of the hotel? If he were robbed of her, it would serve him right.

“You’re tired, Evelyn; you’re too tired to listen.”

“Yes, I’m tired, let’s go; give me my cloak.”

"I don’t care much for the nuptial music," he remarked accidentally; and then, feeling obliged to take advantage of the slip of the tongue, he said, "Lohengrin and Elsa are in the bridal chamber in the next act.”

He felt her hand tremble on his arm.

"In two years hence you’ll be singing here.... But you don’t answer.”

“Owen dear, I’m thinking of you now.”

Her answer was a delicious flattery, and he hurried her to the carriage. The moment his arm was about her she leaned over him, and when their lips parted he uttered a little cry. But in the middle of the sitting-room she stopped and faced him, barring the way. He took her cloak from her shoulders.

“Owen dear, if anything should happen?”

“No, nothing will happen. Have I not said that the cradle and the *chef-d’oeuvre* are irreconcilable.”

“I shall be disappointed in you, Owen, if you speak flippantly.”

“Well, I thought that was what you meant.”

"So I did," she said, with a sigh.

He put his arm round her, and leading her he began to hum the bridal music which they had not heard.

"Oh, what a beautiful phrase," she said, suddenly escaping from him, "let me hear it on the piano." She insisted, and he played all he could remember of it. But she did not seem to wish to leave the piano.

“Why do you wish to loiter here, Evelyn?”

He put his arm round her, and this time she let him lead her, and when they had passed the threshold she said —

“Owen, it is a great mystery, and you do not seem to perceive any of it.”

“I am thinking of you now, dear, and of your hands and hair, and of those sweet eyes which turn from blue to mauve. I thought you were a passionate woman, Evelyn. You seem like a stone.”

"Do I," she said, laughing, "I don’t feel like one. I’m only frightened. Don’t think me a fool.”

As she undid her hair she turned to look at him, and letting it fall she put her arms about him. She was already a different woman from the woman who had detained him at the piano, and he marvelled at the change, and was glad of it.

When he questioned her, she said —

"One does not always think the same, Owen, and now I can only think of you." And all there was of divinity in the world for him was revealed by her long delicate arms, the beautiful breasts, by the light which lit up her eyes, by the beautiful movements with which she surrounded him. And when the door closed behind him, she curled herself into a corner of the tumbled bed where she might sleep, feeling no scruples and hoping she would experience none. She had strayed from the road, and could only dimly discern its outline. She had abandoned her religion and deserted her father. She could not believe she was the woman who used to confess to Father Railston. She tried to think of herself as she certainly was three months ago, and could only remember herself in passing moments.... In a few hours Owen would come to tell her to get up. She must get to sleep. They were going to the races. Suddenly she awoke, and she saw him in his dressing-gown, with blue facings, standing in the middle of the room watching her. His little smile was in his eyes; they seemed to say, "So there you are; I haven’t lost you.”

He wished her to wear a flower-embroidered dress, but her fancy was set on a pale yellow muslin, and it amused her to get cross with him and to send him out of the room; but when the door closed she was moved to run after him. The grave question as to what she would wear dispelled other thoughts. She must be serious; and to please him she decided she would wear

the gown he liked, and as she fixed the hat that went with it she admired the contrast of its purple with her rich hair. Owen was always right. She had never thought that she could look so well, and it was a happy moment when he took her by both hands and said —

“Dearest, you are delicious — quite delicious. You’ll be the prettiest woman at Longchamps to-day.”

She asked for tea, but he said they were in France, and must conform to French taste. When Marie Antoinette was informed that the people wanted bread, etc. Evelyn thought Marie Antoinette must have been a cruel woman. But she liked chocolate and the brioche, and henceforth they were brought to her bedside, and in a Sèvres service, a present from Owen.

When they had finished the little meal he rang for writing materials, and said —

“Now, my dear Evelyn, you must write to your father.”

"*Must* I? What shall I say? Oh, Owen, I cannot write! If I did, father would come over here, and then" —

"I’ll tell you what to say. I’ll dictate the letter you ought to write. You need not give him any address, but you must let him know you’re well, and why you intend to remain abroad. It is by relieving his mind on these subjects that you’ll save yourself from the vexation of his hunting you up here.... Come, now," he said, noticing the agonised and bewildered look on Evelyn’s face, "this is the only disagreeable hour in the day — you must put up with it. Here is the pen. Now write —

"‘MY DEAR FATHER, — I should be happy in Paris, very happy, if it were not for the knowledge of the grief that my flight must have occasioned you. Of course I have acted very wrongly, very wickedly’” —

"But," said Evelyn, "you told me I was acting rightly, that to do otherwise would be madness.”

"Yes, and I only told you the truth. But in writing to your father you must adopt the conventional tone. There’s no use in trying to persuade your father you did right.... I don’t know, though. Scratch out ‘I have acted wrongly and very wickedly,’ and write —

"‘I will not ask you to think that I have acted otherwise than wrongly, for, of course, as a father you can hold no other opinion, but being also a clever man, an artist, you will perhaps be inclined to admit that my wrongdoing is not so irreparable a wrongdoing as it might have been in other and easily imagined circumstances.’ Full stop.

“You’ve got that — ‘so irreparable a wrong-doing as it might have been in other and easily imagined circumstances’?”

“Yes.”

"‘Father dear, you know that if I had remained in Dulwich my voice would have been wasted, not through my fault or yours, but through the fault of circumstances.’

"You have got ‘circumstances’ a few lines higher up, so put ‘through the fault of fate.’”

“Father will never believe that I wrote this letter.”

“That doesn’t matter — the truth is the truth from whoever it conies.”

"‘We should have gone on deceiving ourselves, or trying to deceive ourselves, hoping as soon as the concerts paid that I should go abroad with a proper chaperon. You know, father dear, how we used to talk, both knowing well that no such thing could be. The years would have slipped by, and at five-and-thirty, when it would have been too late, I should have found myself exactly where I was when mother died. You would have reproached yourself, you would have suffered remorse, we should have both been miserable; whereas now I hope that we shall both be happy. You will bring about a revival of Palestrina, and I shall sing opera. Be reasonable, father, and remember that it had to be. Write to me if you can; to hear from you will make me very happy. But do not try to seek me out and endeavour to induce me to return home. Any meeting between us now would merely mean intolerable suffering to both of us, and it would serve no purpose whatever. A little later, when I have succeeded, when I am a great singer, I will come and see you — that is to say, if you will see me. Meanwhile, for a year or two we had better not meet, but I’ll write constantly, and shall look forward to your letters. Again, my dear father, I beseech you to be reasonable; everything will come right in the end. I will not conceal from you the fact that Sir Owen Asher advised me to this step. He is very fond of me, and is determined to help me in every way. When he brings me back to England a great singer, he hopes you will try to look on his fault with as much leniency as may be. He asks me to warn you against speaking of him in connection with me, for any accusation brought against him will injure me. He intends to provide me with a proper chaperon. I need not mention her name; suffice it to say that she is a very grand lady, so appearances will be preserved. No one need know anything for certain if you do not tell them. If you will promise to do this, I will send the name of the lady with whom I am going to live. You can say that I am living with her; her name will be a sufficient cloak — everyone will be satisfied. Interference can be productive of no good, remember that; let things take their natural course, and they will come right in the end. If you

decide to do as I ask you, write at once to me, and address your letter to 31 Rue Faubourg St. Honoré, care of Monsieur Blanco. — Always, dear father, your affectionate daughter,

"'EVELYN INNES.'"

"How clever you are," she said, looking up. "You have written just the kind of letter that will influence father. I have lived with father all my life, and yet I couldn't have known how to write that letter. How did you think of it?"

"I've put the case truthfully, haven't I? Now do you copy out that letter and address it; meanwhile I'll go round to Voisin's and order breakfast. Try to have it finished by the time I get back. We'll post it on our way."

She promised that she would do so, but instead sat a long while with the letter in her hands. It was so unlike herself that she could not bring herself to send it. It would not satisfy her father, he would sooner receive something from her own familiar heart, and, obeying a sudden impulse, she wrote —

"MY DARLING, — What must you think of me, I wonder! that I am an ungrateful girl? I hope not. I don't think you would be so unjust as to think such things of me. I have been very wicked, but I have always loved you, father, and never more than now; and had anything in the world been able to stop me, it would have been my love of you. But, father dear, it was just as I told you; I was determined to resist the temptation if I could, but when the time came I could not. I did my best, indeed I did. I went through agony after agony after you left, and in the end I had to go whether I desired it or not. I could not have stopped in Dulwich any longer; if I had, I should have died, and then you would have lost me altogether. You would not have liked to see me pine away, grow white, and lie coughing on the sofa like poor mother. No, you would not. It would have killed you. You remember how ill I was last Easter when he was away in the Mediterranean, darling. We've always been pals, we've always told each other everything; we never had any secrets, and never shall. I should have died if I hadn't gone away. Now I've told you everything — isn't that so? — and when I come back a great success, you'll come and hear me sing. My success would mean very little if you were not there. I would sooner see your dear darling face in a box than any crowned head in Europe. If I were only sure that you would forgive me? Everything else will turn out right. Owen will be good to me, I shall get on; I have little fear on that score. If I could only know that you were not too lonely, that you were not grieving too much. I shall write to Margaret and beg her to look after you. But she is very careless, and the grocer often puts down things in his book that we never had. A couple of years, and then we shall see each other again. Do you think, darling, you can live all that time without me? I must try to live that time without you. It will be hard to do so; I shall miss you dreadfully; so if you could manage to write to me, not too cross a letter, it would make a great

deal of difference. Of course you are thinking of the disgrace I have brought on you. There need be none. Owen is going to provide me with a chaperon — a lady, he says, in the best society. I will send you her name next week, as soon as Owen hears from her. He may hear to-morrow, and if you say that I'm living with her, no one will know anything. It is deceitful, I know; I told Owen so, but he says that we are not obliged to take the whole world into our confidence. I don't like it, but I suppose if one does the things one must put up with the consequences. Now I must say good-bye. I've expressed myself badly, but you'll know what I mean — that I love you very dearly, that I hope you'll forgive me, and be glad to see me when I come back, that I shall always be, your affectionate daughter,

"EVELYN."

She put the letter into an envelope, and was addressing it when Owen came into the room.

"Have you copied the letter, dear?"

She looked at him inquiringly, and he wondered at her embarrassment.

"No," she said, "I have written quite a different letter. Yours was very clever, of course, but it was not like me. I've written a stupid little letter, but one which will please father better."

"I daresay you're right. If your father suspected the letter was dictated by me he would resent it."

"That's just what I thought."

"Let me see the letter you have written."

"No; don't look at it. I'd rather you didn't."

"Why, dearest? Because there's something about me in it?"

"No, indeed. I would not write anything about you that I wouldn't show you. No; what I don't want you to see is about myself."

"About yourself! Well, as you like, don't show me anything you don't want to."

"But I don't like to have secrets from you, Owen; I hate secrets."

“One of these days you’ll tell me what you’ve written. I’m quite satisfied." He raised her face and kissed her tenderly, and she felt that she loved him better for his well-assumed indifference. Then they went downstairs, and she admired her dress in the long glasses on the landings. She listened to his French as he asked for a stamp. The courtyard was full of sunlight and carriages. The pages pushed open the glass doors for them to pass, and, tingling with health and all the happiness and enchantment of love, she walked by his side under the arcade — glad when, in walking, they came against each other — swinging her parasol pensively, wondering what happy word to say, a little perplexed that she should have a secret from him, and all the while healthily hungry. Suddenly she recognised the street as the one where they had dined on Friday night. He pushed open a white-painted door, and it seemed to her that all the white-aproned waiters advanced. to meet her; and the one who drew the table forward that she might pass seemed to fully appreciate the honour of serving them. A number of hors d’oeuvres were placed before her, but she only ate bread-and-butter and a radish, until Owen insisted on her trying the *filets d’anchois* — the very ones she was originally most averse to. The sole was cooked very elaborately in a rich brown sauce. The tiny chicken which followed it was first shown to her in a tin saucepan; then the waiter took it away and carved it at a side-table. She enjoyed the melon which, for her sake, ended instead of beginning the meal, as Owen said it should.

An Englishman, a friend of Owen’s, sat at the next table, and she could see he regretted that Owen had not introduced him. Most of his conversation seemed designed for that end, and when they got up to go, his eyes surely said, “Well, I wish that he had introduced us; I think we should have got on together." And the eyes of the young man who sat at the opposite table said, as plain as any words, "I’d have given anything to have been introduced! Shall we ever meet again?”

So her exit was very thrilling; and no sooner were they on the pavement than another surprise was in store for her.

A smart coachman touched his hat, and Owen stepped back for her to get into the victoria.

"But this is not our carriage?”

“You did not think we were going to the Longchamps in a fiacre, did you? This is your carriage — I bought these horses yesterday for you.”

You bought this carriage and these horses for me, Owen?”

“Yes, dear, I did; don’t let’s waste time. *Aux courses!*”

"Owen, dear, I cannot accept such a present. I appreciate your kindness, but you will not ask me to accept this carriage and horses."

"Why not?"

Evelyn thought for some time before answering.

"It would only make people think that I was an amateur. The fine clothes you have bought me I shall not be able to wear, except when I want you to think me nice. I shall have to learn Italian, of which I don't know a word, and French, of which I know very little."

Owen looked at her, at once pleased and surprised.

"You're quite right," he said; "this carriage and these horses are unsuitable to your present circumstances. The chestnuts took my fancy.... However, I haven't paid for them. I'll send them back for the present; they, or a pair like them, will come in all right later on."

After a slight pause she said —

"I do not want to run into your debt more than I can help. If my voice develops, if it be all you think it is, I shall be able to go on the stage in a year — at latest in a year and a half from now. My mother was paid three and four hundred a week. Unless I fail altogether, I shall have no difficulty in paying you back the money you so generously lent me."

"But why do you want to cost me nothing?"

"I don't know. Why shouldn't I pay you back? If I succeed, I shall have plenty of money; if I don't, I daresay you'll overlook the debt. Owen, dear, how enchanting it is to be with you in Paris, to wear these beautiful dresses, to drive in this carriage, to see those lovely horses, and to wonder what the races will be like! You're not disappointed in me? I'm as nice as you thought I'd be?"

"Yes; you're a great deal nicer. I was afraid at one time you might be a bore; scruples of conscience aren't very interesting. But somehow in your case they don't seem to matter."

"I do try to keep them to myself. There's no use in inflicting one's personal worries on others. I am all one thing or all the other. When I'm with you, I'm afraid I'm all the other."

He had always known that he could "make something of her," as he used to put it to himself, but she exceeded his expectations; she certainly was an admirable mistress. Her scruples did not

bore him; they were, indeed, a novelty and an excitement which he would not willingly be without. Moreover, she was so intelligent! he had not yet heard her make a stupid remark. She had always been interested in the right things; and, excited by her admiration of the wooden balconies, the metal lanterns hanging from them, the vases standing on the steps leading to the porticoes, he attempted a reading of these villas.

“How plain is this paganism," he said. “Seeing them, we cannot but think of their deep feather-beds, the savoury omelettes made of new-laid eggs served at midday, and followed by juicy beefsteaks cooked in the best butter. Those villas are not only typical of Passy, but of France; their excellent life ascends from the peasant’s cottage; they are the result of agriculture, which is the original loveliness. All that springs from agriculture must be beautiful, just as all that springs from commerce must be vile. Manchester is the ugliest place on the earth, and the money of every individual cotton-spinner serves to multiply the original ugliness — -the house he builds, the pictures he buys. Isn’t that so?”

"I can’t say, dear; I have never been to Manchester. But how can you think of such things?”

“Don’t you like those villas? I love them, and their comfort is secure; its root is in the earth, the only thing we are sure of. There is more of pagan life and sentiment in France than elsewhere. Would you not like to have a Passy villa? Would you not like to live here?”

"One of (these days I may buy one, then you shall come to breakfast, and I’ll give you an omelette and a beefsteak. For the present, I shall have to put up with something less expensive. I must be near my music lessons. Thanks all the same, dearest.”

She sought a reason for the expression of thoughtfulness which had suddenly come over his face.

"I don’t know how it is, but I never see Paris without thinking of Balzac. You don’t know Balzac; one of these days you must read him. The moment I begin to notice Paris, I think, feel, see, and speak Balzac. That dark woman yonder, with her scornful face, fills my mind with Balzacian phrases — the celebrated courtesan, celebrated for her diamonds and her vices, and so on. The little woman in the next carriage, the Princesse de Saxeville, would delight him. He would devote an entire page to the description of her coat of arms — three azure panels, and so on. And I should read it, for Balzac made all the world beautiful, even snobbery. All interesting people are Balzacians. The moment I know that a man is an admirer of Balzac, a sort of freemasonry is established between us, and I am interested in him, as I should be in a man who had loved a woman whom I had loved.”

"But I shouldn’t like a woman because I knew that you had loved her.”

"You are a woman; but men who have loved the same women will seek each other from the ends of the earth, and will take an intense pleasure in their recollections. I don't know whether that aphorism is to be found in Balzac; if not, it is an accident that prevented him from writing it, for it is quite Balzacian — only he would give it a turn, an air of philosophic distinction to which it would be useless for me to pretend."

"I wonder if I should like him. Tell me about him."

"You would be more likely than most women to appreciate him. Supposing you put the matter to the test. You would not accept these horses, maybe you will not refuse a humbler present — an edition of Balzac. There's a very good one in fifty-two volumes."

"So many as that?"

"Yes; and not one too many — each is a masterpiece. In this enormous work there are something like two thousand characters, and these appear in some books in principal, in other books in subordinate, parts. Balzac speaks of them as we should of real people. A young lady is going to the opera and to a ball afterwards, and he says —

"'It is easy to imagine her delight and expectation, for was she not going to meet the delicious Duchesse de la Maufregneuse, and her friend the celebrated Madame d'Espard, Coralis, Lucien de Rubempré and Rastignac.'

"These people are only mentioned in the *Mémoires de deux jeunes Mariées*. But they are heroes and heroines in other books, in *Les Secrets de la Princesse de Cadignan*, *Le Père Goriot*, and *Les Illusions Perdues*. Before you even begin to know Balzac, you must have read at least twenty volumes. There is a vulgarity about those who don't know Balzac; we, his worshippers, recognise in each other a refinement of sense and a peculiar comprehension of life. We are beings apart; we are stamped with the seal of that great mind. You should hear us talk among ourselves. Everyone knows that Popinot is the sublime hero of *L'Interdiction*, but for the moment some feeble Balzacian does not remember the other books he appears in, and is ashamed to ask.... But I'm boring you."

"No, no; I love to listen. It is more interesting than any play."

Owen looked at her questioningly, as if he doubted the flattery, which, at the bottom of his heart, he knew to be quite sincere.

"You cannot understand Paris until you have read Balzac. Balzac discovered Paris; he created Paris. You remember just now what I said of those villas? I was thinking at the moment of Balzac. For he begins one story by a reading of the human characteristics to be perceived in its streets. He says that there are mean streets, and streets that are merely honest; there are young streets about whose morality the public has not yet formed any opinion; there are murderous streets — streets older than the oldest hags; streets that we may esteem — clean streets, work-a-day streets, and commercial streets. Some streets, he says, begin well and end badly. The Rue Montmartre, for instance, has a fine head, but it ends in the tail of a fish. How good that is. You don't know the Rue Montmartre? I'll point it out next time we're that way. But you know the Rue de la Paix?"

"Yes; what does that mean?"

"The Rue de la Paix, he says, is a large street, and a grand street, but it certainly doesn't awaken the gracious and noble thoughts that the Rue Royale suggests to every sensitive mind; nor has it the dignity of the Place Vendôme. The Place de la Bourse, he says, is in the daytime babble and prostitution, but at night it is beautiful. At two o'clock in the morning, by moonlight, it is a dream of old Greece."

"I don't see much in that. What you said about the villas was quite as good."

Fearing that the conversation lacked a familiar and personal interest, he sought a transition, an idea by which he could connect it with Evelyn herself. With this object he called her attention to two young men who, he pretended, reminded him of Rastignac and Morny. That woman in the mail phaeton was an incipient Madame Marneffe; that dark woman now looking at them with ardent, amorous eyes might be an Esther.

"We're all creatures of Balzac's imagination. You," he said, turning a little so that he might see her better, "are intensely Balzacian."

"Do I remind you of one of his characters?" Evelyn became more keenly interested. "Which one?"

"You are more like a character he might have painted than anyone I can think of in the "Human Comedy." He certainly would have been interested in your temperament. But I can't think which of his women is like you. You are more like the adorable Lucien; that is to say, up to the present."

"Who was Lucien?"

"He was the young poet whom all Paris fell in love with. He came up to Paris with a married woman; I think they came from Angoulême. I haven't read *Lost Illusions* for twenty years. She and he were the stars in the society of some provincial town, but when they arrived in Paris each thought the other very common and countrified. He compares her with Madame d'Espard; she compares him with Rastignac; Balzac completes the picture with a touch of pure genius — 'They forgot that six months would transform them both into exquisite Parisians.' How good that is, what wonderful insight into life!"

"And do they become Parisians?"

"Yes, and then they both regret that they broke off" —

"Could they not begin it again?"

"No; it is rarely that a liaison can be begun again — life is too hurried. We may not go back; the past may never become the present — ghosts come between."

"Then if I broke it off with you, or you broke it off with me, it would be for ever?"

"Do not let us discuss such unpleasant possibilities"; and he continued to search the "Human Comedy" for a woman resembling Evelyn. "You are essentially Balzacian — all interesting things are — but I cannot remember any woman in the 'Human Comedy' like you — Honorine, perhaps."

"What does she do?"

"She's a married woman who has left her husband for a lover who very soon deserts her. Her husband tries in vain to love other women, but his wife holds his affections and he makes every effort to win her back. The story is mainly an account of these efforts."

"Does he succeed?"

"Yes. Honorine goes back to her husband, but it cost her her life. She cannot live with a man she doesn't love. That is the point of the story."

"I wonder why that should remind you of me?"

"There is something delicate, rare, and mystical about you both. But I can't say I place *Honorine* very high among Balzac's works. There are beautiful touches in it, but I think he failed to realise the type. You are more virile, more real to me than Honorine. No; on the whole, Balzac has not

done you. He perceived you dimly. If he had lived it might, it certainly would, have been otherwise. There is, of course, the Duchesse Langeais. There is something of you in her; but she is no more than a brilliant sketch, no better than Honorine. There is Eugénie Grandet. But no; Balzac never painted your portrait."

Like all good talkers, he knew how to delude his listeners into the belief that they were taking an important part in the conversation. He allowed them to speak, he solicited their opinions, and listened as if they awakened the keenest interest in him; he developed what they had vaguely suggested. He paused before their remarks, he tempted his listener into personal appreciations and sudden revelations of character. He addressed an intimate vanity and became the inspiration of every choice, and in a mysterious reticulation of emotions, tastes and ideas, life itself seemed to converge to his ultimate authority. And having induced recognition of the wisdom of his wishes, he knew how to make his yoke agreeable to bear; it never galled the back that bore it, it lay upon it soft as a silken gown. Evelyn enjoyed the gentle imposition of his will. Obedience became a delight, and, in its intellectual sloth, life floated as in an opium dream without end, dissolving as the sunset dissolves in various modulations. Obedience is a divine sensualism; it is the sensualism of the saints; its lassitudes are animated with deep pauses and thrills of love and worship. We lift our eyes, and a great joy fills our hearts, and we sink away into blisses of remote consciousness. The delights of obedience are the highest felicities of love, and these Evelyn had begun to experience. She had ascended already into this happy nowhere. She was aware of him, and a little of the brilliant goal whither he was leading her. She was the instrument, he was the hand that played upon it, and all that had happened from hour to hour in their mutual existence revealed in some new and unexpected way his mastery over life. She had seen great ladies bowing to him, smiling upon him in a way that told their intention to get him away from her. She had heard scraps of his conversation with the French and English noblemen who had stopped to speak to him; and now, as Owen was getting into the victoria, after a brief visit to some great lady who had sent her footman to fetch him, a man, who looked to Evelyn like a sort of superior groom, came breathless to their carriage. He had only just heard that Owen was on the course. He was the great English trainer from Chantilly, and had tried Armide II. to win with a stone more on his back than he had to carry.

"That is the horse," and Owen pointed to a big chestnut. "The third horse — orange and white sleeves, black cap... they are going now for the preliminary canter. We shall have just time to back him. There is a Pari Mutuel a little way down the course; or shall we back the horse in the ring? No, it is too late to get across the course. The Pari Mutuel will do. Isn't the racecourse like an English lawn, like an overgrown croquet-ground? and the horses go round by these plantations."

It was not fashionable, he admitted, for a lady to leave her carriage, but no one knew her. It did not matter, and the spectacle amused her. But there was only time to catch a glimpse of beautiful

toilettes, actresses and princesses, and the young men standing on the steps of the carriages. Owen whispered the names of the most celebrated, and told her she should know them when she was on the stage. At present it would be better for her to live quietly — unknown; her lessons would take all her time. He talked as he hastened her towards where a crowd had collected. She saw what looked like a small omnibus, with a man distributing tickets. Owen took five louis out of her purse and handed them to the man, who in return handed her a ticket. They would see the race better from their carriage, but it was pleasanter to stroll about the warm grass and admire the little woods which surrounded this elegant pleasureground, the white painted stands with all their flags flying on the blue summer air, the glitter of the carriages, the colour of the parasols, the bright jackets and caps of the jockeys, the rhythmical movement of the horses. Some sailed along with their heads low, others bounded, their heads high in the air. While Owen watched Evelyn's pleasure, his face expressed a cynical good humour. He was glad she was pleased, and he was flattered that he was influencing her. No longer was she wasting her life, the one life which she had to live. He was proud of his disciple, and he delighted in her astonishment, when, having made sure that Armide II. had won, he led her back to the Pari Mutuel, and bidding her hold out her hands, saw that forty louis were poured into them.

Then Evelyn could not believe that she was in her waking senses, and it took some time to explain to her how she had won so much money; and when she asked why all the poor people did not come and do likewise, since it was so easy, Owen said that he had had more sport seeing her win five-and-thirty louis than he had when he won the Gold Cup at Ascot. It almost inclined him to go in for racing again. Evelyn could not understand the circumstance and, still explaining the odds, he told the coachman that they would not wait for the last race. He had tied her forty louis into her pocket-handkerchief, and feeling the weight of the gold in her hand she leant back in the victoria, lost in the bright, penetrating happiness, of that summer evening. Paris, graceful and indolent — Paris returning through a whirl of wheels, through pleasuregrounds, green swards and long shining roads — instilled a fever of desire into the blood, and the soul cried that life should be made wholly of such light distraction.

The wistful light seemed to breathe all vulgarity from the procession of pleasure-seekers returning from the. races. An aspect of vision stole over the scene. Owen pointed to the group of pines by the lake's edge, to the gondola-like boat moving through the pink stillness; and the cloud in the water, he said, was more beautiful than the cloud in heaven. He spoke of the tea-house on the island, of the shade of the trees, of the lush grass, of the chatter of the nursemaids and ducks. He proposed, and she accepted, that they should go there to-morrow. The secret of their lips floated into their eyes, its echoes drifted through their souls like a faint strain played on violins; and neither spoke for fear of losing one of the faint vibrations. Evelyn settled her embroidered gown over her feet as the carriage swept around the Arc de Triomphe.

"That is our rose garden," he said, pointing to Paris, which lay below them glittering in the evening light, “You remember that I used to read you ‘Omar’?”

"Yes, I remember. Not three days ago, yet it seems far away.”

"But you do not regret — you would not go back?”

"I could not if I would.”

"It has been a charming day, hasn’t it?”

"Yes.”

“And it isn’t over yet. I have ordered dinner at the Café des Ambassadeurs. I’ve got a table on the balcony. The balcony overlooks the garden, and the stage is at the end of the garden, so we shall see the performance as we dine. The comic songs, the can-can dancers, and the acrobats will be a change after Wagner. I hope you’ll like the dinner.”

He took a card from his pocket and read the menu.

“There is no place in Paris where you get a better *petite marmite* than the Ambassadeurs. I have ordered, you see, *filets de volaille*, *pointes d’asperges*. The *filets de volaille* are the backs of the chickens, the tit-bits; the rest — the legs and the wings — go to make the stock; that is why the *marmite* is so good. *Timbale de homard à l’Americaine* is served with a brown sauce garnished with rice. You ought to find it excellent. If we were in autumn I should have ordered a pheasant *Sauvaroff*. A bird being impossible, I allowed myself to be advised by the head waiter. He assured me they have some very special legs of lamb; they have just received them from Normandy; you will not recognise it as the stringy, tasteless thing that in England we know as leg of lamb. *Soufflé au paprike* — this *soufflé* is seasoned not with red pepper, which would produce an intolerable thirst, nor with ordinary pepper, which would be arid and tasteless, but with an intermediate pepper which will just give a zest to the last glass of champagne. There is a *parfait* — that comes before the *soufflé,* of course. I don’t think we can do much better. Are you not glad that you came to Paris with me?”

"Yes, Owen, I’m glad — I suppose I’m glad, but ” —

"But what, dear?" and he scrutinised the slightly perplexed expression.

"I don’t know that I can explain.”

She felt it to be wrong without being able to find words to express her thoughts. The scene appeared to her like a pastry-cook's shop, empty of the substance of life.

"But I've come here to study; if it were not for my singing I don't think I could stay here. I've not come here to go to races nor to dine at expensive restaurants. Let's go to some humble little place. I should like it much better."

XII

The appointment had been made, and he was coming back at half-past three to take her to Madame Savelli, the great singing-mistress, and at four her fate would be decided. She would then learn beyond cavil or doubt if she had, or was likely to acquire, sufficient voice for grand opera. So much Madame Savelli would know for certain, though she could not predict success. So many things were required, and to fail in one was to fail.... Owen expected Isolde and Brunhilda, and she was to achieve in these parts something which had not been achieved. She was to sing them; hitherto, according to Owen, they had been merely howled. Other triumphs were but preparatory to this ultimate triumph, and if she fell short of his ideal, he would take no further interest in her voice. However well she might sing Margaret, he would not really care; as for Lucia and Violetta it would be his amiability that would keep him in the stalls. To-day her fate was to be decided. If Madame Savelli were to say that she had no voice — she couldn't very well say that, but she might say that she had only a nice voice, which, if properly trained, could be heard to advantage in a drawing-room — then what was she to do? She couldn't live with Owen as his kept mistress; in that case she would be no better than the women she had seen at the races. She grew suddenly pale. What was she to do? The choice lay between drowning herself and going back to her father.

Only yesterday she had received such a kind letter from him, offering to forgive everything if she would come back. So like her dear, unpractical dad to ask her to go back and suffer all the disgrace without having attained the end for which she had left home. If, as Owen had said, she went back with the finest soprano voice in Europe, and an engagement to sing at Covent Garden at a salary of £400 a week, the world would close its ears to scandal, the world would deny that any violation of its rules had been committed; but to return after an escapade of a week in Paris would be ruin. So, at Owen's persuasion, she had written a letter to her father, explaining why she could not return. But her inability to obey her father did not detract from the fear which her disobedience caused her. She thought of the old man whom she loved so well, grieving his heart out and thinking her, whom he loved so dearly, cruel and ungrateful. But what could she do? Go back and bring disgrace upon herself and upon her father? Ah, if she had known beforehand the suffering she was enduring, she did not think she would ever have gone away with Owen. It was all wrong, very wrong, and she had merited this punishment by her own grievous fault.... Lady Duckle was coming that evening — the woman whom she was going to live with — an unfortunate day for her to arrive; if Madame Savelli thought that she, Evelyn, had no voice to speak of, the secret could not be kept from her. Lady Duckle would know her for a poor little fool who had been wheedled from her home, and on the pretext that she was to become the greatest singer in Europe. It was all horrid.

And when Owen returned he found Evelyn in tears. But with his scrupulous tact he avoided any allusion to her grief, and while she bathed her eyes she thanked him in her heart for this. Her father would have fretted and fussed and maddened her with questions, but Owen cheered her with sanguine smiles, and seemed to look forward to her success as a natural sequence, any interruption to which it would be idle to anticipate; and he cleverly drew her thoughts from doubt in her own ability into consideration of the music she was going to sing. She suggested the jewel song in *Faust* or the waltz in *Romeo and Juliet*. But he was of the opinion that she had better sing the music she was in the habit of singing; for choice, one of Purcell's songs, the "Epithalamium," or the song from the *Indian Queen*.

"Savelli doesn't know the music; it will interest her. The other things she hears every day of her life."

"But I haven't the music — I don't know the accompaniments."

"The music is here."

"It is very thoughtful of you."

"Henceforth it must be my business to be thoughtful."

They descended the hotel staircase very slowly, seeing themselves in the tall mirrors on the landings. The bright courtyard glittered through the glass verandah; it was full of carriages. Owen signed to his coachman. They got into the victoria, and a moment after were passing through the streets, turning in and out. But not a word did they speak, for the poison of doubt had entered into his, as it had into her, soul. He had begun to ask himself if he was mistaken — if she had really this wonderful voice, or if it only existed in his imagination? True it was that everyone who had heard her sing thought the same; but the last time he had heard her, had not her voice sounded a little thin? He had doubts, too, about her power of passionate interpretation.... She had a beautiful voice — there could be no doubt on that point — but a beautiful voice might be heard to a very great disadvantage on the stage. Moreover, could she sing florid music? Of course, the "Epithalamium" she was going to sing was as florid as it could be. Purcell had suited it to his own singing.... A woman did not always sing to an orchestra as well as to a single instrument. That was only when the singer was an insufficient musician. Evelyn was an excellent musician.... If a woman had the loveliest voice, and was as great a musician as Wagner himself, it would profit her nothing if she had not the strength to stand the wear and tear of rehearsals. He looked at Evelyn, and calculated her physical strength. She was a rather tall and strongly-built girl, but the Wagnerian bosom was wanting. He had always considered a large bosom to be a dreadful deformity. A bosom should be an indication, a hint; a positive statement he viewed with abhorrence. And he paused to think if he would be willing to

forego his natural and cultured taste in female beauty and accept those extravagant growths of flesh if they could be proved to be musical necessities. But Evelyn was by no means flat-chested... and he remembered certain curves and plenitudes with satisfaction. Then, catching sight of Evelyn's frightened face, he forced himself to invent conversation. That was the Madeleine, a fine building, in a way; and the boulevard they had just entered was the Boulevard Malesherbes, which was called after a celebrated French lawyer. The name Haussman recalled the Second Empire, and he ransacked his memory for anecdotes. But soon his conversation grew stilted — even painful. He could continue it no longer, and, taking her hand, he assured her that if she did not sing well, she should come to Madame Savelli again. Evelyn's face lighted up, and she said that what had frightened her was the finality of the decision — a few minutes in which she might not be able to sing at all. Owen reproved her. How could she think that he would permit such a barbarism? It really did not matter a brass button whether she sang well or ill on this particular day; if she did not do herself justice, another appointment should be made. He had money enough to hire Madame Savelli to listen to her for the next six months, if it were required.

He was truly sorry for her. Poor little girl! it really was a dreadful ordeal. Yet he had never seen her look better. What a difference dressing her had made! Her manner, too, had improved. That was the influence of his society. By degrees he'd get rid of all her absurd ideas. But he sorely wished that Madame Savelli's verdict would prove him right — not for his sake — it didn't matter to him — such teeth, such hands, such skin, such eyes and hair! Voice or no voice, he had certainly got the most charming mistress in Europe! But if she did happen to have a great voice, it would make matters so much better for them. He had plenty of money — twenty thousand lying idle — but it was better that she should earn money. It would save her reputation... in every way it would be better. If she had a voice, and were a success, this *liaison* would be one of the most successful things in his life. If he were wrong, they'd have to get on as best they could, but he didn't think that he could be altogether mistaken.

The door was opened by a footman in livery, and they ascended half a dozen steps into the house. Then, off a wide passage, a door was opened, and they found themselves in a great saloon with polished oak floor. There was hardly any furniture — three or four chairs, some benches against the walls, and a grand piano. The mantelpiece was covered with photographs, and there were life-sized photographs in frames on the walls. Owen pointed to one of a somewhat stout woman in evening-dress, and he whispered an illustrious name.

A moment after, Madame entered.

She was of medium height, thin, and somewhat flat-chested. Her hair was iron-grey, and the face was marked with patches of vivid colouring. The mouth was a long, determined line, and

the lines of the hips asserted themselves beneath the black silk dress. She glanced quickly at Evelyn as she went towards Sir Owen.

"This is the young lady of whom you spoke to me."

"Yes, madame, it is she. Let me introduce you. Madame Savelli — Miss Evelyn Innes."

"Does mademoiselle wish to sing as a professional or as an amateur?"

The question was addressed at once to Evelyn and to Owen, and, while Evelyn hesitated with the French words, Owen answered —

"Mademoiselle will be guided by your advice."

"They all say that; however, we shall see. Will mademoiselle sing to me? Does mademoiselle speak French "

"Yes, a little," Evelyn replied timidly.

"Oh, very good. Has mademoiselle studied music?"

"Yes; my father is a musician, but he only cares for the very early music, and I have hardly ever touched a piano, but I play the harpsichord.... My instrument is the viola da gamba."

"The harpsichord and the viola da gamba! That is very interesting, but" — and Madame Savelli laughed good-naturedly — "unfortunately we have no harpsichord here, nor yet a spinet; only the humble piano."

"Miss Innes will be quite satisfied with your piano, Madame Savelli."

"Now, Sir Owen, I will not have you get cross with me. I must always have my little pleasantry. Does he get cross with you like that, Miss Innes?"

"I didn't get cross with you. Madame Savelli."

"You wanted to, but I would not let you — and because I regretted I had not a harpsichord, only a humble piano! Mademoiselle knows, I suppose, all the Church songs. I only know operas.... You see, Sir Owen, you cannot silence me; I will have my little pleasantry. I only know opera, and have nothing but the humble piano. But, joking apart, mademoiselle wants to study serious opera."

"Yes; mademoiselle intends to study for the stage, not for the Church?"

"Then I will teach her."

"You have three classes here. Mademoiselle would like to go into the opera class."

"In the opera class! How you do go on, Sir Owen! If mademoiselle can go into the opera class next year, I shall be more than satisfied, astonished."

"Perhaps you'll be able to say better if mademoiselle will be able to go into the opera class when you have heard her sing."

"But I know, my dear Sir Owen, that is impossible. You don't believe me. Well, I am prepared to be surprised. It matters not to me. Mademoiselle can go into the opera class in three months if she is sufficiently advanced. Will mademoiselle sing to me? Are these her songs?" Madame Savelli took the music out of Sir Owen's hands. "I can see that this music would sound better on the harpsichord or the spinet.... Now, Sir Owen, I see you are getting angry again."

"I'm not angry, Madame Savelli — no one could be angry with you — only mademoiselle is rather nervous."

"Then perhaps my pleasantry was inexpedient. Let me see — this is it, isn't it?" she said, running her fingers through the first bars.... "But perhaps you would like to accompany mademoiselle?"

"Which would you like, Evelyn?"

"You, dear; I should be too nervous with Madame Savelli."

Owen explained, and Madame gave him her place at the piano with alacrity, and took a seat far away by the fireplace. Evelyn sang Purcell's beautiful wedding song, full of roulades, grave pauses, and long-sustained notes, and when she had finished Owen signed to Madame not to speak. "Now, the song from the *Indian Queen*. You sang capitally," he whispered to Evelyn.

And, thus encouraged, she poured all her soul and all the pure melody of her voice into this music, at once religious and voluptuous, seemingly the rapture of a nun that remembrance has overtaken and for the moment overpowered. When she had done, Madame Savelli jumped from her chair, and seizing her by both hands, said —

"If you'll stop with me for a year, I'll make something wonderful of you."

Then without another word she ran out of the room, leaving the door open behind her, and, a few moments after, they heard her calling on the stairs to her husband.

"Come down at once; come down, I've found a star."

"Then she thinks I've a good voice?"

"I should think so indeed. She won't get over the start you've given her for the next six months."

"Are you sure, Owen? Are you sure she's not laughing at us?"

"Laughing at us? She's calling for her husband to come down. She's shouting to him that she's found a star."

Then the joy that rose up in Evelyn's heart blinded her eyes so that she could not see, and she seemed to lose sense of what was happening. It was as if she were going to swoon.

"I've told her," Madame Savelli said to her husband, who followed her into the room; "that; if she will remain a year with me, I'll make something wonderful of her. And you will stay with me, my dear."...

Owen thought that this was the moment to mention the fact that Evelyn was the daughter of the famous Madame Innes.

Monsieur Savelli raised his bushy eyebrows.

"I knew your mother, mademoiselle. If you have a voice like hers " —

"In a year, if she will remain with me, she will have twice the voice her mother had. Mademoiselle must go into the opera class at once."

"I thought you said that such a thing could not be; that no pupil of yours had ever gone straight into the opera class?"

Madame Savelli's grey eyes laughed.

"Ah! I was mistaken.... I had forgotten that all the other classes are full. There is no room for Miss Innes in the other classes. It is against all precedence; it will create much jealousy, but it can't be helped. She must go straight into the opera class. When will mademoiselle begin? The sooner the better."

"Next Monday. Will that be soon enough?"

"On Monday I'll begin to teach her the role of Marguerite. Such a thing was never heard of; but then mademoiselle's voice is one such as one never hears."

Turning to her husband, she said —

"You see my husband is looking at me. Yes, you are looking at me. You think I have gone mad, but he'll not think I've gone mad when he hears mademoiselle sing. Will mademoiselle be so kind?"

Evelyn felt she could not sing again, and, turning suddenly away, she walked to the window and watched the cabs going by. She heard Owen ask Madame and Monsieur Savelli to excuse her. He said that madame's praise had proved too much for her; that her nerves had given way. Then he came over and spoke to her gently. She looked at him through her tears; but, she could not trust herself to speak, nor yet to walk across the room and bid Monsieur and Madame Savelli good-bye. She felt she must die of shame or happiness, and plucked at Owen's sleeve. She was glad to get out of that room; and the moments seemed like years. They could not speak in the glaring of the street. But fortunately their way was through the park, and when they passed under the shade of some overhanging boughs, she looked at him.

"Well, little girl, what do you think? Everything is all right now. It happened even better than I expected."

She wiped away her tears.

"How foolish I am to cry like this. But I could not bear it; my nerves gave way. It was so sudden. I'm afraid those people will think me a little fool. But you don't know, Owen, what I have suffered these last few days. I don't want to worry you, but there were times when I thought I couldn't stand it any longer. I thought that God might punish me by taking my voice from me. Just fancy if I had not been able to sing at all! It would have made you look a fool. You would have hated me for that; but now, even if I should lose my voice between this and next Monday.... Did I sing well, Owen? Did I sing as well as ever you heard me sing?"

"I've heard you sing better, but you sang well enough to convince Savelli that you'll have the finest voice in Europe by this time next year. That's good enough for you, isn't it? You don't want any more, do you?"

"No, no, half that would do, half that; I only want to know that it is all true." Tears again rose to her eyes. "I mean," she said, laughing, "that I want to know that I am sitting by you in the carriage; that Madame Savelli has heard me sing; that she said that I should be a great singer. Did she say that?"

"Yes, she said you would be a great singer."

"Then why does it not seem true? But nothing seems true, not even Paris. It all seems like a dazzling, scattered dream, like spots of light, and every moment I fear that it will pass away, and that I shall wake up and find myself in Dulwich; that I shall see my viola da gamba standing in the corner; that a rap at the front door will tell me that a pupil has come for a lesson."

"Do you remember the lessons that you gave me on the viola da gamba?"

She looked at him beseechingly.

"Then it is true. I suppose it is true, but I wish I could feel this life to be true."

She looked up and saw the clouds moving across the sky; she looked down and saw the people passing along the streets.

"In a few days, in a few weeks, this life will seem quite real. But if you cannot bear the present, how will you bear the success that is to come?"

"When I was a tiny girl, the other girls used to say, 'Evey, dear, do make that funny noise in your throat,' and that was my trill. But since mother's death everything went wrong; it seemed that I would never get out of Dulwich. I never should have, if it had not been for you. I had ceased to believe that I had a voice."

"In that throat there are thousands of pounds."

"I wonder, I wonder."

The carriage stopped at the Continental, and he asked her what she would like to do. It was just five.

"Come and have a cup of tea in the Rue Cambon."

She consented, and, after tea, he said, standing with one foot on the carriage step —

"If you'll allow me to advise you, you will go for a drive in the Bois by yourself. I want to see some pictures."

"May I not come?"

"Certainly, if you like, but I don't think you could give your attention to pictures; you're thinking of yourself, and you want to be alone with yourself — nothing else would interest you."

A pretty flush of shame came into her cheeks. He had seen to the bottom of her heart, and discovered that of which she herself was not aware. But, now that he had told her, she knew that she did want to be alone — not alone in a room, but alone among a great number of people. A drive in the Bois would be a truly delicious indulgence of her egotism. The Champs Elysées floated about her happiness, the Avenue du Bois de Boulogne seemed to stretch out and to lead to the theatre of her glory; and looking at the lake, its groups of pines, its gondola-like boats, she recalled, and with little thrills of pleasure, the exact words that Madame had used.

Then seeing the poplars that lined the avenue, beautiful and tall in the evening, she thought of Owen. He had said they were the trees of the evening. She had not understood, and he had explained that we only see poplars in the sunset; they appear with the bats and the first stars. Catching sight of some passing faces, Evelyn thought how, in two little years, at this very hour, the same people would be returning from the Bois to hear her sing — what! Elsa? Elizabeth? Margaret? She imagined herself in these parts, and sang fragments of the music as it floated into her mind. She was impelled to extravagance. She would have liked to stand up in her carriage and sing aloud, nothing seemed to matter, until she remembered that she must not make a fool of herself before Lady Duckle. And that she might walk the fever out of her blood, she called to the coachman to stop, and she walked down the Champs Elysées rapidly, not pausing to take breath till she reached the Place de la Concorde; and she almost ran the rest of the way, so that she might not be late for dinner. When she entered the hotel, she came suddenly upon Owen on the verandah. He was sitting there engaged in conversation with an elderly woman — a woman of about fifty, who, catching sight of her, whispered something to him.

"Evelyn.... This is Lady Duckle."

“Sir Owen has been telling me, Miss Innes, what Madame Savelli said about your voice. I do not know how to congratulate you. I suppose such a thing has not happened before.”

And her small, grey eyes gazed in envious wonderment, as if seeking to understand how such extraordinary good fortune should have befallen the tall fair girl who stood blushing and embarrassed in her happiness. Owen drew a chair forward.

"Sit down, Evelyn, you look tired.”

"No, I’m not tired\... but I walked from the Arc de Triomphe.”

"Walked! Why did you walk?”

Evelyn did not answer, and Lady Duckle said —

"Sir Owen tells me that you’ll surely succeed in singing Wagner — that I shall be converted.”

"Lady Duckle is a heretic.”

"No, my dear Owen, I’m not a heretic, for I recognise the greatness of the music, and I could hear it with pleasure if it were confined to the orchestra, but I can find no pleasure in listening to a voice trying to accompany a hundred instruments. I heard *Lohengrin* last season. I was in Mrs. Ayre’s box — a charming woman — her husband is an American, but he never comes to London. I presented her at the last Drawing-Room. She had a supper party afterwards, and when she asked me what I’d have to eat, I said, ‘Nothing with wings.’... Oh, that swan!”

Her grey hair was drawn up and elaborately arranged, and Evelyn noticed three diamond rings and an emerald ring on her fat, white fingers. There had been moments, she said, when she had thought the people on the stage were making fun of them — "such booing!” — they had all shouted themselves hoarse — such wandering from key to key.

"Hoping, I suppose, that in the end they’d hit off the right ones. And that trick of going up in fifths. And then they go up in fifths on the half notes. I said if they do that again, I’ll leave the theatre.”

Evelyn could see that Owen liked Lady Duckle, and her conversation, which at first might have seemed extravagant and a little foolish, was illuminated with knowledge and a vague sense of humour which was captivating. Her story of how she had met Rossini in her early youth, and the praise he had bestowed on her voice, and his intention of writing an opera for her, seemed

fanciful enough, but every now and then some slight detail inspired the suspicion that there was perhaps more truth in what she was saying than appeared at first hearing.

“Why did he not write the opera, Olive?”

"It was just as he was ill, when he lived in Rue Monsieur. And he said he was afraid he was not equal to writing down so many notes. Poor old man! I can still see him sitting in his arm-chair.”

She seemed to have been on terms of friendship with the most celebrated men of the time. Her little book entitled *Souvenirs of Some Great Composers* was alluded to, and Owen that at that time she was the great Parisian beauty.

"But instead of going on the stage, I married Lord Duckle.”

And this early mistake she seemed to consider as sufficient explanation for all subsequent misfortunes. Evelyn wondered what these might be, and Owen said —

"The most celebrated singers are glad to sing at Lady Duckle’s afternoons; no reputation is considered complete till it has received her sanction.”

"That is going too far, Owen; but it is true that nearly all the great singers have been heard at my house.”

Owen begged Evelyn to get ready for dinner, and, as she stood waiting for the lift, she saw him resume confidential conversation with Lady Duckle. They were, she knew, making preparations for her future life, and this was the woman she was going to live with for the next few years! The thought gave her pause. She dried her hands and hastened downstairs. They were still talking in the verandah just as she had left them. Owen signed to the coachman and told him to drive to Durand’s. They were dining in a private room, and during dinner the conversation constantly harked back to the success that Evelyn had achieved that afternoon. Owen told the story in well-turned sentences. His eyes were generally fixed on Lady Duckle, and Evelyn sat listening and feeling, as Owen intended she should feel, like the heroine of a fairy tale. She laughed nervously when, imitating Madame Savelli’s accent, he described how she had said, "If you’ll stop with me for a year, I’ll make something wonderful of you." Lady Duckle leaned across the table, glancing from time to time at Evelyn, as if to assure herself that she was still in the presence of this extraordinary person, and murmured something about having the honour of assisting at what she was sure would be a great career.

Owen noticed that Evelyn seemed preoccupied, and did not respond very eagerly to Lady Duckle’s advances. He wondered if she suspected him of having been Lady Duckle’s lover....

Evelyn was thinking entirely of Lady Duckle herself, trying to divine the real woman that was behind all this talk of great men and social notabilities. One phrase let drop seemed to let in some light on the mystery. Talking of her, Lady Duckle said that it was only necessary to know what road we wanted to walk in to succeed, and instantly Lady Duckle appeared to her as one who had never selected a road. She seemed to have walked a little way on all roads, and her face expressed a life of many wanderings, straying from place to place. There was nothing, as she said, worth doing that she had not done, but she had clearly accomplished nothing. As she watched her she feared, though she could not say what she feared. At bottom it was a suspicion of the deteriorating influence that Lady Duckle would exercise, must exercise, upon her — for were they not going to live together for years? And this companionship would be necessarily based on subterfuge and deceit. She would have to talk to her of her friendship for Owen. She could never speak of Owen to Lady Duckle as her lover. But as Evelyn listened to this pleasant, garrulous woman talking, and talking very well, about music and literature, she could not but feel that she liked her, and that her easy humour and want of principle would make life comfortable and careless. She was not a saint; she could not expect a saint to chaperon her; nor did she want a saint. At that moment her spirits rose, and she loved Owen the more for the tact he had shown in finding Lady Duckle for her. She accepted the good lady's faults with reckless enthusiasm, and when they got back to the hotel she took the first occasion to whisper that she liked Lady Duckle and was sure they'd get on very well together.

"Owen, dear, I'm so happy, I don't know what to do with myself. I did enjoy my drive to the Bois. I never was so happy, and I don't seem to be enjoying myself enough; I should like to sit up all night to think of it."

"There's no reason why you shouldn't."

"Only I should feel tired in the morning... Are you coming to my room?"

"Unless you want me not to. Do you want me to come?"

"Do I look as if I didn't?"

"Your eyes are shining like stars. It is worth while taking trouble to make you happy. You do enjoy it so.... We'll go upstairs now. We can't talk here, Lady Duckle is coming back. Leave your door ajar."

"You don't think she suspects?"

"It doesn't matter what people suspect, the essential is that they shouldn't know. I've lots to tell you. I've arranged everything with Lady Duckle."

"I was just telling Miss Innes that in three years she'll probably be singing at the opera house. In a year or a year and a half she'll have learnt all that Savelli can teach her. Isn't that so?"

The question was discussed for a while, and then Lady Duckle mentioned that it was getting late. It was an embarrassing moment when Owen stopped the lift and they bade her good-night. She was on the third, they were on the second floor. As Evelyn went down the passage, Owen stood to watch her sloping shoulders; they seemed to him like those in an old miniature. When she turned the corner a blankness came over him; things seemed to recede, and he was strangely alone with himself as he strolled into his room. But standing before the glass, his heart was swollen with a great pride. He remarked in his eyes the strange, enigmatic look which he admired in Titian and Vandyke, and he thought of himself as a principle — as a force; he wondered if he were an evil influence, and lost himself in moody meditations concerning the mystery of the attractions he presented to women. But suddenly he remembered that in a few minutes she would be in his arms, and he closed his eyes as if to delight more deeply in the joy that she presented to his imagination. So intense was his desire that he could not believe that he was her lover, that he was going to her room, and that nothing could deprive him of this delight. Why should such rare delight happen to him? He did not know. What matter, since it was happening? She was his. It was like holding the rarest jewel in the world in the hollow of his hand.

That she was at that moment preparing to receive him brought a little dizziness into his eyes, and compelled him to tear off his necktie. Then, vaguely, like one in a dream, he began to undress, very slowly, for she had told him to wait a quarter of an hour before coming to her room. He examined his thin waist as he tied himself in blue silk pyjamas, and he paused to admire his long, straight feet before slipping them into a pair of black velvet slippers. He turned to glance at his watch, and to kill the last five minutes of the prescribed time he thought of Evelyn's scruples. She would have to read certain books — Darwin and Huxley he relied upon, and he reposed considerable faith in Herbert Spencer. But there were books of a lighter kind, and their influence he believed to be not less insidious. He took one out of his portmanteau — the book which, he said, had influenced him more than any other. It opened at his favourite passage —

"I am a man of the Homeric time; the world in which I live is not mine, and I know nothing of the society which surrounds me. I am as pagan as Alcibiades or as Phidias.... I never gathered on Golgotha the flowers of the Passion, and the deep stream which flowed from the side of the Crucified and made a red girdle round the world never bathed me in its tide. I believe earth to be as beautiful as heaven, and I think that precision of form is virtue. Spirituality is not my strong point; I love a statue better than a phantom."... He could remember no further; he

glanced at the text, and was about to lay the book down, when, on second thoughts, he decided to take it with him.

Her door was ajar; he pushed it open, and then stopped for a moment, surprised at his own good fortune. And he never forgot that instant's impression of her body's beauty. But before he could snatch the long gauze wrapper from her, she had slipped her arms through the sleeves, and, joyous as a sunlit morning hour, she came forward and threw herself into his arms. Even then he could not believe that some evil accident would not rob him of her. He said some words to that effect, and often tried to recall her answer to them; he was only sure that it was exquisitely characteristic of her, as were all her answers — as her answer was that very evening when he told her that he would have to go to London at the end of the week.

"But only for some days. You don't think that I shall be changed? You're not afraid that I shall love you less?"

XIII

In the afternoons she studied French and German. Owen dined with them in the evenings, and after dinner they went to a theatre or to the opera. When Owen was not in Paris she spent the evenings amid her books. Owen had once caught her doing a German exercise at ten o'clock at night, and he said —

"You have been at it all day since half-past nine in the morning. If you loved me you would not be so industrious, you would not pass as easily as you do from love to art and from art to love. I notice that you never allow me to interfere with your work."

"Is not that as it should be? You want me to succeed, and if I do not work I shall have no excuse for living; but I am tired now, the night is hot, let us go for a stroll in the Champs Elysée."

Her industry surprised her as much as it surprised Owen. She remembered that when she was at school she could take no interest in her French lessons so long as she had to learn them for a mistress, but when they got a master she had taken a new interest in her work. Women can only work for their children or to please a man, so she supposed she was taking all this trouble to please Owen.

Madame Savelli took the same view, and she was therefore surprised at the end of the year, after ten Italian operas had been learnt patiently and obediently, that Evelyn should choose Elisabeth instead of Margaret for her first appearance. She did this in spite of Madame Savelli, in spite of Owen, in spite of the fact that she had not studied the part, and in spite of the fact that the date of her début had been fixed, and only about six weeks was left for her to study the part in. Madame Savelli stood looking at her in amazement.

"My dear friend, I cannot play comedy. I don't feel it, and I know I should be a failure; you cannot know what is inside me as well as I do myself."

"But, my dear, *Faust* is not comedy — Margaret is a tragic part."

"Maybe so, but to me there is nothing tragic in Margaret. For there is nothing true, and everything that is not true is comedy. Some day, when I am more experienced, I shall play Margaret, if it be necessary that I should play it. But I understand Elizabeth so well. She is in my instincts; I can see her when she comes into the hall gravely, mysteriously, as it were, like one hallucinated."

"But, my dear, she comes into the hall gaily."

Evelyn looked at Madame Savelli for a moment, and said —

"I must play the part as I feel it. You all speak of my walk as a grave walk. You tell me that I look at you strangely. You said only the other day that though I laughed lightly enough my levity was superficial, and that I was grave underneath it all. I don't know that you are right; one knows very little about oneself, but if I have the qualities you say I have, if my walk be grave, and there be a strange look in my eyes, I must play parts that are in accord with these qualities. Besides, I don't want to act, I want to live it, and as I talk to you I feel I can live the part of Elizabeth; so don't say anything more to me about it — teach me the part, I mean teach me the music, and I will try not to disgrace you."

"I will do my best, but whatever I say, you will always sing the music in your own way; we will begin tomorrow."

She sang the part with Madame Savelli, and accepted all her readings; but eventually she returned to her own reading, and at the end of the month she and Madame Savelli and Owen went to Brussels for the rehearsals.

Owen said she would be a great success or a great failure; and immediately after the performance it seemed as if she had failed, though it could not be said that she had failed greatly. For though she had been received coldly, Owen noticed that she was being discussed; it was admitted that she had a distinct stage personality. Everyone seemed to want to see hex again, even those who criticised her most severely; and, at the end of the week, among the commonplace of criticism, a singular article appeared, and this article, it was said, had had the effect of getting the management to engage her: to Owen and to Evelyn it seemed like a prophecy.

"Notwithstanding many great qualities," the critic said, "she is not a great artist, in fact she is not an artist at all. By an artist we understand one who, by long practice, obtains command over the material to such an extent that he never falls below a certain level. Miss Innes's inspiration comes and goes. Only in a very short part, like that of Elizabeth, can she keep up to a certain level; or in a part like Elsa, where, after the first act, the emotion hardly ever rises or falls. To use an expression," he said, "which will be understood in theatrical circles, 'she is in the habit of dropping the scene.' The inspiration which sustains her seems to leave her, and then she is very bad indeed. If you ask me," he said, "whether she will ever improve, I say at once that I don't think she will. I doubt very much that she has ever learnt anything. There are many who learn nothing, and among them are the greatest geniuses. Nothing is more common than to find an artist who is inspired for certain years of his life; to some the inspiration comes early, and to

some it comes late. Most great artists have done their best work during a period of seven, eight, nine, or ten years. Miss Innes is one of these — she is now in the heyday of her talent."

XIV

There were long intervals in which she did not see Owen. He often went to England for hunting and shooting, and all the pleasures of his class. Then he would arrive suddenly to hear her sing Elsa, Elizabeth, or Senta, and their love story was continued in new environments and new artistic instincts. One morning they stood on the battlements of a castle, breathless with happiness as they gazed at the long German plains dotted with towns, and a few days after they left for the Rhine, and it was with Owen that she visited the Rhine cathedrals, and it was from him she learnt to distinguish between the Romanesque and the Gothic. They remembered walks in places they never returned to and love scenes in gardens they would never see again. The night she sang to the sailors in the Mediterranean under the blue midnight, windless and full of stars, Owen said, was an imperishable memory; and it was in Florence that she had begun again to study the part of Isolde.

"It does not," she said, "flare up in me; it is not in my instincts, it is merely in my head."

"Well, if you do not feel it, you can do nothing with it. What is going to be your new part?"

"I have been thinking of Fidelio. Although I am a passionate woman," she said, "I cannot express passion in art. A sense of the mystery of life is the sentiment which I can express best — I don't know why it is so."

And it was in Florence that she had found herself overcome by scruples, and had sent him away for a fortnight. But it was merely, he said, a question of nerves, the moment she put away the score of *Tristan* she would take him back. She had smiled at his explanation of her conscience, and wondered if it were the true one. "Not entirely," she thought, "but it may have had something to do with it." And her conscience did not make itself heard again. There were the Dresden performances, and the success of her Leonore directed her thoughts towards further triumphs. She accepted the conventions of the stage: — That there is no higher mission in life than to sing a musical phrase at once dramatically and beautifully; that because she did this she was entitled to the admiration of her fellow-creatures and to receive large sums of money from them. There were the social conventions: — That it is right to live in ease and pleasure if one can afford to pay for them; that if appearances were preserved it mattered to no one whether she and Owen had or had not registered their relations in the parish books. There remained the question of children, and Owen's views were accepted: that the one real and substantial good is to refrain from bringing creatures into the world who will suffer as we have suffered, and as we shall continue to suffer till death relieves us of suffering.

Owen had asked her again to marry him. He had reminded her that he was forty-seven, and if he married at all he must marry now. He had said that he wished her to succeed in London and Bayreuth, and when this was done he believed she would have done all that could be demanded from her; there was no reason why she should remain on the stage singing till she had not a shred of voice left.

When she left the stage she might marry; there would be nothing else for her to do. She supposed she would have to marry Owen. It was now six years since they had gone away together, and they were still fond of each other. She did not look forward to seeing him with quite the same excitement as she used to, but she had not been unfaithful to him, and most of the women she knew were occasionally unfaithful to their lovers; many things had led her to suspect that they were, and then she remembered that if she did not go to England she would go to Russia, and in St. Petersburg she would meet Ivan again, and she did not wish to meet him again. Yes, she would like to go to England, if she were sure her father would receive her. After her first letter to her father her letters had remained unanswered for two years. She had not heard from him for nearly two years after her elopement, and the thought that he no longer loved her had spoiled many a burst of applause and many a kiss. Owen had tried to persuade her to write to her father again, but she said it was no use.

Owen had taken the credit of having brought their reconciliation about. A singularly sympathetic article on her Elizabeth had drawn a note of acknowledgment from him, for if he had not made her an artist her father would never have forgiven her, and then it was he who had sent the article on her Elizabeth. Henceforth father and daughter wrote to each other occasionally; and when Mr. Innes wrote to his daughter, asking her to meet him in Rome, Owen had pressed her to go at once. She had at first seemed delighted at the idea of going to Rome to meet her father, but when the day came she often stopped to think, unable to make up her mind. Every hour created a new mood in her, sometimes it seemed an easy thing to go, and an hour after it seemed to her impossible. In the end Owen had had to send a telegram to her father saying she had missed the train. Mr. Innes was now giving a concert in Rome, and to arrive after his concert she did not dare. So she did not go at all, and a few days after she received a letter from him saying he was convinced she was a heartless woman, and he never wanted to see or hear anything of her again. They had thought of sending him a paper containing a flattering account of her Dresden success, the news of which had reached the ears of Mr. Hermann Goetze, who was collecting singers for his summer season, and he had offered her an engagement. But they had decided not to send it. They were going to London, and it would be better for her to go straight to her father and beg him to forgive her. It would be "easier to explain in conversation that in a letter the incomprehensible weakness which had prevented her going to meet him in Rome

XV

A few weeks after, she sang Margaret at Covent Garden, and Owen said, as they drove home together after the performance, that she had infused a life and meaning into the part, and that henceforth her reading would have to be “adopted.”

"I wonder if father was there? He was not in the box. Did you look in the stalls?”

“Yes, but he was not there. You’ll go and see him to-morrow.”

“No, not to-morrow, dear.”

"Why not to-morrow?”
“Because I want him to see the papers. He may not have been in the theatre; on Thursday night is Lady Ascott’s ball; then on Friday — I’ll go to see father on Friday. I’ll try to summon courage.”

And so, that she might not be too tired on Friday morning, Owen insisted on her leaving the ballroom at two o’clock, and their last words, as he left her on her doorstep, were that she would go to Dulwich before she went to rehearsal. But in the warmth of her bed, not occupied long enough to restore to the body the strength of which a ballroom had robbed it, her resolution waned, and her brain, weak from insufficient sleep, shrank from the prospect of a long drive and a face of stone at the end of it.

“You were at the opera last night, Merat. Was Mademoiselle Helbrun a success?”

"No, mademoiselle, I’m afraid not.”

“Ah!" Evelyn put down her cup and looked at her maid. "I’m sorry, but I thought she wouldn’t succeed in London. She was coldly received, was she?”

“Yes, mademoiselle.”

“I’m sorry, for she’s a true artist.”

“She has not the passion of mademoiselle.”

A little look of pleasure lit up Evelyn’s face.

"She is a charming singer. I can't think how she could have failed."

"I thought Mademoiselle Helbrun rather cold. But then I'm one of the public. Mademoiselle has not yet told me what I am to tell the coachman."

"You do not listen to me, Merat," Evelyn answered in a sudden access of ill-humour. "Instead of accepting the answer I choose to give, you stop there in the intention of obtaining the answer which seems to you the most suitable. I told you to tell the coachman that he was to get a map and acquaint himself with the way to Dulwich."

And to bring the interview to a close, she told Merat to take away the chocolate tray, and she took up one of the scores which lay on a small table by the bedside. She began reading the second act at the place where Isolde, ignoring Brangana's advice, signals to Tristan with the handkerchief, and it suddenly occurred to her that she might study it with the young man whom she had met every day at rehearsals. She had heard this young man, Ulick Dean, spoken of as a musician and as a visionary, and had expected to meet someone strange and complex, but she had met a young man simple and bright as a spring morning. The score dropped from her hands, and she remembered that his confidence in life seemed complete and that he seemed happy, like one on a pleasant journey. His eyes and his voice reflected his ideas; he was his ideas; and now, as she lay thinking, he had suddenly come to seem to her to be the revelation she had been waiting for.

The distressing doubts she had had in Florence had revived, and she knew she was weary of the life she had been living for the last six years. His belief that we have lost a great deal in civilising ourselves interested her, and his belief in the wisdom of primitive peoples interested her, and to believe that God is everywhere, especially in the undefiled country, interested her beyond measure. His idea of going to the country in search of God seemed beautiful and true. We are surely more likely to find Him in the eternal elements than in a wafer which man has made. She had never heard anyone talk like this before, and it seemed to her delightfully true.

The strangest thing was, that this young man who was her father's friend should be the first person to interest her after her arrival in England, and turning over in bed she was very glad her father had discovered such a nice friend for himself while she was away. As she drowsed, the wish came again to study Isolde with him. He had just begun to tell her why he had recanted his Wagnerian faith; he still believed Wagner to be a genius for all time, but he no longer thought it possible to go farther in the direction Wagner had gone. He now wished to write the things which were true to him; to tell the truth, he said, seemed to him to be more important than beautiful writing. The songs he had sent her were in accord with his theory; and as she drowsed she thought of the article he had written about her Margaret, and she stretched out her hand and took it from the table at her bedside, and began reading.

He had liked the dull green dress she had worn in the first act, and the long braids of chestnut hair which he had admired were her own. He had mentioned them and the velvet cape, which he could not remember whether she wore or carried on her arm. He said that she made good use of the cape in the next act, and she was glad that he had perceived that.

Like every other Margaret, her prayer-book was in her hand when she first met Faust; but she dropped it as she saw him, and while she shyly and sweetly sang that she was neither a lady nor a beauty, she stooped and, with some embarrassment, picked up the book. He liked the way she passed on, and did not stop to utter a mechanical cry when she saw Mephistopheles, and then run away. For Mephistopheles was not in sight, but Faust was just behind her, and her hesitation seemed to say, “What a charming — what a lovely young man! I think I’ll stop a little longer, and possibly he’ll say something more. But no — after all — perhaps I’d better not," and, with a little sigh of regret, she turned and went, at first quietly and then more quickly, as though fearful of being tempted to change her mind.

In the garden scene she sang the first bars of the music absent-mindedly, dusting and folding her little cape, stopping when it was only half folded to stand forgetful a moment, her eyes far off, gazing back into the preceding act. Awaking with a little start, she went to her spinning-wheel, and, with her back to the audience, arranged the spindle and the flax. Then stopping in her work and standing in thought, she half hummed, half sang the song "Le Roi de Thulé," and it was not until she had nearly finished that she sat down to spin, and then only for a moment, as though too restless and disturbed for work that afternoon.

"She laughed out the Jewel Song," he said, "with real laughter, returning lightly across the stage”; and he said that they had “wondered what was this lovely music, which they had never heard before!" And when she placed the jewels back, he said that she did so lingeringly, regretfully, slowly, one by one, even forgetting the earrings, perhaps purposely, till just before she entered the house. He seemed to have noticed everything.

She was glad that he had noticed that when she fainted at the sight of Mephistopheles, she slowly revived as the curtain was falling and pointed to the place where he had been, seeing him again in her over-wrought brain. This she did think was a good idea, and, as he said, "it seemed to accomplish something.”

He thought her idea for her entrance in the following act exceedingly well imagined, for, instead of coming on neatly dressed and smiling like the other Margarets, she came down the steps of the church with her dress and hair disordered, in the arms of two women, walking with difficulty, only half recovered from her fainting fit. "It is by ideas like this," he said, "that the singer carried forward the story, and made it seem true. And after her brother had cursed

Margaret, when he falls back dead, Miss Innes retreats, getting away from the body, half mad, half afraid. She did not rush immediately to him, as has been the operatic custom, kneel down, and, with one arm leaning heavily on Valentine's stomach, look up in the flies. Miss Innes, after backing far away from him, slowly returned, as if impelled to do so against her will, and, standing over the body, looked at it with curiosity, repulsion, terror; and then she burst into a whispered laugh, which communicated a feeling of real horror to the audience.

"In the last act madness was tangled in her hair, and in her wide-open eyes were read the workings of her insane brain, and her every movement expressed the pathos of madness; her lovely voice told its sad tale without losing any of its sweetness and beauty. The pathos of the little souvenir phrases was almost unbearable, and the tragic power of the finish was extraordinary in a voice of such rare distinction and fluid utterance. Her singing and acting went hand in hand, twin sisters, equal and indivisible, and when the great moment in the trio came, she stepped forward and, with an inspired intensity, lifted her quivering hands above her head in a sort of mad ecstasy, and sang out the note clear and true, yet throbbing with emotion."

The paper slid from Evelyn's hand. She could see from Ulick's description of her acting that she had acted very well; if she had not, he could not have written like that. But neither in the music nor in the words did the dramatic idea get below the surface, and she was not at all sure that it would not be better to act it according to the convention it was written in. However, he had liked it, and if he liked her Margaret, what would he think of her Elizabeth? it was ten times as real to her.
Suddenly the thought struck her like a spur, that if she were going to Dulwich she must get up, and she sprang out of bed, and laying her finger on the electric bell she kept the button pressed till Merat arrived breathless.

"Merat, I shall get up at once; prepare my bath, and tell the coachman I shall be ready to start in twenty minutes."

"Twenty minutes? Mademoiselle is joking."

"No, I am not... in twenty minutes — half an hour at the most."

"It would be impossible for me to dress you in less than three-quarters of an hour."

"I shall be dressed in half an hour. Go and tell the coachman at once; I shall have had my bath when you return."

Her dressing was accomplished amid curt phrases. "It doesn't matter, that will do.... I can't afford to waste time.... Gome, Merat, try to get on with my hair."

And while Merat buttoned her boots she buttoned her gloves. She wore a grey tailor-made dress and a blue veil tied round a black hat with ostrich feathers. Escaping from her maid's hands, she ran downstairs. But the dining-room door opened, and Lady Duckle intervened.

"My dear girl, you really cannot go out before you have had something to eat."

"I cannot stay; I'll get something at the theatre."

"Do eat a cutlet, it will not take a moment... a mouthful of omelette. Think of your voice."

Lady Duckle's thoughts turned to the coachman. "He sent in just now to ask for a map of London. It appears he doesn't know the way; yet, when I took up his references, I was assured that he knew London perfectly."

"Dulwich is very little known; it is at least five miles from here."

"Oh, Dulwich!... you're going there?"

"Yes, I ought to have gone the day after we arrived in London.... I wanted to; I've been thinking of it all the time, and the longer I put it off the more difficult it will become."

"That is true."

"I thought I would drive there today before I went to rehearsal."

Lady Duckle followed her to the front door, and stood for a moment to admire the beauty of the morning. The chestnut horses pawed the ground restlessly, excited by the scent of the lilac which a wilful little breeze carried up from Hamilton Place. Every passing hansom was full of flowered silks, and the verandahed balconies seemed to hang lower than ever, and they were all hung and burdened with flowers. And of all these eighteenth- century houses, Evelyn's was the cosiest, and the elder of the two men, who, from the opposite pavement, stood watching the prima donna stroking the quivering nostrils of her almost thoroughbred chestnuts with her white-gloved hand, could easily imagine her in her pretty drawing-room standing beside a cabinet filled with Worcester and Old Chelsea china.

"Owen is doing the thing well. Those horses must have cost four hundred. I know how much the Boucher drawing cost."

"How do you know there is a Boucher drawing?"

"Because we bid against each other for it at Christie's. A woman lying on her stomach, drawn very freely, very simply — quite a large drawing — just the thing for such a room as hers is, amid chintz and eighteenth-century inlaid or painted tables."

"I wonder where she is going. Perhaps to see him."

"At ten o'clock in the morning! More likely that she will call at her dressmaker's on her way to rehearsal. She is to sing Elizabeth to-morrow night." And, while discussing her singing, the elder man asked himself if he had ever had a mistress that would compare with her. "She isn't by any means a beautiful woman," he said, "but she's the sort of woman that if one did catch on to it would be for a long while."

The young man pitied Evelyn's misfortune of so elderly an admirer as Owen. It seemed to him impossible that she could like a man who must be over forty, and the thought saddened him that he might never possess so desirable a mistress.

"I wonder if she's faithful to him?"

"Faithful to him, after six years of liaison!"

"But, my dear Frank, we know you don't believe that any woman is straight. How do you know that he is her lover? Very often " —

"My dear Cyril, because you meet her at a ball at Lady Ascott's, and because she has lived with that Lady Duckle — an old thing who used to present the daughters of ironmongers at Court for a consideration — above all, because you want her yourself, you are ready to believe anything. I never did meet anyone who could deceive himself with the same ease. Besides, I know all about her. It's quite an extraordinary story."

"How did he pick her up?"

"I'll tell you presently."

Her bow was gracious as the chestnuts swept the light carriage by them; the young man pleased her fancy for the moment, and she tried to recall the few words they had exchanged as she left the ball. But his face was suddenly blotted from her mind, for she had been warned against London, and ever since she had consented to come she had been ill at ease and nervous — of what she did not know — of someone behind her, of someone lurking round her. She argued that she would not have had those feelings if there was not a reason. When she had them,

something always happened to her, and nothing could convince her that London was not the turning-point in her fortune. The carriage seemed to be going very fast; they were already in Victoria Street; she called to the coachman not to drive so fast, but he answered that he must drive at that pace if he was to get there by eleven.... The chestnuts were prancing like greyhounds amid heavy drays and clumsy, bear-like horses; the coachman was trying to hold them in and to understand the policeman, who shouted the way to him from the edge of the pavement.

XVI

But she ought not to go to St. Joseph's. She had promised Owen to avoid churches, priests — all that reminded her of religion. He had begged that until she was firm in her agnosticism she should not expose herself to influences which could but result in mental distress, and without any practical issue unless to separate them. She had escaped once; next time he might find it more difficult to win her back. How kind he was! He had not said a word about his own suffering.

It had happened very nearly a year ago in Florence, and an accident had brought it all about. One afternoon she was walking in the streets; she could still see the deep cornices showing distinct against the sky; she was admiring them when suddenly a church appeared; she could not tell how it was, but she had been propelled to enter.... A feeling which had arisen out of her heart, a sort of yearning — that was it. The church was almost empty; how restful it had seemed that afternoon, the rough plastered walls and the two figures of the nuns absorbed in prayer. Her heart had begun to ache, and her daily life with its riches and glories had seemed to concern her no longer. It was as if the light had changed, and she had become suddenly aware of her real self, and she had left the church overcome with remorse — remorse, for what she could not say; the church had awakened a vague disquiet in her. It had made her feel that it could not be right to live for the sake of applause, wealth, and the lust of the flesh. Yet what else was there to do? She could think of no remedy. She had chosen to be a singer, and must abide by her choice... and life consisted of nothing else for her, or for the people she associated with, except the writing of a phrase and the singing of it.

Owen had remarked her disquiet, and she knew she had sung very badly indeed that night, and when they returned home she begged of him not to come to her room. She had said that it would make her very unhappy. He had asked her to explain, but of course she could not explain, and they had remained separated for nearly three weeks. All that time she had endured great mental suffering, and the fact that she had got everything the world has to give did not seem to make any difference. Her position had seemed still more illogical when she refused to marry him, and yet she felt she could not go on living with him in sin.

She could not go through it again, nor could she think what would have happened if they had not met that afternoon. She had been near to killing herself.... To kill herself would put an end to it all, but instead she had gone out, and she walked with her eyes steadily fixed before her, and somehow she was not surprised when she saw him coming towards her. He had joined her quite naturally, as if by appointment, and they had walked on, instinctively finding their way out of the crowd. They had walked on and on, now and then exchanging remarks, waiting for a full explanation, wondering what form it would take. Cypresses and campanili defined

themselves in the landscape as the evening advanced. Farther on, the country flattened out; there were urban gardens and dusty little vineyards.

Their talk had been gentle and philosophic; she had listened eagerly, and had promised to shun influences which made her uselessly unhappy. There were sounds of children's voices in the air, and a glow of light upon the roofs. Nearly a year had passed since that time in Florence, and she was now going to put the strength of her agnosticism to the test.

"They have not built a new entrance," she remarked to herself as the coachman reined up the chestnuts before the meagre steps. "But alterations are being made," she thought, catching sight of some scaffolding. And, smiling at the idea of dressing herself in a humble frock suitable for reconciliation, she entered the church hurriedly. She did not care to meet him in open daylight, in the presence of her servants. The church would be a better place. He could not say much to her in church, and she thought she would like to meet him suddenly face to face; in church there would be no time for explanations, and he could not refuse to speak to her.

Looking round she saw that Mass was in progress at one of the side altars. The acolyte had just changed the Book from the left to the right, and the congregation of about a dozen had risen for the reading of the Gospel. She knew that her father was not among them. She must have known all the while that he was not in church. If he were at St. Joseph's, he would be in the practising-room. She might go round and ask for him — yes, and run the risk of meeting one of the priests! They were men of tact, and would refrain from unpleasant allusions. But they knew she was on the stage, that she had not been back since she had left home; they could not but suspect; however they might speak, she could not avoid reading meanings, which very likely were not intended, into their words.... And she would see the practising-room full of faces, and her father, already angry at the interruption, opening the door to her. It would be worse than meeting him in the street. No, she would not seek him in the practising-room — then where — Dulwich? Perhaps, but not to-day. She would wait in the church and see if the Elevation compelled her to bow her head.

And in this intention she took a seat in full view of the altar where the priest was saying Mass. Every shape and every colour of this church, its slightest characteristics, brought back an impression of long ago; the very wording of her childish thoughts was suddenly remembered; and she felt, whether she believed or disbelieved, that it was pleasant to kneel where she knelt when she was a little girl. It was touching to see the poor folk pray. The poor Irish and Italians — especially the Irish — how simple they were! it was all real to them, however false it may have become to her. Her eyes wandered among the little congregation; only one she recognised — the strangely thin and crooked lady who, as far back as she could remember, used to walk up the aisle, her hands crossed in front of her like a wooden doll's. She had not altered at all; she wore the same battered black bonnet. This lonely lady had always been a subject of curiosity to

Evelyn. She remembered how she used to invent houses for her to live in, and suitable friends and evenings at home. The day that Owen came to St. Joseph's, he had put his hat on this lady's chair, and she had had to ask him to remove it. How frightened she had looked! and he not too well pleased at having to sit beside her. That was six years ago, and Evelyn thought how much had happened to her in that time — a great deal to her and very little to that poor woman in the black bonnet. She must have some little income on which she lived, in a room with wax fruit in the window. Every morning and evening she was at St. Joseph's. The church was her one distraction: it was her theatre, the theatre certainly of all her thoughts.

The Gospel ended, the little congregation sat down, and Evelyn reflected how much more difficult belief was to her than to the slightly deformed woman in front of her. The doctrine that a merciful God has prepared a place of eternal torment for His erring creatures is hard enough to credit. She didn't think she could ever believe that again; or that God had sent His Son on earth to expiate on the cross the sins which He and His Father, in conjunction with the Holy Ghost, had fated them to commit; or that bread and wine becomes, at the bidding of the priest, the Creator of all the stars we see at midnight. True that she believed these doctrines no longer, but, unfortunately, this advancement brought her no nearer to the solution of the question directly affecting her life. Owen encouraged her to persevere in her agnosticism. "Old instincts," he said, "are not conquered at once. You must be patient. The Scotch were converted about three or four hundred years after Christ. Christianity is therefore fourteen hundred years old, whereas the seed of agnosticism has been sown but a few years; give it time to catch root." She had laughed, his wit amused her, but our feelings are — well, they are ours, and we cannot separate ourselves from them. They are certain, though everything else is uncertain, and when she Jooked into her mind (she tried to avoid doing so as much as possible, but she could not always help herself) something told her that the present was but a passing stage. Often it seemed to her that she was like one out on a picnic — she was amused — she would be sorry when it ended; but she could not feel that it was to last. Other women were at home in their lives; she was not in hers. We all have a life that it is more natural for us to live than any other; we all have a mission of some sort to accomplish, and the happiest are those whose lives correspond to their convictions.

All this they had argued a hundred times, but their points of view were so different. Once, however, she thought she had made him understand. She had said, "If you don't understand religion, you understand art. Well, then, imagine a man who wants to paint pictures; give him a palace to live in; place every pleasure at his call, imposing only one condition — that he is not to paint. His appetites may detain him in the palace for a while, but sooner or later he will cry out, 'All these pleasures are nothing to me; what I want is to paint pictures.'" She could see that the parable had convinced him, or nearly. He had said he was afraid she was hopeless. But a moment after, drawing her toward him with quiet, masterful arm, and speaking with that hard

voice that could become so soft, it had seemed as if heaven suddenly melted away, and his kisses were worth every sacrifice.

That was the worst of it. She was neither one thing nor the other. She desired two lives diametrically opposed to each other, consequently she would never be happy. But she was happy. She had everything; she could think of nothing that she wanted that she had not got; it was really too ridiculous for her to pretend to herself that she was not happy. So long as she had believed in religion she had not been happy, but now she believed no longer — she was happy. It was strange, however, that a church always brought the old feeling back again, and her thoughts paused, and in a silent awe of soul she asked herself if, at the bottom of her soul, she still disbelieved in God. But it was so silly to believe the story of the Virgin — think of it.... As Owen said, in no mythology was there anything more ridiculous. Nevertheless, she did not convince herself that the dim, vague, unquiet sensation which rankled in her was not a still unextirpated germ of the original faith. She tried to think it was not a religious feeling but the result of the terrible interview still hanging over her, the dread that her father might not forgive her. She tried to look into her mind to discover the impulse which had compelled her to turn from her intention and come to this church. She remembered the uncontrollable desire to say a prayer: that she could have resisted, but the moment after she had remembered that perhaps it was too late to find her father at home. But had she really hoped to find him at St. Joseph's, or had she used the pretext to deceive herself? She could not tell. But if religion was not true, if she did not believe, how was it that she had always thought it wrong to live with a man to whom she was not married? There was no use pretending; she never had quite got a haunting scruple on that point out of her mind.

There could be but two reasons, he had insisted, for the maintenance of the matrimonial idea — the preservation of the race, and the belief that cohabitation without matrimony is an offence against God. But the race is antecedent to matrimony, and if there be no resurrection there can be no religion.... If there be no personal God who manages our affairs and summons to everlasting bliss or torment, the matter is not worth thinking about — at least not to a Catholic. Pious agnosticism is a bauble unworthy to tempt anyone who has been brought up a Catholic. A Catholic remains a Catholic, or else becomes a frank agnostic. Only weak-minded Protestants run to that slender shelter — morality without God. "But why are you like this?" he had said, fixing his eyes.... "I think I see. Your father comes of a long line of Scotch Protestants; he became a Catholic so that he might marry your mother. Your scruples must be a Protestant heredity. I wonder if it is so. In no other way can I account for the fact that although you no longer believe in a resurrection, you cling fast to the doctrine which declares it wrong for two people, both free, to live together, unless they register their cohabitation in the parish books. Our reason is our own. Our feelings we inherit. You are enslaved to your Scotch ancestors; you are a slave to the superstitions of your grandmother and your grand-aunts; you obey them."

"But do we not inherit our reason just as much as we inherit our feelings? ”

They had argued that point. She could not remember what his argument was, but she remembered that she had held her ground, that he had complimented her, not forgetting, however, to take the credit of the improvement in her intellectual equipment to himself — which indeed was no more than just. She would have been nothing without him. How he had altered her! She had come to think and feel like him. She often caught herself saying exactly what he would say in certain circumstances, and having heard him say how odours affected him, she had tried to acquire a like sensibility. Unconsciously she had assimilated a great deal. That little trick of his, using his eyes a certain way, that knowing little glance of his, had become habitual to her. She had met men who were more profound, never anyone whose mind was more alert, more amusing and sufficient for every occasion. She sentimentalised a moment, and then remembered further similarities. They now ate the same dishes, and no longer had need to consult each other before ordering dinner. In their first week in Paris she had learnt to look forward to chocolate in the morning before she got up, and this taste was endeared to her, for it reminded her of him. In the picture galleries she had always tried to pick out the pictures he would like. If they could not decide how a passage should be sung, or were in doubt regarding the attitude and gesture best fitted to carry on a dramatic action, she had noticed that, if they separated so that they might arrive at individual conclusions, they almost always happened upon the same.

She had often wondered whether, by having absorbed so much of Owen’s character, she had proved herself deficient in character. Owen maintained, on the contrary, that the sign of genius is the power of recognising and assimilating that which is necessary to the development of oneself. He mentioned Goethe’s life, which he said was but the tale of a long assimilation of ideas. The narrow, barren soul is narrow and barren because it cannot acquire. We come into the world with nothing in our own right except the capacity for the acquisition of ideas. We cannot invent ideas; we can only gather some of those in circulation since the beginning of the world. We endow them with the colour and form of our time, and, if that colour and form be of supreme quality, the work is preserved as representative of a period in the history of civilisation; a name may or may not be attached to each specimen. Genius is merely the power of assimilation; only the fool imagines he invents. Owen would go still further. He maintained that if the circumstances of a man’s life admitted the acquisition of only one set of ideas, his work was thin; but if, on the contrary, circumstances threw him in the way of a new set of ideas, a set of ideas different from the first set, yet sufficiently near for the same brain to assimilate, then the work produced by that brain would be endowed with richer colour; or, in severer form, the idea was, he said, to a work of art what salt is to meat — it preserved works of art against the corrupting action of time.

How they had talked! how they had discussed things! They had talked about everything, and she remembered all he said, as she recalled the arguments he had used. The scene of this last conversation passed and re-passed in vanishing gleams — Boppad on the Rhine. They had stopped there on their way to Bayreuth. The maidens and their gold, the fire-surrounding Brunhilda, the death of the hero, the end of the legends: these she knew, but of *Parsifal* she knew nothing — the story or the music. The time was propitious for him to tell it. The flame of the candle burnt in the still midnight, and she had listened with bated breath. She could see Owen leaning forward, telling the story, and she could even see her own listening face as he related how the poor fool rises through sanctification of faith and repudiation of doubt; how he heals the sick king with the sacred spear, and becomes himself the high priest of the Grail. It had seemed to Evelyn that she had been carried beyond the limits of earthly things. The thrill and shiver of the dead man's genius haunted the liquid ripple of the river; the moment was ecstatic: the deep, windless night was full of the haunting ripple of the Rhine. And she remembered how she had clasped her hands... her very words came back to her....

"It is wonderful... and we are listening to the Rhine; we shall never forget this midnight."

At that moment the Sanctus bell rang, and she remembered why she had stayed in church. She wished to discover what remnant, tatter, or shred of her early faith still clung about her. She wished to put her agnosticism to the test. She wondered if, at the moment of consecration, she would be compelled to bow her head. The bell rang again.... She grew tremulous with expectation. She strove to refrain, but her head bowed a little, and her thoughts expanded into prayer; she was not sure that she actually prayed, for her thoughts did not divide into explicit words or phrases. There certainly followed a beautiful softening of her whole being, the bitterness of life was extinguished; Divine eyes seemed bent upon her, and she was in the midst of mercy, peace, and love; and daring no longer to think she did not believe, she sat rapt till Mass was ended.

XVII

Through the grey twilight of the auditorium she could see heads and hands, and shapes of musical instruments. The conductor's grey hair was combed back over his high forehead. He swung a lean body to the right and left. Suddenly he sprang up in his seat, and, looking in the direction of certain instruments, he brought down his stick determinedly, and, having obtained the effect he desired, his beat swung leisurely for a while.... "'Cellos, crescendo," he cried. "Ah, mon Dieu! Ta-ra-la-la-la! Now, gentlemen, Number 25, please."

For a few bars the stick swung automatically, striking the little conductor's piano as it descended. "'Cellos, a sudden piano after the accent, and then no accent whatever. Ta-ra-ta-ta-ta!"

At the back of the stalls the poor Italian chorus had gathered like a herd, not daring to sit in seats, the hire of which for a few hours equalled their weekly wages. But the English girls, whose musical tastes had compelled them from their suburban homes, had no such scruples. Confident of the cleanliness of their skirts and hats, they sat in the best stalls, their scores on their knees.

Meanwhile the Pilgrims' Song grew more strenuous, until at last the trombones proclaimed, in unconquerable tones, Tannhauser's abjuration of sensual life, and at that moment the tall, spare figure of Mr. Hermann Goetze, the manager, appeared in the doorway leading to the stalls. He was with his apparitor and satellite, Mr. Wheeler, a foppish little man, who seemed pleased at being seen in confidential conversation with his great chief. Catching sight of Evelyn in the box just above his eyes, he smiled and bowed obsequiously. A sudden thought seemed to strike him, and Evelyn said to herself, "He's coming to talk with me about the Brangana. I hope he has done what I told him, and engaged Helbrun for the part."

"How do you do, Mr. Hermann Goetze? Well, I hope you succeeded in inducing Mademoiselle Helbrun to play Brangana?"

"I have not had a moment, Miss Innes. I have not seen Mademoiselle Helbrun since last night. You will be sorry to hear that her Carmen was not considered a success.... Do you think " —

"There is no finer artist than Mademoiselle Helbrun. If you do not engage her" —

Mr. Hermann Goetze took his handkerchief from his pocket, and, upon inquiry, she learnt that he was suffering from toothache. Mr. Wheeler advised different remedies, but Mr. Hermann Goetze did not believe in remedies. He begged of her not to think of him, and they entered into

the difficult question of salary. He told her that Mademoiselle Helbrun would ask eighty pounds a performance; but so intense was the pain from his tooth at this moment that he could not finish the sentence. A little alarmed, Evelyn waited until the spasm had ended, and when the manager's composure was somewhat restored, she reminded the poor man of Brangana's long song in which she endeavours to appease Isolde. Mr. Hermann Goetze looked at her out of pain-stricken eyes, and said he was listening. Mr. Wheeler proposed to go to the chemist for a remedy. Mr. Hermann Goetze shook his head; he had tried all remedies in vain; the dentist was the only resort, and he promised to go to Evelyn's when the rehearsal was over, and he retired from the box, holding his handkerchief to his face. When he got on to the stage, Evelyn was glad to see that he was a little better, and was able to give some directions regarding the stage management. She was genuinely sorry for him, for she had had toothache herself. Nevertheless, it was unfortunate that they had not been able to settle about Mademoiselle Helbrun's engagement. She wondered how this might be effected; perhaps, after rehearsal, Mr. Hermann Goetze might be feeling better, or she might ask him to dinner. As she considered the question, her eyes wandered over the auditorium in quest of Ulick Dean.

She saw him at the end of a long row of stalls listening to the music. Suddenly he got up in the middle of the overture and stood in the doorway, as if he were about to leave the theatre.

"But he knows that I am here," she thought, and she kept her eyes fixed upon him so that she might make a sign when he looked in the direction of her box. All the while she admired his tall thin figure, she wondered if she would like him better without a beard, for you cannot kiss a man with a beard with any comfort. He was dressed in an old grey suit of clothes, and she could not think of him in any other, and he wore a loose necktie and a soft felt hat, and she liked him in it. One did not think of Ulick's clothes, and she was glad to see him hurry across the theatre to speak to her.

He met her with the same genuine kindness that had attracted the other day, and, forgetful of the rehearsal, they sat down to talk to each other. What she liked best in him was his eyes; they were so wide, and so grey, and so tender that it was always a pleasure to look into them; but she felt that she must refrain, for she did not want him to think she was in love with him, and she knew she had shown too much interest in him on the first occasion. She was uncertain at what point to pick up the thread, but her hesitation only lasted for a moment. Ulick's naturalness made everyone natural, and she thanked him for the songs he had sent her. He waited for her to tell how she liked the songs he had sent her, and she said they were so different from the music she was in the habit of singing that they seemed to her alike, but that was, no doubt, because his ideas were new to her and his mode of expressing them was also new.

For a long time he said he had written incorrectly, and his friends had thought he had no gift for musical expression. But suddenly he seemed to acquire command over the medium, and now he wrote easily, thinking only of what he had to say.

She asked him about the opera he was writing; he told her the legend on which it was founded; and she had already begun to feel she was going to see a good deal of this young man, so it would be better to speak to him at once of her estrangement from her father and her liaison with Owen Asher. Until they had spoken of these things they could never be really friends. There would be a gulf between them, and she longed to cross this gulf, but could not bring herself to speak to him about her father. She had suddenly seemed to have become tongue-tied.

"I am sure," he said, "that you cannot understand my writing dramatic music; the songs I sent you are reveries. I think you will like my dramatic music better than those early songs."

"What made you think of writing an opera?"

"Well," he said, "you did. You see your father is my great friend, and I have heard a great deal about you and read a great deal about you, and that set me thinking about the drama."

"We're about the same age, and it is when one is about thirty that one begins to find out what one wants to do. You must come and play it to me very soon. What does father think about it?"

"Your father likes what I have written."

The question had flared up impetuously, and she said —

"Tell me about father."

"He is very well in health, and very interested in his choir, but probably what you want me to tell you is what he has said about you."

"Yes, yes, that is what I want to know. I sent him a box for my first night, but he did not come."

"Miss Innes, why don't you go to see your father? You have been in London three weeks, and you should have gone to see him."

"I know I should, and I long to go, but I have not the courage."

"You must find the courage," he said; "the sooner you go the easier it will be for you and for him."

She said she feared her father would never understand why she had not gone to meet him in Rome, and she begged Ulick to explain the matter to him before she went. But Ulick assured her this was not a matter for anyone's interference. No, he could not tell her how her father spoke of her, nor would he say if he spoke of her at all; and he shook his head when she asked him if her father had been to see her act.

"I have promised your father not to speak of him to you, nor will I tell him anything of what you have said to me. I beseech you to go and see him. All will be well, I am sure, if you will go to see him, but do not put the visit off any longer."

There was nothing more to be said, and they turned to the stage and made some remarks about the woman who was playing Venus. But they could not fix their attention on the stage, and she said suddenly —

"I have not thanked you for the article you wrote about my Margaret; it is such a beautiful article. How well you understand! nothing escapes you. But," she said, "it is only an invented part. If the part had been written properly it should be played as I play it, I think. I admire your article, but I don't believe in it at all, any more than I do in my own acting of the part. I have been thinking of Margaret for years; she's only a stage shadow. I think you will like my Elizabeth better."

"If you please me in Elizabeth I shall be surprised. No one has yet, for I have very distinct ideas as to how the part should be played: I see Elizabeth as a very grave, a mediaeval maiden, who knows beforehand what is going to happen to her."

"I think," she said, "you had better go away; I don't want you to hear me rehearse the part. This hat and feathers are against me."

"I will go away if you like."

"No, no, stay; I could not rehearse at all unless you were here to hear me."

XVIII

Instead of rushing wildly to and fro, emphasising the staccato of "the address to the hall," she advanced gravely like a priestess entering a temple. The priestess holds a lamp in her hand, but Elizabeth's lamp is her heart. Her heart is aflame with memories. Her heart has been like a buried lamp all the while Tannhäuser has been with Venus in Mount Hörsel. She only knows that he has left her father's court, and been away a long while, and that he has come back to her. Evelyn advanced into the hall absorbed in the mystery of her love for the errant knight, in the mystery of his going and the mystery of his returning.

The sensation Evelyn brought on the stage was one of dream. She represented Elizabeth as a somnambulist. The staccato of her song, usually so painfully insisted upon in order to obtain the gleeful maiden whose lover has returned to her — was suppressed, and one seemed never to have heard the song before, so softened was it by the intention of the singer, who sang it like one dreaming a dream. The large hat and the ostrich feathers tied with a blue veil hindered no whit of the idea, and the tailor-made dress and the six years' *liaison* with Owen Asher was no let to the mediaeval virgin formulated in antique custom. She knows nothing of his sins, nor does she care to penetrate the veil which divides her from the reality. Evelyn's Elizabeth moved across the stage full of premonition and benedictive forgiveness. Tannhäuser kneels at her feet, and she raises him, and knows nothing of his unworthiness. Love burns in her heart, like a flame on a shrine.
Ulick leaned out of the box and applauded; he dared even to cry encore, and following suit the musicians laid aside their instruments, and standing up in the orchestra applauded with him. The conductor tapped his stick on the harmonium, acknowledging the applause of a fellow-artist; with a graceful bow she went up the stage to meet the Landgrave — her father — and she sang a duet with him.

As soon as it was concluded, the introduction to the march brought the first courtiers on the stage, and with the first strains of the march the assembly, which had been invited to witness the competitions, was seated in the circular benches ranged round the throne of the Landgrave and his daughter. The competitors sang their tiresome songs, and then Tannhäuser avowed the joys he had experienced with the Venus on Mount Hörsel. The dames and wives of the burgesses hastened away, leaving their husbands to avenge the affront offered to their modesty. The knights drew their swords, and the moment came for Elizabeth to run down the steps of the throne and ask for mercy.

The idea of the scene was very clear to Ulick, and his whole attention was fixed upon Evelyn. He was only attracted by essential ideas, and the mysterious expectancy of the virgin awaiting the approach of the predestined lover was surely the essential spirit of life — the ultimate

meaning of things. The comedy of existence, the habit of life worn in different ages of the world, had no interest for him; it was the essential that he sought and wished to put upon the stage — the striving and yearning, and then the inevitable acceptation of the burden of life; in other words, the entrance into the life of resignation. That was what he sought in his own operas, and from this ideal he had never wavered; all other art but this essential art was indifferent to him. It was no longer the beautiful writing of Wagner's later works that attracted him; he deemed this one to be, perhaps, the finest, being the sincerest, and *Parsifal* the worst, being the most hypocritical. Elizabeth was the essential penitent; she who does penance not for herself — she has committed no sin; but the sublime penitent who does penance for the sins of others. Not for a moment could he admit the penitence of Kundry. In her there was merely the external aspect. Parsifal was to Ulick a revolting hypocrisy, and Kundry the blot on Wagner's life. In the first act she is a sort of wild witch, not very explicit to any intelligence that probes below the surface. In the second, she is a courtesan with black diamonds. In the third, she wears the coarse habit of a penitent, and her waist is tied with a cord; but her repentance goes no further than these exterior signs. She says no word, and Ulick could not accept the descriptive music as sufficient explanation of her repentance, even if it were sincere, which it was not, and he spoke derisively of the amorous cries to be heard at every moment in the orchestra while she is dragging herself to Parsifal's feet. Elizabeth's prayer was to him a perfect expression of a penitent soul. Kundry, he pointed out, had no such prayer, and he derisively sang the cries of amorous desire. The character of Parsifal he could admit even less than the character of Kundry. As he would say in discussion, "If I am to discuss an artistic question I must go to the very heart of it. Now, if we ask ourselves what Siegfried did, the answer is that he forged the sword, killed the dragon, and released Brunhilda. But if, in like manner, we ask ourselves what Parsifal did, is not the answer, that he killed a swan and refused a kiss with many morbid, suggestive, and disagreeable remarks? These are the facts," he would say; "confute them who may, explain them who can!" And if it were urged, as it often was, that in Parsifal Wagner sought the very opposite to what he had sought in Siegfried, that Parsifal is opposed to Siegfried as Hamlet is opposed to Othello, Ulick eagerly accepted the challenge, and like one sure of his adversary's life, began the attack.

Wagner had been all his life dreaming of an opera with a subjective hero. Christ first and then Buddha had suggested themselves as likely subjects. He had gone so far as to make sketches for both heroes, but both subjects had been rejected as unpractical, and he had fallen back on a pretty mediaeval myth, and had shot into a pretty mediaeval myth all the material he had accumulated for the other dramas, whose heroes were veritable heroes, men who had accomplished great things, men who had preached great doctrines, and whose lives were symbols of their doctrines. The result of pouring this old wine into the new bottle was to burst the bottle.

In neither Christ nor Buddha did the question of sex arise, and that was the reason that Wagner eventually rejected both. He was as full of sex — mysterious, subconscious sex — as Rossetti

himself. In Christ's life there is the Magdalen, but how naturally harmonious, how implicit in the idea, are their relations, how concentric; but how excentric (using the word in its grammatical sense) are the relations of Parsifal to Kundry. A Redeemer is chaste, but he does not speak of His chastity nor does He think of it; He passes the question by. The figure of Christ is so noble, that whether God or man, or both, it seems to us in harmony that the Magdalen should bathe His feet and wipe them with her hair, but the introduction of the same incident into *Parsifal* revolts. Parsifal merely killed a swan and refused to be kissed — the other preached a doctrine in which beauty and wisdom touch the highest point, and His life was an exemplification of His doctrine of non-resistance — "Take ye and eat, for this is My body, and this is My blood."

In *Parsifal* there was only the second act which he could admire without enormous reservations. The writing in the chorus of the "Flower Maidens" was, of course, irresistible — little cries, meaningless by themselves, but, when brought together, they created an enchanted garden, marvellous and seductive. But it was the duet that followed that compelled his admiration. Music hardly ever more than a recitative, hardly ever breaking into an air, and yet so beautiful! There the notes merely served to lift the words, to impregnate them with more terrible and subtle meaning; and the subdued harmonies enfolded them in an atmosphere, a sensual mood; and in this music we sink into depths of soul and float upon sullen and mysterious tides of life — those which roll beneath the phase of life which we call existence. But the vulgarly vaunted Good Friday music did not deceive him; at the second or third time of hearing he had perceived its insincerity. It was very beautiful music, but in such a situation sincerity was essential. The airs of this mock redeemer were truly unbearable. And the first scene that will seem old-fashioned will be this one, for it is ornamental; it is the first appearance in the art of Wagner of the scene for its own sake; it is an example of what Schopenhauer calls "the charming"; and it is only in its taste for "the charming" that the taste of each generation differs. Ulick called attention to the austerity of *Tristan*, nowhere a trace of ornament, simple even to bareness; and in the *Ring*, notwithstanding its many fantastic devices, he said Wagner had never introduced a scene for its own sake. He pointed to Gurnemanz's explanations, and all his "whys" and "wherefores" in introducing the scene he claimed as proof that Wagner was not without suspicion that the scene was ornamental, and sought to justify it. "This is the scene," he added, "that has made most converts to Wagnerism, and it will be the beginning of the first heresy."

To him *Parsifal* was a decoration, painted by a man whose true genius was to reveal the intimate secrets of his soul in melodies; sometimes he does this in melodies no longer than a bar and a bar and a half. In *Parsifal* he had been led from the true path of the genius into the false one of a rivalry with Veronese. But in *Tannhäuser*, in this first flower of his dramatic and musical genius, he had perhaps told the story of his own soul and the soul of humanity more truly and more sincerely than elsewhere. For Ulick, *Tannhäuser* was a typical story, for what is the human story if it be not the pursuit of the ideal? and this was the essential and primal truth that Evelyn

revealed to him. The dream into which her acting had carried him was suddenly broken by the stopping of the orchestra. The singer had stopped the orchestra, and a long altercation began, in which the singer and the manager and the conductor took leading parts. Later on the manager and his apparitor intervened, and later on the whole orchestra had a word to say on the subject. Mr. Hermann Goetze defended the cut. It had been accepted at Berlin, at Wiesbaden, at Munich, and everywhere except at Bayreuth. It was stated that if the eighteen pages taken out were restored the opera would have to begin at seven o'clock, and that the artist in the first act would be playing to empty benches. Finally it was discovered that the musicians had either obliterated the text or pasted pieces of paper over it so effectually that new parts would have to be made up. For a long time compromise seemed impossible. Groups formed, and everyone had a different opinion. At last the conductor took up his stick and cried, "Number 105, please."

"Hermann Goetze has completely upset her; she won't be able to sing again"; and, as Ulick expected, she could not recapture her lost inspiration; mood, Ulick could see, was the foundation and the keystone of her art.

"No, no," she said at the end of the act, "I sang horribly — I am all out of sorts — I don't feel what I am singing, and when the mood is not upon me I am atrocious. What annoyed me was attributing such selfishness to me, and such vulgar selfishness too."

"Never mind," he said, "I have come to tell you what I think of your conception of the part."

And she had listened, wondering how he could see so much in it, asking herself if she had intended to put all the things in it which he had discovered in it.

"You are very kind," she said, "to speak to me like this; come and let us sit down. I daresay we shall find a couple of stools somewhere in the wings, and I will tell you what I want you to do for me. If I ask you to do me a favour, will you do it? It has nothing to do with my father."

"I shall be delighted."

"Well, it is this — I have been trying to learn the part of Isolde for the last six months, and can't; I have given it up as hopeless. But lately I have been thinking of it again, and I think if I were to read it over with you, and discuss it with you and hear your ideas about it, I might find an idea for a new Isolde. I don't mean to take your ideas and put them on the stage; I could not do that, but in talking to you my own ideas would become clear to me; and then' your ideas would awaken new ideas in me. I think something might come of it if you have patience to spend a long afternoon with me at the piano? or if you will let me tell you all I think and feel about the part. When will you come?"

"Whenever it suits you.... When you have been to see your father."

"I will go to him directly after rehearsal. I must go to see him. It is only cowardice that restrains me."

A few moments after the pilgrims were heard singing, and Evelyn would have to go on the stage.

"Now I shan't be able to act at all, I am not in the mood. I am thinking about father, and not about Elizabeth."

The strenuous chant of the pilgrims grew louder, the procession approached, and, as it passed across the stage, Elizabeth sought for Tannhäuser, but he was not among them. So her last earthly hope has perished, and she throws herself on her knees at the foot of the wayside cross. And it was the anguish of her soul that called forth that high note, a G repeated three times; and it seemed to Ulick as if she threw herself upon that note, that reiterated note, as if she would reach God's ears with it and force Him to listen to her. In the religious, almost Gregorian, strain her voice was as pure as a little child, but when she spoke of her renunciation, and the music grew more chromatic, her voice filled with colour — her sex appeared in it; and when the music returned to the peace of the religious strain, her voice grew blanched and faded like a nun's voice. Henceforth her life will be lived beyond this world, and, as she walked up the stage, the flutes and clarionets seemed to lead her straight to God; they seemed to depict a narrow, shining path, shining and ascending till it disappeared amid the light of the stars.

XIX

“'This way, miss, please.”

"No, I will wait in the music-room. I am Miss Innes, Mr. Innes is my father.”

How she had waited in this room for her father to come back to dinner, the faintness of those hungry hours, worse still that yearning for love! She must have died if she had not gone away, and if she had to decide all over again, she must act as she had acted. How well she remembered when she felt that her life in Dulwich had become impossible. She was coming from the village, where she had been paying some bills, and looking up she had suddenly seen the angle of the house and the bare trees, and she could still hear the voice which had spoken out of her very soul, "Shall I never get out of this place, shall I go on doing these daily tasks for ever?”

"I forgot to ask you, miss" — Evelyn turned from the window, startled — it was the servant who had come back — "if you was going to stop for dinner, for there’s very little in the house — only a bit cold beef; I should be ashamed to put it on the table, miss; I’m sure you wouldn’t eat it. Master don’t think what he eats, and he is always thinking of the music. I hope you are not like that, miss?”

"So he doesn’t eat much; how is my father looking?”

“Middling, miss. He varies about a good bit; he’s gone rather thin lately.”

“Is he lonely, do you think... in the evenings?”

“No, miss; I don’t hear him say nothing about being lonely. For the last couple of years he never did more than come home to sleep and to his meals, and he’d spend the evenings copying out the music.”

“And off again early in the morning?”

"That’s it, miss, with his music tied up in a brown paper parcel. Sometimes Mr. Dean comes and helps him to write the music. He eats better when Mr. Dean’s here. They ’as nice little dinners together. Now he’s taken up with that ’ere instrument, the harpychord, they’s making. He’s comin’ home to-night to finish it; he says he can’t get it finished nohow — that they’s always something more to do to it.”

"I wonder if we could get a nice dinner for him this evening?"

“Well, miss, you see there’s no shops to speak of about here. You know that as well as I do.”

"I wonder what your cooking is like?"

"I don’t know, miss; p’r’aps it wouldn’t suit you, but I’ve been always praised for my cooking."

"I could send for some things."

“Then there’s to-morrow to be thought about, if you’re stopping here. I tell you we don’t keep much in the ’ouse.”

"Is my father coming home to dinner?"

"I can’t say for certain, miss, only that he said ’e’d be ’ome early to finish the harpychord. ’E might have ’is dinner out and come ’ome directly after, but I shouldn’t think that was likely."

Agnes asked her if she was going to stop the night.

“That I can’t tell, Agnes.... I don’t think so.... You won’t tell my father I’m here when you let him in?... I want it to be a surprise.”

"I won’t say nothing, miss, I’ll leave him to find it out."

She let her fingers run over the keys; she played anything that came into her head, too nervous to seek out a volume of Bach. At last there came a knock, and her heart told her it was his. In another moment he would be in the room. He entered, and seeing her he stopped, and without a word went to a table and began untying a parcel of music.

“Father, I have come to see you.... Are you not going to speak to me?”

“If you had wanted to see me, you would have come a month ago.”

"I was not in London a month ago."

"Well, three weeks ago, I suppose you were busy with your rehearsals — you had no time; but why discuss these matters? You might have spared yourself the trouble of coming, for we have nothing to say to each other, Evelyn. I am very busy now."

"You must hear my explanation."

"There is none — there is none, and I am really very busy, Evelyn. I wish you would not trouble me with this explanation now."

"My desertion you have forgiven me; you can't go back on that, father. I have come here to tell you why I didn't go to Rome."

"There is no necessity; why should you tell me? You had a rehearsal, or you wanted to see a manager, or Owen Asher wanted you to go somewhere with him; it matters not. Really these things don't concern me in the least."

"You are quite wrong; none of the reasons you give would have prevented me from going to you; had it been possible, I should have gone. I should have written to tell you why, but Owen said the explanation was too difficult a one to make on paper, and that I had better wait till I came to London, and now you say you will not hear it."

"Why should you speak to me about Owen Asher? Really, Evelyn!"

"Father, let us be as sincere as we can to each other. I must tell you of Owen, If he did not marry me, it is because I did not wish to marry him."

"I know that you hold many strange opinions. But you need not come here to tell me that you lived with Owen Asher because you liked to do so, because it suited your purpose."

"I do feel it to be wrong. I feel all my life to be wrong, but that is not what I have come to talk about. I have come to tell you why I did not go to Rome. I want to tell you what held me back from marriage; it is all part and parcel of the same thing."

"You mean that you did not marry Owen Asher for the same reason that prevented your going to Rome?"

She nodded.

"In both cases I acted against my interests and desires. I longed to see you, and to hear you tell me that you had forgiven me, but when the day came I could not go. Owen did his best to persuade me, but I could not — I could not bring myself to the decisive act of going."

"And you could not bring yourself to the decisive act of marrying Owen Asher — these are fine excuses!"

"You do not believe in a hidden reason?"

"It did not suit your convenience to undertake the journey; you dreaded the fatigue of it."

"You understand then, father; no reason except a material one, a merely physical reason."

"Your conduct from the beginning has been characterised by the most sordid selfishness. I cannot forgive you; there is no use saying I can — I can't. It would have been better if you had not come here."

"I can but tell you that no selfish reason prevented me from going. I had nothing to do at the time. And nothing would have given me so much pleasure as seeing you, father — nothing — not all the applause in Europe."

"You are very fortunate, Evelyn; some spiritual force always helps you towards your desires, and holds you back from your obvious duty."

"Father, dear, no good will come of such remarks. We have to arrive at an understanding. This moment is the most serious moment in my life, and if you will not forgive me, you must at least know why you refuse to do so. It would be a terrible thing if I went away leaving things unexplained. Something held me back, some great fear, some great lassitude; I could not get up to go when the time came. Is it impossible for you to understand that — that there are moments when we cannot act, and that the reasons are hidden from us? My conduct in going away from you, in leaving you alone for six years, is bad enough."

"You could not help that either?"

"No, I could not help it. Owen said that if I had not learnt to sing you would have reproached yourself — wrongly, he said, for you had your work to do in the world, and you have done it nobly. I have heard about your choir."

"But you have not been to hear it."

"Nor have you been to the opera to hear me. I sent you a box. Forgive me, father — I am your only daughter, and though she is full of faults she has never ceased to love you."

He sat at the table fumbling with the string of the parcel he had brought in, and she stood looking at him, unable to speak. She seemed to have said all there was to say, and the thought passed in her mind that she must go; but, guided by some instinct, she went to the harpsichord

and she played one of the little Elizabethan songs, “John, come kiss me now." Then an old French song tempted her voice by its very appropriateness to the situation — "Que vous me coûtez cher, mon coeur, pour vos plaisirs." The instrument she was playing on was filled with levers and stops, the use of which was not quite apparent to her; and she could see by the expression on his face that he was annoyed by her want of knowledge of the technicalities of the instrument. So she purposely exaggerated her ignorance until he said, "You are not making use of the levers.”

“Oh, am I not? What is this instrument — a virginal or a harpsichord?”

"It is a harpsichord, but it has much more power than the old harpsichord. I made it this winter. The volume of sound from the old harpsichord is not sufficient in a large theatre; that is why the recitations in Mozart’s operas have to be played on the fiddles.”

He stopped speaking, and she pressed him in vain to explain the instrument. Unable to obtain an answer she went on playing.

"The levers," he said at last, "are right and left of your knees. Press them." She pretended not to understand, and he seated himself at the instrument. “You see the volume of sound I obtain, and all the while I do not alter the quality of tone.”

"Yes, yes, and the sonority of the instrument is double that of the old harpsichord. It would be heard all over Covent Garden." She could see that the remark pleased him. "I’ll sing Zerlina, if you’ll play it.”

"You couldn’t sing Zerlina; it isn’t in your voice.”

“You don’t know what my voice is like.”

"Evelyn, I wonder how you can expect me to forgive you; I wonder how I can speak to you. Have you forgotten how you went away, leaving me to bear the shame, the disgrace?”

“Father, you must forgive me, we are all in all to each other; nothing can change that. Ever since mother’s death — you remember when the nurse told us all was over; ever since I’ve felt that we were in some strange way dependent on each other. Our love for each other is the one unalterable thing. You taught me music. The first songs I sang were at your concerts. But I see you’re still thinking that I left you. Of course, it was very wrong, but has that changed anything?”

The celebrated phrase, so plaintive, so full of intercession, broke from her lips, “Was the rebel act so full of shame that my rebellion is so shamefully scourged? Was my offence so deep in disgrace that thou dost plan so deep a disgrace for me? Was this my crime so dark with dishonour? Oh, tell me, father; look in mine eyes. Whenever I sang that phrase, I sang it at your feet.... You don’t know it; never mind. I can’t explain it now. I want you to forgive me. You can’t push me out of doors, so what is the use of arguing about my faults? I am like that… you must take me as I am, and perhaps you would not have cared for me half as much if I had been different.”

His eyes told her what was happening in his heart, and with that beautiful movement of rapture so natural to her, she threw herself into his arms.

"I knew, father dear, that you’d forgive me in the end. It was impossible to think of two like us living and dying in alienation. I should have killed myself, and you, dear, you would have died of grief. But I dreaded this first meeting. I had thought of it too much, and, as I told you, I have acted it often.”

"Have I been so severe with you, Evelyn, that you should dread me?”

"My first thought was for you on landing in England. There was a train waiting at Victoria, but we’d had a bad crossing, and I felt so ill that I couldn’t go. Next day I was nervous. I had not the courage, and he proposed that I should wait till I had sung Margaret. So much depended on the success of my first appearance. He was afraid that if I had had a scene with you I might break down.”

Agnes announced that the coachman had returned.

"Father, I’ve lots of things to see to. I’m going to stop to dinner, if you’ll let me.”

"I’m afraid, Evelyn — Agnes "—

"You need not trouble about the dinner — Agnes and I will see to that. We have made all necessary arrangements.”

"Is that your carriage?...You’ve got a fine pair of horses. But if you’re stopping to dinner you’d better stop the night. I’m giving the ‘ Missa Brevis’ to-morrow. I’m giving it in honour of Monsignore Mostyn. It was he who helped me to overcome Father Gordon.”

“You shall tell me all about Monsignore after dinner. Winter storms wane in the winsome May.”

He stopped before the harpsichord, thinking he saw her still there; and his thoughts sailed on, vagrant as clouds in a spring breeze. Then, taken with a sudden craving to see her, he went to the door and called to her.

"Evelyn."

"Yes, father."

"You are stopping to-night?"

"Yes, but I can't stop to speak with you now — I'm busy with Agnes."

Agnes thought she knew how to prepare the sole with bread-crumbs, but both were equally uncertain how the melted butter was to be made. There was no cookery-book in the house, and it seemed as if the fish would have to be eaten with plain butter until it occurred to Agnes that she might borrow a cookery-book next door. And when Agnes came back with the book, Evelyn read out the directions.

Every seven or eight minutes the chicken was taken out to be basted. The bluey-whitey look of the flesh which Evelyn had disliked had disappeared; the chicken was acquiring a rich brown colour which she much admired; and if it had not been for Agnes, who told her the dinner would be delayed till eight o'clock, she would have had the chicken out every five minutes, so much did she enjoy pouring the rich bubbling juice over the plump breast.

"Father! Father, dinner is ready! I've got a sole and a chicken. The sole is a beauty; Agnes says she never saw a fresher one."

"But I don't know how you're to get the bottle open, miss; we've no champagne nippers."

"I'll see to that." Evelyn kept her eyes on her father's plate, and begged to be allowed to help him again, and she delighted in filling up his glass with wine; and though she longed to ask him if he had been to hear her sing, she did not allude to herself, but induced him to talk of his victories over Father Gordon.

"But it would all have come to nothing had it not been for Monsignore Mostyn."

She fetched him his pipe and tobacco.

"Who is Monsignore Mostyn?" she asked, dreading a long tale in which she could feel no interest at all.

“I will tell you about Monsignore Mostyn another time. Well," he said, working his tobacco down with his little finger-nail, “your Margaret is very good; better than I expected.”

"So you went after all.... I sent you a box and a stall, but you were in neither; in what part of the theatre were you?”

"In the upper boxes; I did not want to dress. Well, for a dramatic soprano you sing light music very fluently. I should not have thought, from the quality of your voice, that you would be able to sing the other. But you try to read into the part more than is in the part. The part is written in a convention, and it ought to be played in that convention.”

"Ah, that is just what I think myself; I am sure that mother was a great deal better.”

“You have not got your mother’s voice, but you bring a mystery with you when you come on the stage, and your voice is beautifully pure, and it is somehow like yourself. There is mystery — it is not merely singing. I daresay you are not conscious of its quality?”

"I could not play the part according to the convention. I have certain qualities, and they have to be utilised; if I were to leave them out I should be nothing. But Ulick Dean liked my Margaret. Have you seen his article?”

“Yes, I have seen his article. He made the most of you.”

“You and he have been friends all the time I was away. He told me how you met. I see it all — it was father and son instead of father and daughter, and a very good exchange too.”

"If you had only waited, you might have married him. He came here only a few months after you left.”

The conversation paused, and then they spoke of his music. Ulick’s opera could not be played on the harpsichord, and they went to the piano.

"I wanted him," Mr. Innes said, “to write an opera on the lines of Caccini or Monteverde, and I had invented just such a system of orchestration as they would have used if they had written an opera. In some respects it is not unlike Wagner; the vocal music is mostly recitative, but now and then there is nearly an air. My idea was that each character should be allotted a different set of instruments as accompaniment; in this way you would get astonishing colour contrasts. For instance, the priest would be accompanied by a chest of six viols, i.e. two trebles, two tenors, two basses. Cond would be accompanied by six cromores, like the viols, of various sizes. The

fairy woman would have a set of six flutes or recorders, the smallest of which is eight inches long, the biggest quite six feet. Connla is accompanied by a group of oboes and bassoons; another character would be allotted three lutes, with an arch lute, another a pair of virginals, another a regal, another a set of sackbuts and trumpets. You see, all the instruments would be used in the overture and in the dances, of which there would be plenty — pavanes, galliards, allemaines. And, what is still more important, even in the instrumental pieces the instruments would not be mixed as in the modern orchestra, but used in groups, always distinct, like patches of colour in impressionist pictures."

"Father, dear, it is all very interesting as a theory, but I wonder how it would look when it was written down — and when it was played."

"I assure you it is quite feasible. But Ulick is not interested in art, he never was. He is the slave of what he has got to say at the moment."

"Is not that the way it should be?"

"Yes, of course, so long as one is inspired it is all very well; but when he is not inspired he is helpless — he is like a man who has suddenly been deprived of the power of swimming, and has no corks to keep him up — art is a cork which assists you when the inspiration is not there. His writing is a mixture of commonplaces and the most beautiful inspirations."

According to Mr. Innes, the present musical idiom is corrupted by intervals which have been so hackneyed and made so vulgar by journalism that they cannot be used, and the ideal composer is he who avoids every musical phrase that has been used before; and he told Evelyn that Ulick thought that fear of vulgarity was the greatest vulgarity of all. Mr. Inkles continued a long time on the subject. He was a musical dandy, and to him technical writing was everything.

Evelyn wearied of the argument. She had to tell him of Madame Savelli and her method of teaching singing. She had to tell him of her first appearance, of her travels in Germany and in Italy, and she wanted to sing for him.

XX

As they went to church he told her about Monsignore Mostyn. Evelyn remembered that the very day she went away, he had had an appointment with the prelate, and while trying to recall the words he had used at the time — how Monsignore believed that a revival of Palestrina would advance the Catholic cause in England — she heard her father say that no one except Monsignore could have succeeded in so difficult an enterprise as the reformation of church music in England.

The organ is a Protestant instrument, and in organ music the London churches do very well; the Protestant congregations are, musically, more enlightened; the flattest degradation is found among the English Catholics, and he instanced the Oratory as an extraordinary disgrace to a civilised country, relating how he had heard the great Mass of Pope Marcellus given there by an operatic choir of twenty singers. In the West End are apathy and fashionable vulgarity, and it was at St. Joseph's, Southwark, that the Church had had restored to her all her own beautiful music. Monsignore had begun by coming forward with a subscription of one thousand pounds a year, and by such *largesse* he had confounded the intractable Jesuits and vanquished Father Gordon. The poor man, who had predicted ruin, now viewed the magnificent congregation with a sullen face. "He has a nice voice, too, that's the strange part of it; I could have taught him, but he is too proud to admit he was wrong." However, *bon gré mal gré*, Father Gordon had had to submit to Monsignore. When Monsignore makes up his mind, things have to be done. If a thousand pounds had not been enough, he would have given two thousand pounds; Monsignore was rich, but he was also tactful, and did not rely entirely on his money. He had come to St. Joseph's with the Pope's written request in his hand, that St. Joseph's should attempt a revival of the truly Catholic music, if sufficient money could be obtained for the choir. So there was no gainsaying, the Jesuits had had to submit, for, if they had again objected to the expense, Monsignore would come forward with a subscription of two thousand a year. He could not have afforded to pay so much for more than a limited number of years, "but he and I felt that it was only necessary to start the thing for it to succeed."

Mr. Innes told his daughter of Monsignore's social influence; Monsignore had the command of any amount of money. There is always the money; the difficulty is to obtain the will that can direct the money. Monsignore was the will. He was all-powerful in Rome. He spent his winters and springs in Rome, and no one thought of going to Rome without calling on him. It was through him that the Pope kept in touch with the English Catholics. He had a confessional at St. Joseph's, and he was *au mieux* with the Jesuits. It was the influence of Monsignore that had given Palestrina his present vogue. But a revival of Palestrina was in the air; through him the inevitable reaction against Wagner was making itself felt. Monsignore had made all the rich Catholics understand that it was their duty to support the unique experiment which some poor

Jesuits in Southwark were making, and the fact that he had come forward with a subscription of one thousand a year enabled him to ask his friends for their money. He had told Mr. Innes that a dinner party which did not produce a subscriber he looked upon as a dinner wasted. Monsignore knew how to carry a thing through; his influence was extraordinary; he could get people to do what he wanted.

Evelyn and her father had so much to say that it did not seem as if they ever would find time to say it in. There was the story to tell of the construction of the vast choir and the difficulties he had experienced in teaching his singers to read at sight; for, as she knew, contrapuntal music cannot be sung except by singers who can sing unaccompanied. The trebles and the altos were of course the great difficulty; the boys often burst into tears; they said they preferred to die rather than endure his discipline. He was often sorry for them, for he knew that the perfect singing of this contrapuntal music was almost impossible except by *castrati*. But he was able to communicate his enthusiasm; he told them stories of how the ancient choirs used to sing Palestrina's masses without a rehearsal, how the ancient choirs used to compete one against the other, singing music they had never seen against men in the opposite organ-loft whom they did not even know. He was full of such stories; they served to fire the boys' enthusiasm, and to change dislike into an aspiration. He had hypnotised them into a love of Palestrina, and when they went home their parents had told him that the boys were always talking about the ancient music, and that they sat up at night reading motets. He had told them that they would abandon all foolish pastimes for Palestrina, and they had in a measure; instead of batting and bowling, their ambition became sightsinging. Once a spirit of emulation is inspired, great things are accomplished. There had been some beautiful singing at St. Joseph's. Three months ago he believed that his choir would have compared with some of the sixteenth-century choirs. Mr. Innes told an instructive story of how he had lost a most extraordinary treble, the best he had ever had. No, he had not lost his voice; a casual word had done the mischief. The boy had happened to tell his mother that Mr. Innes had said that he would give up cricket for Palestrina, and she, being a fool, had laughed at him. Her laughter had ruined the boy; he had refused to sing any more; he had become a dissipated young rascal, up to every mischief. Unfortunately, before he left he had influenced other boys; many had to be sent away as useless; and it was only now that his choir was beginning to recover from this egregious calamity. But though the difficulty of the trebles and the altos was always the difficulty of his choir, it no longer seemed insuperable. With the large amount of money at his disposal, he could afford to pay almost any amount of money for a good treble or alto, so every boy in London who showed signs of a voice was brought to him. But in three or four years a boy's voice breaks, and the task of finding another to take his place has to be undertaken. Very often this is impossible; there are times when there are no voices. The present time was such an one, and he fumed at the foolish woman whose casual word had broken up his choir three months ago, bemoaning that such a calamity should have happened just before Monsignore's return from Borne. It was for that reason he was giving the "Missa Brevis," a small work easily done. He declared he would give

fifty pounds to recall his choir of three months ago, just for Evelyn and Monsignore to hear it. Evelyn easily believed that he would, and as they parted inside the church she said —

"I wish I could take the place of the naughty boy."

A look of hope came into his eyes, but it died away in an instant, and she watched his despondent back as he went towards the Choir-loft.

The influence of Monsignore had worked great changes at St. Joseph's — the very atmosphere of the church was different, the sensation was one of culture and refinement, instead of that of acrid poverty. From the altar rail to the middle of the aisle the church was crowded — in the free as well as in the paying parts. From the altar rails to the middle of the aisle there were chairs for the ease of the subscribers, and for those who were willing to pay a fee of two shillings. In front of each chair was a comfortable kneeling place, and slender gloved hands held prayer-books bound in morocco, and under fashionable hats, filled with bright beads and shadowy feathers, veiled faces were bent in dainty prayer. Among these Evelyn picked out a number of her friends. There was Lady Ascott, who missed no musical entertainment of whatever kind, even when it took place in church, and Lady Gremaldin, who thought she was listening to Wagner when she was thinking of the tenor whom she would take away to supper in her brougham after the performance…. Evelyn caught sight of a painter or two and a man of letters who used to come to her father's concerts. Suddenly she saw Ulick standing close by her; he had not seen her, and was looking for a seat. Catching sight of her, he came and sat in the chair next to hers. Almost at the same moment the acolytes led the procession from the sacristy. They were followed by the sub-deacon, the deacon, and the priest who was to sing the Mass. When the I Mass began the choir broke forth, singing the Introit.

The practice of singing in church proceeds from the idea that, in the exaltation of prayer, the soul, having reached the last limit obtainable by mere words, demands an extended expression, and finds it in song. The earliest form of music, the plain chant or Gregorian, is sung in unison, for it was intended to be sung by the whole congregation, but as only a few in every congregation are musicians, the idea of a choir could not fail to suggest itself; and, once the idea of a choir accepted, part writing followed, and the vocal Masses of the sixteenth century were the result. Then the art of religious music had gone as far as it could, and the next step, the introduction of an accompanying instrument, was decadence.

The "Missa Brevis" is one of the most exquisite of the master's minor works. It is written for four voices, and, with the large choir at his command, Mr. Innes was able to put eight to ten voices on a part; and hearing voices darting, voices soaring, voices floating, weaving an audible embroidery, Evelyn felt the vanity of accompaniment instruments. Upon the ancient chant the new harmonies blossomed like roses on an old gnarled stem, and when on the ninth bar of the

"Kyrie" the tenors softly separated from the sustained chord of the other parts, the effect was as of magic. Evelyn lifted her eyes and saw her dear father conducting with calm skill.

She had heard the Mass in Rome, and remembered the beautiful phrase which opens the "Kyrie," and which is the essence of the first part of that movement. But the altos had not the true alto quality; they were trebles singing in the lower register of their voices. Leaning towards her, Ulick whispered, "The altos are not quite in tune." She had heard nothing wrong, but, seeing that he was convinced, she resolved to submit the matter to her father's decision. She had every confidence in the accuracy of her ear; but last night her father had said that the modern musical ear was not nearly so fine as the ancient, trained to the exact intervals of the monochord, instead of the coarse approximation of the keyboard.

She remembered that when she had heard the Mass in Rome there was a moment when she had longed for the sweet concord of a pure third. Now, when it came at the end of the first note of the basses, Ulick said, "It is as sharp as that of an ordinary piano." It had not seemed so to her, and she wondered if her ear had deteriorated, if the corrupting influence of modern chromatic music had been too strong, if she had lost her ear in the Wagner drama. The coarse intonation was more obvious in the "Christe Eleison," sung by four solo voices, than in the "Kyrie," sung by the full choir; and she did catch a slight equivocation, and the discovery tended to make her doubt Ulick's assertion that the altos were wrong in the "Kyrie," for if she heard right in one place, why did she not hear right in another? The leading treble had a hard, unsympathetic voice, which did not suit the florid passages occurring three times on the second syllable of the word Eleison. He hammered them instead of singing them tenderly, with just the sense of a caress in the voice.

But outside of such extreme criticism, in the audience of the ordinary musical ear, the beautiful "Missa Brevis" was as well given as it could be given in modern times, and Evelyn was, of course, anxious to see the great prelate to whose energetic influence the revival of this music was owing, the man who had helped to make her dear father's life a satisfaction to him. It was just slipping into disappointment when the prelate had come to save it. This was why Evelyn was so interested in him — why she was already attracted toward him. It was for this reason she was sitting in one of the front chairs, near to where Monsignore would have to pass on his way to the pulpit. He was to preach that Sunday at St. Joseph's.... He passed close to her, and she had a clear view of his thin, hard, handsome face, dark in colour and severe as a piece of mediaeval woodcarving; a head small and narrow across the temples, as if it had been squeezed. The eyes were bright brown, and fixed; the nose long and straight, with clear-cut nostrils. She noticed the thin, mobile mouth and the swift look in the keen eyes — in that look he seemed to gather an exact notion of the congregation he was about to address.

Already Evelyn trembled inwardly. The silence was quick with possibility; anything might happen — he might even publicly reprove her from the pulpit, and to strengthen her nerves against this influence she compared the present tension with that which gathered her audience together as one man when the moment approached for her to come on the stage. All were listening, as if she were going to sing; it remained to be seen if the effect of his preaching equalled that of her singing. She was curious to see.

"I say unto you, that likewise joy shall be in heaven over one sinner that repenteth, more than over ninety- and-nine just persons, which need no repentance." In introducing this text he declared it to be one of the most beautiful and hopeful in Scripture. Was it the sweet, clear voice that lured the different minds and led them, as it were, in leash? Or was it that slow, deliberate, persuasive manner? Or was it the benedictive and essentially Christian creed which he preached that disengaged the weight from every soul, allowing each to breathe an easier and sweeter breath? To one and all it seemed as if they were listening to the voice of their own souls, rather than to that of a living man whom they did not know, and who did not know them. The preacher's voice and words were as the voices they heard speaking from the bottom of their souls in moments of strange collectedness. And as if aware of the spiritual life he had awakened, the preacher leaned over the pulpit and paused, as if watching the effect of his will upon the congregation. The hush trembled into intensity when he said, "Yes, and not only in heaven, but on earth as well, there shall be joy when a sinner repents. This can be verified, not in public places where men seek wealth, fame, and pleasure — there, there shall be only scorn and sneers — but in the sanctuary of every heart; there is no one, I take it, who has not at some moment repented." Instantly Evelyn remembered Florence. Had her repentance there been a joy or a pain? She had not persevered. At that moment she heard the preacher ask if the most painful moments of our lives were the result of our having followed the doctrine of Jesus or the doctrine of the world? He instanced the gambler and the libertine, who willingly confess themselves unhappy, but who, he asked, ever heard of the good man saying he was unhappy? The tedium of life the good man never knows. Men have been known to regret the money they spent on themselves, but who has ever regretted the money he has spent in charity? But even success cannot save the gambler and libertine from the tedium of existence, and when the preacher said, "These men dare not be alone," Evelyn thought of Owen, and of her constant efforts to keep him amused, distracted; and when the preacher said it was impossible for the sinner to abstract himself, to enter into his consciousness without hearing it reprove him, Evelyn thought of herself. The preacher made no distinctions; all men, he said, when they are sincere with themselves, are aware of the difference between good and evil living. When they listen, the voice is always audible; even those who purposely close their ears often hear it. For this voice cannot be wholly silenced; it can be stifled for a while, but it can be no more abolished than the sound of the sea from the shell. "As a shell, man is murmurous with morality."

Of the rest of the sermon Evelyn heard very little.... It was the phrase that if we look into our lives we shall find that our most painful moments are due to our having followed the doctrine of the world instead of the doctrine of Christ that touched Evelyn. It seemed to explain things in herself which she had never understood. It told her why she was not happy.... Happy she had never been, and she had never understood why. Because she had been leading a life that was opposed to what she deemed to be essentially right. How very simple; and yet she had never quite apprehended it before — she had striven to close her ears, but she had never succeeded. Why? Because that whisper can be no more abolished than the murmur of the sea from the shell. How true! That murmur had never died out of her ears; she had been able to stifle it for a while — she had never been able to abolish it — and what convincing proof this was of the existence of God!

Disprove it you couldn't, for it was part of one's senses — the very evidence on which the materialists rely to prove that beyond this world there is nothing. Yet what a flagrant contradiction her conduct was to the murmur of spiritual existence! And that was why she was not happy. That was why she would never be happy till she reformed.... But the preacher spoke as if it were easy for all who wished it to change their lives. How was she to change her life? Her life was settled and determined for her ever since the day she went away with Owen. If she sent Owen away again the same thing would happen; she would take him back. She could not remain on the stage without a lover; she would take another before a month was out. It was no use for her to deceive herself! That is what she would do. To sing Isolde and live a chaste life, she did not believe it to be possible — and she sat helpless, hearing vaguely the Credo, her attention so distracted that she was only half aware of its beauty. She noticed that the "Et incarnatus est" was inadequately rendered, but that she expected. It would require the strange, immortal voices she had heard in Rome. But the vigour with which the basses led the "Et resurrexit" was such that the other parts could not choose but follow. She felt thankful to them; they dissipated her painful personal reverie. Yes, the basses were the best part of the choir; among them she recognised two of her father's oldest pupils; she had known them as boys singing alto — beautiful voices they had been, and were not less beautiful now. But if she desired to reform her life, how was she to begin? She knew what the priest would tell her. He would say, Send away your lover; but to send him away in the plenitude of her success would be odious. He was unhappy; he was ill; he needed her sorely. His mother's health was a great anxiety to him, and if, on the top of all, she were to announce that she intended leaving him, he would break down altogether. She owed everything to him. No, not even for the sake of her immortal soul would she do anything that would give him pain. But he had been anxious to marry her for some time. Would she make him a good wife? She was fond of him; she would do anything for him. She had travelled hundreds of miles to see him when he was ill, and the other night she could not sleep because she feared he was unhappy about his mother's health. She would marry him if he asked her. On that point she was certain. Refuse Owen? Not for anything

that could be offered her; nothing would change her from that. Nothing! Her resolve was taken. No, it was not taken; it was there in her heart.

And at the moment when the Elevation bell rang she decided not only to accept Owen if he asked her, but to use all her influence to induce him to ask her. This seemed to her equivalent to a resolution to reform her life, and, happier in mind, she bowed her head, and as a very unworthy Catholic, but still a Catholic, and feeling no longer as an alien and an outcast, she assisted at the mystery of the Mass. She even ventured to offer up a vague prayer, and when the dread interval was over, she remembered that her father had spoken to her of the second "Agnus Dei" as an especially beautiful number. It was for five voices; exquisitely prayerful it seemed to her. With devout insistence the theme is reiterated by the two soprani, then the voices are woven together, and the simile that rose up in her mind was the pious image of fingers interlaced in prayer.

The first thrill, the first impression of the music over, she applied herself to the dissection of it, so that she might be able to discuss it with Ulick and her father afterwards. This beautiful melody, apparently so free, was so exquisitely contrived that it contained within itself descant and harmony. She knew it well; it is a strict canon in unison, and she had heard it sung by two grey-haired men in the Papal choir in Rome, soprano voices of a rarer and more radiant timbre than any woman's sexful voice, and subtle, and, in some complex way, hardly of the earth at all — voices in which no accent of sex transpired, abstract voices aloof from any stress of passion, undistressed by any longing, even for God. They were not human voices, and, hearing them, Evelyn had imagined angels bearing tall lilies in their hands, standing on wan heights of celestial landscape, singing their clear silver music.

These men had sung this "Agnus Dei" as perhaps it never would be sung again, but she knew the boy treble to be incapable of singing this canon properly, so she could hardly resist the impulse to run up to the choir-loft and tell her father breathlessly that she would take his place. She smiled at the consternation such an act would occasion. Even if she could get to the choir-loft without being noticed, she could not sing this music; her voice was full of sex, and this music required the strange sexless timbre of the voices she had heard in Rome. But the boy sang better than she anticipated; his voice was wanting in strength and firmness; she listened, anxious to help him, perplexed that she could not.

The last Gospel was then read, and she followed Ulick out of church.

XXI

On getting outside the church they were surprised to find it had been raining; the shower had freshened the air, and there were strange hills and valleys and fabulous prospects in the great white cloud which hung at the end of the suburban street.

"I did not expect to see you here," she said, opening her parasol. “You came to hear the ‘Missa Brevis’; it is very beautiful, isn’t it?”

“Yes; and seeing you here I need not ask any questions — you have made it all right with your father. I was anxious to know the result of your interview, and then I knew he would like me to hear his Mass. Tell me about your interview. What was he like? Was he very cold with you at the first?”

Evelyn laughed. "He was just like himself." She laughed again, and Ulick wondered at her levity. But when she told him how she had tricked her father into forgiving her by pretending not to know how to use the levers in the new harpsichord he laughed too, and they walked on together, feeling very happy.

"I owe it all to you," she said. "If I had not met you perhaps I should never have had the courage to go to him.”

"Oh yes, you would; but you might have delayed, and then it would have been harder. But even if I had known he was not going to forgive you, I should still have advised you to go to him all the same.”

“I don’t know what would have happened to me.”

"It does not matter. Certain things have to be done. We must live up to a certain level.”

“That is what I am beginning to feel," she said, “but it is very difficult.”

Her answer caused a slight embarrassment, and, to avoid speaking of Owen Asher, he said, "It is a long way to Dulwich, do you think you can walk so far?”

"Oh yes, I can walk any distance, and it would be a pity to miss this beautiful morning.”

She told him her father was dining with the Jesuits at two o'clock, and that he must go back and have dinner with her, or lunch, and as they walked on together the conversation turned on Monsignore.

Ulick admitted that he believed Monsignore to be genuinely interested in the old music, and that without his help the reformation would have come to naught. She was eager to hear Ulick praise Monsignore, and was disappointed to find he did not hold him in any great esteem. Mostyn, he maintained, was more interested in dogma than in religion; he considered his Church from the point of view of a trades union. But he admitted there were some fine sentences in the sermon. "When we ask ourselves to what our unhappiness is attributable, we find that it is attributable to having followed the way of the world instead of the way of Christ." That was fine, but he did not believe it to be Monsignore's own, since nearly all the rest of the sermon was sententious commonplace about the soul and about obedience to the Church.

Ulick said he hated churches, and she was at first a little disappointed, but she soon perceived that Ulick's reasons for disliking the churches were different from Owen's, and much more interesting.

"The earth breath," he said, "is God's own incense; why bum a little drug in the place of it, and why bow our heads before a little wafer when we can bow them before those beautiful white clouds?"

"But you do," she said, "believe in spiritual things; you don't think that this life is the end?"

"I don't believe it to be the end or even the beginning. If it were the beginning, as the Christian Church teaches, I don't see why it should not be the end."

"But why," she asked, "do you believe there is a spiritual life? — you have never seen it."

"I know it in my heart, and have seen it."

"Seen it?"

"Yes, seen it many times — constantly."

She did not question his sincerity — as well might she question the sincerity of the morning. Moreover, why should not these beliefs be believed in as well as the beliefs which they had just come from witnessing?

After dinner they wandered out into the lanes, and in the bright afternoon they continued to talk of spiritual things, and, seeing that he was influencing her, he encouraged her to confide in him.

“You spoke," she said, “of Monsignore as a mere popular leader, and of a man who would be efficient in organising a strike; you said he regarded his Church as an organisation rather than as a spiritual enterprise. Do you not think that a definite creed is necessary for many, and that if we were to do away with priestcraft we should take religion out of many a heart? There must be rite and dogma, so that great truths may penetrate into simple hearts.”

"Everyone must worship according to his need. I accept the highest form of worship that my nature admits. Others do the same. I should lose my soul in a monastery.”

The conversation flagged, and they walked on looking into the sunset, and the silence became agitated, and she told him of the great distress of mind she had suffered in Florence, and how she had thought for a moment that she would abandon the stage. She had felt that to sing a phrase better than she had ever sung it before, would prove useless if —

"If, if what?" he asked.

"That I did not find out, and I had to continue singing. I could find nothing better to do than to sing as well as I could. Do you think," she said, after having resisted the temptation to speak for a few moments, "that it is wrong for a woman to live with a man she is not married to?”

“I have no theories on the subject. I accept the instincts as good, as true, as Divine, and I cannot accept man’s conventions regarding them. If a woman who legalises her union with a man leads a pure life it is well, and if a woman who does not choose to legalise her union leads a pure life it is well also. It is the priests who cannot live without sacraments, not we.”

“But do you think a woman is obliged to live always with the same man? If she should tire of him, if she should see another man she liked better, would she not be justified in leaving him?”

"I lay down no rules," he said; "each one must do right as best she can. How should I know what is best for another’s heart, and how should I know what is her destiny?”

“If a woman thinks that she has outgrown the idea which attracted her towards one man; if she thinks he is dragging her down, chaining her in a lower level than she feels she can live in, would it not be right for her to leave him?”

"I cannot answer these questions; only your own heart can answer them. You would not be satisfied with any answer that I could give."

They were on the point of speaking of Owen Asher. His name had risen to her lips, and to avoid speaking of him she told him that she and her father had talked about "Grania" last night; and then, with a merry laugh, she told him of the system of orchestration her father had wished him to adopt.

A perplexed expression passed over Ulick's face, and he said —

"You see, your father understands very little in music except the phrase — a beautiful interval is everything to him, and if he were to write music I fancy his music would read like a string of beautiful quotations. He can never understand that when one has anything to say one can only say it in a particular way; if it is said in any other way, it is merely an invention." Then he sang over several of his own phrases which her father had proposed to alter, and he said —

"I cannot go. into the question whether the alterations are better or worse; I know what I had to say, and I said it. But what I had to say seemed to matter nothing to him. His idea seems to be that a writer should say something that has never been said before. I admit that it is necessary not to repeat the thoughts of others, but your originality must exist in the total effect and not in an individual phrase."

XXII

The news that she was staying at Dowlands, and the presumption that she would sing at the concert, had brought many a priest from St. Josephs, and all the painters, men of letters, and designers of stained glass, and all the old pupils, the viol players, and the madrigal singers, so that, when Evelyn came downstairs, she was surrounded by her old friends.

"Do come, girls; can you come on Thursday night? I'll send you seats. It would be such a pleasure to me to sing to you, but not to-night; I want to-night to be like old times. I am going to play the viola da gamba."

Ulick laughed outright; the others looked at Evelyn amazed and a little perplexed, and the consumptive man who wore brown clothes and who had asked her to marry him came forward to congratulate her. But, while talking to him, her eyes were attracted by the tall, spare ecclesiastic who stood talking to her father. She thought vaguely of Ulick's depreciation. In spite of herself she felt herself gravitating towards him. Several times she nearly broke off the conversation with the consumptive man; her feet seemed to acquire a will of their own. But when her eyes and thought returned to the consumptive man, her heart filled with plaintive terror, for she could not help thinking of the little space he had to live, and how soon the earth would be over him. Site met in his eyes a clear, plaintive look, in which she seemed to catch sight of his soul. She seemed to be aware of it, almost in contact with it, and through the eyes she divined the thought passing there, and it was painful to her to think that it was of her health and success he was thinking. She could see how cruelly she reminded him of his folly in asking her to marry him, and she was quite sure that he was thinking now how very lucky for her it was that she had refused him. Pictures were formulating, she could see, in his poor mind of how different her life would have been in the home he had to offer her, and all this seemed to her so infinitely pathetic that she forgot Ulick, Mon- signore, and everything else. Her father called her.

"Evelyn," he said, "let me introduce you to Monsignore."

The sight of a priest always shocked her; that appearance of frequentation of the other world, at least of the hither side of this, impressed her, and she trembled before him as she had trembled six years ago when she met Owen in the same room. And when the concert was over, when she lay in bed, she asked herself how it was that a little ordinary conversation about Church singing — Palestrina, plain chant, the Papal choir, and the rest of it — should have impressed her so vividly, should have excited her so much that she could not get to sleep.

She remembered the discontent when it began to be perceived that she did not intend to sing, and how Julia had said, when it came to her turn to sing, that she did not dare. Julia had fixed her eyes on her, and then everyone seemed to be looking at her. The consumptive man was emboldened to demand "Elsa's Dream," but she had refused to sing for him. She was determined that nothing would induce her to sing that night, but suddenly Monsignore had said —

"I hope you will not refuse to sing, Miss Innes. Remember that I cannot go to the opera to hear you."

"If you wish to hear me, Monsignore, I shall be pleased indeed."

It was impossible for her to refuse Monsignore; it was out of the question that she should refuse to sing for him. If he had wished it, she would have had to sing the whole evening. All that was quite true, but there seemed to be another reason which she could not define to herself. It had given her infinite pleasure to sing to Monsignore, a pleasure she had never experienced before, not at least for a very long while, and wondering what was about to happen, she fell asleep.

Next day she bade her father goodbye on the steps of St. Josephs. But she would see him again in a few hours, for he was coming to hear her sing Elizabeth.

On her singing nights she dined at half-past five, and the interval after dinner she spent looking over her part, humming bits of it to herself. She sat with the music on her knees, looking at it only occasionally, for she was thinking how it would appeal to her father, and how her mother would have sung it. But she had to abandon these vain speculations. She must play the part as she felt it; to alter her conception would be to court favour; to please herself was the only chance of pleasing her father. If he did not like her reading of the part, if her singing did not please him, it would be very unfortunate, but it could not be helped; and when the carriage came to the theatre she was not sure she would not be glad to receive a telegram saying he was prevented from coming.

She was very nervous while dressing, and she stood in the wings watching the stage box where he was sitting with Ulick. She knew that her father and her friend would appreciate her merits and detect her shortcomings better than all the others.

The moment the curtain went up she forgot herself and became the mediaeval German princess, and her father was the inspiration of her acting that night; and one stage box was the whole theatre for her. Her eyes did not wander there, but she knew that her ultimate judge sat there. He would not judge her by the mere superficial appearance she presented on the stage, by the superficial qualities of her voice and of her acting; he would see to the origin of the idea,

whence it had sprung, and how it had developed. He did not know this particular opera, but he knew all music, and would judge it and her, not according to the capricious taste of the music, but its relation and her relation to the immutable canons of art, from the plain chant to Palestrina, from Palestrina to Bach and Beethoven. Her singing of every phrase would be passed, as it were, through the long traditions of the centuries; it would not be accepted as an isolated fact. It would be judged good, indifferent, or bad by a learned technical comparison. That she was his daughter would weigh not a hair's weight in the scale. The knowledge of this terrible justice raised her out of herself and detached her from the superficial and the vulgar. She sang and acted in a dream, hypnotised by her audience.

The curtain was raised several times, but that night the only applause or censure she was minded to hear she would hear in her dressing-room. So she sent Merat away, telling her she was to wait in the passage, saying that she expected her father; and she waited, breathless, on the threshold for the sound of his footsteps. Suddenly she saw him, and she took him into her room. She could see that Ulick was satisfied, more than satisfied, but she wanted to hear what her father thought, and she stood waiting in silence, and the little casual phrase, "Well, Evelyn, you are really very good," thrilled her to the heart, and it meant more to her than all the applause she had yet received. Ulick said nothing, leaving the conversation to her father. She was glad of this, but Mr. Innes said very little, and he was a long time saying it. Yes, he was satisfied with her acting and with her singing, and he admitted the music seemed to him much more beautiful than it had seemed to him in the score.

"That is a great deal for you to say, father; I am very happy."

"But never having seen the part played before," Ulick said, "he is unable to judge of the originality and the dignity of your reading of it. If he had seen all the abominable prima donnas in it that I have, he would praise you more."

"Father never praises very much, and though he had seen bad prima donnas he would not remember them; he is comparing me with mother."

"It is hard to say at this distance of time; but, if your mother had been brought up in the same musical traditions as you, I daresay she would have sung it very much as you have sung it."

"Now, dear, I must send you away; I have to dress for the third act."

She sang the prayer more purely than ever, and the flutes and the clarionets led her up the shining road, and when she ascended the hillside she turned from Wolfram, pointing to the skies with a sublime gesture. Ulick and her father came to see her after the third act, and she listened to them in slight embarrassment, for she had just remembered she had promised Lady

Duckle to go with her to Lady Ascott's ball. She did not intend to spend more than an hour there, but she would have to go home and dress, and this was a great pity, for she felt no inclination to go to a ball that night. She wanted to think of what her father had said to her, and of the admiration she had read in Ulick's face. This was the happiest day of her life, and she wanted to think of her happiness — her reconciliation to her father, and the praise he had bestowed upon her — that if her mother had been brought up in the same musical traditions she would probably have sung the part very much as she had sung it.

"I would give anything," she.said, "to escape from this odious ball, and indeed to escape from all these people, who do not amuse me in the least; they are not my friends."

She stopped, regretting her indiscretion, and she avoided Ulick's eyes, and as she lay back in the blue shadows of her brougham she strove to come to terms with herself; she wished to be true to herself, and she felt she was not going to marry Owen Asher. It had always been arranged that they should marry when she left the stage, but now she felt certain she would never marry him; and, her thoughts turning a little, she considered what her life would be if she were to yield to Ulick — a series of subterfuges. A pained expression gathered in her face, and she thought of how, after spending an afternoon with Ulick, she would come home to find Owen waiting for her. He would suspect her and question her; he would ask her to give him her word of honour that Ulick Dean was not her lover. And the lie would have to be repeated again and again.

The carriage stopped, and she ran upstairs, and, standing on the threshold of her drawing-room, she remembered that Owen had given her everything she possessed. He had given her this room — and what a pretty room it was! But at that moment it did not seem to matter whether she lived in two or three rooms, so long as they were clean and healthy. She tried to admire the symmetry of her eighteenth-century rooms. The wall paper, a delicate harmony in brown and pink roses, pleased the eye; the design was a lattice through which the flowers grew; and an oval mirror hung lengthwise above the white marble chimney-piece, and the Louis xv. clock was a charming composition of two figures. A Muse, in a simple attitude, leaned a little to the left in order to strike the lyre placed above the dial; on the other side a Cupid listened attentively for the sound of the hour, presumably his hour. There was a little lyrical inevitableness in the lines of this clock, and Owen could not come into the room without admiring it. On the chimney-piece there were two bowls filled with violets, and the flowers partly hid the beautiful Worcester blue and the golden pheasants. And on either side of the clock were two Chelsea groups, factitious bowers made out of dark green shell-like leaves, in which were seated a lady in a flowered silk, and a beribboned shepherd playing a flute.

They had spent long mornings seeking a real Sheraton sofa, with six or eight chairs to match. For a long time they were unfortunate, but they had happened upon two sofas, certainly of the

period, probably made by Sheraton himself. A hundred and twenty years had given a beautiful lustre to the satinwood and to the painted garlands of gold; and the chairs that went with the sofa were works of art, so happy were the proportions of their thin legs and backs, and in the middle of the backs the circle of harmonious cane was in exquisite proportion.

For a long while the question for immediate decision had become, what carpet should be there? Evelyn had happened upon an old Aubusson carpet, a little threadbare, but the dealer had assured her that it could be made as good as new, and she had telegraphed to Owen to go to see its pale roses and purple architecture. He had written to her that its harmony was as florid and yet as classical as an aria by Mozart. He was still more pleased when he saw it down, and he had spent hours thinking of what pictures would suit it. The Boucher drawing which he had bought at Christie's had seemed to him the very thing, and he had brought it home in a cab.

Evelyn wondered why her room did not give her more satisfaction. Perhaps it was because it was no more than the eye could see. It was hers today, but perhaps it might be another's to-morrow, and she thought the happiness she had discovered in discussing ideas with Ulick Dean yesterday greater than any she could obtain from her room. As Ulick had said, "My happiness is in the creation of ideas," and he was right, and she had been happy to-night because she had presented an idea upon the stage.

At that moment the door opened; it was Merat, who had come to tell her that Lady Duckle would be dressed in half an hour; would mademoiselle come upstairs, everything was ready. The ball seemed to her an intolerable servitude, but there seemed no escape from it; and she went upstairs with Merat to dress herself, conscious of her own futility and the futility of all her social life.

Sir Owen was expected, and the drawing-room glittered, in all its melancholy frivolity when he paused upon the threshold to admire it. It reminded him of the Colonnade — the picture he had pressed upon the notice of Evelyn when they had visited the Dulwich Gallery; for the room appeared to him a little melancholy that evening, and he did not derive any comfort from the "little lyrical inevitableness" which he admired in the clock, and the roses and the purple architecture of the Aubusson carpet seemed to him insipid.

He was suffering from an attack of gout, and the grace of the Boucher drawing did not cheer him. He wore a great velvet slipper on the right foot; and there passed in his eyes that look of absorption which marks the end of a long love affair. In his autumn-haunted eyes there was a dread of the chances which he knew were accumulating against him. He knew enemies were gathering in the background, and how he might guard her and keep her for himself became a daily inquisition.

Nothing had happened; but he felt he was losing her; she was gliding from him; and, striving to subordinate instinct to reason, he often refrained from kissing her. He imitated the indifference which in other times he could not dissimulate when women who had really loved him besought him with tears.

Ever since their rupture and reconciliation in Florence their relations had been so uncertain that Owen often wondered if he were her lover. “The stage has not altered her,” he thought, "time has but nourished her idiosyncrasies."

For some time he had been hoping for one of her sudden and violent returnings to her former self, but her manner, when she came into the room, was distant and indifferent. She hardly looked at him. She came into the room, her eyes on her bracelets. She was clasping them over her gloves.

"I came, Evelyn, to tell you that I could not go to the ball to-night; I could not even go to the theatre, my gout is so bad; but I thought I should like to see you for a moment before you went to Lady Ascott’s ball — I want to know about your visit to your father.”

"Yes, I have seen father; it is all right. He came to the opera tonight.”

“And what did he think of your singing?”

“He said he was quite satisfied. You know father doesn’t say much, and afterwards, when Ulick said he would think more of my singing if he had seen anyone else play the part” —

“Who is Ulick?”

"Oh, Ulick Dean, a very interesting young man — a musician. He has promised to go through the music of Isolde with me.”

"What did your father say then?”

“He said that if mother had been brought up in the German traditions she would have sung it very like me.”

"Did he say that? Did he really say that? I am so glad. I hope you said something in my favour; I don't want him to think me a brute — a villainous seducer, the man who wronged his daughter.”

“No, there was nothing of that kind.”

Her natural humour overcame her, and she made him laugh as she had made Ulick laugh at the part the harpsichord had played in their reconciliation. He would like to know Ulick. This pleased her, and she talked of mutual friends, of the performance of the opera that night, and of the people she would meet at the ball. She wore a beautiful, attractive gown — a mauve silk embroidered with silver irises, and he regretted his gout which kept him from the ball. He caught sight of her as she passed down the glittering floor, saving, with a pretty movement of the shoulders, the dress that was slipping from them. He saw himself dancing with her — they passed in front of a mirror, and looking straight over her shoulder his eyes followed the tremulous sparkle of the diamond wings which she wore in her hair.

"Dearest, I am fond of yon, you know that; it is not my fault if I prefer to be your lover rather than your husband." He would have knelt at her feet had it not been for his gout, and, passing his arm about her waist, he said, "Don't you believe that I am very fond of you, Evelyn?"

"Yes, Owen, I think you are."

"Not a very enthusiastic reply; it used to be you who delighted to throw your arms about my neck; but all that is over and done with now."

"One is not always in such humour, Owen."

Lady Duckle came into the room. Her features had grown wider, and her eyes more cold and material; and she said in her cold social voice —

"Well, Evelyn, we shall not get to Lady Ascott's before half-past one."

But she at once became sympathetic when she heard of Owen's attack of gout, and she went downstairs first, and Owen called Evelyn back and asked her if he might wait for her. She said she should not be home till late. "That will not matter," he said; and she was obliged to send him away, saying —

"I shall be very tired. I cannot see you to-night, Owen."

At that moment his gout gave him such pain that he was obliged to sit down, and she felt ashamed of her unkindness.

"There is no use waiting — I am in too great pain."

And he sat in the drawing-room for half an hour thinking of her, thinking if he were to throw the jewel away he would be a free man: the hunt would follow in another direction.

But he could not bring himself to surrender the jewel which caused him so much suffering, though there seemed little prospect of his ever being able to obtain a quiet enjoyment of it again. Besides the dangers from without, he had begun to grow conscious of his age — and as he limped downstairs he wondered who was this young man, Ulick Dean?

XXIII

“Dreams” was the first of the five, but the music that haunted belonged to the third song. She could not quite remember a single phrase, nor any words except “pining flowers." She had thought of sending for it, but such vague memory suited her mood better than an exact text. If she had the song she would go to the piano, and she did not wish to move from the Sheraton sofa, made comfortable with pale blue cushions. But again the music stirred her memory like wind the tall grasses, and out of the slowly moving harmonies there arose an invocation of the strange pathos of existence; no plaint for an accidental sorrow, something that happened to you or me, or might have happened, if our circumstances had been different; only the mood of desolate self-consciousness in which the soul slowly contemplates the disaster of existence. The melancholy that the music exhales is no querulous feminine plaint, but an immemorial melancholy, an exalted resignation. The music goes out like a taper, dying in remote chords, and Evelyn sat absorbed, viewing the world from afar, like the Lady of Shalott, seeing in the mirror of memory the chestnut trees of the Dulwich street, and a little girl running after her hoop; and then her mother’s singing classes, and the expectation she had lived in of learning to sing, and being brought upon the stage by her mother. If her mother had lived she would have been singing in *Romeo and Juliet* and *Lucia*.... Her father would have deemed her voice wasted; but mother always had had her way with father. Then she saw herself pining for Owen, sick of love, longing, hungry, weak, weary, disappointed, hopeless. Her thoughts turned from that past, and her mother’s face looked out of her reverie, grey and grave and watchful, only half seen in the shadows. She seemed aware of her mother as she might be of some idea, strangely personal to herself, something near and remote, beyond this span of life, stretching into infinity. She seemed to feel herself lifted a little above the verge of life, so that she might inquire the truth from her mother; but something seemed to hold her back, and she did not dare to hear the supernatural truth. She was still too thrall to this life of lies, but she could not but see her mother’s face, and what surprised her was that this grey shadow was more real to her than the rest of the world. The face did not stir, it always wore the same expression. Evelyn could not even tell if the expression of the dim eyes was one of disapproval. But it needs must be — she could have no doubt on that point. What was certain and sure was that she seemed in a nearer and more intimate, in a more essential communication with her mother, than with her father who was alive. Nothing seemed to divide her from her mother; she had only to let her soul go, and it could mingle with her mother’s spirit, and then all misunderstandings would be at an end.

She was tempted to free herself from this fettering life, where all is limitation and division. Its individualism appeared to her particularly clear when she thought of Owen. They had clasped and kissed in the hope to become part of the other’s substance. They had sought to mingle, to become one; now it was in the hope of a union of soul that Owen sought her, his kisses were for this end. She had read his desire in his eyes. But the barrier of the flesh, which at first could

barely sunder them, now seemed to have acquired a personal life, a separate entity; it seemed like some invisible force thrusting them apart. The flesh which had brought them together now seemed to have had enough of them; the flesh, once gentle and persuasive, seemed to have become stern, relentless as the commander in *Don Juan*. She thought of it as the forest in *Macbeth*; of something that had come out of the inanimate, angry and determined — a terrible thing this angry, frustrated flesh. Like the commander, it seemed to grasp and hurry her away from Owen, and she seemed to hear it mutter, "This vain noise must cease." The idea of the flesh was not their pleasure, but the next generation; the frustrated flesh was now putting them apart. She hummed the music, and the life she had lived continued to loom up and fall back into darkness like shapes seen in a faded picture. She had loved Owen, and sung a few operas, that was all. She remembered that everything was passing; the notes she sang existed only while she sang them, each was a little past. A moment approaches; it is ours, and no sooner is it ours than it has slipped behind us, even in the space of the indrawing of a breath. No wonder, then, that men had come to seek reality beyond this life; it was natural to believe that this life must be the shadow of another life lying beyond it, and she leaned forward, pale and nervous, in the pale grace of the Sheraton sofa.

Her depression that morning was itself a mystery. What did it mean? Whence did it proceed? She had not lost her voice. Owen did not love her less. Ulick was coming to see her; but within her was an unendurable anxiety. It proceeded from nothing without; it was her own mind that frightened her. But just now she had been exalted and happy in the memory of that deeply emotional music. She tried to remember the exact moment when this strange, penetrating sorrow had fallen upon her. Whence had it come, and what did it mean? A few minutes ago it was not with her. She knew that it would not always be with her, yet it did not seem as if it would ever leave her. She could not think of herself as ever being happy again. But Ulick would distract this misery from her brain. She would send him to the piano, and the exalted sorrow in the music, which she could but faintly remember, would raise her above sorrow, would bear her out of and above the circle of personal despondency. Ulick might help her; she could not help herself. She was incapable of going to the piano, though she was fully conscious that her mood would pass away in music. She walked across the room, her eyes contracted with suffering, and she stretched herself like one who would rid herself of a burden.

She felt as if she could resign with a little smile the part that she had to play in life. Not the past, that was no longer hers either to preserve or to blot out; she could not wish herself different from what she had been; but the future — was that to be the same as the past? Then, with an apparent contradiction to what she had been thinking a few moments before regarding the worthlessness of life, she began to think that her unhappiness was possibly the result of her excentric life. She had lived in defiance of rules, governed by individual caprice. Apparently it had succeeded, but only apparently. Underneath the surface of her life she had always been unhappy. All her talent, all her intelligence had not been able to save her. And Owen? All that

pride of intelligence had resulted in unhappiness in his case as in hers. Both had disobeyed the law which we feel to be right when we look into the very recesses of our soul, and that these laws seem foolish and illogical when criticised by the light of reason does not prove their untruth. There is something beyond reason, and to become concentric, to enter into the conventions, seemed to her in a vague and distant manner to be indispensable. She was weary of living in the inhospitable regions outside of prejudice and authority.... She felt that it was prejudice and authority that gave a meaning, or a sufficient semblance of a meaning, to life as it was; she was a helpless atom tossed hither and thither by every gust of passion as a leaf in a whirlwind, and she longed to understand herself and her mission in life.

In her present attitude towards life, nothing mattered except the present reality, the satisfaction of the moment; her present conception of life only counselled sacrifice of personal desires for the sake of larger desires. But these larger satisfactions did not differ in kind from the lesser, and all went the same way, the pleasure we take in a bunch of violets, or that which a love story brings; and both pass, but one leaves neither remorse nor bitterness behind. A thought told her that she was, while in the midst of these moral reflections, preparing herself to be Ulick's mistress. She denied the thought and put it behind her angrily, attributing its intrusion to her nerves, and to separate herself from it she allowed thoughts on the mutability of things to again exclusively occupy her. If she were to get up from the sofa she would create another division in her life, and to-morrow she would not remember her mood of to-day; it would have vanished as if it had never been. She asked, What do we live for? and rose nervously from the sofa, and then stood still. That half-hour was now behind her; again her place in life had been shifted. Yesterday, too, was gone, and with it the pleasure of her walk with Ulick. She had walked with him yesterday in the Green Park, in the still crystal evening. She could almost see the two figures; she could see them at one spot, but if she looked too long they disappeared from her eyes. She remembered nothing of what they had said, only that the colour of the evening was pale blue, with a little east wind in it, and that was yesterday! They had talked and walked, and been tremulously interested in each other; but she remembered nothing that had been said until they turned to go home. Then arose an exact vision of herself and Ulick walking under the graceful trees which overhung the Piccadilly railings. There the park had been shaped into little dells, and it had reminded her of the picture in the Dulwich Gallery. There his pleading was more passionate. He had begged her to go away with him, and she had had to answer that she could not give Owen up. She had felt that it was better to speak frankly though she was sorry to have to say things that would give him pain. She had told him the truth, and was glad she had done so; but she liked him very much, and had said it was a pity they had not met earlier. "I missed you by about a year," he answered. His words came back to her, and she wondered if there was a cause for the accident, and if it could have been predicted. They had walked slowly up the pathways, and seeing the young summer in the sky and trees, they had walked as upon air, borne up by the sadness of finding themselves divided. They had thought what forms and colours their lives would have taken if she had waited a few months, if she had not gone away

with Owen; or, better still, if she had never met Owen. She was conscious that such thoughts amounted to an infidelity, and she knew that she did love Ulick as she loved Owen. But the temptation was cruelly intense, and she could not wrench herself out of its grip. Their voices had fallen, they suffocated in the silence. Ulick had mentioned Blake's name, and she had accepted an artistic discussion as an escapement, but their hearts were overloaded, and it was in answer to his own thoughts that Ulick had spoken of the eighteenth - century mystic. For the question had arisen in him whether the passions of the flesh are not destructive of spiritual exaltation, and he told her that exaltation was the gospel according to Blake. We must seek to exalt ourselves, to live in the idea; sexual passion was a merely inferior state, but mean content was the true degradation.

"Then passion is the highest plane to which the materialist can rise? "asked Evelyn, thinking of Owen.

"Yes; I don't think I'm wrong in admitting that, in the main, that is Blake's contention."

But at this point he had broken off his discourse, and told an anecdote in his half-witty, half-wistful way about an article which he had written on Blake, and which had somehow strayed into the hands of a man and his wife living in Normandy. This couple were at the time engaged in continuing the tradition of Bastien Lepage. They laboriously copied what they saw in the fields — grey days, hobnailed boots, and the rest of it. His article had, however, awakened them to the vanity of realism; and they had taken their pictures to a neighbouring tower, and at the top of it made a holocaust of all their abominable endeavour. And a few days after, two faded human beings had presented themselves at Ulick's lodgings in Bloomsbury, seemingly at once unhappy and excited, and professing their complete willingness to accept the gospel of life according to Blake. It was the man who did the talking, the woman, who was dressed in olive-green garments, acquiesced in what he said. They were tired of materialism; they had trudged that bleak road till they were weary, and now they desired Blake, submission to Blake, and were therefore disappointed when Ulick explained that Blake's doctrine was not subordination to Blake, but the very opposite, the development of self, the cultivation of personal will.

"It was clear to me,"Ulick said, "that the woman had abased herself before the man; that she ate what he ate, drank what he drank, thought what he thought; so I decided that we should begin with first principles — that the woman should decide for herself, without referring to her husband, what she should eat for dinner. But after some efforts to attain sufficient personal will, she confessed her incapacity, and I therefore proposed to the husband that she should be kept in her room until she had regained her will. They went away hopeful, but he called a few days after to tell me that the experiment had failed. For after striving for many hours to decide between soles and plaice, she had burst into tears, and I felt I could not advise him further."

It had seemed a pity to ask Ulick how much of this story was true, how much invention; and it was remembrance of the will-less lady in the olive-green gown that caused Evelyn's face to light up into smiles as she stood at the window watching for his coming.

Her excuse for not marrying Owen was that she would have to retire from the stage. But she was not convinced that that was the real reason. There seemed to be another reason at the back of her mind which her reason could not drag out. She tried again and again, but it eluded her, and it was appalling to find that she had so little knowledge of the motives that had determined her life. Feeling that she must change her thoughts, she asked herself what a man like Ulick, of spiritual temperament, but uninfected with religious dogma, would think of her relations with Owen. "Ah, that was the front-door bell!" She waited in a delicious tremble of expectation, and the servant announcing Sir Owen awoke her, and with a shock as painful as if she had been struck on the nape of the neck.

XXIV

They had read the original legend together, and many poems which had been written about these immortal lovers, and they visited the museums. They had meditated journeys to Cornwall and Brittany, and they had dreamed of the kingdom of Lyonesse, traces of which the fisher folk say may still be seen at low tide. But Isolde had come from Ireland, and Ulick said he knew the place, a small village not more than a few miles from Dublin.

"Let us go there." Ulick looked at her in surprise, and she said, "There is no time to lose; let us go to-morrow morning."

"You will be disappointed. There is no ruin, no trace except the name."

"No, I don't think I shall. It will help me to see a place where Isolde had been."

And they met next morning at Euston. Ulick could not afford to travel first class; the landscape, he said, was as beautiful from the window of a third-class carriage; and they were not a hundred miles from London when the sun was shining upon flowering meadows. The sun had not yet risen above the white morning clouds, and in shadows, clear and evanescent, they watched the semi-conscious life of the sheep and cattle, and the fulfilment of the spring in the May trees and the half-grown lambs. Ulick said that when you closed your eyes in London there was only darkness, but when you closed your eyes in Ireland there was still twilight.

It was a delight to him to speak of the ancient legends and traditions and gods, to tell Evelyn his ideas; how the land had made the race, to tell of the traditions of the race, to speak of the great plain of the land over the sea, the land of the children of Dana.

Men lived there, he said, for a while, enjoying all their desires, and at the end of this period they are born again. Man lives between two desires — his desire of spiritual peace and happiness, and his desire of earthly experience. Man's desire of earthly experience draws him to re-birth, and he is born into a form that fits his nature as a glove fits a hand. The soul of a warrior passes into a robust form of a warrior; the soul of a poet into the most sensitive body of a poet. He spoke of the old Irish legend of Mongan and the Bard, and Evelyn begged him to tell it to her. Mongan, he said, had been Fin MacCool two hundred years before; and when he was Fin he had been present at the death of a certain king. The Bard was singing before Mongan, and had misstated the place of the king's death; Mongan corrected him, and the Bard was so incensed at the correction that he threatened to satirise the kingdom, so that it should become barren; and he would only consent to withhold his satire if Mongan would give him his wife.

"Mrs. Mongan?"

“Yes, just so," Ulick replied, with a laugh. "Mongan asked for three days’ delay to consider the dreadful dilemma in which the Bard’s threat had placed him, and during that time Mongan sat with his wife, consoling her, saying, ‘A man will come to us; his feet are already upon the western sea.’ And at the time when the Bard stood up to claim Mongan’s wife, a strange warrior came into the encampment, holding a barbless spear. He said he was Caoelte, one of Fin’s famous warriors. The king, whose place of death was in dispute, was killed where Mongan had said, and if they dug down into the earth they would find a spear-head, and it would fit the shaft he held in his hand, and that it was the spearhead that had killed the king.”

Evelyn liked the Midland counties, and pointed to beautiful stone bridges and decaying brick-work; Ulick acquiesced, but he was not really interested till the Welsh mountains appeared. The Welsh and the Irish Druids were more learned than any others, and it was to Anglesea and Ireland that the Druids of Gaul went for instruction in the divine mysteries, and Anglesea was the last refuge of the Druids.

He regretted they had not time to bicycle across the flat island, and as the steamer pushed its way through the still water like some black fish, they talked of the forlorn ships and the strange crews which had crossed these seas in primitive times. Ulick beguiled the way with many beautiful stories; a great gull floated round the ship, and when at last the Wicklow hills appeared above the horizon he was telling her the story of Bran, the son of Feval. He said this was the story of a man who went to the great plain, the land over the sea, the land of the children of Dana. He was sitting in his court when a beautiful woman appeared to him, and she told him to man his ship and sail to the land of the gods, the land where no one dies, where blossoms fall for ever.... “I have forgotten the song. What a wonderful song it is! I remember — ‘Where music is not born, for music is eternally there.’ No, that is out of some other old Irish poem; I can’t remember it. Bran sails away, and after sailing for some days he meets a man driving a chariot over the waves. This man says, ‘To my eyes you are sailing over the tops of the forest trees,’ and in many other ways makes it clear to him that all things are but appearances, and change with the eye that sees them.”

"Then what happens to Bran, son of Feval?”

"Bran visits many islands of many delights, but wishing to see his native land once more, he sails away; but the people of these islands have told him that he must not set foot on any earthly shore, or he will perish, so he sails close to his native land, but does not leave the ship. The inhabitants ask him who he is; and he tells them, and they reply, ‘The voyage of Bran, son of Feval, is among our most ancient stories.’ One man swims to shore, and the moment his foot

touches the earth he becomes a heap of dust. Bran sails away, and the story ends with a phrase which you already know — 'The further adventures of Bran are unknown!'"

"How true, how true! The stories of our lives are known up to a certain point, and our further adventures are unknown."

Evelyn sat striving to read her own destiny in the legends. Bran visited many islands of many delights, but when he wished to return to his native land he was told he must do no more than sail along the coast, that if he set foot on any earthly shore he would perish. But what did this story mean? What meaning had it for her? She had visited many islands of many delights, and had come home again. What meaning had this story for her? Why had she remembered the last phrase, and why had she been impelled to ask Ulick to tell her this story? They entered the large shallow bay in the yellow evening, and as they drove through the streets Ulick remembered Chapelizod. The driver told them it was on the other side of the Phoenix Park, and as he said he could get them back in time for dinner, they agreed to go there at once. But he knew of no ruined chapel or ruin. The park seemed to them very formal, and when they turned out of the park the driver said, pointing with his whip, "This is Chapelizod." There were two rows of houses — one parallel with the park railings, the other led to the river. They experienced the same feeling of disappointment, that the place of so great a legend should seem sordid even under the sunset. But the green hill must have been always there, and Isolde must have walked there with Tristan. So they climbed the hill and looked into the Liffey River. Ulick, always optimistic, said the Liffey must have been a beautiful river in the time of Tristan and Isolde, and to cheer her he spoke of their clasps of gold and their strange cloaks, and, despite the sordid village, it was impressive to walk by the river, along whose banks Isolde may have gathered the herbs with which she cured the wounds Tristan received when fighting with Morwald.

Nevertheless they drove back through the park disappointed, and anticipating the journey back to London, she said —

"Still, I am glad we walked on the green hill. It is a gain to have been where they both walked."

But Chapelizod, as Ulick pointed out, had, after all, only a historic interest, and he said she must see the sacred places where the earth breathed in all her primal energy. For the earth, according to Ulick, was no dead thing, as the Christians would have us believe, but a live thing breathing like a man, remembering like a man, and, according to him, the great epochs of the world happened when the breathing of the earth was deepest. Then gods and heroes were on earth. "The breathing of the earth waxes and wanes," he said, "and there are places where the energy of the holy breath concentrates, where the life of the earth can be felt clearly." These holy places the Druids discovered by instinct, as the divining-rod divines the water, and there the Druids had erected their altars. All faculties, he said, increased in these places. If a man had the faculty

of seeing visions, the faculty would become heightened. If a man were a poet he would create, and intensely; even ordinary qualities were increased in these places. If a man were given to being angry, he would very likely be possessed with a frenzy of rage in these holy places.

They spent the evening in the hotel sitting-room reading his poems and playing his music, and though both were vague and imperfect they meant a great deal to her. His art revealed a morality, and she needed one; she was at a moment of life when the moral idea is desired above all things, and technical achievement often seems the barrier.

At midnight his simplicity saved her from throwing herself into his arms. A moment after, she was glad, knowing that if she had done so she would have been unhappy in the morning. But having refrained, she awoke happy, and no morning had ever seemed to her more beautiful. It was like yesterday — behind the mist there was a promise of a beautiful day; and when they got out at Drogheda the sun was shining on the green country. The country emerged from the mist, the trees pale and vaporous, and the water in the river like rings of opal lights.

Now Evelyn was ready to believe that her lover could see the great past which was always in his thoughts. Even now she had begun to see Ireland through a haze of divinities, and the earth-breath filled her; Isolde became part of her flesh; Isolde flowed in her blood; Isolde emerged. "If I could only go on the stage," she thought, "and play it now!”

They rode on, and after riding some miles they came upon a woman knitting; she had a little basket beside her full of candle-ends; and she led them through a field, chatting all the while, defending the Druids against the libels of tourists, who said they were heathens. She said that heathens worshipped images, and the Irish people had never done that; they had always had very good beliefs. She said the Druids had considered the earth as sacred, and, on Evelyn questioning her, she admitted that the earth here was stronger than any other earth. “It is wonderful," she said, “to walk here in the morning. The smell of the earth seems to carry your soul away.”

To see Ulick light his bicycle lamp filled her with misgivings. Her hand trembled as she took a candle from the woman, and they went down a ladder into what seemed like a well. At the bottom of it there was a small opening through which a fox could have gone easily; through this opening she had to follow, bending herself, and it was terrifying to creep nearly on her hands and knees. At last they arrived at the circular chamber. It was made out of uncouth, unmortared stones, but laid together so ingeniously that the hill was upheld as by enchantment, and on the floor of one of these chambers lay the sacrificial cup or basin.

Nothing here had changed; this place was the same now as it was before Christ was born, before Rome had perhaps begun. The rocks were cut with strange signs, and Ulick told her that

the spot in the middle of the circle was the earth, that the first circle was the ring of water, the second circle Tir-nan-og, and the third circle was the circle of the infinite Lir. She noticed that there were more than three circles, but she did not ask him what they were, fearing he might not know. He told her the eaves cut upon stones were the leaves of the sacred hazel, and he promised to tell her the story of the sacred hazel on their way to the greater crypts.

She was at once amused and impressed, and sitting with closed eyes, hoping the darkness would be cloven by a vision, she called on Dana, Lir, and Aonghus. A spot of light appeared; she waited for it to increase, but it dwindled, and the people she saw seemed like memories of pictures and operas — Druids advancing in white robes, worshippers of the mistletoe in skins of wild beasts. Suddenly the scene changed to the Venusburg in the first act of *Tannhäuser*, and, a little ashamed, she determined to find her way out. She went out quietly, so that she might not interrupt his meditation, which might at any moment break into vision.

There was another chamber at the foot of the ladder, but she only dared to glance into it.

At first she was uncertain if the hill were a natural or artificial hill, and she consulted the peasant who pointed out the excavations, for the antiquarians had dug many places before they found the entrance to the crypts. The peasant thought the hill was a natural one, but Evelyn perceived that it was made of loose stones, and she felt that generations must have worked at the building of this hill.

These crypts were more wonderful than any cathedral, for they were nearer to Nature. But the Earth has grown sullen among generations that refuse to accept her Godhead.

The wind blew over miles of green land, and the earth and sky seemed but the beauty of the gods. There was such beauty over the earth that it seemed to her she could lie upon the grass for ever, drinking in the colour of the earth and the sky; and slightly hypnotised by the colour and gladness of the day, she lay watching the high hill where Tara had once stood, where Tristan and Isolde may have met, where certainly another pair of immortal lovers had met — Diarmuid and Grania, and she tried to remember the music and the heroism of the poem.

Therefore it seemed to her a desecration for two thick-set Presbyterian ministers to visit the crypts, and seemingly this violation was about to happen. She still hoped they had come for some other purpose, but when she saw them take candles from the peasant woman she knew there was no room for hope. Poor Ulick, how he would hate this burly Christianity! and she imagined the surprise of the Christians when they discovered him in prayer.

They only remained a few minutes in the crypt, and when they reappeared one of them, seeing Evelyn engaged in admiring the view, ventured to hope she was not a friend of the gentleman

underground. She said she was, and asked him the reason of his question. He said something about "brooding a history down there," and they went their way. She hoped Ulick would succeed in recapturing his lost vision, for however willing she was to believe, and she was very willing to believe that Ulick might see Cuchullen, she could not believe that a vision would endure in the presence of two clergymen. In this she was right, for after some five or ten minutes of vain effort to summon the invisible, Ulick returned. He said they had scattered a vision, and very soon they noticed they were followed by the two clergymen, and they knew the greater crypts would likewise be desecrated by the unbeliever.

But the way there was difficult to find out, and it was a long time before they found a labourer. At the end of a long hot road they met one, and he told them they had taken the wrong turning.

"I am afraid you have led us wrong," said one of the clergymen, and Ulick answered him —

"Gentlemen of your profession should know the meaning of the ‘blind leading the blind.’"

Ulick’s neatness in reply amused Evelyn the greater part of the way; she chuckled over the difficulty that must have arisen in the clergymen’s minds, that a man who was capable of the folly of prayer in a pagan crypt should be capable of a witty retort.

As they bicycled the day became hotter, the hills began to seem very high and long, and they were glad to get to the next crypt. Another woman with candles led them to a hole through which Evelyn thought she never would be able to squeeze herself, but the bulky clergyman got through, and Evelyn and Ulick lay under the trees and waited.

In front of them was a circle of great stones, and they pondered these, and when the clergymen had gone they took candles from the woman.

These crypts were larger than the first they had seen, and everywhere the stones were carved with sun symbols and with the leaves of the hazel. He told her that it has its roots in the gods, and he told her how the Druids said that at certain times the nuts of knowledge fell from the sacred branches and floated to the surface, for the hazel grows under the sea in the everlasting fountains.

And when they crawled out of the crypts they found a place where they could sit — a shady place in front of an endless prospect of trees and pastureland; and she sat, her eyes fixed on the blue distance.

"It seems to me," she said, "no one has attempted to differentiate between Isolde before she drank the love potion and after she had drunk it. I daresay Wagner did not want the actress to

differentiate, but I don't think I could play the part without doing so." And thinking of the moment of sexual exaltation in her own life she would choose to put upon the stage, she remembered one night at the Hotel Continental, when Owen had come suddenly into her room, and she had slipped her arms through a gauze wrapper, and had flung herself into his arms. But the memory of that night no longer interested her; her emotion had been merely a physical one; she thought now of a spiritual ecstasy having its roots in sense.

In the heat of the summer, when the breathing of the earth seemed to enter her flesh by every pore, it seemed to her that she could create a typical passion out of her love for Ulick.... But the thought of two lovers frightened her — the simple instincts of the earth are averse to such profanation. The goldfinch singing in the whitethorn tree is faithful to its mate; the earth mates all things in their youth, and desires no divagation; but the soul transforms, its needs are not always the same, and her life would be incomplete without Ulick.

He closed the score, and she told him she had seen Rosa Sucher play the part.

"She attained an extraordinary oneness of idea, but at what price! At the loss of all individuality. Her Isolde was a hurricane, the story of an avalanche, and the woman was lost in the storm. There was plenty of breath, but it was breath at the price of accent; there was a great frame, and a sort of design within the frame. I can't think that her Isolde ever existed, or that a man would ever like a woman like that."

She sat drawing her rings off and on her white fingers. She had taken off three rings, and they lay upon her knee; the fourth she passed backwards and forwards over her fourth finger, and suddenly there came a deepening in the colour of her long female eyes, and she moved nearer and played nervously with her rings.

It was their intention to study the score in some shady place when they had visited the crypts and had meditated on the mysteries; and they read on for some time with a view to seeing how the music agreed with Evelyn's reading of the part.

"But here she is violent, unmistakably violent — hear these chords, how aggressive they are — the music is against you; listen to these chords."

"I know those chords well enough. There are a few places where she is violent, but I think it is possible to make her violence a sort of love madness.... I can't explain, and the chords, I admit, must be given violently. But let us read on, and I think you will see that my reading is a possible one."

They turned over the pages, and Ulick said —

“Well, there is more in the music that supports your reading than I had thought. When Isolde says to Brangana, but really to herself, ‘To die, and without having been loved by that man,’ the love motive appears for the first time, but more drawn out, and broader than elsewhere.”

“The old man knew what he was doing; when he marked this passage to be sung gloomily, he meant with lassitude. Now if I sing the first half of the first act as wearily as the music allows me, I shall get a contrast.”

"I wish we had a piano. We can’t do much without an instrument.”

"Don’t you see," she said, "that the love potion is only a symbol of her surrender to her desire? But you don’t understand; you see it differently. Put the score away," she said, “I am tired.”

XXV

Standing under an ash tree, whose pale, lace-like foliage fluttered a little in the breeze, she asked Ulick why these primitive people had taken such extraordinary care to conceal their rituals, and he told her that the great mysteries of life and death were known to the first men. They were not yet overworn by experience, but as the world grew wiser in experience the primordial knowledge became confined to a caste; and this caste, in its desire to keep its knowledge pure, was at pains to create a place where no echo of the mysteries could penetrate to the outer world; and their buildings had survived, he said, for four thousand years, because they were built for a great purpose and a great idea.

As they climbed over the stones and through the May tree, the solitude impelled her to speak to him of himself. She wanted to know if he had ever been in love with anyone, and she was specially curious to know his ideas about love. She feared he pitied her. He was thinking of Owen Asher. She felt they could know nothing more of each other until they had spoken of him; the hush of the afternoon compelled her to confide in him, and speaking of the love music in the second act she was able to ask him if he had ever loved, but the question came too abruptly.

“No, I am waiting.”

"Waiting for whom?”

"For the woman I have always desired.”

"Have you only desired one woman?" She stopped, thinking her words had betrayed her, and yet her only chance was to be quite truthful, and the solitude forced her to speak. “Yes," she said, “I can imagine you true to one ideal.”

"But it would seem, Evelyn, that I was mistaken, though I don’t know how I could have been mistaken; there must be a fulfillment, and yet I don’t see how there can be one.”

She turned pale, and her heart seemed as if it were going to stop beating.

"Because I love you," he said.

“You love me. Oh, Ulick, why do you love me? We should have met before; it is too late now.”

“All I know of your past is that you went away with Sir Owen Asher, but whatever you may have been then, you are quite different now — you want to be quite different, otherwise we

could not have met; everything is a fulfilment, and we have met because we can help each other."

"I wonder if you can help me.... I mean if I am capable of being helped. I don't mean helped in my art; you can do that; but I have begun to feel that there are things above art, that art is not everything."

A bough she had bent down slipped out of her hand, and it flew up with a slight sound of leaves.

"How very kind you are to me!" she said, and for some seconds she thought of his gentleness. There was no suspicion of unmanliness in his gentleness. It seemed to her as if she had been seeking something for a long time, and had suddenly found it. Her happiness was extraordinary, but she must speak to Ulick of Owen — she must confess herself to him.

"I am a passionate woman," she said; "but I am capable of love — I am very different from what I was then, and the worst is that Owen doesn't see that I am different."

"I have only seen Sir Owen Asher once, and I admit his appearance is not sympathetic. It is not easy to understand how you could ever have loved him. But there is no reason why we should speak of him. I can see you have suffered. You could not have spoken to me just now as you did unless you had suffered."

"What did I say, Ulick?"

"You said that you had come to see that art was not everything — that art was only a means to an end; you did not say that, but I think you must have meant that. You have come to see that there is something beyond the material things — that they are but the symbols, and that we must not mistake them for the reality."

"Is there a spiritual life, Ulick? Do you think there is? and how may we attain it? Will you guide me?"

"There is no way to attain this spiritual life, as I have often said, except by practising it. Some friends of mine once asked me to speak to them on the subject, and they asked leave to meet and discuss this spiritual life. I said to these friends I had only one thing to advise, and that was to go and practise it. Were you to sit here for a year discussing it you would be no nearer to it than you are now."

She tried to listen, but she gloated in the idea, and that he should not have thought her unworthy was a proof to her that she was not unworthy.

“We all live," he said, "for a while in our animal instincts; the awakening happens sometimes earlier, sometimes later; but once we see there is nothing true in life but our ideas, we must hesitate no longer — the moment has come for us to choose between circumstances and ideas.”

The summer dosed in the branches above them, and a gentle, ambiguous wind lifted the branches and waved the tall grasses. She was propelled by the silence to speak to him of herself, and with a little gasp she said —

"I have often thought that my way leads through chastity; if so, the way will be difficult for me — more difficult than ever now, for I am in love.”

“It is a very dear thing to me to hear you say that you love me, Evelyn. How would you have me answer you?”

"Say that you love me; but is not love materialism?”

"I look upon the kiss you gave me as the fulfilment.”

"You must teach me to look upon it as you look upon it. You must teach me to look upon love as a spiritual aspiration.”

“A kiss is an ephemeral joy, or a manifestation of the Divine will — just as we look upon it.”

"But should my way lead through chastity?" she said again.

“No one can tell another whither his way lies; you must find out your way. I believe there are some to whom chastity is necessary.”

"Have you not found it necessary? You have led a chaste life.”

"Only because I had not met the woman I waited for; but I was not impatient — any other woman would have been useless to me, any other would have been a hindrance.”

It was an extraordinary excitement to listen to him, to hear him say that a Christian only gains a little feverish exaltation through abstinences and grey pieties and factitious rituals; to hear him say that the earth breath is the great truth.

“But what the earth says is so vague; the earth does not reprove us nor counsel us.”

"Look out into that deep sunny landscape, its meaning is surely clear enough; if you listen attentively you will hear all that is necessary for you to know. All books are vain, worse than vain, they are a hindrance, for they separate you from the only book that teaches. If you watch the sky you will have noble thoughts. If you love the earth you will have tenderness for all living things. Is not this true? ”

"Yes, it is true.”

"In cities men lose all that is divine in them, and wear out their lives in senseless seeking after gold.”

"But Nature is so vague.”

“We must catch the rhythm of Nature. Listen now, and you will hear it; it is only in great silences you can hear it. But this rhythm is clearer than that of any written gospel. We owe all things to the earth, the likeness of our bodies and the likeness of our minds, for thought comes to us straight out of the earth. Are not nations formed by the lands they live in? Are not Americans taking on the type of the Red Indian? Is not the Celt like his country? are not his stories like his country? His soul is the image of his country; take a man’s country away from him and you take his soul. That is why I speak of the old gods; they are the instinct of the land, the breath of all the landscape before you. Its ideas of love, heroism, and beauty are the intimate thoughts and aspirations which no God from Judea can express. Christ expresses the universal mind for me, but the gods of my own earth and my own land and my own skies must be nearer to me. Christ is the God of the wide world, but there must be in every land gods for the hearth. Man wants many gods, and I love no less than the great God the familiar gods that can be brooded by the fireside.”

"By the peat fire?”

"The turf fire; the word is more familiar. We must deserve one another, Evelyn, and serve one another. Give me your hand and your lips, Evelyn. I don’t think we shall lose anything by our love.”

"I don’t think we shall, Ulick.”

XXVI

They lay with their eyes fixed on the green land, absorbed by its beauty, and its restfulness was in their hearts. In them and in the land summer achieved itself. The sun descended, and the horizon was dim as with grey dust. The summer was at its height and the day was at wane, and Evelyn lay without speaking, seeing the earth as a mother. The mystery within her responded to the mystery without her, and she seemed to remember the earth as the lost child remembers its mother's features and voice.

"We have many miles to ride," he said, and they rode many miles along the smooth white roads towards the hills. There were fewer trees and the hedges were scanty, and the folk that worked in the great fields were far from the roads. At the barren crossroads, by a lonely house, they met a drunken man driving a cart, and he directed them wrong; but a child crept through a hedge and pointed out the right way, and other children confirmed the direction of the first child. After many miles, at the end of a long ascending road which dipped a little, they saw the hills or the high knolls among which lay the ruins of the monastery.

This learned, monastic Ireland was not as sympathetic to Ulick as pagan Ireland. Already the land had lost a good deal of the original inspiration, but even then Ireland possessed her own language, her arts and her handicrafts. Here there was a chapel and here there was a porch, and here a beautiful piece of wall; and they studied the sculptured walls and the beauties of the pavement, which reminded them of the long past.

There was a village, if half a dozen houses can be called a village, and at one of these houses they could get tea; and after tea they climbed the knoll overlooking the monastery. Ulick lit his pipe, and lying beside him she thought how well he emphasised his theory that man was but part of his country. In London he was disparate and a little strange. His art too was more interesting here than she had thought it in London, and her only regret was that this day should ever end.

They rode on and on, going always towards the sea, up and down the winding roads. The hills plunged into shadowy valleys, and the shape of every tree and the line of every hedgerow was beautiful and mysterious, and the Earth seemed to Evelyn like a green divinity sleeping under pink clouds, curled like ostrich feathers.

As they passed the high hedge on her left a peasant girl drove a herd of cows. The animals moved into the shadow of the vague hedge, and the shy peasant lifted her shawl and looked back at them. The picture was hardly more distinct than a little evening mist, and it pleased her to think of it as an exhalation of the earth.

The sky had darkened, only a rim of light remained above the horizon. Ulick said there would be very little night, only a darker veil would be drawn above the sky at midnight; and as the bicycles fled down the smooth inclines towards the sea, the outlying streets of the dim country town began to appear in the dusk.

After dinner Ulick, who was untiring, proposed they should go through the second act of the opera.

“My dear Ulick, I have ridden forty-five miles on a bicycle. I have crept through holes that a full-grown fox would pause before. I have studied an act of *Tristan* with you. I have heard all the Celtic mythologies, and all your theories regarding pagan and Christian gods, and all your ideas about art — the arts of poetry and music, and" — she paused — "and I have fallen in love with you. Well, that is enough for one day.”

XXVII

"Eternal night, oh, lovely night, oh, holy night of love!" Rapture succeeded rapture, and the souls of the lovers rose nearer to the surface of life. In a shudder of silver chords he saw them float away like little clouds towards the low rim of the universe.

But at that moment of escape reality broke in upon the dream. Melot had betrayed them, and Ulick heard King Mark's noble and grave reproaches like a prophecy. "Thou wert my friend and didst deceive me," he sang, and his melancholy motive seemed to echo like a cry along the shores of Ulick's own life. Amid calm and mysteriously exalted melodies, expressive of the terror and pathos of fate fulfilled, Tristan's resolve took shape, and as he fell mortally wounded, the melancholy Mark motive was heard again, and again Ulick asked what meaning it might have for him.

The scene-shifters were carrying the scenery away, but he did not see them, nor the violet powder upon her arms and hands. He was only aware of her exalted eyes, and she was hardly aware of him; she had not returned to ordinary things. He was about to withdraw, fearing to interrupt her, but she leant upon his shoulder and walked through the crowd.

"Come to my room," she said, "and you will tell me what you think about it"; and when she reached the top of the stairs she told Merat she would not want her, that she might sit in front. "Come here and sit by me; you can tell me what you think of it," she said. "The coming back is painful, even when it is coming back to you." Then awakening a little more she said —

"Are you satisfied? Was the spiritual truth of the story upon the stage?"

"Your Isolde is no passing woman, but one of the eternal souls that descend from generation to generation."

"But we have not come back," she answered, "we are still in the legend."

"Ah, Ulick, it is all you. To stand on the hill where Isolde stood drew me back as it were through time, and our visit to the ancient altars helped me too, and to talk to you and to hear the legends from your lips helped me; for these things made me forget the circumstantial and the unreal — the things of the hour. Oh, Ulick, it's for you I am singing."

They sat holding hands, glad to be together in such a moment.

"I must not stay with you any longer; it will break the mood."

“No, no — you help me to continue it.”

Then, guessing what was in his mind, she said —

"He will not come here; he never comes to me during the performance; he knows that he would break the mood in me.”

"Evelyn, this must cease; you must put him away from you.”

“Ulick, let us not speak of such things now; to do so will break the mood; but stay by me and tell me of the great people who built the altars, of the great people who lived near to the gods, hardly separated from them.”

He spoke things in accordance with her mood, but she could not hear him, and suddenly she felt she must be alone, and she said —

“Perhaps for the present you had better go; I will see you afterwards. You are right, even you are a distraction to me; I want to get back to my people.”

He did not want to return to the stalls; he preferred to hide himself among the scenery.

Without the castle was the haunting pipe of the shepherd, a vague melody, unsteady as the wind about the cliff’s edge. Within the castle was the plaint of a dying man, "Isolde, Isolde”; and afloat in the orchestra many memories of the garden where he used to meet her. Ulick heard the dying man dream of a ship bringing Isolde to him, and heard the servant tell the shepherd to watch for the ship. But the ship did not come, and the vague pipe answered the while that clouds passed, that the wind veered. At last the real ship came into sight, and then the shepherd played a joyful strain, and the wounded man in his impatience tore away the bandages.

As Isolde’s grief changed from wild lamentation, the figure of ecstasy broke with a sound as of wings shaking, and Ulick seemed to witness a soul’s transfiguration. He watched it rising in several ascensions, like a lark’s flight. For an instant it seemed to float in some divine consummation, and then it vanished. The harps wept over the bodies of the dead lovers. All was done; Evelyn came out of an immortal world; the scenery vacillated and was being carried away; the stage was in twilight, and Ulick walked to and fro in such an extraordinary exaltation of senses that he saw, through the transient Evelyn, the eternal idea which she represented on earth, which may not change, being itself a reflection of the unchanging spirit. He had known her before seeing her with the outward sight, for she was one of those eternal states of consciousness, one of the everlasting souls who do not die with the individual, but flow on

abiding in the generations, a beauty which never perishes, a fire which never wanes. She had lived always in his heart; he had always known her and had always worshipped her. They were part of the holy breath which, flowing through silence like an incantation, had summoned the stars out of chaos....

Out of the loins of the divine spirit love had been taken, and out of the loins of her spiritual and corporeal incarnations of the old myths; and if the sensual love they discovered in each other was necessary for their earthly work, it was to be welcomed, praised, and worshipped. Was it not out of the loins of her he had taken his Grania? For this end they had met. She had come to represent his re-telling of the eternal truth, of passionate desire and beauty of life, exalted from the beginning, but ever waxing into purer exaltations, shining with purer light, attaining the quality of the divine light from which she had first been kindled, and the suggestion of which had made her first beloved.

Suddenly his imagination had dropped from the height it had risen to, and, resuming his walk, he thought of the long chain, all intimately interwoven, which had led him to Evelyn; and a few minutes after she came down the stairs wrapped in a white cloak, and they walked across the stage in silence, and as they waited at the stage door for her carriage to come up, she said —

"Well, are you satisfied with the way I sang the Liebestod?"

"Yes," he said, "you sang it wonderfully; it was wonderful."

He had used the very words that anyone else might have used if they had wished to praise her; but no one but he could have looked at her so tenderly, and no eyes but his could have told her what his told her: they looked at her tenderly, wistfully, and worshipfully.

XXVIII

As they sat in the brougham looking into each other's eyes he became still more aware of his happiness; it suddenly broke in his heart with a thrill and shiver, like an exquisite dawn — opal and rose. The brilliancy of her eyes, the rapture of her face, the magnetic stir of the little gold curls along her forehead were so wonderful that he feared her as an enchanter fears the spirit he has raised, and they sat gazing into each other's eyes, too eager to speak. Suddenly his face clouded a little, and she said —

"Of what are you thinking?"

He tried to put back the thought. It seemed cruel to spoil her happiness and his own happiness, but the thought compelled speech.

"Evelyn," he said very gravely, "have you thought of where we are going?"

"Yes, we are going to Park Lane."

"Yes, I know that; but do you remember whose house it is? We must come to an understanding on this point. Have you told him that I am your lover?"

"No, I have not told him yet."

"But you must tell him."

She did not answer, and when he pressed her for an answer, assuming that she intended to tell him the truth, she grew frightened, and she said —

"I wish you would not speak of this to me to-night."

They became suddenly conscious of the motion of the carriage through the streets, and the silence seemed very long.

"I do not wish to make an enemy of Owen Asher; he has been very good to me. Can you not have a little patience? Don't you think matters will settle themselves if we have a little patience?"

A few minutes after, the carriage stopped at her door.

"I won't ask you upstairs," she said; "I am very tired."

"I think I will come upstairs, if you will let me. I shall not stay long. We must talk this matter out."

There was a syphon and some carafes of brandy and whisky on the table, and she asked him if he would drink anything. He took a little water, for he never drank alcohol, and she said she was sorry that there was neither tea nor coffee, and then, from nervousness, she asked him which he generally took at home; and he said when he was writing he drank a great deal of coffee, and she imagined the abominable liquid he must drink for coffee, and she told him what he must do if he would have good coffee. He listened as if he were interested, but it was not the interest of the gourmand, and when she asked why he was surprised, he said —

"When you come to see me I will try to make coffee as you say it must be made, but I would not take so much trouble for myself."

She laughed nervously, saying that he was quite right. Why waste ten minutes making a cup of coffee? She knew that before, only she had not had the courage to think it out for herself.

"Then this drawing-room must seem very frivolous to you — very unnecessary. The art of painted chairs, Aubusson carpets, and French clocks does not appeal to you."

"I suppose it does not — ideas interest me more than things. But this room is all Owen Asher."

"Yes," she said, looking round, "it is impossible to imagine anyone writing a great work here, or doing anything great here. It was those four days in Ireland with you that gave me the inspiration for Isolde."

"We must talk of Owen Asher now. Is it quite true that his ideas mean nothing to you any more, and that you are anxious to separate yourself from him?"

"I have been like a boat blown about by a little puff of wind, but I have met with a great wind which has blown me over to the other side."

She spoke of the feeling she had experienced in Florence, and of her estrangement from Owen.

"But now you must separate yourself from him; you must do this or I can never come and see you again here — this is his house!"

"You would not wish me never to speak to him again. He will think it so cruel."

“It would have been easier if we had married before. But we are married — is not that so?”

“Yes, it is so; but even if we were legally married you could hardly ask me not to speak to Owen — to pass him in the street without speaking. He is a materialist, but he always loved art, and art is a kind of spirituality. I should like you to know him, Ulick; he has become less and less material. He has changed a great deal since first I met him. He is softening, and you could influence him as you have influenced me. Will you do this, I ask you?”

“I am willing to see Owen Asher, or anybody who wishes to see me, but then I cannot see him under any false pretexts; he must know that you have separated yourself from him and that you have come to me.”

"If I belonged to neither of you, you might be friends," she said, like one speaking to herself. "But, Ulick, he has been very good to me, so good that I don’t think I could ever bring myself to be harsh to him. Why should love, which is so tender and beautiful a thing, force us to be harsh to someone?”

"But, Evelyn, you cannot belong to two men.”

"Oh, not like that," she said, putting her hand over her eyes for a moment. "Oh, that would be intolerable. I could never kiss Owen again, but I should like him to be friends with you.”

“Then tell him the step you have taken, and it will be for you to decide if he can be friends with me.”

“Ulick, it is easy to see that I am your first love — you are so exacting.”

“It is only those, Evelyn, who love for the first time who know love. I am more learned in love than all the libertines in Europe, because I have never loved before. You will find in exchanging my love for Owen Asher’s that you have thrown back the horizons.”

“Yes, I believe I shall; but admit, Ulick, it is difficult. I can never belong to anyone else again; but you do not wish me to be cruel. According to his lights Owen Asher was very kind to me; let me be as kind and good to him as may be. I cannot decide now all I shall do, but I will do all you want me to.”

XXIX

Owen had telegraphed to her, and she had come at once. But how callous and unsympathetic she was! If people knew what she was, no one would speak to her. If Owen knew that she had desired his mother's death.... But had she? She had only thought that, if Lady Asher were not to recover, it were better that she died before she, Evelyn, arrived at Riversdale. As the carriage drove through the woods she noticed that they were empty and silent, save for the screech of one incessant bird, and she thought of the dead woman's face, and contrasted it with the summer-time.

The house stood on the side of some rising ground in the midst of the green park. Cattle were grazing dreamily in the grass, which grew rich and long about a string of ponds, and she could see Owen walking under the colonnade. As the carriage came round the gravel space his eyes sought for her in the brougham, and she knew the wild and perplexed look on his face.

"No, don't let's go into the house unless you're tired,"he said; and they walked down the drive under the branches, making, they knew not why, for the open park. "This is terrible, isn't it? And this beautiful summer day, too; not a cloud in the sky, not a wind in all the air. How peaceful the cattle are in the meadow, and the swans in the pond! But we are unhappy. Why is this? You say that it is the will of God. That is no answer. But you think it is?"

Fearing to irritate him, she did not speak, but he would not be put off, and she said —

"Do not let us argue, Owen dear. Tell me about it. It was quite unexpected?"

"She had been in ill-health, as you know, for some time. Let us go this way."

He led her through the shrubbery and through the wicket into the meadows which lay under the terrace, and, thinking of the dead woman, she wondered at the strange, somnolent life of the cattle in the meadows and the swans on the pond. The willows, as if exhausted by the heat, seemed to bend under the stream, and their eyes followed the lines of the woods and looked into the burning blue of the sky, striving to read the secret there. A rim of moist earth under their feet, and above their heads the infinite blue! The stillness of the summer was in every blade of grass, in every leaf, and the pond reflected the sky and willows in hard, immovable reflections. An occasional ripple of the water-fowl in the reeds impressed upon them the mystery of Nature's indifference to human suffering.

"In that house behind that colonnade she lies dead. Good God! isn't it awful? We shall never see her. But you think we shall?"

“Owen, dear, let us avoid all discussion. She was a good woman. She was very good to me.”

"I haven’t told you that it was by her wish that I sent for you. She wanted to ask you to promise to marry me.... I told her that I had asked you, and that in a way we were engaged. I could not say more. You seemed unsettled; you seemed to wish to get out of your promise — is not that so?”

Evelyn thought of the scene by Lady Asher’s bedside that an accident had saved her from. Marriage was more than ever impossible. What should she have said if Lady Asher had not died before she arrived? The dying woman’s eyes, the dying woman’s voice! Good heavens! what would she have said? But she had considered nothing. After glancing at the telegram, she had told Merat to pack a few clothes, and had rushed away. She pondered the various excuses she might have sent. She might have said she was not in when the telegram came, she had only just caught the train as it was; if she had not got the telegram before eleven o’clock she would have been safe. But all that was past now — Lady Asher had died before she arrived. It were better that she had died — anything were better rather than that scene should have taken place; for she could not have promised to marry Owen. What would she have done? Refused while looking into her dying eyes, or run out of the room?

“You don’t answer me, Evelyn.”

"Owen, don’t press me. Enough has been said on that subject. This is no time to discuss such questions.”

“But it is, Evelyn — it was her dearest wish.... Is it then impossible? Have you entirely ceased to care?”

“No, Owen, I’m very fond of you. But you don’t really want to marry me, it is because your mother wished it.”

His face changed expression, and she knew that he was not certain on the point himself.

“Yes, Evelyn, I do, indeed I do”; and, convinced for the moment that what he said was true, he took her hands, and, looking at her, he added, "It was her wish, and if what you believe be true, she is listening now from behind that blue sky.”

Both were trembling, and, while the swans floated by, they considered the depth of blue contained in the sky. He was taken with a little dread, and was surprised to find in himself a

vague, haunting belief in the possibility of an after life. Suddenly his self-consciousness fell from him, was merged in his instinct of the woman.

“Evelyn, if I don’t marry you I shall lose you. I cannot lose you, that would be to lose everything. I don’t ask any questions-—whether you like Ulick Dean, or even what your relations are. I only want to know if you will marry me.”

He read in her eyes that the tale of their love was ended, and heard his future life ring hollow. It seemed strange that at such a moment the serene swans should float about them, that the water-fowl should move in and out of the reeds, and that the green park and the cloudless sky were like painted paper.

"Then everything is over — everything I had to live for — all is a blank. But when you sent me away before, you had to take me back; you’re not a woman who can live without a lover.”

"It is difficult, I know.”

“What has come between us, tell me? This fellow Ulick Dean, or religious scruples?”

"I have no right to talk about religious scruples.”

“Then it is this man. You love him, you’ve ceased to care for me, and you ask me to barter my right to kiss you, to take you in my arms, so that I may remain your friend. Why, Evelyn, have you got tired of me?”

"But I have not got tired of you, Owen. I am very fond of you.”

“Yes, but you don’t care any more for me to make love to you.”

"Of course it is not the same as it was in the beginning, but there is affection.”

"When passion is dead all is dead, the rest is nothing.”

It seemed so shameful that he should suffer like this, and she strove to rouse herself out of her stony determination. She was like one upon a rampart; she could see the surrounding country but could not escape to it; this rampart was the instinct in which Nature had shut her soul. But she could not bear to see him cry.

"Oh, Evelyn, this cannot be.”

Then feeling that the reality was too brutal, she yielded to the temptation to disguise the truth.

“I don’t know what I shall do, Owen; there would be no use making promises.”

"Then you do love me a little, Evelyn?”

“Yes, Owen, you must never doubt that. I shall always be fond of you; remember that, whatever happens.”

"Yes, I know, as a friend. Look round! the earth and the sky are quiet, and one day we shall be quiet too, only that is sure.”

As they walked towards the house, their self-consciousness rose to so high a pitch that the park and house seemed to them like a thin illusion, a sort of painted paper reality, which might fall to pieces at any moment. He thought how few were the hours between the present moment and the moment when she would be taken from him, — whereas she was thinking that these hours would never pass. She realised the long hours before the sunlight waned. She thought of their lonely dinner and their evening after it. All that while she would witness his grief for the love that had gone from her — a love which she could no more give than she could once withhold. The day had passed somehow; dinner was over. Around the green park the last light of the sunset grew narrower, and the cattle faded mysteriously into the gathering gloom. Owen held converse with himself.

"How you used to hang round my neck and listen with eager, nervous eyes! You always had the genius of exaltation. You were wonderful; I watched you, I understood you, I appreciated you; you were a marvellous jewel I had found, and of which I was excessively proud. I hardly lived at all for myself. You were my life; my life lived in you. Every time I went to see you, every appointment was a thrill, a wonder, a mystery. But it was not until you took me back after that separation at Florence that I sank into the depths of love. Then I became like a diver in the deep sea. What I had known before were but the shallows of passion. Oh, Evelyn, I have been extraordinarily in love. But all this is nothing to you; it even bores you.”

Never had Owen seemed so like himself; the old age which so visibly had laid its wrinkles and infirmities upon him was clearly his old age, and the old age of his fathers before him. He was in his own old room, planned and ordered by himself. Even his arm-chair seemed characteristic of him. With whatever hardships he might put up in the hunting-field or the deer-forest, he believed in the deepest armchair that upholstery could stuff when he came home. In this room were his personal pictures — those he had bought himself. They, of course, included a beautiful woman by Gainsborough, and a pellucid evening sky, with a group of pensive trees, by Corot. There were beautiful painted tables and chairs, and marble and ormolu clocks, the refined and

gracious designs of the best periods; and the sight of Owen sitting amid all these attempts to capture happiness, revealed to her the moral idea of which this man was but a symbol; and the thought that life without a moral purpose is but a passing spectre, and that our immortality lies in our religious life, occurred to her again. His first remark, too, about his gout, that it wasn't much, but just enough to make life a curse — could she tell him what end was served by torturing us in this way? — laid, as it were, an accent upon the thoughts of him that were passing in her mind.

It was that crouching attitude in the arm-chair that had made him seem so old. Now that he had taken off his spectacles, and was standing up, he did not look older than his age. He wore a silk shirt and a black velvet smokingsuit, and had kept his figure — it still went in at the waist.

The desire to tell him the truth was irresistible; the avowal trembled on her lips; but just as she was about to speak he said —

"I knew my mistake, but the temptation was irresistible. I wanted so to tell you that I loved you, and so I lost you. I wonder if any lover would have the courage to forswear these joys so that he might retain his mistress? Would any mistress be worthy of the sacrifice?"

At that moment their eyes met, and she read what was passing in his mind, and remembering how dearly she had loved him she was seized with a dread lest their love-story should end in an ignoble episode. She did not desire him in the least, and another man was her lover. Yet she was drawn by an impulse of which she was ashamed, or was it mere pity? She sat thinking that she should have foreseen this danger before she started; she was not certain she had not foreseen it, dimly, and all the while the consequences were clear to her: her future life thrown into confusion, her love of Ulick spoilt. She could only escape from this treachery by some act of will; she must tell him that she must return to London that night. If she did not he would be sure to ask if he might come to her room, or he might reach out his hand and draw her toward him at any moment.

XXX

A moment before she had been thinking how old he looked as he sat in his arm-chair, and yet, when he put his arms round her, she had allowed him to kiss her. It was not desire, nor was it love; she seemed to have been overcome by some incomprehensible lassitude. Now what was going to happen? Now what was she going to do? She could not marry Ulick.

She had managed everything very badly, and she was overcome with a feeling that she could no longer cope with things. Other women might manage intrigues and keep their lovers apart, passing from one to another; but she could not manage these things, and she felt that there was no way except to put love aside altogether. The idea of putting Ulick away frightened her, and yet the feeling rose in her again, and it was so intense that it almost sounded like a voice speaking within her — "You must put Ulick away and Owen away and lead a chaste life; you are only bungling things. You have disgraced yourself in your own eyes and in the eyes of both your lovers. If you were to tell them the truth, neither would speak to you again. This is not true — Owen would; but you will not tell him. You will tell them lie upon lie, and if you persist there will be other lovers after Ulick. It will be nothing but lies until you do what you know you must do — put love aside and lead a chaste life; it is the only life for you." Her feeling was so distinct and precise that she was frightened, and she looked out of the window of the railway carriage, hoping the landscape would distract her. But she could take no interest in it. Yesterday it had seemed so beautiful, but to-day it was all reversed, and the light was different. She preferred to remember it.... They must be nearing the river, and she remembered how in one place it ran round a field, making a silver horseshoe in the green land. They had crossed it twice in the space of a quarter of a mile; then it followed the railway, placid, docile, reflecting the trees and sky. Then, like a child, it was soon taken with a new idea; it ran far away out of sight, and Evelyn thought it would never return. But it came back again, turbulent and shallow, and with woods on the steep hillside, and spanned by a beautiful stone bridge. A little later its wanderings grew still more perplexing, and she was not sure that it had not been joined in some strange way by another river. But flowing round a low-lying field, coming suddenly from behind a bend in the land, it had seemed in that place like a pond. One bank was lined with bushes, the other lay open to a view of a treeless plain divided by ditches. Three ladies had held their light boat in the deep current, and she had wondered who they were, and what was their manner of living and their desires, and though she would never know these things, the image of these ladies in their boat had fixed itself in her mind.

Soon after the train began to slacken speed, and nervously she awaited her destiny.

And she began to wonder what she would do when she got to London. Would she tell Ulick what had happened? She could not bring herself to a resolution. At the bottom of her heart she

thought she would not tell him. Then why was she going to see him? For she felt she must see him, and on arriving in London she took a hansom and drove to his lodgings. He lived in an old faded square in Bloomsbury. Even in June the leaves dropped on the rusty railings, and in July the grass was worn away, and even the cats seemed overcome by the heat of the baked earth. In the side streets there were newspaper shops and greengrocers' shops; and the children of the neighbourhood seemed to make a playground of the steps of Ulick's house — an old-fashioned house, with dusty panes and wide sloping staircase. The children made way for Evelyn; and the waddling, middle-aged woman of the London purlieus, who wears no stays, said that Mr. Dean was not at home; she thought he had gone to write in the British Museum.

Evelyn had not a ticket for the reading-room, and inquiries were made with difficulty. Eventually she was given a ticket for the day, and she wandered round the rooms, learning from one librarian and another that Mr. Dean had been in the Museum and had gone away, but was coming back again.

She walked about the galleries trying to interest herself in the statues, and at four o'clock she felt it would be useless to wait for him any longer, and she went to Dulwich, thinking he must have gone there to see her father. Her father had gone to St. Joseph's, and it was seven o'clock before she got back to Park Lane. But she still felt that she must see Ulick, and after dinner she set forth again. The same servant opened the door to her, and she was told that Mr. Dean had come back very soon after she had left. He had gone out after his dinner, leaving a message that he was lecturing that evening, and she gave Evelyn the address.

It was the other side of London, and it seemed to her that she had passed through a thousand streets before she got there. The house door was open, but the passage was so dark that she could not see who was speaking to her. She guessed it was a woman. "Dean is in No. 37," and she was left to find the way there by herself. The house was full of passages and staircases, and there was not sufficient light to read the numbers on the doors. At last a light at the end of a passage guided her; the door was ajar, she pushed it open and she saw Ulick seated at a small wooden table. The light of the paraffin lamp fell on his face. There were many others in the room, but she could not distinguish their faces. Ulick got up to receive her, and he pointed to a chair in the corner of the room where she might sit, and in a few words he told her that they had been discussing the five senses and had now come to the last, the sense of permeability. This sixth sense, he said, enabled those who possessed it to distinguish the nature of persons or things without recourse to the ordinary senses, it pertained more to the nature of an intuition. He proceeded to explain it, and Evelyn could not help wondering what transcendental criticisms he had applied to the ordinary five.

All that day she had been propelled to see him, and it had never once been clear to her why she desired to see him. If she had come here only that he might detect Owen Asher in her! Would he

know that she had come from Owen? Apparently he did not know, and if he suspected she would have to lie.

She saw a head lighted up as if by enchantment on a background of mysterious shadows. The wide grey eyes were full of quiet resolve, and they and the soft brown beard carried the likeness far back through the ages. The scene was for all time, a young man teaching philosophy. His listeners were poor clerks and seamstresses, men and women weary of the brutality of daily life, glad to forget the world for a while, glad to rest for a while in a dream of beyond the world.

Evelyn could see that he was typical as the scene was typical. He showed the same courtesy as she imagined Christ showed among His disciples; and she admired his gentleness once more. Never once did he grow impatient at a foolish answer, and he frequently interrupted his discourse to put a question to one of his disciples.

He spoke for about half an hour after Evelyn had come in, and then, perhaps because Evelyn was waiting for him, he dismissed his audience, saying that on next Thursday he would discuss the spiritual necessity for a native religion. His disciples went, bidding him goodbye, and he listened to everyone, though he was anxious to speak to Evelyn, and they did not detain him unduly, seeing that he had special business with one.

“Before our marriage, Evelyn, you must go away to some pure place where there are trees and silences among the trees, and where there are grey skies and perhaps the sound of the sea.”

"Why," she thought, "does he speak like this to me, the very thoughts I was thinking as I came here? He cannot know what has happened.”

"And I will come to meet you there," he said, “and we shall be married." She did not answer him, and he wondered at her silence. "The season," he said, “will soon be over, and you can leave London in another month.”

She spoke of the materialism of the town. The town had come to seem to her like a stuffy omnibus; and then she spoke of her intention of leaving the stage.

“I should not like you to give up your art — that is the best part of you. Elizabeth, Elsa, Isolde are your ideas. We must always cling to our ideas.”

"Do you think so? I’m tired of the stage. I want something else. Ulick, I must leave the stage. I can’t tell you why, but I feel it.”

“When anyone feels like that, I never argue with him. There is probably a great reason behind this vague feeling ”; and he spoke to her of the descent of the Oversoul into the individual as they walked, turning to the right and left through a tangle of mean streets.

XXXI

At the end of the month Lady Duckle went to Homburg. Owen's doctors had ordered him to Bath for treatment for his gout, and Ulick was pressing her to come to the mountains and forests, where they could be alone with nature. He spoke of a glen, and of lawn and lake prospects; and one day, tired of subterfuges and evasions, she proposed that before returning to Ireland they should spend a week or two at Dulwich.

He seemed very serious, and did not answer her for a long while.

"There can be no happiness for either of us, Evelyn, until I tell your father I am your lover, and that we are going to be married."

"We ought to have told him, Ulick, but I felt I could not tell him."

"You have not even told me!"

She looked up in surprise, and he said —

"You have not even told me that you would marry me. I cannot live with you in your father's house, or elsewhere, until he knows what our relations are."

"Ulick, when I am in Dulwich, if you will come and live there for a week we will talk about it. You will persuade me to marry you if you will come to Dulwich."

This last argument was convincing, and the happiest time in their lives was the week they spent in Dulwich. They sat down together to dinner under the lamp at the round table in the little back room, and their evenings were passed at the harpsichord and the clavichord; and amid the dreams and aspirations of great men they attained their sublime nature. The music that had been given, and that was to be given, at St. Joseph's furnished a never-failing subject of discussion; and Mr. Innes told them stories of Italy in the sixteenth century — how almost every Sunday there was a festival in some church, where the most beautiful music was heard; along the nave were eight choirs, four on one side and four on the other, raised on stages eight to ten, feet high, and facing one another at equal distances. Each choir had a portable organ, and the *maestro di capello* beat the time for the principal choir. And Mr. Innes's eyes lighted up when he spoke of the admirable *style recitatif* in the oratory of St. Marcellus when there was a congregation of the Brothers of the Holy Crucifix. This order was composed of the chief noblemen of Rome, who had therefore the power of bringing together the rarest musicians Italy could produce. The voices began with a psalm in motet form, and then the instruments played a

symphony, after which the voices sang a story from the Old Testament. Each chorister represented a personage in the story, etc. He spoke of the great organist at St. Peter's, and the wonderful invention he is said to have displayed in his improvisations. No one since had played the harp like the renowned Horatio, but there was no one who could play the lyre like the renowned Ferrabosco in England. Evelyn leaned across the table, transported three centuries back, hearing all this music, which she had known from her earliest years, performed, by virtue of her father's description in Italy, in St. Peter's, in the oratory of St. Marcellus, and in the church of Minerva.

In the mornings Evelyn and Ulick lingered in the shade of the chestnut trees or loitered in the lanes. They went for long drives; and Richmond Park, not more than eight or ten miles distant, was at this season a beautiful, plaintive languor. There was a strange stillness in the air and a tender bloom upon the blue sky which spoke to the heart as no words, as only music could. The shadows moved listlessly among the bracken, and every vista was an enticement. There were wide prospects suggesting some great domain, and about the large oaks which stood in these open spaces herds of deer browsed, themselves the colour of the approaching month. About a sudden hillside, brilliantly blue, the evanescent mist hung over the heavy fronds, going out in the sunlight that was breaking through a grey sky. .Ulick exclaimed, "How beautiful!" and at the same moment Evelyn said, "Look at the deer; they are going to jump the railings." But the deer ran underneath, and galloped down the sloping park between a line of massive oaks; and the white and the tan hinds and fawns expressed in their life and beauty something which thrilled in the heart, and remained there.

The park was wreathed that morning in sunlight and mist; it seemed to invite confidences, and the lovers dreamed of a perfect union of soul. The carriage was told to wait for them, and they took a path leading under a long line of trees towards high ground. Carts had passed there, and the ruts were full of water, but the earth about them was a little crisp, as if there had been frost during the night. They had brought with them a score of *Parsifal*, for it was not yet certain that Evelyn would not play the part of Kundry. Notwithstanding Ulick's criticism, she thought she would like to play in the third act. But they were too interested in each other to open the score, and they were excited by the wonder of Nature in the still morning. The sky was all silver, and a very little distance bathed the hillsides in beautiful blue tones. The leaves of the oak trees hung languidly, as if considering the lowly earth to which they must soon return. Yet the blood was hot and the nerves were highly strung, and life seemed capable of great things in this moody, contemplative morning. There was a wonder in the little wren that picked her way among the fronds, and a thrill in the scurry of the watchful rabbit; and when they reached the crest of the upland and saw an open expanse of park, with the deer moving away through the mist, their souls dilated, and in happy ecstasy they looked upon Nature with the same innocent wonderment as the first man and woman.

But day by day it became clear to her that Ulick intended to keep to his resolution not to make love to her, not to kiss her until she had told her father that he was her lover, or that she was going to marry him.

"I see it distresses you," she said, "that I should speak on the subject. We are like friends. No one would think to see us that we had ever been in love with each other."

"That we are in love with each other."

She took his hand, and he did not attempt to withdraw it, but she could see that he was quite firm.

"You will never kiss me again, I suppose," she said.

"Many things must happen before I do. You have not told me that you have broken with Owen Asher, that you do not intend to see him any more; and if you love me I don't see why you do not tell your father that you wish to marry me. If we love anyone it is natural that we should wish to live with them. I don't understand you, Evelyn."

A stick breaking under a passing step roused her, and with a little start she let go his hand. She was quite sure he would never kiss her again until she had promised to be his wife, and she could not understand why she did not make this promise at once, why she continued to hesitate, for she truly loved him. She loved himself, and his ideas and his art — they seemed to have been made for one another; then why did she hesitate? Was it for the trivial reason that she did not wish to leave London? She knew that he was only staying on for her sake. She knew that every breath of air he drew was a weariness to him. She could see he pined for the air of the country and the seashore, that he longed for mountain prospects and the solitude of some lonely dell, and she, did she not too love these things? Had she not been very happy with him that time in Ireland? She wished he would talk to her of love. She was weary of music, but there was nothing else to talk about, and she asked him to play to her, for he had brought his fiddle with him, and he played Lulli and Rameau, and hearing the music the passers-by stopped to listen, and the deer in the distant bracken raised their heads.

XXXII

Her father had gone to St. Joseph's for choir practice, Ulick had gone to London for strings for her viola da gamba; and all the morning she had been uneasy and expectant. The feeling never quite left her that something was about to happen, that she was to meet someone — someone for whom she had been waiting a long while. So she started on hearing the front-door bell ring. She could think of no one whom it might be unless Owen. If it were, what would she say? And she waited, eager for the servant to announce the visitor. It was Monsignore Mostyn.

She was dressed in a muslin teagown over shot-green silk, and was conscious of her triviality as she stood before the tall, spare ecclesiastic. She admired the calm, refined beauty of his face, the bright dark eyes and the thin features, steadfast and aloof as some saints she had seen in pictures.

"I called to see your father, Miss Innes, but he is not in, and hearing that you were, I asked to see you. For my business is really with you, that is, if you can spare the time?"

"Won't you sit down, Monsignore?"

"I have come, Miss Innes, to remind you of a promise that you once made me."

The colour returned to her cheeks, and a smile to her lips. But she did not remember, and was slightly embarrassed.

"Did I make you a promise?"

"Have you forgotten my speaking to you about some poor Sisters who might be driven from their convent if they failed to pay the interest on a mortgage?"

"Ah, yes, on the night of the concert."

"They have paid the interest and kept a roof over their heads, but in doing so they have exhausted their resources; and, not to put too fine a point upon it, I am afraid they often have not enough to eat. Something must be done for them. I thought that a concert would be the quickest way of getting them some money."

"Where is this convent

"At Wimbledon."

“My old convent! The Passionist Sisters!”

"Your old convent?”

“Yes," Evelyn replied, the colour rising slightly to her cheeks. "I made a retreat there, long ago, before I went on the stage.”

She was grieved to hear that the prioress she had known was dead; she had died two years ago, and Mother Margaret was dead too. Monsignore could tell her nothing about Sister Bonaventure; and in the midst of her questions he explained how the financial difficulties had arisen. They were, he said, the result of the imprudences of the late prioress, one of the best and holiest of women, but unfortunately not endowed with sufficient business foresight. He was quite prepared to admit that the little wooden chapel which had preceded the present chapel was inadequate, and that she was justified in building another, but not in expending nearly one thousand pounds in stained glass. The new chapel had cost ten thousand pounds, and the interest of this money had to be paid. There were other debts —

“But there is no reason why I should weary you with an exact statement.”

“But you do not weary me, Monsignore; I am, on the contrary, deeply interested.”

“The convent owes a great deal to the late prioress, and the last thing I wish to express is disapproval. We do not know the circumstances, and must not judge her; we know that she acted for the best. No doubt she is now praying to God to secure the safety of her convent.”

A few days after, she was in Park Lane. She had gone there to pay some bills, and she was going through them when she was startled by the front-door bell. It was a visitor, without doubt. Her thoughts leaped to Monsignore, and her face lighted up. But he did not know she was at Park Lane; he would not go there.... It was Owen come up from Bath. What should she say to him? Good heavens! It was too late to say she was not at home. He was already on the stairs, and when he entered he divined that he was not welcome.

Suddenly he besought her not to throw him over.... She had to refuse to kiss him, and that was convincing, he said. Once a woman was not greedy for kisses, the end was near. And his questions were to the point, and irritatingly categorical. Had she ever been unfaithful to him? Did she love Ulick Dean? He took her by both hands, and, looking her straight in the face, asked her to give him her word of honour that Ulick Dean was not her lover, — that she had never kissed him, that she had never even desired to kiss him, that no idea of love-making had ever arisen between them. She pledged her word on every point, and this was the second time that

her *liaison* with Ulick had obliged her to lie, deliberately in so many words. Nor did the lying even end there. He wanted her to stay, to dine with him; she had to invent excuses — more lies.

She was deceiving Owen, she was deceiving her father, she was deceiving Ulick, she was deceiving Monsignore — he would not have thought of asking her to sing at the concert if he knew what a life was hers. Nor would those good women at the convent accept her aid, if they knew what kind of woman she was. And the strange thing was that she did not believe herself to be a bad woman; at the bottom of her heart she loved truth and sincerity. She wished to have an ideal and to live up to it, yet she was doing the very opposite. That was what was so strange; that was what she did not understand; that was what made her incomprehensible to herself. She sighed, and at the bottom of her heart there lay an immense weariness, a weariness of life, of the life she was leading; and she longed for a life that would coincide with her principles, and she felt that if she did not change her life, she would do something desperate.

Evelyn remembered that when she had sent Owen away before, he had said, "Sexual continence is not the whole of morality; from your use of the word one would think that it was." But for her the sexual conscience was the entire conscience — she had no temptation to steal. There was lying, but she was never tempted to tell lies except for one reason; she could not think of herself telling a lie for any other. To her the sexual sin included all the others. She turned her head aside, for the bitterness of her conscience was unendurable, and she vowed that, whatever happened, she would speak the truth if Owen questioned her again. She could never bring herself to tell such horrible falsehoods again.

As she lay in bed, conscious of the inextricable tangle of her life, it was knotting so closely and rapidly that her present double life could not endure much longer, the odious taste of the lies she had told that afternoon rose again to her lips, and, as if to quench the bitterness, she vowed that she would tell Owen the truth... if he asked her. If he did not ask her she would have to bear the burden of her lies. She tried not to wish that he might ask her. Then questions sallied from every side. She could not marry Owen without telling him about Ulick. She could not marry Ulick without telling him that she had been unfaithful to him with Owen. Should she send away Owen, and marry Ulick, or would it be better to send away Ulick and marry Owen — if he would marry her after he had heard her confession? It was unendurable to have to tell lies all day long — yes, all day long — of one sort or another. She ought to send them both away.... But could she remain on the stage without a lover? Could she go to Bayreuth by herself? Could she give up the stage? And then?

She even thought that she would not greatly care if she never sang on the stage again. Last night she had put the thought aside as if it were madness — to-day it seemed almost natural. Thinking of the poor Sisters who lived in prayer and poverty on the edge of the common, she remembered that her life was given up to the portrayal of sensual emotion on the stage. She

remembered the fierce egotism of the stage — an egotism which pursued her into every corner of her life. Compared with the lives of the poor Sisters, who had renounced all that was base in them, her life was very base indeed. In her stage life she was an agent of the sensual passion, not only with her voice, but with her arms, her neck and hair, and every expression of her face; and it was the craving of the music that had thrown her into Ulick's arms. If it had subjugated her, how much more would it subjugate and hold within its sensual persuasion the ignorant listener — the listener who would perceive in the music nothing but its sensuality? Why had the Church not placed stage life under the ban of mortal sin? It would have done so if it knew what stage life was, and must always be. She then wondered what Monsignore thought of the stage, and from the moment her curiosity was engaged on this point it did not cease to trouble her till it brought her to the door of the presbytery. The ostensible object of her visit was to make certain proposals to Monsignore regarding the music she was to sing at the concert.

She was shown into a small room; its one window was so high up on the wall that the light was dim in the room, though outside there was brilliant sunshine. The sadness of the little room struck cold upon her, and she noticed the little space of floor covered with cocoa-nut matting, and how it grated under the feet. The furniture was a polished oak table, with six chairs to match. A pious print hung on each wall. One was St. Monica and St. Augustine, and the rapt expression of their faces reminded her that she might be bartering a divine inheritance for a coarse pleasure that left but regret in the heart. And it was in such heartsick humour that Monsignore found her. He seemed to assume that she needed his help, and the tender solicitude with which he wished to come to her aid was in itself a consolation. She was already an incipient penitent as she told him of her project to bring an orchestra at her own expense to Wimbledon, and give the forest murmurs with the Bird Song from *Siegfried*. Monsignore left everything to her; he placed himself unreservedly in her hands. After a long silence, she pushed a cheque for fifty pounds across the table, begging him not to mention the name of the giver. She was singing for them, that was sufficient obligation. He approved of her delicacy of feeling, thanked her for her generosity, and the business of the interview seemed ended.

"I'm so much obliged to you, Monsignore Mostyn, for having come to me. for having given me an opportunity of doing some good with my money. Hitherto, I'm ashamed to say, I've spent it all on myself. It has often seemed to me intolerably selfish, and I often felt that I must do something, only I did not know what to do."

Then, feeling that she must take him into her confidence, she asked him what proportion of our income we should devote to charity. He said it was impossible to fix a precise sum, but he knew many deserving cases, and offered to advise her in the distribution of whatever money she might decide to spend in charity. Suddenly his manner changed; he even seemed to wish her to stay, and the conversation turned back to music. The conversation was mundane as possible,

and it was only now and then, by some slight allusion to the Church, that he reminded Evelyn, and perchance himself, that the essential must be distinguished from the circumstantial.

Again and again the temptation rose up, it seemed to look out from her very eyes, and she was so conscious of this irresistible desire to speak to him of herself that she no longer heard him, and hardly saw the blank wall with the pious print upon it.

"I have not told you, Monsignore," she said at last, "that I am leaving the stage."

She knew that he must ask her what had induced her to think of taking so important a step, and then she would have an opportunity of asking his opinion of the stage. Of course neither Ulick's nor Owen's name would be mentioned.

"As at present constituted, the stage is a dangerous influence. Some women no doubt are capable of resisting evil when surrounded by evil. Even so they set a bad example, for the very knowledge of their virtue tempts others less sure of themselves to engage in the same life, and these weak ones fall. The virtuous actress is like a false light, which instead of warning vessels from the rocks entices them to their ruin."

He did not indict the Oberammergau Passion Play, but he could not accept *Parsifal*. He had heard Catholics aver, while approving of the performance of *Parsifal*, that they would not wish to see the piece performed out of Bayreuth. But he failed to understand this point of view altogether. It seemed to assume that a parody of the Mass was unobjectionable at Bayreuth, though not elsewhere. If there was no parody of the Mass, why should they say that they would not like to see the piece performed elsewhere? He had read the book and knew the music, and could not understand how a great work of art could contain scenes from real life. Whether these be religious ceremonies or social functions, the artistic sin is the same. He asked Evelyn why she was smiling, and she told him that it was because the only two whom she had heard disapprove of *Parsifal* were Monsignore Mostyn and Ulick Dean. It seemed strange that two such extremes should agree regarding the profligacy of *Parsifal*. Monsignore was interested for a moment in Ulick Dean's views, and then he said —

"But was it with the intention of consulting me, Miss Innes, that you introduced the subject? I hear that you are going to play the principal part next year — Kundry."

"Nothing is settled. As I told you just now, Monsignore, I am thinking of leaving the stage, and your opinions concerning it do not encourage me to remain an actress."

“My dear child, you have had the good fortune to be brought up in Holy Church. You have, I hope, constant recourse to the sacraments. You have confided the difficulties of your stage life to your confessor. How does he advise you?”

Raising her eyes, Evelyn said in a sinking voice —

"Even if one has doubts about the whole doctrine of the Church, it is still possible to wish to lead a good life. Don’t you think so, Monsignore?”

"There are many Protestants who lead excellent lives. But I have always noticed that when a Catholic begins to question the doctrine of the Church, his or her doubts were preceded by a desire to lead an irregular life.”

And in the silence Evelyn became aware of the afternoon sun shining through the window above their heads, enlivening the dark parlour. When he resumed the conversation, it was to lead her to speak of herself and the reasons which had suggested an abandonment of her stage career, and she told him how she had begun to perceive that the stage had ceased to interest her as it had once done; she spoke of vulgarity and parade, yet that was not quite what she meant; it had come to seem to her like so much waste, as if she were wasting her time in doing things that did not matter, like grown people would feel if they were asked to pass the afternoon playing with dolls. Shrugging her shoulders hysterically, she said she could not explain.

"But have you an idea of what life you wish to lead?”

“No, I don’t think I have; I only know that I am not happy in my present life.”

"I believe you see a good deal of Sir Owen Asher. He helped you, did he not, in your musical education?”

"Yes,"she answered under her breath. "He is an intimate friend." In a moment of unexpected courage, she said, “Do you know him, Monsignore? ”

"I have heard a good deal about him, and nothing, I regret to say, to his credit. He is, I believe, an avowed atheist, and does not hesitate to declare his unbelief in every society, and to make open boast of an immoral life. He has read and tried to understand a little more than the people with whom he associates. I suppose the doubts you entertain regarding the doctrine of the Church are the result of his teaching?”

With a little pathetic air, Evelyn admitted that Owen had used every possible argument to destroy her faith. She had read Huxley, Darwin, and a little of Herbert Spencer.

“Herbert Spencer! Miserable collections of trivial facts, bearing upon nothing. Of what value, I ask, can it be to suffering humanity to know that such and such a fact has been observed and described? Then the general law! Rubbish, ridiculous rubbish!”

"The scientists fail to see that what we feel matters much more than what we know.”

"True, quite true," he said, turning sharply and looking at her with admiration. Then, recollecting himself, he said, "But God does not exist because we feel He exists. He exists not through us, but through Himself, from all time and through all eternity. To feel is better than to observe, to pray is better than to inquire, but indiscriminate abandonment to our feelings would lead us to give credence to every superstition. You have, I perceive, escaped from the rank materialism of Sir Owen’s teaching, but whither are you drifting, my dear child? You must return to the Church; without the Church we are as vessels without a rudder or compass.”

He walked up and down the room as though debating with himself. Evelyn held her breath, wondering what new turn the conversation would take. Suddenly she lost her courage, and overcome with fear got up to go, and Monsignore, considering that enough had been said, did not attempt to detain her. But as he bade her good-bye at the door, his keen eye fixed upon her, he added, "Remember, I do not admit your difficulties to be intellectual ones. When you come to realise that for yourself, I shall be glad to do all in my power to help you. God bless you, my child! ”

If only she could put the whole thing aside — refuse to bother her head any more, or else believe blindly what she was told. She hated wobbling, yet she did nothing else. Suddenly she felt that if she were to believe at all, it must be like Monsignore. The magnetism of his face thrilled her, and, in a moment, it had all become real to her. But it was too late. She could never do all her religion asked. Her whole life would have to come to pieces; nothing of it would remain, and she entirely lost heart when she considered in detail the sacrifices she would have to make. She saw herself at Dulwich with her father, giving singing lessons, attending the services, and living about St. Joseph’s. She saw herself singing operas in every capital, and always a new lover at her heels. Both lives were equally impossible to her. As she lay back in her carriage driving through the lazy summer streets, she almost wished she had no conscience at all. What was the use of it? She had just enough to spoil her happiness in wrong-doing, yet not enough to prevent her doing what deep down in her heart she knew to be wrong.

That evening she wrote a number of letters, and begged a subscription from every friend.

She dipped her pen in the ink, and then laid it down, overcome by a sudden and intolerable melancholy. She could have cried, so great was her weariness with the world, so worthless did

her life seem. She had begged her father's forgiveness; he had forgiven her, but she had not sent away her lover.... She had told Monsignore that, in consequence of certain scruples of conscience, she intended to give up the stage; but she had not told him that she had taken another lover and brought him to live with her under her father's roof. She walked to and fro, and came to a resolution regarding her relations with Ulick, at all events in her father's house.

But Ulick? Should she marry him and accept the gods? That would settle everything.

At that moment the servant brought her a small brown-paper parcel. It looked like a book. It was a book. She opened it. Monsignore had sent her a book. *Sin and its Consequences!* She began reading it. On one point she was sure, that sin did exist.... If we felt certain things to be wrong, they were wrong; at least they were wrong for those who thought them wrong, and she had never been able to feel that it was right to live with a man to whom she was not married. Everyone had a moral code. Owen would not cheat at cards, and he thought it mean to tell lies — a very poor code it was, but still he acted up to it. Ulick had a code of morals, and he acted up to it. Her mistake from the beginning was in trying to accept a code of morals which did not coincide with her feelings. But the teaching in this book did coincide with her feelings. Could she follow it? That was the point. Could she live without a lover? Owen thought not. She laughed, and then walked about the room, unable to shake off a dead weight of melancholy.

Though the Church was all wrong, and there was no God, she was still leading a life which she felt to be wrong; and if the Church were right, and there was a resurrection, her soul was lost. She took up the book and read till her fears became so intense that she could read no more, and she walked up and down the room, her nerves partially unstrung. In the evening she talked a great deal and rapidly, apparently not quite aware of what she was saying, or else her face wore a brooding look; sometimes it awakened a little, and then her eyes were fixed on Ulick.

She was thinking that she had got her life into an extraordinary muddle; that for her at least there was nothing but to deny herself; and as she sat looking at Ulick the conviction grew stronger and stronger that it was necessary for her to lead a chaste life.

XXXIII

Owing to her exertions and Monsignore Mostyn's, a large audience had been collected, and though the month was September there were many fashionable, influential, and musical people present.

She sang "Elsa's Dream," "Elizabeth's Prayer," and the "Liebestod," and when she was recalled at the end of the concert, she sang Senta's ballad as a *bonne bouche*, something that the audience had not expected, and would send her friends away more than ever pleased with her.

Her father had not been able to come — that was a disappointment, but when she left the platform Monsignore Mostyn and Father Daly, the convent chaplain, were waiting to thank her. In his courtly manner Monsignore told her of the pleasure her singing had given him. But when Father Daly, a small blonde man, seemingly too shy to raise his eyes, mentioned that the nuns expected her to tea, her courage seemed to slip away. The idea of the convent frightened her, and she tried to excuse herself, arguing that she had to go back to London.

"If you're engaged for dinner I'm afraid there will not be time," Monsignore said. She looked up, and, meeting his eyes, did not dare to lie to him.

"No; I'm not dining out, but I promised to take Mr. Dean back in my carriage."

"Mr. Dean will, I'm sure, not mind waiting."

It seemed to Evelyn that Monsignore suspected her relations with Ulick, and to refuse to go to the convent, she thought, would only confirm him in his suspicions. So she accepted the invitation abruptly, and when they turned to go, she said —

"My carriage is here; I'll drive you "; and at the same moment she remembered that Ulick was waiting. But she felt that she could not drive back to London with him after leaving the convent, and she hoped that Monsignore would not correctly interpret the disappointment which was plain upon his face. No; he must go back by train — no, there would be no use his calling that evening at Park Lane.

She wore a black-and-white striped silk dress, with a sort of muslin bodice covered with lace, and there was a large bunch of violets in her waistband. The horses were beautiful in the sunshine, and their red hides glistened in the long slanting rays. She put up her parasol and tried to understand, but she could only see the angles of houses and the eccentricity of every passer-by. She saw very clearly the thin facial line, and her eyes rested on the touch of purple at

the throat to mark his Roman dignity. Father Daly sat opposite, rubbing his thumbs, like one in the presence of a superior. He was not ill-looking, but so shy that his features passed unperceived, and it was some time before she saw his eyes — they were always cast down; and a thin, well-cut nose disappeared in his freckled cheeks. The cloth he wore was coarser than Monsignore's; his heavy shoes contrasted with the finely stitched and buckled shoes of the Papal prelate.

This visit to the convent frightened Evelyn more than the largest audience that had ever assembled to hear her, and, until they got clear of the town, she was not certain she would not plead some excuse and tell the coachman to turn back. But now it was too late. The carriage ascended the steep street, and, at the top of it, the town ended abruptly at the edge of the common. On one side was a high brick wall, hiding the grounds and gardens of the villas; on the other was the common, seen through the leaves of a line of thin trees. In her nervous agitation, she saw very distinctly — the foreground teeming with the animation of cricket, the more remote parts solitary, the windmill . hovering in a corner out of the way of the sunset, and two horsemen and a horsewoman cantering along the edge of the long valley into which the plain dropped precipitously. The sun sank in a white sky, and Evelyn caught the point of one of the ribs of her parasol, so that she could hold it in a better position to shade her eyes, and she saw how the houses stretched into a point, the last being an inn, no doubt the noisy resort of the cricketers and the landscape painters. There was a painter making his way towards the valley, his paint-box on his back. But at that moment the carriage turned into a lane where a paling enclosed the small gardens. She then noticed the decaying pear or apple tree, to which was attached a clothes-line. Enormous sunflowers weltered in the dusty corners. The brick was crumbling and broken, beautiful in colour, "And in every one of these cottages someone is living; someone is laughing; someone will soon be dead. Good heavens, how strange!"

"We are nearly there."

Evelyn started; it was Father Daly speaking to her. "The cottages have spoilt the appearance on this side, but the view is splendid from the other."

The lane ascended, and Evelyn remembered how the house stood inside a wall behind some trees, looking westward, the last southern end of the common land as the windmill was the last northern end. There had been iron gates when a great City merchant lived in the Georgian house, which had been gradually transformed to suit the requirements of the Sisters. The melancholy little peal of the bell hanging on a loose wire sounded far away, and in the interval Evelyn noticed the large double door, from which the old green paint was peeling. A step was heard within, and the little shutter which closed the grated peephole in the panel of the door was drawn back; the eyes and forehead band of a nun appeared for an instant in the opening; and then, with a rattle of keys, the door was hastily opened, and the little portress, with ruddy

cheeks and a shy smile, stood aside to let Evelyn pass in. She kissed the hand of Monsignore as he turned to her with a kindly word of salutation. “The reverend mother is expecting you," she said, her agitation being due to the importance of the occasion.

“No doubt they have been praying that I might sing well, poor dears," Evelyn thought, as she followed the nun up the paved covered way. Through the iron frame-work, woven through and through with creepers and monthly roses, she caught glimpses of the partly obliterated carriage drive, and of the neatly kept flower beds filled with geraniums and tall white asters.

In the hall an Adams’ ceiling radiated in graceful lines from a central medallion, and before a statue of the Sacred Heart a light was burning. Evelyn remembered how the poor lay Sisters laboured to keep the stone floor spotless, and it was into the parlour on the left, which Evelyn remembered to be the best parlour, that Sister Angela ushered them.

In the old days, before a sudden crisis on the Stock Exchange had obliged the owner to sell the house for much less than its true value to the little community of Sisters of the Passion who were then seeking a permanent house, this room, round which Evelyn and the two priests were looking for seats, had been used, as a morning-room. Three long French windows looked out on the garden, and the flowers and air made it a bright, cheerful room, in spite of the severe pictures on the walls. She recognised at once the engraving of Leonardo’s "Last Supper" which hung over the solid marble chimney-piece a little above the statue of Our Lady of Lourdes and the two blue vases, and also the pale, distempered walls, and the coloured smiling portrait of the Pope, and a full-length photograph of Cardinal Manning, signed in his own clear, neat handwriting.

Evelyn and the priests, still undecided where they should sit, looked at the little horsehair sofa. Monsignore brought forward for her one of the six high, straight-backed chairs, and they sat at the circular table laid out with severe books; a volume of the *Lives of the Saints* lay under her hand, and she glanced at a little box for contributions. She looked at the priests and then round the room, striving to penetrate the meaning which it vaguely conveyed to her — an indescribable air of scrupulous neatness and cleanliness, a sense of virginal dulness. But suddenly a startling sense of the incongruity came upon her, that she, the opera-singer, Owen Asher’s mistress, should be admitted into a convent, should be received, the honoured guest of holy women. And she got up, leaving the two priests to discuss the financial results of the concert, and stood gazing out at the window. There was the rosery with the lilac bushes shutting out the view of the green fields beyond; and this was the portion of the garden given up to visitors and boarders. She used to walk there during the retreat. Away to the right was the big sunny garden where the nuns went for their daily recreation. By special permission she had once been allowed there; she remembered the sloping lawns, the fringe of stately elms, and over them the view westward of Richmond Park. She thought of the nuns walking under their trees,

half ghost-like, half sybil-like they used to seem in their grey habits, with their long grey veils falling picturesquely, their thoughts fixed on an infinite life, and this life never seeming more to them than a little passing shadow.

Evelyn returned slowly to the table. The priests were talking of the convent choir; Monsignore turned to address a question to her, but before he spoke, the door opened and two nuns entered, hardly of this world did they seem in their long grey habits.

The reverend mother, a small, thin woman, with eager eyes and a nervous, intimate manner, hastened forward. Evelyn felt that the reverend mother could not be less than sixty, yet she did not think of her as an old woman. Between her rapid utterances an expression of sadness came upon her face, instilled through the bright eyes, and Evelyn contrasted her with Mother Philippa, the sub-prioress. Even the touch of these women's hands was different. There was a nervous emotion in the reverend mother's hand. Mother Philippa's hand when it touched Evelyn's expressed somehow a simpler humanity.

She was a short, rather stout, homely-faced Englishwoman, about thirty-eight or forty — such a woman as is met daily on the croquet-lawns in our suburbs, probably one of three plain sisters, and never could have doubted her vocation.

"I cannot tell you how grateful we are, Miss Innes, for what you have done for us. Monsignore will have told you of the straits we are in…. But you are an old friend, I understand, of our convent. Mother Philippa, our sub-prioress, tells me you made a retreat here seven or eight years ago."

"I don't think it was more than six years," Mother Philippa said, correcting the reverend mother. "I remember you very well, Miss Innes. You left us one Easter morning."

Evelyn liked her plain, matter-of- fact face — a short face, undistinguished, by any special characteristic, yet once seen it could not be forgotten, so implicit was it of her practical mind and a desire to serve someone.

"That silly Sister Agnes has forgotten the strawberry jam," she said, when the portress brought in the tea. "I will run and fetch it; I shan't be a moment."

"Oh, Mother Philippa, pray don't trouble. I prefer some of that cake."

"No, no, I've been thinking all the afternoon of this jam; we make it ourselves; you must have some."

The reverend mother apologised for having put sugar in Evelyn's tea, for she remembered now that Evelyn had said that she did not like sugar; and Monsignore took advantage of the occasion to reassure the reverend mother that the success of the concert had been much greater than he had anticipated.... Thanks to Miss Innes, he hoped to be able to hand her a cheque for more than two hundred pounds. This was more than double the sum she had hoped to receive.

"We shall always pray for you," she said, taking Evelyn's hand. "I cannot tell you what a load you have taken off my shoulders, for, of course, the main responsibility rests upon me."

Mother Philippa asked her suddenly why she had not been to see them before, and Evelyn answered that she had been abroad. But living abroad meant to the nun the pleasure of living in Catholic countries, and she was eager to know if Evelyn had had the privilege of going to Rome. Mother Philippa asked if Evelyn had travelled with her father. Any simple answer would have sufficed, but she. lost her presence of mind, and the "No" which came at last was so weak and equivocal that the reverend mother divined in that moment some part of the truth. Evelyn sat as if tongue-tied, and it was Monsignore who came to her rescue by explaining that she had sung in St. Petersburg, Vienna, Paris, and all the capitals of Europe.

"You must excuse us," the prioress said, "for not knowing, but these things do not penetrate convent walls."

The conversation dropped, and the prioress took advantage of the occasion to suggest that they should visit the chapel.

Mother Philippa walked on with the priests in front, leaving Evelyn with the prioress.

"I am forced to walk very slowly on account of my heart. I hope you don't mind, Miss Innes?"

"Your heart, Reverend Mother? You suffer from your heart? I'm so sorry."

The prioress said the new chapel had been built by the celebrated Catholic architect, and mentioned how the last three years of the late prioress's life had been given over to this work. Evelyn knew that the mouldings and carving and the stained glass had caused the pecuniary embarrassments of the convent, and did not speak of them. She was told that the architect had insisted that every detail should be in keeping, and understood that the thirteenth century had proved the ruin of the convent; every minor decoration was faithful to it — the very patterns stitched in wool on the cushions of the *prie-dieu* were strictly Gothic in character.

Then at her request they went into the garden. It was the part of the convent she remembered best. She recognised at once the broad terrace walk extending the full length of the house, from

the new wing to the rose garden, whence some steps led to the lower grounds. They were several acres in extent, and sloped gently to the south-west. The prioress and the priests had turned to the left; they had business matters to discuss, and were going round the garden by the outer walk. Evelyn and Mother Philippa chose the middle path. The sunset was before them, and the wistfulness of a distant park sinking into blue mist. Evelyn thought that in all her travels she had never seen anything so lovely as the convent garden in that evening light. It filled her soul with an ecstatic sense of peace and joy, and a sudden passionate desire to share this life of calm and happy seclusion brought tears to her eyes. She could not speak, but Mother Philippa, with a single quick glance, seemed instinctively to understand, and it was in silence that they walked down a grassy path that led between the narrow beds filled with a gay tangle of old-fashioned flowers to a little summer-house. Behind the summer-house, at the bottom of the garden, was a broad walk pleasantly shaded by the overhanging branches of the elms.

“We call this St. Peter’s Path," Mother Philippa said placidly, “and for his feast the novices put up his statue in the summer-house and decorate it with flowers. They always come here for their mid-day recreation.”

"Your garden is quite lovely, Mother Philippa; I remember it all so well.”

They wandered on, past the apple and plum trees laden with fruit — they made a pretty orchard in one corner; and while the nun passed here and there gathering flowers, Evelyn stood gazing, recalling all her girlish impressions. Almost every turn in the walks recalled some innocent aspiration, some girlish feeling of love and reverence. In every nook there was a statue of the Virgin, or a cross whereby the thoughts of the passer-by might be recalled to the essential object of her life. She remembered how she had stopped one morning before the crucifix which stood on the top of some rocks at the end of the garden. She had stopped as in a dream, and for a long while had stood looking at the face of the dying Redeemer, praying to His Father for pardon for them that persecuted Him. She had felt as if crazed with love, and had walked up the pathway feeling that the one thing of worth in the world was to live for Him who had died for her. But she had betrayed Him. She had chosen Owen!

Mother Philippa added another flower to the bouquet. She looked at it, and, regarding it as finished, she presented it to Evelyn.

"I hope I did not say anything that caused you pain in the parlour. If I did you must know that I did not mean it. I hope your father is quite well?”

“Yes, he’s quite well. You did not offend me, Mother Philippa," she said, raising her eyes, and in that moment the two women felt they understood each other in some mute and far-off way.

“The day you left us was Easter Sunday. It was a beautiful morning, and you walked round the rose garden with an old lady; she asked you to sing, and you sang her two little songs.”

“Yes, I remember; her hair was quite white, and she walked with a stick.”

“I am glad you remember; I feared that you had forgotten, as you were so long coming back. I often prayed for you that you might come and see us. I always felt that you would come back, and when one feels like that, it generally happens.”

Evelyn raised her eyes, drawing delight from the nun’s happy and contented face. She experienced an exquisite idea, a holy intimacy of feeling; there was a breathless exaltation in the heavens and on the earth, and the wild cry of a startled bird darting through the shrubberies sounded like a challenge or defiance. The sunset grew narrower in the slate-coloured sky, and the long plain of the common showed under two bars of belated purple. The priests and the prioress went up the steps, and were about to enter the convent. Evelyn and Mother Philippa lingered by a distant corner of the garden marked by nine tall crosses.

"When I was here there were but six. I remember Sister Bonaventure, thin and white, and so weak that she could not move. She was dying far from all she knew, yet she was quite happy. It was we who were unhappy.”

“She was happy, for her thoughts were set upon God. How could she be otherwise than happy when she knew she was going to Him?”

A few minutes after, Evelyn was bidding the nuns good-night. The prioress hoped that when she made another retreat she would be their guest. Mother Philippa was disappointed that they had not heard her sing. Perhaps one day she might sing to them. They would see how it could be arranged: perhaps at Benediction, when she came to make another retreat. Evelyn smiled, and the carriage passed into the night.

XXXIV

The dawn crept through her closed eyelids, and burying her face in the pillows, she sought to retain the receding dream.

But out of the gloom which she divined and through which a face looked — a face which she could not understand, but which she must follow — there came a sound as of someone moving. The dream dissolved in the sound; she opened her eyes, and upon her lips there was terror, and she could not move.... Nor did she dare to look, and when her eyes turned towards the doorway she could not see beyond it; she could not remember if she had left the door ajar. Shadows gathered, and again came the awful sound of someone; she slipped under the bedclothes, and lay there stark, frozen with terror. When she summoned sufficient courage, she looked towards the shadowy doorway, but the passage beyond it was filled with nameless foreboding shapes from an under world; and the thought that the sound she had heard had been caused by her clothes slipping from a chair failed to reassure her. She was as cold as a corpse in a grave. She felt that it was her duty to explore the dark, but to get out of bed to stand in that grey room and look into the passage was more than she dared; she could only lie still and endure the sensation of hands at her throat and breath above her face.

A little later she was able to distinguish the pattern of the wall paper, and as she followed its design human life seemed black and intolerably loathsome. She strove against the thought, but she saw the creature leer so plainly that there was no way of escaping from the conviction that what she had accepted as life was but a mask worn by a leper. The vision persisted for what seemed a long while, and when it faded it was pictures of her own life that she read upon the wall; her soul cried out against the miserable record of her sins, and, turning on her pillow, she saw the dawn — the inexorable light that was taking her back to life, to sin, and all the miserable routine of vanity and selfishness which she would have to begin again. She had left her father, though she knew he would be lonely and unhappy without her. She had lived with Owen when she knew it was wrong, and she had acquiesced in his blasphemies, and by reading evil books she had striven to undermine her faith in God. It seemed to her incredible that anyone should be capable of such wickedness, yet she was that very one; she had committed all sins, and in her great misery she wished herself dead, so that she might think no more.

With eyes wide open to the dawn and to her soul, she lay hour after hour. She heard the French clock strike six sharp strokes, and, unable to endure her hot bed any longer, she got up, slipped her arms into a dressing-gown, and went down to the drawing-room. It was filled with a grey twilight, and the street was greyblue and silent save for the sparrows. Sitting on the edge of the sofa, she remembered the convent. The nuns had thought her a good Catholic, and she had had to pretend she was. Monsignore, it is true, had turned the conversation and saved her from

exposure. But what then? She knew, and he knew, everyone knew; Lady Ascott, Lady Mersey, Lady Duckle very probably didn't care, but appearances had to be preserved, and she had to tell lies to them all. Her life had become a network of lies. There was no corner of her life into which she could look without finding a lie. She had been faithful to no one, not even to Owen. She had another lover, and she had sent Owen away on account of scruples of conscience! She could not understand herself; she had taken Ulick to Dowlands and had lived with him there — in her father's house. So awful did her life seem to her that her thoughts stopped, and she became possessed of the desire of escape which takes a trapped animal and forces it to gnaw off one of its legs. She must escape from this life of lies whatever it cost her; she must free herself. But how? If she went to Monsignore, he would tell her she must leave the stage, and she had promised to create the part of Grania. She had promised, and she hated not keeping her promise. He would say it was impossible for her to remain on the stage and live a virtuous life; he would tell her that she must refuse to see Owen. She was still very fond of him, and would like to see him sometimes. What reason could she give to her friends for refusing to see him? what reason could she give for leaving the stage? — to do so would set everyone talking. Everyone would want to know why; Lady Ascott, Lady Mersey, all her friends. How was she to separate herself from her surroundings? Wherever she went she would be known. Her friends would follow her, lovers would follow her, temptations would begin again — would she have strength to resist? "Not always," was the answer her heart gave back. A great despair fell upon her, and she walked up the room. Stopping at the window, she looked out, and all reform of her life seemed to her impossible. She was hemmed in on every side. If she could only think of it no more! She had adopted an evil life, and must pursue it to the end. She must be wretched in this life, and be punished eternally in the next.

Hearing a footstep on the stair, she drew herself behind the door, and when the sound passed downstairs she tried to reason with herself. After all, the housemaid would have been merely surprised to find her in the drawing-room at that hour. She could not have guessed why she was there. She ran up the stairs, and when she had closed the door of her room she stood looking at the clock. It was not yet seven, and Merat did not come to her room till half-past nine. She must try to get to sleep between this and then. She lay with her eyes closed, and did not perceive that a thin, shallow sleep had come upon her, for she continued to think the same thoughts; fear of God and hatred of sin assumed even more terrifying proportions; and she started like a hunted animal when Merat came in with her bath.

"I hope mademoiselle is not ill?"

"No, I am not ill, only I have not slept at all."

In order to distract her thoughts, she went for a walk after breakfast in the Park, but any casual sight sufficed to recall them to the one important question. She could not see the children sailing

their toy boats without thinking her ambitions were as futile, and a chance glimpse of a church spire frightened her. so that she turned her back and walked the other way. In the afternoon she tried to interest herself in some music, but her hands dropped from the keys, so useless did it appear to her. At four she was dreaming of Owen in an arm-chair. The servant suddenly announced him, and he came in, seemingly recovered from his gout and his old age. His figure was the perfect elegance of a man of forty-three, and in such beautiful balance that an old admiration awakened in her. His "waistcoats and his valet," she thought, catching sight of the embroideries and the pale, subdued, terrified air of the personal servant. The valet carried a parcel which Evelyn guessed to be a present for her. It was a tea-service of old Crown Derby that Owen had happened upon in Bath, and they spent some time examining its pale roses and gilt pattern. She expected him to refer to their last interview, but he avoided doing so, preferring to take it for granted that he still was her lover, and he did so without giving her sufficient occasion to correct him on this point. He was affectionate and intimate; he sat beside her on the sofa, and talked pleasantly of the benefit he had derived from the waters, of the boredom of hotel life, and of a concert given in aid of a charity.

"But that reminds me," he said; "I heard about the Wimbledon concert, and was sorry you did not write to me for a subscription. Lady Merrington told me about the nuns; they spent all their money building a chapel, and had not enough to eat."

"I didn't think you would care to subscribe to a convent."

"Now, why did you think that? Poor devils of nuns, shut up in a convent without enough to eat! Of course I'll subscribe; I'll send them a cheque for ten pounds to-morrow."

This afternoon, whether by accident or design, he said no word that might jar on her religious scruples; he even appeared to sympathise with religious life, and admitted that the world was not much, and to renounce the world was sublime. The conversation flagged, and he said, "I think the tea-service suits the room. You haven't thanked me for it yet, Evelyn."

"I don't know that I ought to accept any more presents from you. I have accepted too much as it is."

She was conscious of her feebleness. It would have been better to have said, "I am another man's mistress"; but she could not speak the words, and he asked if they might have tea in the new service. She did not answer, so he rang, and when the servant left the room he took her hands and drew her closer to him. "I am another man's mistress, you must not touch me," rang in her brain; but he did not kiss her, and the truth was not spoken.

“Lady Duckle is still at Homburg, is she not?" he asked, but he was thinking of the inexplicable event each had been in the other’s life. They had wandered thus far, now their paths divided, for nothing endures. That is the sadness, the incurable sadness! He was getting too old for her; in a few more years he would be fifty. But he had hoped that this friendship would continue to the end of the chapter. And while he was thinking these things, Evelyn was telling him that Lady Duckle had met Lady Mersey at Homburg, and had gone on with her to Lucerne, where they hoped to meet Lady Ascott.

"You are going to shoot with Lord Ascott next month?" she said, and looking at him she wondered if their relations were after all no more than a chance meeting and parting. While he spoke of Lord Ascott’s pheasant shooting, she felt that whatever happened neither could divorce the other from his or her faults.

"How beautiful the Park is now! I like the view from your windows. I like this hour; a sense of resignation is in the air.”

"Yes," she said, "the sky is beautifully calm”; and she experienced a return of old tendernesses, and she had no scruple, for he did not make love to her, and did not kiss her until he rose to leave. Then he kissed her on the forehead and on the cheek, and refrained from asking if they were reconciled.

Never had he been nicer than he had been that afternoon, and she dared not look into her heart, for she did not wish to think that she would send him away. Why should she send him away? why not the other? She could not answer this question; she only knew that the choice had fallen upon Owen. She must send him away, but what reasons should she give? She felt that her conduct that afternoon had rendered a complete rupture in their relations more difficult than ever. It was as she lay sleepless in bed long after midnight that the solution of the difficulty suddenly sounded in her brain. She must write to him saying that he might come to see her once more, but that it must be for the last time. This was the way out of her difficulty, and she turned over in her bed, feeling she might now get to sleep. But instead of sleep there began the very words of this last interview, and her brain teemed with different plans for escape from her lover. She saw herself on ocean steamers, in desert isles, and riding wild horses through mountain passes. Barred doors, changes of name, all means were passed and reviewed; each was in turn dismissed, and the darkness about her bed was like a flame. There was no doubt that she was doomed to another night of insomnia. The bell of the French clock struck three, and, quite exhausted, she got up and walked about the room. "In another hour I shall hear the screech of the sparrow on the window-sill, and may lie awake till Merat comes to call me." She lay down, folded her arms, closed her eyes, and began to count the sheep as they came through the gate. But thoughts of Owen began to loom up, and in spite of her efforts to repress them, they grew more and more distinct. The clock struck four, and soon after it seemed to her that the

darkness was lightening. For a long while she did not dare to open her eyes. At last she had to open them, and the grey-blue light was indescribably mournful. Again her life seemed small, black, and evil. She jumped out of bed, passed her arms into a tea-gown, and. paced the room. She must see Owen. She must tell him the truth. Once he knew the truth he would not care for her, and that would make the parting easier for both. She did not believe that this was so, but she had to believe something, and she went down to the drawing-room and wrote —

"DEAR OWEN, — You may come and see me to-morrow, if you care to. I am afraid that your visit will not be a pleasant one. I don't think I could be an agreeable companion to anyone at present, but I cannot send you away without explaining why. However painful that explanation may be to you, there is at all events this to be said, that it will be doubly painful to me. I am not, dear Owen, ungrateful; that you should think me so is the hardest punishment of all; and I am sorry I have not made you happier. I know other women don't feel as I do, but I can't change myself. I feel dreadfully hypocritical writing in this strain. I less than anyone have a right to do so, especially now. But you will try to understand. You know that I am not a hypocrite at heart. I am determined to tell you all, and you will then see that no course is open to me but to send you away. Even if you were to promise that we should be friends, we must not see each other; but I don't think that you would care to see me on those terms. I should have stopped you yesterday when you took my hand, when you kissed me, but I was weak and cowardly. Somehow I could not bring myself to tell you the truth. I shall expect you in the afternoon, and will tell you all. I am punishing myself as well as you. So please don't try to make things more difficult than they are. — Yours very sincerely, EVELYN INNES."

Leaving this letter with directions that it should be posted at once, weary, and with her brain as clear as crystal, she threw herself upon her bed. Folding her arms, she closed her eyes, and strove to banish thoughts of Owen and the confession she was to make that afternoon. But when sleep gathered about her eyes, the memory of past sins, at first dense, then with greater clearness, shone through, and the traitor sleep moved away. Or she would suddenly find herself in the middle of the interview, the entire dialogue standing clear cut in her brain — she could almost see the punctuation of every sentence. Once more she counted the sheep coming through the gate; she counted and counted, until her imagination failed her, and, in spite of herself, her eyes opened upon the dreaded room. She heard the clock strike nine. Merat would knock at her door in another half-hour, and she lay waiting, fearing her arrival. But at last her face grew quieter; she seemed to see Monsignore vaguely; she could not tell where or how he had come to her, but she heard him saying distinctly that she must never sing Isolde again. He seemed to bar her way to the stage, and the music that was to bring her on sounded in her ears, yet she could see the shape of her room and its furniture. A knock came at the door, and she was surprised to find that she had been asleep.

After breakfast she felt a little rested, and went into the Park and remained there till lunch-time, dimly aware of the open air, the waving of branches, the sound of human voices. She wandered about, and then hastened back to Park Lane. She feared the day, its meal-times, and the long hours of morning and evening sunshine, and the idea of the coming interview with Owen was intolerable. Her brain was splitting, she could not think of what she would say. But her letter had gone!

XXXV

“You have been thinking it over — you are going to send me away?”

He sat opposite her, holding his hat in both his hands, looking perplexed and worried.

"Evelyn, I have come to ask you to be my wife. Will you give up the stage and be my wife? Why don’t you answer? Don’t tell me I ought to have asked you a long time ago.... But you said you were determined to tell me something. What is it?”

The expression of her face did not change. Her lips moved a little, and she cast down her eyes and said —

"I have got another lover.”

"Another lover! Who is he? Not that Russian?”

"No,"she said, "Ulick Dean.”

She noticed that he turned pale, but he did not seem in the least angry, and, guessing the reason, she was tempted to smile.

"When did it happen?”

"When we went to Ireland.”

"Evelyn, this is a great blow to me; but it is better than that that priest should get hold of you — anything is better than that.”

He covered his face in his hands, and a moment afterwards he said —

"But you will not love Ulick Dean always, will you? You will not love him more than me? You will want to see me again, won’t you? Only don’t let me be put in the second place. Say that no one shall come before me, and I will try and forget that you see him. It is a great shock to me, but I’d sooner Ulick than that damned hypocritical fool. Besides, I don’t think you will be able to love him always. He can never be as much to you as I have been. Do you love him very much? Tell me about it.”

“There is very little to tell," she said, looking at him with wide-open eyes.

“But you are not going to marry him — you are not going to marry him?”

"No, I am not going to marry him, at least I don’t think I am. I don’t think I shall marry anyone; something has always held me back. You often said we were alike, and you have often said that something held you back from marriage.”

"Then what are you going to do? Send us both away, or keep us both.”

He said that women could manage two lovers better than a man could manage two women, and some of the happiest households he had ever known consisted of three. He spoke of the Tibetans, and cited an amusing incident which he said he had read the other day in some eighteenth-century memoirs; but she could see that he was trembling, and that his gaiety was merely the result of nervousness; he was very pale all the while. She said very little. She allowed him to do all the talking, and he frequently thought he was convincing her that she might have two lovers. He even said he had always liked Ulick Dean, and was sure he would get to like him more.

“But, Evelyn, you have not said what you are going to do. Are you going to send me away, or are you going to send him away, or are you going to keep us both? Which is it?”

“I am going to send you both away," she said, and her firmness frightened him. Then she sat silently looking at him, and he spoke a long while of what her life would be without lovers. He knew something of her temperament, and he did not believe for one moment she could live without a lover.

“I know it will be difficult," she said, "but I must.”

The “must" was addressed to herself, and a strange conviction lighted up in her eyes, and he grew frightened again. The strangest things happen, and perhaps even this might happen.

“So it was in Ireland you fell in love with him? It has not lasted above a couple of months, and with me it has lasted six years. But," he said suddenly, “remember you were at Riversdale since you came back from Ireland.... You have been untrue to him as well as to me.”

"Yes, and that is why I am sending you both away. I have made a great muddle of things. That is why I cannot marry Ulick Dean.”

"How cruel you are, Evelyn! oh, how cruel you are!”

"I do not mean to be cruel, but I must tell the truth. There is no avoiding it, Owen; there is no way out of it for me except in a chaste life."

"You lead a chaste life! And what is to become of Ulick? Have you told him you are going to send him away?"

"No, not yet; but I am going to."

"Have you told him that you were unfaithful to him with me?"

"Oh no, Owen," she said, getting up from the sofa, "I have not told him that; he would never speak to me again if I did. Ulick is quite different from you."

"You are quite different, Evelyn, from what you were. I did not think you were so cruel as this."

"No, dear, I am not cruel, but I cannot help it. I am going to send Ulick away just as I am going to send you away, but I would not have him despise me. Don't tell him about Riversdale. Keep my secret for me, and then I shall always be able to think of you with pleasure; there will be nothing to spoil my pleasure in thinking of you."

"You think Ulick Dean would not understand that a woman might have two lovers, and love both differently? You think he would not even understand a sudden caprice?"

"Ulick never loved anyone before me. He would not understand such subtleties."

"Oh, a virgin," he said contemptuously.

"Ulick," she said, "is a great man. I do not know if his music is great, or if his poetry is great, but I know that he is a great man — he is greater than any art; he is great in himself."

"He's better than that priest. That priest will get hold of you. I was at Eton with him; he always was" — Then he muttered something under his breath. "You are not going to the convent. Oh, my God," he said, as he walked up the room, "I would sooner you married Ulick; you are much too good for God." Then, turning suddenly and looking at her, was attracted once more by the strange oval face and the mysterious eyes that changed from blue to mauve, and though she always told him the truth about herself, the secret of her nature still eluded him. "You will be wasted on religion," he said.

"From your point of view I suppose I shall be."

They talked on and on, saying what they had said many times before. The hands of the clock pointed to six, and the servants had taken the tea away. Owen had urged Evelyn not to abandon the stage; he had urged the cause of Art; he had urged that her voice was her natural vocation; he had spoken of their love, and of the happiness they had found in each other — the conversation had drifted from an argument concerning the authenticity of the Gospels to a lake where they had spent a season five years ago. She saw again the reedy reaches and the steep mountain shores. They had been there in the month of September, and the leaves of the vine were drooping, and the grapes ready for gathering. They had been sweethearts only a little while, and the drives about the lake were one of his happiest memories.

"Evelyn, I did hope our friendship would have continued to the end, and when you are my age you will find that there is one. I don't say that I shall be the one." His voice trembled, and he passed his hand across his eyes.

"It is very sad, Owen; life is very difficult. But you see I cannot help myself. If you would only understand that — that I cannot help myself. I must send you away now, but you will promise me to keep my secret; you will never tell Ulick about Riversdale."

"No," he said, "I will never tell him."

They talked on and on, conscious of the hands of the clock moving on towards their divided lives. When it struck seven, she said he must go, but he asked to be allowed to stay till a quarter-past, and in this last quarter of an hour he urged that their separation should not be final, and he succeeded in extracting a half-promise from her that she would allow him to come and see her in three months' time.

"You cannot refuse this," he said, "though I have promised to keep your secret; but I will not make a bargain. I will keep your secret in any case."

XXXVI

He walked up Park Lane, staring now and then at the quaint balconies from a mere habit of admiration. But all were indifferent to him, even the one supported by the four Empire figures. It did not seem that anything in the world could interest him again, and he wondered how he would get through the years that remained to him to live. He was tired of hunting and shooting; he had seen everything there was to be seen; he had been round the world twice; it did not seem to him that he would ever care for another woman, and he reflected with pride that he had been faithful to Evelyn for six years. “But I shall never see her again," his heart wailed; "in three months she’ll be a different woman; she won’t want to see me, she’ll find some excuse. That infernal priest will refuse his absolution if " — Owen stopped suddenly. Far away a little pink cloud dissolved mysteriously. “In another second," he thought, “it will be no more." In the Green Park the trees rocked in the soft autumn air, and he noticed that now and then a leaf broke from its twig, fluttered across the path, and fell by the iron railings.

“Well, Asher, how is it that you are in town at this time of year?”

It was a club acquaintance, one of the ordinary conventional men that Owen met by the dozen in every one of his clubs, a man whose next question would surely be, "How are your two-year-olds?”

"I should like to hear that they had all broken their legs," Owen answered through his teeth, and the colour mounted in his cheeks.

“Asher always was mad... now he seems madder than ever. What did he mean by saying he wished his two-year-olds had all broken their legs?”

Owen lingered on the kerb, inveighing against the stupidity of his set. He had thought of dining at the Turf Club, but after this irritating incident he felt that he dared not risk it; if anyone were to speak to him again of his two-year-olds, he felt he would not be able to control himself. Suddenly he thought of a friend. He must speak to someone.... He need mention no names. He put up his stick and stopped a hansom. A few minutes took him to Harding’s rooms.

The unexpectedness of the visit, and the manner in which Owen strode about the room, trying to talk of the things that he generally talked about, while clearly thinking of something quite different, struck Harding as unusual, and a suspicion of the truth had just begun to dawn upon him, when, breaking off suddenly, Owen said —

“Swear you’ll never speak of what I am going to say — and don’t ask for names.”

“I’ll tell no one," said Harding, “and the name does not interest me.”

"It’s this: a woman whom I have known many years — a friendship that I thought would go on to the end of the chapter — told me to-day that it was all finished, that she never wanted to see me again.”

“A friendship! Were you her lover?”

“What does it matter? Suffice it to say that she was my dearest friend, and now I have lost her. She has been taken from me," he said, throwing his arms into the air. It was a superb gesture of despair, and Harding could not help smiling.

"So Evelyn has left him! I wonder for whom?" Then, with as much sympathy as he could call into his voice, he asked if the lady had given any reason for this sudden dismissal.

"Only that she thinks it wrong; we’ve been discussing it all the afternoon. It has made me quite ill”; and he dropped into a chair.

Harding knew perfectly well of whom they were speaking, and Owen knew that he knew; but it seemed more decorous to refrain from mentioning names, and Evelyn’s soul was discussed as if it were an abstract quantity, and all indication of the individual incarnation was avoided. Owen admitted that, notwithstanding many seeming contradictory appearances, Evelyn had always thought it wrong to live with him, and yet, notwithstanding her being very fond of him, she had never shown any eagerness to be married. “Of course it is very wrong," she would say, in her own enchanting way, "but a lover is very exciting, and a husband always seems dull. I don’t think you’d be half as nice as a husband as you are as a lover." The recital of the Florence episode interested Harding, but it was the opposition of the priest and the musician that made the story from his point of view one of the most fascinating he had ever heard in his life.

They dined together in an old-fashioned club, in a room lighted by wax candles in silver candlesticks. Tall mirrors in gold frames reflected the black mahogany furniture. In answer to Owen, who lamented that Evelyn was sacrificing everything for an idea, Harding spoke, and with his usual conscious exaltation, of the Christian martyrs, the Spanish Inquisition, and then Robespierre seemed to him the most striking example of what men will do for an idea. He mentioned a portrait by Greuze in which Robespierre appears as a beautiful young man. "Such a face," he said, "as we might imagine for a lover or a poet, a sort of Lucien de Rubempré, but in his brain there was a cell containing the pedantic idea, and for this idea he cut off a thousand heads, and would have cut off a million. The world must conform to his idea, or it was a lost world.”

Towards the end of dinner the head waiter interrupted their conversation. He lingered about the table, anxious to hear something of Lord Ascott's two-year-olds; but, in the smoking-room over their coffee, they returned to the more vital question — the sentimental affections. They were agreed that the pleasure of love is in loving, not in being loved, and their reasons were incontrovertible.

"It is the letters;" said Harding, "that we write at three in the morning to tell her how enchanting she was; it is the flowers we send, the words of love that we speak in her ear, that are our undoing. So long as we are indifferent, they love us."

"Quite true. At first I did not care for her so much as she did for me, and I noticed that as soon as I began to fall in love " —

"To aspire, to suffer. Maybe there is no deep pleasure in contentment. In casting you out she has given you a more intense life."

Owen did not seem to understand. His eye wandered, then, returning to Harding, he said —

"We cannot worship and be worshipped! If that is what you mean, I agree with you. But I'd sooner lose her as I have done than not have told her that I loved her.... There never was anyone like her. Sympathy, understanding, appreciation, and enthusiasm! it was like living in a dream. Good God! to think that that priest should have got her; that, after all my teaching, she should think it wrong to have a lover! I don't know if you know of whom we are speaking. If you suspect, I can't help it, but don't ask me. I shouldn't speak of her at all; it is wrong to speak of her, even though I don't mention her name, but it is impossible to help it. If you are proud of a woman, you must speak of her — and I was so proud of her. It is very easy to be discreet when you are ashamed of them," he added, with a laugh. "When I had nothing to do, I used to sit down and think of her, and I used to say to myself that if I were the king of the whole world I could not get anything better. But it is all over now."

"Well, you've had six years — the very prime of her life."

"That's true; you're very sympathetic, Harding. Have another cigarette. I was faithful to her for six years — you can't understand that, but it is quite true, and I had plenty of chances, but, when I came to think of it, it always seemed that I liked her the best."

XXXVII

Walking towards the sofa as if she were going to sit down, Evelyn flung herself upon it and buried her face among the cushions. She lay there weeping, and when she raised her face she dashed the tears from her streaming cheeks; but this pause was only the prelude to another passionate outbreak, and she wept again, finding in tears fatigue, and in fatigue relief. She sobbed until she could sob no more, and so tired was she that she no longer cared what happened; very tired, and her head heavy, she went upstairs, eager for sleep. And closing her eyes she felt a delicious numbing of sense, a dissolution of her being into darkness….

But in her waking there was a consciousness, a foreboding of a nameless dread, of a heavy weight upon her, and when the foreboding in her ears grew louder, she seemed to know that an irreparable calamity had happened, and, trying to fathom it, she saw the wall paper, and it told her she was in her own room. She seemed to be trying to read something on it, but what she was trying to read and understand seemed to move away, and her brain laboured in anxious pursuit. Her eyes opened, and she remembered her interview with Owen. She had sent him away, she understood it all now, she had sent Owen away! She had told him that Ulick was her lover, so even if he were to come back it never could be the same as it was. Why had she told him about Ulick? It was bad enough to send him away, but she had degraded his memory of her, and the thought that she had not deceived him, but had told him what he otherwise might never have known, did not console her just then. She lay quite still, face to face with, seeing as it were into, the eyes of the Irreparable. Never again would a man hold her in his arms, saying, "Darling, I am very fond of you!" Take love out of her life, and what barrenness, what weariness! After all, she was only seven-and-twenty, and the thought came upon her that she might have waited until she was a little older. The word "never" rang in her ears, and she realised as she had not done before all that a lover meant to her — romance, adventure, the brilliancy and sparkle of life. What was life without the delightful excitement of the chase, the delicious doubts regarding the hidden significance of every look and word, then the rapture of the final abandonment? She tried to think that the life she proposed to relinquish had not brought her happiness, but she could not put back memory of the enchanting days she had spent with her lovers. Such rapture seemed to her to be worth the remorse that came after, and the peace of mind that a chaste life would secure was a poor recompense for dreary days and months. She realised the length and the colour of the time — grey week after grey week, blank month after blank month, empty year after empty year! And she always getting a little older, getting older in a drab, lifeless time, in a lifeless life, a weary life filled with intolerable craving! She had endured it once, a feeling as if she wanted to go mad…. She picked up her letters.

Among the letters she received that morning was one from Lady Duckle. She liked Homburg; everyone was there, and she hoped Evelyn would not be detained in London much longer. The

Duke of Berwick had proposed to Miss Beale, and Lady Mersey was always about with young Mr. So-and-So.

Evelyn lay back thinking. This letter, about things that interested her no longer, had led her thoughts back to self. Even now she knew that she would not marry Ulick; and why? Her eyes went to the piano, but on the way there she stopped to ask herself another question. Why was she in London at this time of year? She knew why she did not care to go to Homburg — because she was tired of society. But why did she not go to some quiet seaside place, where she could enjoy the summer weather? Why did she pace the empty alley facing the Bayswater Road?

No one was there except a nursemaid and a small child, and she and they shared the solitude. She could see the omnibuses passing, and hear the clank of the heavy harness, and seated on one of the seats she drew diagrams on the gravel with her parasol. Owen said there was no meaning in life, that it was no more than an unfortunate accident between two eternal sleeps. But she had never been able to believe that this was so; and if she had sought to disbelieve in God, it was, as Monsignore had said, because she wished to lead a sinful life. And if she could not believe in annihilation, there could be no annihilation for her, that was Ulick's theory. But such vague beliefs had not helped her. In spite of all her efforts, the world was slipping behind her.

Then, almost without thinking at all, in a sort of stupor, she walked over the hill and descended the slope, and, leaning over the balustrade, she looked at the fountains. But the splashing water explained nothing, and she turned to resume her walk; and she reflected that to send away her lovers would avail her nothing, unless she subsequently confessed her sins and obtained the priest's absolution. Monsignore would tell her that to send away her lovers was not sufficient, and he would refuse his absolution unless she promised him not to see them any more. That promise she could not give, for she had promised Ulick that she would sing Grania, and she had promised Owen to see him in three months. It seemed to her both weak and shameful to break either of these promises, and it was in a sudden anguish of mind that she determined that her repentance must be postponed. She had considered the question from every point of view, and could not at once reverse her life; the change must come gradually. She had sent Owen away; that was enough for the present.

The numerous pea-fowls had gathered in a bare roosting-tree on an opposite hillside, and the immense tails of the cock-birds swept the evening sky. Owen would have certainly compared it to a picture by Honderhoker. The ducks clambered out of the water, keeping their cunning black eyes fixed on the loitering children whom the nursemaid was urging to return home. In Kensington Gardens the glades were green and gold, and for some little while Evelyn watched the delicate spectacle of the fading light, and insensibly she began to feel that a life of spiritual endeavour was the only life possible to her, and that, however much it might cost her, she must

make the effort to attain it. It was delightful to feel she was capable of desiring this ideal life, and her thoughts flowed on for a long while, unmindful of practical difficulties. Suddenly it came upon her like a sudden illumination, that sooner or later she would have to make all the sacrifices that this ideal demanded.

As she crossed the road dividing Kensington Gardens from Hyde Park, she understood that the simple fact of owing a few thousand pounds rendered her immediate retirement from the stage impossible. She had insisted that the money she required to live in Paris and study with Madame Savelli should be considered as a debt, which she would repay out of her first earnings. But Owen had laughed at her. He had refused to accept it, and he would never tell her the rent of the house in the Rue Balzac; he had urged that as he had made use of the house he could not allow her to pay for it. In the rough, she supposed that a thousand pounds would settle her debt for the year they had spent in Paris.

Since then she had, however, insisted on keeping herself; but now that she came to think it out, it did not seem that she had done much more than pay her dressmaker's bills. She grew alarmed at the amount of her debt, which seemed in her excited imagination so large that all her savings, amounting to about six or seven thousand pounds, would not suffice to pay it off. There was the furniture, the pictures, and the china in Park Lane! She would have to return all these, and the horses too, if she wished to pay everything, and the net result would be that she would mortally offend the man who had done everything for her. She knew he would not forgive her if she sent back the presents he had made her, nor could she blame him, and she decided that such complete restitution was impossible. But, for all she knew, Monsignore might insist upon it. If he did? She felt that she would go mad if she did not put aside these scruples, which she knew to be in a measure fictitious, but which she was nevertheless unable to shake off. And she could not help thinking, though she knew that such thoughts were both foolish and unjust, that Owen had purposely contrived this thraldom. Then there was only one thing for her to do, to follow Ulick to Ireland…. She could not go. But what was she to do? She might go to Monsignore and lay the whole matter before him and take his advice. But she knew if she went to him she must confess. Better that, she thought, than that the intolerable present should endure.

Mental depression and sleepless nights had produced nervous pains in her neck and arms. She could hardly drag herself along for very weariness. The very substance of her being seemed to waste away; that amount of unconsciousness without which life is an agony had been abstracted, leaving nothing but a fierce mentality.

She slept a little after dinner, and awakening about eleven she foresaw another night of insomnia. The chatter of her conscience continued, tireless as a cricket, and she had lost hope of being able to silence it. The hysterical tears of last night had brought her four hours of sleep, but

there was no chance of any repetition of them. It would be useless to go upstairs. She sang through the greater part of *Lohengrin*, and then took up the *Meistersinger*, and read it till it fell from her hands.... It was three o'clock; and feeling very tired, she thought that she might be able to sleep. But all night long she saw her life from end to end. Her miserable passage through this life, the weakness of her character and the vileness of her sins were shown to her in a hideous magnification. She was exhibited to herself like an insect in a crystal, and she perceived the remotest antennae of her being.

XXXVIII

One night it occurred to her that she might ring for Merat and send her to the chemist's for a sleeping-draught. But it was four o'clock in the morning, and she did not like to impose such a task on her maid. Moreover, she might get to sleep a little later on, so she wrote on a piece of paper that Merat was not to come to her room until she rang for her, and she lay down and folded her arms, and once more began to count the sheep through the gate. But that night sleep seemed farther than ever from her eyes, and at eight she was obliged to ring. "Merat, I have not closed my eyes all night."

"Mademoiselle ought to have a sleeping-draught."

"Yes, I'll take one to-night. Get me some tea. Another night like this will drive me mad."

Late in the afternoon she slept for an hour in an arm-chair, and, a little rested, went to walk in the Park. She was not feeling so dazed; her brain was not so light, and the sense of whiteness was gone; the pains in the neck and arms too had died down; they were now like a dim suggestion, a memory. But the greatest relief of all was that she was not thinking — conscience was quiescent; and in the calm of the evening and the gentleness of the light, life seemed easier to bear. If she could only get a night's sleep! Now she did not know which was the worst — the reality, the memory, or the anticipation of a sleepless night. She had wandered round the Park by the Marble Arch, and had continued her walk through Kensington Gardens, and sitting on the hillside by the Long Water, with the bridge on her left hand and the fountains under her eyes, she looked towards Kensington. There an iridescent sky floated like a bubble among the autumn-tinted trees. She was then thinking of her music and her friends; she hardly knew of what she was thinking, when a thought so clear that it sounded like a bell spoke within her, and it said that the things of which she was thinking were as nothing, and that Life was but a little moment compared with Eternity, and she seemed to see into the final time which lay beyond the grave. "There and not here are the true realities," said the voice, and she got up and walked hurriedly down the hillside, fearing lest the fierce conflict of conscience should begin again in her. She walked as fast as she was able, hoping to extinguish in action the conscience that she dreaded, but she was weak and almost helpless, and had to pause to rest. She stood, one hand on the balustrade, not daring to turn her head lest she should see the spire of the Kensington church.

She walked across the gardens, through the great groves, and sat down. The grass was worn away about the roots of the trees, and through the gnarled trunks she could see the keeper's cottage covered with reddened creeper. Perhaps it was the calm and seclusion that called her thoughts to the convent garden, and she reflected that if she had not accepted the nuns'

invitation to tea, her life might have continued without deviation. She was impressed with the slightness of the thread on which our destiny hangs, and then by the inevitableness of our lives. We perceive the governing rule only when we look back. The present always seems chaos, but when we look back we distinguish the reason of every action, and we recognise the perfect fulfilment of what must be. Her visit to the convent — how little it was when looked at from one side, when looked at from another how extraordinary! If she had known that Monsignore was going to ask her to go there, she would have invented a plausible excuse — but she had had no time to think; his kind eyes were fixed upon her, and he seemed so ready to believe all she said, that her courage sank within her, and she could not lie to him. Perhaps all this was by intention, by the very grace of God! The Virgin might have interceded on her behalf, for is it not said that whoever wears the scapular of Our Lady of Mount Carmel cannot lose her soul? But for the last two years, for more than two years, she had not worn her scapular. The strings had broken, and they had not been mended. She had intended to buy another, but had not been able to bring herself to do so, so hypocritical did it seem.

It might be that these dreadful nights of insomnia had been sent so that she might have an opportunity of realising the wickedness of her life, and the risk she incurred of losing her soul. She dare not have recourse to the sleeping-draught, and must endure perhaps another sleepless night. If they had been sent, as she thought they were, for a purpose, she must not dare to hush, by artificial means, the sense God had awakened in her; to do so would be like flying in the face of Providence. She had never suffered from sleeplessness before, and could not think that this insomnia was accidental. No, she dare not have recourse to sleeping-draughts, at least not till she had been to confession. If afterwards she did not get to sleep, it would be different. If she were to die in her sleep! If she were to awake in hell! And that evening, when Merat reminded her of the draught, she said it was to be left on the table, and that she would take it if she required it.

The darkness could not hide the slim bottle corked with a slim blond cork, and so clear was the vision that she could read the label through the darkness. It was only partially gummed on the bottom, and she could read the pale writing — "To be taken before bedtime." She was tempted as by a dark, dreamless river; hushed in an unconscious darkness she would be upon that river, floating through a long, winding night towards a dim, very distant day. If she were to drink, darkness would sink upon her, and all this visible world, the continual sight of which she felt must end in lunacy, would pass from her. So great was the temptation that she did not dare to get out of bed and put the bottle away — if she did she must drink it, so she lay quite still, her face turned against the wall, trying to find courage in the thought that God had imposed the torture of these sleepless nights upon her in order that she might be saved from the eternal sleeplessness of hell.

Mistakes are made in the preparation of medicines, but if no mistake had been made, a change in her health might unfit her for so large a dose, and if through either of these chances she were to die in her sleep, there was no question that she must awake in hell. She did not dare to go to the draught, but lay quite still, her head close against the wall, praying for darkness, crying for relief from this too fierce mentality; it seemed to be eating up the very substance of her brain.

On the following evening she sat in her arm-chair watching the clock. It had struck eleven — that was the time for her going to bed, but the hour had become a redoubtable one. Bedtime filled her with fear, and the thought of another sleepless night deprived her of all courage. She did not dare to go upstairs. She sat in her arm-chair as if in terror of a mortal enemy. She had hidden the bottle, but her maid had ordered another. There were now two — sufficient to procure death, said her conscience; and since dinner the temptation to commit suicide had been growing in her brain; like a vulture perched upon a jag of mountain rock, she could see the temptation watching her. She tried not to see, but the thought grew blacker and larger — its beak was in her brain, and she was drawn, as if by talons, tremblingly from her chair. She was so weak that she could hardly cross the room; but the thought of death seemed to give her courage, and without it she thought she never would have had the strength to get upstairs. The attraction was extraordinary, and her powerlessness to resist it was part of the fascination; and she looked round the room like a victim looking for the knife. She could not see the bottle on her dressing-table, and, accepting this as a favourable omen, she undressed and lay down.

After all, she might sleep without having recourse to death; but, lying on the pillow, she could think of nothing but the slim bottle and the slim blond cork, and a thick, white liquid, and the dark river into which she would sink, the winding darkness on which she would float, and she had not strength to think whither it led. Her only thought was not to see this world any more; her only desire not to think of Ulick or Owen, and to be tortured no longer by doubt of what was right and what was wrong. She was aware that she was losing possession of her self-control, and would be soon drawn into the dreaded but much-desired abyss; and in this delirium, produced by long insomnia, she began to conceive her suicide as an act of defiance against God, and she rejoiced in her hatred of God, who had afflicted her so cruelly — for it was hatred that had come to her aid, and would enable her to secure a long, long sleep. "Out of the sight of this world" — she muttered the words as she sought the chloral — "I'll sleep, I'll sleep, I must sleep. Sleep or death, one or the other, so long as I am out of the sight of this world." But in her frenzy of desire for sleep she overlooked the slim bottle with the thin blond cork. Yet it stood on the toilet-table amid other bottles, right under her eyes, but over and over again she passed it by, until, frightened at not finding it, she opened drawer after drawer, and rushed to her wardrobe thinking it might be there. She sought for it, throwing her things about, and, not finding it anywhere, a cold sweat broke over her forehead. Another sleepless night and she must go mad. If she did not find it, she must find another way out of this agony, and the thought of cutting her throat, or throwing herself out of the window, flashed across her mind.

"Sleep I must have — sleep, sleep, sleep!" she muttered, as with fearing fingers she emptied out the contents of her little workbox, where odds and ends collected. It was her scapular that came up under her hand, and at the sight of it all her mad revolt was hushed, and a calm settled upon her. "A miracle, a miracle," she murmured, "the Virgin has done this; she interceded for me"; and at the same moment, catching sight of the chloral right under her very eyes, she could no longer doubt the miraculous interposition of the Virgin. For how otherwise could that bottle have escaped her notice? She had looked at the very place where it stood many times, and had not seen it; she had moved the other bottles and she had not seen it. The Virgin had taken it away — she was sure it was not there five minutes ago — or else the Virgin had blinded her eyes to it. A miracle had happened; and in a quivering peace of mind, and an intense joy of the heart, she mended the strings of her broken scapular. Then she hung it round her neck, and, kneeling by the bedside, she said the prayers that it enjoined; and when she got into bed she saw a light shining in one corner of the room, and, sure that it was the Virgin who had come in person to visit her, she continued her prayers till she fell asleep.

XXXIX

A knock came at her door, and Merat was glad to hear that mademoiselle had slept. She noticed that the sleeping-draught had not been taken, and picking up the various things that Evelyn had scattered in her search, she wondered at the disorder of the room, making Evelyn feel uncomfortable by her remarks. Evelyn knew it would be impossible for Merat to guess the cause of it all. But when she hesitated about what dress she would wear, declaring against this one and that one, her choice all the time being fixed on a black crepon, Merat glanced suspiciously at her mistress; and when Evelyn put aside her rings, selecting in preference two which she did not usually wear, the maid was convinced that some disaster had happened, and was ready to conclude that Ulick Dean was the cause of these sleepless nights.

Evelyn had chosen this dress because she was going to St. Joseph's, or because she supposed she was going there. It did not seem to her that she could confess to anyone but Monsignore. But why he? one priest would do as well as another. She was too tired to think.

Her brain was like one of those autumn days when clouds hang low, and a dimness broods between sky and earth. True that there were the events of last night — her search for the chloral, the finding of her scapular, her belief in a special interposition of Providence, and then her resolution to go to confession. It was all there; she knew it all, but did not want to think about it. She had been thinking for a week, and this was the first respite she had had from thought, and she wished this stupor of brain to continue till four o'clock. That was the time she would have to be at St. Joseph's. He was generally there at that time,

She had lain down on the sofa after breakfast, hoping to sleep a little; if she didn't, the time would be very long; but, as she dozed, she began to see the thin worn face and the piercing eyes, and the intonation of his voice began to ring in her ears. As she thought, or as she dreamed, the striking of the clock reminded her of the number of hours that separated them. Only four hours and she would be kneeling at his feet! Then she felt that she had advanced a stage, and was appreciably nearer the inevitable end, and lay staring at the sequence of events. She saw the hours stretching out reaching to him, and she all the while was moving through the hours automatically. All kinds of similes presented themselves to her mind. She asked herself how it was that Monsignore had come into her life. She had not sought him; she had not wanted him in her life, but he had come! She remembered the first time she saw him — that Sunday morning when she went to St. Joseph's to meet her father's choir — and could recall the exact appearance of the church as he walked across the aisle to the pulpit. It was illuminated by a sudden ray of sunlight falling through one of the eastern windows, and she remembered how it had lighted up the thin, narrow face, bringing a glow of colour to the dark skin till it seemed like one of the carved saints she had seen in Romanesque churches on the Rhine. She

remembered the shape of the small head, carried well back, and how she had been impressed by the slow stride with which he crossed the sanctuary. Then her thoughts passed to the moment when, standing in the pulpit, he had looked out on the congregation, seeming to divine the presence of some great sinner there. She had felt that he was aware of her existence, for in that moment the thin grey eyes seemed to see her, even to think her, and they had frightened her, they were so clear, so set on some purpose — God's or the Church's. She had met him that evening at a concert, and how well she remembered her father introducing him! He had spoken to her several minutes; everyone in the room was looking at them, and she recalled the scene — all the girls, their dresses, and the expression of their eyes. But she could not recall what Monsignore had said, only her impressions; the same strange fascination and fear which she had experienced when Owen came to the concerts long ago — that loud winter night, harsh and hard as iron. Owen had stood talking to her too, and she had been fascinated.... He had admired her singing, and Monsignore had admired her singing; but she was determined not to sing until Monsignore had asked her to sing, and when he had asked her to go to the convent she had gone. She walked up the room, and tried to understand herself — what was she, bad or good, weak or strong? If she only knew what she was, then she would know how to act.

There were her sins against faith. She had striven to undermine her belief in God. She had read Darwin and Huxley for this purpose, and not in the least to obtain knowledge. As Monsignore had said, "When a Catholic loses his faith, it is because he desires to lead a loose life," and she hardly dared to look into her soul, knowing that she would find confirmation of this opinion. She had not been to Mass, because at the Elevation she believed in spite of herself; so she had been as insincere in her unfaith as in her faith. Then there were the sins of the flesh, and their number and their blackness terrified her. There were sins that she strove to put out of her mind at once, sins she was even ashamed to think of; and once more it seemed that she could never raise herself out of the slough into which she had fallen. She had all along taken it for granted that a general admission that she had lived with Owen as his wife would be sufficient. But now it seemed to her that she would have to tell Monsignore how gross her life had been.

In a corner of the room her sins crowded, and, covering her face with her hands, she was convinced that she could not go to confession.

Before she went away with Owen she had had no sins to confess, or only venial sins — that she had been late for Mass, through her own fault; that she had omitted her evening prayers. Her worst sin was the reading of a novel which she thought she ought not to have read — but now her life was all sin. If the priest questioned her she could not answer, she must refuse to answer. So there seemed no hope for her. She could not confess everything, and the conviction suddenly possessed her that God had deserted her, and she could not hope for redemption from her present life. For she could not confess all her sins; her heart would fail her, she would be

tempted to conceal something, and then to her other sins she would add the sin of a bad confession.

Nervous pains began again in her arms and neck, and she experienced the same wasting away of the very substance of her being, of the protecting envelope of the unconscious. She was again a mere mentality, and she looked round the room with a frightened, distracted air. On the table was the book Monsignore had given her, *Sin and its Consequences*. But she turned from it with a smile. She did not need anyone to tell her what were the consequences of sin. At the same moment she caught sight of the clock; it was half-past twelve, and she remembered that in about three hours and a half it would be time to go to St. Joseph's.

Was it Monsignore's influence that had induced this desire of a pure life in her? She could not deny to herself that she was attracted by his personality. So the question was, How far his personality accounted for the change that had come over her life? Was it the mere personal influence of the prelate, or an inherent sense of right and wrong that compelled her to send her lovers away and change her life? If it were the mere personal influence of Monsignore, her desire of a pure life would not last, and to attain something that was not natural to her she would have ruined her life to no purpose.

"So my life is over and done," she said, "and at seven-and-twenty!"

She twisted in her fingers a letter which she had received that morning from Mademoiselle Helbrun. She was staying at the Savoy Hotel, and had just returned from Munich, and Evelyn felt she would like to hear about her success as Frika, and how So-and-So had sung Brunhilda, and the rest of the little gossip about the profession. She would like to lunch with Louise in the restaurant, at a table by the window. She would like to see the Thames, and hear things that she might never hear again. But was it possible that she was never going to join again in the tumult of the Valkyrie? She remembered her war-gear, the white tunic with gold breastplates. Was it possible that she would never cry their cry from the top of the rocks; and her favourite horse, the horse that Owen had given her for the part, what would become of him? What would become of her jewellery, of her house, of her fame, of everything?

Owen had said it could not matter to God whether she kissed him or not. She could not confess — she could not explain everything; and again she was struck with a sort of mental paralysis. Why Monsignore — why not another priest? No, not another. She could not say why, but not another; he was the one. But. perhaps she only wanted to tell someone, a woman — Louise, for instance. If she were to tell Louise — she put the idea out of her mind, feeling it to be vain; and trying to think that there was no need why she should leave the stage, and uncertain whether she should stay on the stage if Monsignore forbade her, or if she wanted to even if he allowed her, she put on her hat and went to lunch with Louise.

She must speak to someone. But the Savoy was on her way to St. Joseph's. It was half-way there, and a little overcome by the coincidence, she told her servant to call a hansom.

She met Louise in the courtyard, and the vivacious little woman cried, "My dear, how glad I am to see you!" and she stretched out both hands, and while listening to her Evelyn envied her for being so happy, and she wondered why she was so happy; and while asking herself these questions she noticed her dress.

Mademoiselle Helbrun's plump figure was set off to full advantage in a black-and-white check silk dress, and she wore a wonderful arched hat with flowing plumes of the bird of paradise. She was a prima-donna every inch of her, standing on the steps of her hotel.

"My dear," Evelyn said, "I have come to ask you to let me lunch with you."

"But I shall be enchanted, my dear. I wrote on the chance, never thinking that you would be in town this season."

"Yes, it is strange. I don't know why I am here. There's no one in town."

"Where would you like to lunch? In my room or in the restaurant?"

"It will be gayer in the restaurant. I haven't seen a soul for nearly a week."

"My dear!"

The sun was shining on the great brown river. Evelyn's eyes had wandered out there, and she seemed to see a thin face and hard, cold eyes, and she asked Louise abruptly what the time was, for she had forgotten her watch. It was only just three o'clock. She returned to the Munich performances, but Louise could see that Evelyn was all the time struggling against an overmastering fate. The only thing she could think of was that Evelyn was being forced into a marriage or an elopement against her will. Once or twice she thought that Evelyn was going to confide in her. She waited, afraid to say a word lest she should check the confidences that her friend seemed tempted to entrust her with. "I am sorry I did not see your Frika." Once started, she rattled on for some time, hardly knowing what she was saying, arguing about the music and expressing opinions about everything and everybody. Stopping abruptly, she again asked her friend what time it was. Louise said that she must not go, and then tried to induce her to come for a drive with her; but Evelyn shook her head. There was no trace of colour in her face, and when Louise asked when they should meet again, she said she did not know, but she hoped very soon.

XL

While wondering at the grotesque movement of the trotting horse, Evelyn tried once more to save herself from this visit to St. Joseph's. She thought of what it would cost her — her present life! Her lovers were gone already, and Monsignore would tell her that she must give up the stage. But these considerations did not alter the fact that she was going to St. Joseph's. She was rolling thither, like a stone down a hill. She saw the streets and people as she passed them, as a stone might if it had eyes. All power of will had been taken from her; it was the same as when she went to meet Owen at Berkeley Square, and in a strange lucidity of mind she asked herself if it were not true that we are never more than mere machines set in motion by a master hand, predestined to certain courses, halfblind creatures who do not perceive their own helplessness, except in rare moments of heightened consciousness. As if to convince herself on this point, she strove to raise her hand to open the trap in the roof of the hansom, and her fear increased on finding that she could not. To acquire the necessary strength, she reminded herself that she was wrecking her whole life for an idea — for perhaps nothing more than a desire to confess her sins. Again she tried to raise her hand, and she looked round, feeling that nothing short of some extraordinary accident could save her — nothing except an accident to the horse or carriage could save her artistic life. Some material accident, nothing else.... Monsignore might not be at St. Joseph's. Perhaps he had left town. Nobody stayed in town in September, and for a moment it seemed hardly worth while to continue her drive.

And, as in a nervous vision, Evelyn saw that the whole of her future life depended on her seeing Monsignore that day. She foresaw that if she were turned away from the door of St. Joseph's, she would never come back; never would she be able to bring herself to the point again. She would find Owen waiting for her; wherever she went, she would meet him; sooner or later the temptation to return to him would overcome her. Then, indeed, she would be lost; then, indeed, her tragedy would begin.... Ah! if she could only cease to think for a little while — only for a little while. She was uncertain if she could lead a good life. She no longer desired anything. She was conscious of no sensation, except that she was rolling independent of her own will, like a stone.

A moment after, the gable of the church appeared against the sky, and she recognised the poor ridiculous creature in the tattered black bonnet, whose stiff, crooked appearance she had known since childhood. She had changed little in the last twenty years. She walked with the same sidling gait, her hands crossed in front of her like a doll. Her life had been lived about St. Joseph's; the church had always been the theatre and centre of her thoughts. Doubtless she was on her way to Benediction, and the temptation to follow her arose, but was easily resisted. Evelyn paid the cabman his fare, and in an increasing tremor of nervous agitation, she crossed the gravelled space in front of the presbytery. The attendant showed her into the same bare

room, where there was nothing to distract her thoughts from herself except the four prints on the walls. She had recourse to them in the hope of stimulating her religious fervour, but as she gazed on Monica and St. Augustine she remembered the poor woman she had just seen. There had been scorn of her ridiculous appearance in her heart, and pride that she, Evelyn, had been given a more beautiful body, more perfect health, and a clearer intelligence. So she was overcome with shame. How dare she have scorned this holy woman? If she had been more richly gifted by nature, to what shameful usage had she put her body and her talents? And Evelyn thought how much more lovely in God's eyes was this poor deformed woman. To sin is the common lot of humanity; but she had done more than commit sins — she had committed the sin, she had striven to tear out of her heart that sense of right and wrong which God had planted there. She had denied the ideal, as the Jews had denied Christ. Owen had not done that; he lived up to his principles, such as they were. But she had not thought she was acting right; she had always known that she was doing wrong, and she had gone on doing wrong — stifling her conscience, hoping always that it would be the last time.

That poor woman whose appearance had raised a contemptuous thought in her heart had never sinned against her faith. She had not sought to raise doubts in her heart concerning God and morals; she had lived in ardent belief and love, never doubting that God watched her from His heaven, whither He would call her in good time. Almighty God! She was struck with fear lest she did not believe all that this poor woman believed. Did she believe that she, Evelyn Innes, would appear at the final judgment and be assigned a place for ever and ever in either eternal bliss or torment? She did not know if she believed this. Last night she was sure she believed, but to-day she did not know.... She did not know that heaven was as this poor woman imagined it. She asked herself if she believed in a future life of any sort? She was not sure, she did not know; she was only sure that whether there be a future life or none, our obligation to live according to the dictates of our conscience remains the same. But Monsignore might not deem this sufficient, and might refuse her absolution. She strove to convince herself, hurriedly, aware that the moments were fleeting, that she had a soul. That sense of right and wrong which, like a whip, had driven her here could be nothing else but the voice of her soul; therefore there was a soul, and if there was a soul it could not die, and if it did not die it must go somewhere; therefore there was a heaven and a hell. But in spite of her desire to convince herself, remembrance of Owen's arguments whistled like a wind through her pious exhortations, and all that she had read in Huxley and Darwin and Spencer; the very words came back thick and distinct, and like one who finds progress impossible in the face of the gale, she stopped thinking. "We know nothing... we know nothing," were the words she heard in the shriek of the wind; and revealed religion appeared in tattered, miserable plight, a forlorn spectre borne away on the wind. So distinct was the vision, so explicit her hearing, that she could not pretend to herself that she was a Christian in any but a moral sense, and this would not satisfy Monsignore. Then question after question pealed in her ears. What should she say when he came? Was it not better for her to leave at once? But then? She took one step towards the door. However thin and shallow her

belief might be, she must confess her sins. She felt that she must confess her sins even if she did not believe in confession. Her thoughts paused, and she was terrified by the mystery which her own existence presented to herself.

The door opened, and the priest stood looking at her. She could see that he divined the truth. In the first glance he read that Evelyn had come to confession, and it was for him a moment of extraordinary spiritual pride.

XLI

Monsignore Mostyn and Sir Owen had been at school together, and though they had not met since, they frequently heard of each other. Owen's ideas of marriage and religion were well known to the priest. He had heard soon after Evelyn had gone away that she had gone with Asher, his old schoolfellow. He knew the pride that Asher would take in destroying her faith, and this diabolic project he had determined to frustrate; and every year when he returned from Rorne he asked if Evelyn was expected to sing in London that season. As year after year went by, his chance of saving her soul seemed to grow more remote; but at the bottom of his heart he believed that he was the chosen instrument'of God's grace. That night at the concert in her father's house, the first words — something in her manner, the expression in her eyes — had led him to think that the conversion would be an easy one. But it had come about quicker than he had expected. And, as he stood looking at her, he was aware of an alloy of personal vanity, and strove to stifle it; he thought of himself as the humble instrument selected to win her from this infamous, this renegade Catholic, and the trouble so visible in her was confirmation of his belief that there can be no peace for a Catholic outside the pale of the Church.

"I have wanted to see you so much," she began hurriedly. "There is a great deal I want to tell you. But perhaps you have no time now?"

"My dear child, I have ample time; I am only too pleased to be of service to you. I am afraid you are in trouble — you look quite ill."

To give her time to recover herself, Monsignore spoke of a letter he had received that morning from the Superior of the Passionist Convent.

"I will not trouble you with her repeated thanks for what you have done for her. She begs me to tell you that she and the Sisters unite in inviting you to spend a few days with them. They suggest that you should choose your own time."

"Oh, Monsignore, how can I go and stay with them? I thought I should have died of shame when I went there with you after the concert. Mother Philippa asked me if I had travelled with my father when I went abroad. You must remember, for you came to my assistance."

"I turned the conversation, seeing that it embarrassed you."

"But you must have guessed?"

"On account of your father's position at St. Joseph's, I had heard of you.... I had heard of your intimacy with Sir Owen Asher, and the life of an opera singer is not one to which a good Catholic can easily reconcile herself."

As they sat on either side of the table, Evelyn was attracted, and then absorbed, by the distinctive appearance of the priest. His mind was in his face. The long, high forehead, with black hair growing sparely upon it; the small brilliant eyes, and the long, firm line of the jaw, now distinct, for the head was turned almost in profile. The face was a symbol of the mind behind it; and the intimate concurrence of the appearance and the thought was the reason of its attractiveness. It was the beauty of unity; here was a man whose ideas are so deeply rooted that they express themselves in his flesh. In him there was nothing floating or undecided; and in the line of the thin small mouth and the square nostrils Evelyn divined a perfect certainty on all points. In this way she was attracted to his spiritual guidance, and desired the support of his knowledge, as she had desired Ulick's knowledge when she was studying Isolde. Ulick's technical knowledge had been useful to her; upon it she had raised herself, through it she had attained her idea. And in the same way Monsignore's knowledge on all points of doctrine would free her from doubt. Then she would be able to rise above the degradation of earthly passion to that purer and higher passion — the love of God. Doctrine she did not love for its own sake as Monsignore loved it. She regarded it as the musician regards crotchets and quavers, as a means of expression; and she now felt that without doctrine she could not acquire the love which she desired; without doctrine she could not free herself from the bondage of the flesh, and every moment the temptation to give her soul into his keeping grew more irresistible. Rising from her chair, she said —

"Will you hear my confession now, Monsignore?"

The priest looked at her — his narrow, hard face concentrated in an ardent scrutiny.

"Certainly, my child, if you think you are sufficiently prepared."

"I must confess now; I could not put it off again"; and, glancing round the room, she slipped suddenly upon her knees.

The priest put on his stole and murmured a Latin prayer, making the sign of the cross over the head of his penitent.

"I fear I shall never remember all my sins. I have been living in mortal sin so many years."

"I remember that you spoke to me of intellectual difficulties concerning faith. You see now, my dear child, that you were deceiving yourself. Your real difficulties were quite different."

“I think that my doubts were sincere," Evelyn replied tremblingly, for she felt that Monsignore expected her to agree with him.

“If your doubts were sincere, what has removed them? What has convinced you of the existence of a future life? That, I believe, was one of your chief difficulties. Have you examined the evidence?”

Evelyn murmured that that sense of right and wrong which she had never been able to drive out of her heart implied the existence of God.

“But savages, to whom the Scriptures are unknown, have a sense of right and wrong. Those who lived before the birth of Christ — the Greeks and Romans — had a sense of right and wrong.”

Knowing that the priest’s absolution depended upon her acceptance of the doctrine of a future life, she strove to believe as a little child. But it was her sins of the flesh that she wanted to confess, and this argument about the Incarnation had begun to seem out of place. Suddenly it seemed to her inexpressibly ludicrous that she should be kneeling beside the priest. She could not help wondering what Owen would think of her. She remembered his pointing out that it is stated in the Gospel that the Messiah should be descended from David. Now Mary was not of royal blood, so it was through Joseph, who was not his father, that Christ was descended from David. But these discrepancies did not matter. She felt the Church to be necessary to her, and that its teaching coincided with her deepest feeling seemed to her enough. But Monsignore was insistent, and he pressed dogma after dogma upon her. All the while the cocoa-nut matting ate into her knees, and she was perplexed by remembrances of sexual abandonments. How to speak of them she did not know, and she was haunted and terrified by the idea of concealing anything which would invalidate her confession. So she hastily availed herself of the first pause to tell him that she had lived with Owen Asher for the last six years. The priest did not trouble to inquire further, and she felt that she could not leave him under the impression that she had lived with Owen the moderate, sexual life which she believed was maintained between husband and wife.

"My life during the last six years," she said, interrupting him, "has been so abandoned. There are few — -there are no excesses of which I have not been guilty.”

“You have said enough on that point," he answered, to her great relief. But at that moment she remembered Ulick, and she felt that she must mention him. To do so she had again to interrupt the priest.

“But I must tell you — Sir Owen was not the only one " — she bowed her head — “there was another." Then, yielding to the temptation to explain herself, she told Monsignore how it was this second sin that had awakened her conscience.

“And this showed you, my dear child, the impossibility of a moral life for one who was born a Catholic, except when protected by the doctrine and the Sacraments of our Holy Church. And that brings us back to the point from which we started — the necessity of an unquestioning acceptance of the entire doctrine, and, I may add, a general acquiescence in Catholic belief. It seems strange to you that I am more anxious about your sins against faith than your sins of the flesh. It is because I know that without faith you will fall again. It is because I know the danger, the seduction of the theory that even if there be neither hell nor heaven, yet the obligation to lead a moral life exists. Such theory is in essence Protestantism, and a delicious flattery of the vanity of human nature. It has been the cause of the loss of millions of souls. You yourself are a living testimony of the untrustworthiness of this shelter, and it is entirely contrary to the spirit of the teaching of the Church, which is, that we must lead a moral life in order to gain heaven and avoid the pain of hell.”

She leaned heavily on the table to relieve her knees from as much weight as possible, and she thought of the possibility of getting her handkerchief out of her pocket and placing it under her. But when her confession turned from her sins against faith to her sins of the flesh, she forgot the pain of her knees.

“There is one more question I must ask you. You have lived with this man as his mistress for six years, you have spoken of the excesses to which you abandoned yourself, but more important than these is whether you deliberately avoided the probable consequences of your sin — I mean in regard to children?”

"If we sin, we must needs avoid the consequences of our sin. I know that it is forbidden — but my profession — I had to think of others — my father " —

"Your answer, my dear child, does not surprise me. It shows me into what depths you have fallen. That you should think like this is part of the teaching of the man whose object was to undermine your faith; it is part of the teaching of Darwin and Huxley and Spencer. You were persuaded that to live with a man to whom you were not married differed in no wise from living with your husband. The result has proved how false is such teaching. The sacrament of marriage was instituted to save the weak from the danger of temptation, and human nature is essentially weak, and without the protection of the Church it falls. The doctrine of the Church is our only safeguard. But that you should have proved unfaithful to this man — this second sin which shocked you so much, and which I am thankful awakened in you a sense of sin, is not more important than to thwart the design of Nature. It is important that you should understand

this, for an understanding on this point will show you how false, how contradictory, is the teaching of the naturalistic philosophy in which you placed your trust. These men put aside revealed religion and refer everything to Nature, but they do not hesitate to oppose the designs of Nature when it suits their purpose. The doctrine of the Church has always been one wife, one husband. Polygamy and polyandry are relatively sterile. It is the acknowledged wife and the acknowledged husband that are fruitful; it is the husband and wife who furnish the world with men and heaven with souls; whereas the lover and the mistress fulfil no purpose — they merely encumber the world with their vice, they are useless to Nature, and are hateful in God's sight; the nations that do not cast them out soon become decrepit. If we go to the root of things, we find that the law of the Church coincides very closely with the law of Nature, and that the so-called natural sciences are but a nineteenth-century figment. I hope all this is quite clear to you?"

Evelyn acquiesced. Her natural instinct forbade her the original sin — what happened after did not appeal to her; she could feel no interest in the question he had raised. But she was determined to avoid all falsehood — on that question her instinct was again explicit — and when he returned again in his irritation at her insubordination to his ideas, and questioned her regarding her belief as to a future life, her answer was so doubtful that after a moment's hesitation he said —

"If you are not convinced on so cardinal a point of dogma, it is impossible for me to give you absolution."

"Do not deny me your absolution. I cannot face my life without some sign of forgiveness. I believe — I think I believe. You probe too deeply. Sometimes it seems to me that there must be a future life; sometimes it seems to me that it would be too terrible if we were to live again."

"It would be too terrible, indeed, my dear child, if we were to live again unassoiled, unpurified, in all our miserable imperfections. But these have been removed by the priest's absolution, by the sinner's repentance in this world, and by purgatory in the next. Those who have the happiness to live in the sight of God are without stain."

"I only know that I must lead a moral life, and that religion will help me to do so. I try to speak the truth, and in trying to tell the whole truth perhaps I leave an impression that I believe less than I do. You must make allowance for my ignorance and incapacity. I cannot find words as you do to express myself. Do not refuse me absolution, for without it I shall not have strength to persevere.... I fear what may become of me. If you knew the effort it has cost me to come to you. I have not slept for many nights for thinking of my sins."

“There is one promise you must make me before I give you absolution; you must not seek either of these men again who have been to you a cause of sin.”

The pain from her knees was expressed in her voice, and it was almost with a cry that she answered —

“But I have promised to sing his opera.”

"I thought, my dear child, that you told me you intended to give up the stage? I feel bound to tell you that I do not see how you are to remain on the stage if you wish to lead a new life.”

"I have been kneeling a long while," and a cry escaped her, so acute was the pain. She struggled to her feet and stood leaning against the table, waiting for the pain to die out of her limbs. “The other man is father’s friend. If I tell him, or if I write to him that he may not come to the house, father will suspect. Then I have promised to sing his opera. Oh, Monsignore "—

“These difficulties," said Monsignore, as he rose from his chair, "appear to you very serious. You are overcome by their importance because you have not adequately realised the awfulness of your state in the sight of God. If you were to die now, your soul would be lost. Once you have grasped this central fact in its full significance, the rest will seem easy. I will lend you a book which I think will help you.”

"But, Monsignore, are you going to refuse me your absolution?”

“My dear child, you are in doubt regarding the essential doctrine of the resurrection, and you are unable to promise me not to see one of the men who has been to you a cause of sin.”

Her clear, nervous vision met the dry, narrow vision that was the priest, and there was a pause in the conflict of their wills. He saw that his penitent was moved to the depth of her being, and had lost control of herself. He feared to send her away without absolution, yet he felt that she must be forced into submission — she must accept the entire doctrine of the Church. He could not understand, and therefore could not sympathise with, her hesitation on points of doctrine. If the penitent accepted the Church as the true Church, conscience was laid aside for doctrine. The value of the Church was that it relieved the individual of the responsibility of life. So it was by an effort of will that he retained his patience. He was determined to reduce her to his mind, but he was instinctively aware of the danger of refusing her absolution; to do so might fling her back upon agnosticism. He was contending with vast passions. An unexpected wave might carry her beyond his reach. The stakes were high; he was playing for her soul with Owen Asher. He had decided to yield a point if necessary, but his voice was so kind, so irresistibly kind, that she heard nothing but it. However she might think when she had left him, she could not

withstand the kindness of that voice; it seemed to enter into her life like some extraordinary music or perfume. He could see the effect he was producing on her; he watched her eyes growing bright, until a slight dread crossed his mind. She seemed like one fascinated, trembling in bonds that were loosening, and that in the next moment would break, leaving her free — perhaps to throw herself into his arms; he did not dare to withdraw his eyes. An awful moment passed, and she turned slowly as if to leave the room. But at the moment of so doing a light seemed to break upon her brain; where there was darkness there was light. He saw her walk suddenly forward. She threw herself upon her knees at the table, and like one to whom speech had suddenly come back, she said —

"I believe in our Holy Church and all that she teaches. Father, I beseech you to absolve me from my sins."

So striking was the change that the priest himself was cowed by it, and his personal pride in his conquest of her soul was drowned in a great awe. He had first to thank God for having chosen, him as the instrument of His will, and then he spoke to Evelyn of the wonder and magnitude of God's mercies, — that, at the very height of her artistic career, He should have roused her to a sense of her own exceeding sinfulness was a miracle of His grace.

His presence by her at that moment was a balm. She heard him say that her life would not be an easy one, but that she must not be discouraged, that she must remember that she had made her peace with God, and would derive strength from His sacraments. An extraordinary sweetness came over her; she seemed borne away upon a delicious sweetness; she was conscious of an extraordinary inward Presence. She did not dare to look up, or even to think, but buried herself in prayer, experiencing all the while the most wonderful and continuous sensation of delight. She had been racked and torn, and had fallen at his feet a helpless mass of suffering humanity. He had healed her, and she felt hope and life returning to her again, and sufficient strength to get up and continue her way. Never again would she be alone; he would be always near to guide her. She heard him tell her that she must recite daily for penance the hymn *Veni sanctus spiritus*, and the thought of this obedience to him refreshed her as the first draught of spring water refreshes the wanderer who for weeks has hesitated between the tortures of thirst and the foul water of brackish desert pools. She was conscious that he was making the sign of the cross over her bowed head, the murmured Latin formula sounded strangely familiar and delicious in her ears, with the more clearly enunciated *Ego te absolvo* towards the close. In that supreme moment for which she had longed, the last traces of Owen's agnostic teaching seemed to fall from her, and she was carried back to the days of her girlhood, to the days of her old prayer-book, a "Garden of the Soul" bound in ivory; and she rose from her knees, weak, but happy as a convalescent.

"I hope you will sleep well tonight," said Monsignore kindly, noticing the signs of physical exhaustion in Evelyn as she stood mechanically drawing down her veil and putting on her gloves. "A good conscience is the best of all narcotics." Evelyn smiled through her tears, but could not trust herself to speak. "But I don't really like you living alone in Park Lane. It is too great a strain on your nerves. Could you not go to your father's for a time?"

"Yes, perhaps, I don't know. Dear father would like to have me."

He told her that the Mass he was to say to-morrow he would offer up for her; and as she drove home her joy grew more intense, and in a sort of spiritual intoxication she identified herself with the faith of her childhood. Life again presented possibilities of infinite perfection, and she was astonished that the difficulties which she had thought insuperable had been so easily overcome.

All that evening she thought of God and His sacraments, and remembering the moment when His grace had descended upon her and all had become; clear, she perforce believed in a miracle — a miracle of grace had certainly happened.

She looked forward to the moment when her maid would leave the room, and she would throw herself on her knees and lose herself in prayer, as she had lost herself when she knelt beside Monsignore, and he absolved her from sin. But when the door closed she was incapable of prayer, she only desired sleep. Her whole mind seemed to have veered. She had exaggerated everything, conducted herself strangely, hysterically, and her prayers were repeated without ardour, almost indifferently.

XLII

But the next day she could not account to herself for the extraordinary relief she had derived from her confession. For years she had battled with life, alone, with no light to guide her, blown hither and thither by the gust of her own emotions. But now she was at peace, she was reconciled to the Church; she would never be alone again. The struggle of her life still lay before her, and yet in a sense it was a thing of the past. She felt like a ship that has passed from the roar of the surf into the shelter of the embaying land, and in the distance stretched the long peacefulness of the winding harbour.

She kept her jewels in a small iron safe; it stood in her dressing-room under her washhand-stand, and Merat surprised her two hours later sitting on her bed, with everything, down to the rings which she wore daily, spread over the counterpane. The maid gave her mistress a sharp look, remarking that she hoped mademoiselle did not miss anything. In her hand there was a brooch consisting of three large emeralds set with diamonds; she often wore it at the front of her dress — it went particularly well with a flowered silk which Owen always admired. She calculated the price it would fetch, and at the same time was convinced that Monsignore's permission to sing on the concert platform, and possibly to go to Bayreuth to sing Kundry, would not affect her decision. She wanted to leave the stage. Half measures did not appeal to her in the least. If she was to give up the stage, she must give it up wholly. It must be a thing over and done with, or she must remain on the stage and sing for the good of Art and her lovers. Since that was no longer possible, she preferred never to sing a note again in public. The worst wrench of all was her promise to Monsignore not to sing Grania, and since she had made that sacrifice, she could not dally with lesser things. I Then, resuming her search among her jewellery, she selected the few things she would like to keep. She examined a cameo brooch set in filigree gold, ornamented with old rose diamonds, and she picked up a strange ring which a man whom Owen knew had taken from the finger of a mummy. It was a large emerald set in plain gold. A man who had been present at the unswathing of this princess, dead at least three thousand years, had managed to secure it, and Owen had paid him a large sum for it. She put it on her finger, and decided to keep a dozen other rings, the earrings she wore, and a few bracelets. The rest of her jewellery she would sell, if Owen refused to have them back. Of course there would be her teaching; she could not live in Dulwich doing nothing, and would take up her mother's singing classes....

Her mother had lost her voice in the middle of her career, and her daughter had abandoned the stage at the moment of her greatest triumph! Looking at her jewels scattered all over the bed, Evelyn wondered what was going to happen to her. Was she really going to leave the stage? She — Evelyn Innes! When she thought of it, it seemed impossible. If religion were only a craze! If she were to go back to Owen, or to other lovers? How strange it was! it seemed strange to be

herself, and yet it was quite true. Remembering that on Sunday she would partake of the Body and Blood which her Saviour had given for the salvation of sinners, her soul suddenly hushed, and, catching sight of the jewels which symbolised the sacrifice she was making, it seemed to her that she could afford much greater sacrifices for what she was going to receive....

"Then mademoiselle does not want the carriage?"

"No, I shall go by train."

She found her father in the workroom, and the sight of him in his cap and apron mending an old musical instrument caused many home scenes to flash across her mind, and she did not know whether it was from curiosity or a desire to please him that she asked the name of the strange little instrument he was repairing. It looked like an overgrown concertina, and he explained that it was a tiny virginal, and pointed out the date; it was made in 1631, in Roman notation.

"Father," she said, "I have come back to you; we shall never be separated any more — if you'll have me back."

"Have you back, dear! What has happened now?"

He stood with a chisel in his hand, and she noticed that he dug the point nervously into the soft deal plank. She sat down on a small wooden stool, and, kicking the shavings with her feet, she said —

"A great deal has happened. I have sent Owen away... I shall never see him again; I'm sorry to have to speak about him to you; you mustn't be angry; he was very good to me, and he asked me to marry him; he did everything — I'm afraid I've broken his heart."

"You're very strange, Evelyn, and I don't know what answer to make to you.... Why did you send him away, and why did you refuse to marry him?"

"I sent him away because I thought it wrong to live with him, and I refused to marry him — well, I don't know, father, I don't know why I refused to marry him. It seemed to me that if he had wished to marry me he ought to have done so long ago."

"Is that the only reason you can give?"

"It is the only reason I know. You seem sorry for him, father, are you? I hope you are. He has been very good to me. I've often wished to tell you; it has often been in my heart to tell you that

you should not hate him. He was very good to me, no one could have been kinder; he was very fond of me; you must not bear him any ill-will."

"I never said that I bore him ill-will. He made you a great singer, and you say he was very kind to you and wanted to marry you."

They glanced at each other hastily, and to change the subject he mentioned that he had had a letter that morning from Ulick. He had finished scoring the second act of Granta, and, thinking that he was on safe ground, Mr. Innes told her that Ulick hoped to finish his score in the autumn.

"I shall enjoy going through his opera with him."

"Will you ever forgive me or him? Ulick must not come back here — at least not while I am here. Perhaps I had better go."

The chisel dropped from his hand, and he stood looking at his daughter.

"Poor father is wondering why I am I like this"; and to interrupt his reflections she said —

"You must forgive me, whatever I am; you know that we've always loved each other, and we always shall. Nothing can come between us; you must be sorry for me, and kiss me, and love me more than ever, for I've been very unhappy. I haven't told you all I have given up so that I might be a good woman; it is not easy to make the sacrifices I have made, but I am happier now that I have made them. Ulick — Ulick must not come here while I'm here. But you'll want to see him — I had better go. Father dear, it is hard to say all these things. I've done nothing but bring you trouble. Now I've robbed you of your friend."

Mr. Innes stood looking at his daughter, and a peculiar puzzled expression had begun in his eyes, and had spread over his face. He suddenly shrugged his shoulders; the movement was like Evelyn's shrug, it expressed the same nervous hopelessness.

"I promised Monsignore that I would not see either."

"You went to confession — to him?"

Evelyn nodded.

"But how about Grania?"

"I’m not going to sing Grania. I’ve left the stage for good.”

"Left the stage?”

“Yes, father, I’ve left the stage, and I could not go back even if Monsignore were to allow me. Some day, when it is all far away, I’ll tell you the whole story. I cannot speak of it at present, it is all too near me. Suffice it to say that I have repented, and have come to ask you if you’ll have me back to live with you?”

“You’re my daughter, and you must do as you like. You were always different from anyone else — I cannot cope with you. So you have left the stage — left the stage! What will people think?”

"I could not be a good woman and remain on the stage, that's what it comes to. I am a very unsatisfactory person, I know that. I can’t make people happy; but there it is, it can’t be otherwise. If I don’t sing on the stage, I can sing at your concerts. Come downstairs and let’s have some music. We’ve talked enough.”

She had to ask her father for some writing-paper; she would have avoided doing so if she could have helped it. However, she was sending her lovers away.

XLIII

The first thing she saw in the morning was her letter to Owen. There it was! And every word and letter sank into her brain. “Sir Owen Asher, Bart., Riversdale, Northamptonshire." Should she post it?

Ashamed of her instability, and feeling herself unworthy and no longer pure as absolution had made her, she went that afternoon to St. Joseph’s, and in confession laid the matter before Monsignore Mostyn. Regarding the money question, he approved of what she had written to Sir Owen, and he was far more indulgent regarding her breakdown than she had dared to hope. He had expected some such mental crisis. It was extraordinary the strength it gave her even to see his stern, grave face; she was thrilled by his certainty on all points, and it no longer seemed difficult to send the letter she had written, or to write a similar letter to Ulick, which he advised her to send by the same post. She began it the moment she got home, and she wrote in perfect confidence and courage, the words coming easily to her, so easily that there were times when she seemed to hear Monsignore speaking over her shoulder.

“DEAR ULICK, — A very great event has happened in my life since I saw you — the greatest event that can happen in any life — Grace has been vouchsafed to me. Now I understand how sinful my life has been, as much from a human as a religious point of view. I deserted my clear father, I left him alone to live as best he could. I was not even faithful to my lover. From a worldly point of view I owed him everything, yet for the sake of my passion for you I encouraged myself for a while to dwell on his faults, to see nothing in him but the small and the mean. I strove to degrade him in my eyes, so that I might find some excuse for loving you. You were kind, you were good to me, and I was enthusiastic about your genius. One of my greatest troubles now is that I shall not be able to sing your opera. For a long while this very thing prevented my repentance. I said to myself, ‘It is impossible — I cannot — I have promised; I must do what I said I would do. He will think me hateful if I do not create the part.’ But these hesitations between what is certainly right and what is certainly wrong existed in me because I did not then perceive how very little the things of this world are compared with eternal things, and that nothing matters compared with the necessity of saving our souls. All this is now quite clear to me, and it would therefore be madness for me to remain on the stage, recognising as I do that it is a source of grave temptation to me. You will try to understand, dear Ulick, you will try to look at things from my point of view? You will see that it is impossible for me to act otherwise?

"I am living now with my father, and must not see you when you return to London. I have promised my confessor not to see you. One of these days, in years to come, when you and I are different beings, we may meet; but we must not see each other at present. I must beg of you not

to write or to try to see me. I know that by asking you not to come to Dulwich I am robbing my father of his friend. I have never brought happiness to anyone — not to father, not to Sir Owen, not to you, not to myself. If other proof were wanting, would not this fact be enough to convince me that my life has been all wrong? What it will be in the future I don't know; I have confidence in the goodness of God and in the wisdom of my spiritual adviser. — Sincerely yours, "EVELYN INNES."

It was on Friday morning that Agnes handed her Ulick's letter. She did not read it at once; it lay on the table while she was dressing, and she was uncertain whether it would not be better to put off reading it until she came back from St. Joseph's.

"I left London without seeing you, because I felt it would be trying for us both to argue out once more what we have argued so often — the necessity of marriage, or at any rate the avowal of our relations to your father. If you had allowed me to tell your father what these relations were, I would have stayed in London with you. But I could not get you to even promise to separate yourself entirely from Owen Asher. I went to Dulwich to live under your father's roof as your friend, but friendship between you and me, Evelyn, is for the present impossible — I could see that it was as difficult for you as it was for me. These things became very clear to me, and though I have suffered I have not doubted that I acted rightly. But your letter filled me with doubt.

"For a long while I was uncertain whether I should go back to London to help you, whether I should return in the hopes of saving you from the sterile renunciations in which you seem to be slipping, from the desperate remedies which you seem on the point of trying. But yesterday, after a long walk in the mountains, I came back, quite sure that the right thing to do was to ask you to come here where there is air, clouds, trees, and desolate lands. Come here, Evelyn, and we will go for long walks together, returning; homeward in the evenings when the lights glimmer among the hills and the scents of the evening arise. Come here, and you will have no more doubts; you will know that the gods have willed it, and that I am your lover — not for a day or a month, but for all time. It is impossible, I think, that the mountains here should not reveal to you what it is essential for you to know about yourself, about me, and about life. That is why I do not ask you to retract your command that I am not to go to see you. It would be useless for me to see you in London. Only the mountains can advise you. If you stay in London, you will be driven into religion, into senseless rituals and observances and curiously invented dogma. For religion is necessarily a make-weight to the materialism of London, where men have forgotten all except a lust for gold and the physical satisfactions that gold can buy. The desire of dogma from which you are suffering is only a reaction from the materialism of London. It is excessive materialism that sends men and women to Rome, as violent diseases send us to violent remedies which are hardly better than the disease. Come, Evelyn, I beseech you, to where there is a cure for all your ills — the ill of Sir Owen Asher and the ill of London. I

cannot doubt that you love me — if the doubt existed but for an instant it would be unpardonable — so come, Evelyn, to me, and in some quiet hollow of this delightful land we shall learn the truth together — the truth which Nature is always whispering, and which is always audible to those who listen to her."

Owen's letter she received in the evening about six o'clock. She changed colour at the sight of it, and her hand trembled, and she tore the envelope across as she opened it.

"You ask me to make no attempt to save you. You ask me to stand on the bank while you struggle and are dragged down by the current. Evelyn, I have never disobeyed your slightest wish before; but I declare my right to use all means to save you from a terrible fate. I return to London to do so. God only knows if I shall succeed.... In any case, I hope you will never allude again to any money questions. What I gave, I gave, and unless you want to kill me outright, never speak again of returning my presents. — As ever, OWEN ASHER."

Her eyes ran through the lines, and her heart said, "How he loves me!" But the temptation to see him quenched instantly in remembrance of her Communion, and she tore the letter hastily into two pieces, as if by destroying it she destroyed the difficulty it had created for her. She must not see him. But how was she to avoid meeting him? To-morrow he would be waiting in the street for her, and she walked about the room too agitated to think clearly. To see him and to hear him'would ruin her peace of mind, and peace of mind was essential to the reverent reception of the Sacrament... and on the spot she resolved to go straight to Monsignore and consult him. He would advise her, he would find some way out of the difficulty. But it was now six; she could not get to St. Joseph's before seven. It was late, but she did not think he would refuse to see her; he would know that it was only a matter of the greatest moment that would bring her to inquire for him at that hour.

"Tell him — tell him that my business does not admit delay."

She was shown into the same waiting-room. She listened for his step; twice she was mistaken; at last the door opened. It was he, and he guessed, before she had time to speak, what had happened.

"One of those men," he said, "has come again into your life?"

She nodded, and, still unable to speak, she searched in her pocket for their letters.

"I received these letters to-day — one this morning; the other, Sir Owen's, just now. That was why I came. I felt that I had to see you."

"Pray sit down, my child, you are agitated." He handed her a chair.

“You remember you said I might go to Communion on Sunday, and if I were to meet him to-morrow it would — there is no temptation, I don’t mean that — but I do not wish to be reminded of things which you told me I was to try to forget.”

The priest stood reading the letters, and Evelyn sat looking into space, absorbed in the desire to escape from Owen. All her faith was in Monsignore, and she believed he would be able to save her from Owen’s intrusion.

"I don’t think you need fear anything from Mr. Dean.”

“No, not from him. But, Monsignore, please read Sir Owen’s letter. I want to know what I am to do.”

He walked once across the room, and when he returned to the table he said half to himself, as if his thoughts had long outstripped his words —

"I am glad I advised you to leave Park Lane, for of course he will go there first.”

“He will easily find out I’m at Dulwich; he need not even ask — he will guess it at once.”

"Yes, to be sure.”

"If I am not to meet him I must go away — but where? All my friends and acquaintances are his friends. You would approve of none of them, Monsignore," she said, smiling a little.

He did not seem to hear her. Suddenly he said, "I think you had better go and spend a few days at the Passionist Convent. The Reverend Mother sent you an invitation through me, you remember, so we need have no hesitation in proposing it. Indeed, I feel confident that they will receive you with the greatest pleasure. It will do you a great deal of good. You will have peace and quiet, my child; you will find yourself in an atmosphere of faith and purity which cannot but be helpful to you in your present unsettled state.”

It seemed to Evelyn that that was what she had wanted all the time, only she had not been able to say so. Yes; to spend a week with those dear nuns, to sit in the convent garden, to kneel before the Blessed Sacrament in the convent church, it would be a real spiritual luxury.

"Yes, I should like to go," she said. “I feel it is just what I need. I have so much to think out, so much to learn, and at home there are a hundred things to distract me.”

"Very well, then, that is settled. I will send the Reverend Mother word to-morrow; but there is no necessity, you can write yourself, and say you are coming in the afternoon; she will only have to get your room ready."

"But, Monsignore, my Communion? I had forgotten it was from you I was to receive Holy Communion. Of course I know it doesn't really make any difference, but still, you heard my confession, and I would far rather receive Communion this first time from you than from anyone else. I don't think it could be quite the same thing — if it weren't from you."

"And I should be sorry too, my child, as by God's grace I have been the means of bringing you thus far, not to complete your reconciliation to Him. But I think we can manage that too without much difficulty. I say Mass to-morrow at nine o'clock, and will give you'Communion then, and you can go to the convent for your retreat early in the afternoon. Will that suit you?"

XLIV

She rejected a tea-gown as unsuitable for convent wear, and put in a black lace scarf which she thought would be useful for wearing in church; it would look better in the convent chapel than a hat. Instead of a flowered silk, she chose a grey alpaca. Then she remembered that she must take some books with her. It would be useless to bring pious books with her; she would find plenty of those in the convent.

"Have you any books, father? I must have something to read."

"There are a few books downstairs; you know them all."

"You don't read much, father?"

"Not much, except music. But Ulick brings books here; you may find something among them."

She returned with Berlioz's *Memoirs*, Pater's *Imaginary Portraits*, and Blake's *Songs of Innocence and Experience*.

"I suppose these books belong to Ulick? I don't know if I ought to take them."

"I cannot advise you; you must do as you like. I suppose you'll bring them back?"

"Oh yes, of course I shall bring them back."

"Evelyn dear, is it quite essential that you should go?"

"Yes, father, yes, it is quite; but I don't know how I am to get away."

"How you're to get away! What do you mean?"

"Well," she answered, laughing, "you see in his letter he says he's coming to watch me. Father, I can see that you pity him; you're sorry for him, aren't you?"

"Well, Evelyn, he offered to marry you, he made you a great singer, and you say he'd do anything for you. I suppose I am sorry for him."

They stood looking out of the window.

“You know I’d like to stop with you. It can’t be helped; but I shall come back.”

At that moment Agnes drove up in a hansom. She ran up the little garden, and carried out Evelyn’s bag, and placed it in the hansom.

"I must go now, father; good-bye, darling. I shan’t be away more than seven or eight days.”

The road lay through fields and past farmhouses, but the suburban street was never quite lost sight of. Its blue roofs and cheap porticoes appeared unexpectedly at the end of an otherwise romantic prospect, and when they reached the top she craned her neck, and was in time to catch a glimpse of the windmill far away to the right. The inn was in front of her, the end of a long point of houses stretching into the common, and the hansom rolled easily on the wide curving roads. She anticipated the choked gardens, the decaying pear trees, the gold crowns of sunflowers; and, a moment after, the hansom passed these things and she saw the old green door, and heard the jangling peal. The eyes of the lay Sister looked through the barred loophole.

"How do you do, Sister? I suppose you expected me? But my luggage?”

"If you’ll come into the parlour I’ll get one of the Sisters to help me to carry it upstairs.”

She was sitting at the table turning over the leaves of the *Confessions of St.. Augustine*, when the prioress entered.

"I’m glad you were able to come so soon. All the Sisters are anxious to meet you — you who have done so much for us.”

“I’ve done very little, Reverend Mother. Could I have done less for my old convent? I hope that your difficulties are at an end?”

"At an end, no; but you helped us over a critical moment in the fortunes of our convent.”

Her hands were leaned against the edge of the table; her white fingers, white with age, played with the hem of her veil; her blue, anxious eyes were fixed on Evelyn at once tenderly, expectantly, and compassionately. Her voice was the clear, refined voice which signifies Society, and Evelyn would not have been surprised to learn that she belonged to an old aristocratic family. Evelyn imagined her to be a woman in whom the genius of government dominated, and who, not having found an outlet into the world, had turned to the cloister.

They went up the circular staircase, at the top of which was a large landing. There were two rooms at the head of the stairs, and the prioress said —

"These are our guest chambers." Standing on a second landing, one step higher than the first, a solid wooden partition had been erected, and, pointing to a door, the nun said, with a laugh, "That door leads to the Sisters' cells. You must not make a mistake."

Evelyn was pleased to see that her room had two windows overlooking the garden. There was a table covered by a cloth at which she could write, and she bent over the bowl of roses and wondered which kind nun had gathered them. The Reverend Mother left her, saying that she would be told when supper was ready.

As she stood in the convent room noticing the beeswaxed floor and the two rugs, one by the small iron bed, she remembered a hunting morning three years ago at Riversdale. She had gone to Owen's room to see if he were ready. A multitude of orders were being given there; the valet was searching anxiously in the large wardrobe, piled high with many various coats and trousers; Owen stood before the looking-glass tying a white scarf, and two footmen watched each movement, dreading a mistake. She remembered that she had been amused at the time, and she never recalled the scene without smiling. But she had liked Owen better for the innumerable superfluities, all of which were necessary to his happiness, the breakdown of any one of which made him the most miserable man alive. She remembered how she had secretly imitated him, and how she had gathered about her a mass of superfluous necessities. But they had never become necessities to her — they had always galled her. It was in a spirit of perversity she had imitated him. She had always felt it to be wrong to eat peaches at five francs a piece, and had always been aware of an inward resentment against the extravagance of a reserved carriage on the railway and private saloon on board the boat. She had always desired a simple life; the life of these nuns was a simple life, simpler perhaps than she cared for. There was no hot water in her room — she wondered how she would wash her hands; and, smiling at her philosophical reflections, she thought how Owen would laugh if he could see her in her present situation — in a convent, crying out for a constant supply of hot water and her maid. A religious life with home comforts, that was what she wanted.

A knock awoke her from her whimsical reveries. She answered "Come in," and an elderly nun told her that supper was ready in the parlour. In this room, furnished with a table and six chairs and four pious prints, Evelyn ate her convent meal — a sort of mixed meal, which included soup, cold meat, coffee, jam, and some unripe pears. The portress took the plates away, and somehow Evelyn could not help feeling that she was giving a good deal of trouble. She could see that the nuns did everything for themselves, and she abandoned hope of ever finding a can of hot water in her room. She remembered that when she made her retreat some years ago, she had not noticed these things. She owed all her wants to Owen.

Mother Philippa came in, delighted to see her, and anxious to know if she had everything she wanted. Evelyn listened, more interested in Mother Philippa's kind, amicable nature than in what she said. She imagined in different circumstances what a good wife she would have been, and what a good mother! "But she is happier as she is." Evelyn could not imagine any soul-rending uncertainties in Mother Philippa. At a certain age, at seventeen or eighteen, she had felt that she would like to be a nun; very probably she was not any more pious than her sisters; she had merely felt that the life would suit her. That was her story. Evelyn smiled, and looked into Mother Philippa's mild eyes, in which there was nothing but simple kindness, and with a Yes and a No she kept the conversation going till the bell rang for Office.

"I do not know if you would care to come to church. Perhaps you are tired after your journey?"

"Journey! I have only driven a few miles."

Evelyn ran upstairs for her hat, and she followed the nun down the cloister which led to the church.

"That is your door, it will take you into the outer church."

Evelyn had only just taken her place, when a door opened on the other side of the grille, and the grey figures, their heads a little bent, came in couples and took their place in the stalls. They were wonderfully beautiful and impressive, and the idea they represented seemed to Evelyn extraordinary, simple, and true.

The monotonous chant of the nuns reciting Matins sank into her soul, soothing it; the long, unbroken rhythm flowed on, and in the dimness of her sensation Evelyn lost count of time. She was suddenly awakened by a sound of shuffling. The nuns had risen to their feet, and in the middle of the floor a Sister began the lessons in a shrill voice, keeping always on the same note, never letting her voice fall at the close of the sentences. She viewed the lines of grey nuns and heard the Latin syllables. These poor nuns whom she was just now pitying for their ignorance of life, could at all events read the Office in Latin. Evelyn grew more interested; the rite was full of a penetrating mystery.

XLV

As she hooked on her skirt she reflected on the necessity of not leaving bottles of scent or too many sponges for the observation of the nuns; and the nightgown she had brought was certainly not a conventual garment. She hurried downstairs, and was just in time to see the nuns coming into church. They came in by a side door, walking two by two, and Evelyn was again struck by the. beauty and mystery of this grey procession.

In extraordinary beauty of grey habit and veil and solemn procession, the nuns passed to their seats. Now they were kneeling altarwise, and Evelyn was still occupied by the thought that this was not outward show, as she had often seen it on the stage, but the thing itself. This was not acting, this was truth — the truth of all their lifetimes.

Suddenly began the plaint of the organ, and some half-dozen voices sang a hymn; and these pale, etiolated voices interested her. It was not the clear, sexless voice of boys — these were women's voices, out of which sex had faded like colour out of flowers; and these pale, deciduous voices wailing a poor, pathetic music, so weak and feeble that it was almost interesting through its very feebleness, interested Evelyn. Tears trembled in her eyes, and she listened to the poor voices rising and falling, breaking forth spasmodically in the lamentable hymn. "Desolate" and "forgotten" were the words that came up in her mind.

They were still kneeling altarwise; their profiles turned from her. Outside of the choir stalls, on either side of the church, were two special stalls, and the prioress and the sub-prioress knelt apart. Their backs were turned to Evelyn, and she noticed the fine delicate shoulders of the prioress and the heavy figure of Mother Philippa. "Even in their backs they are like themselves," she thought, and then, seeing that Mass had begun, she began her prayers. She had not felt especially pious till that moment, and to rouse herself she remembered Monsignore's words, "That at the height of her artistic career she should have been awakened to a sense of her own exceeding sinfulness was a miracle of His grace," and she felt that the devotion of her whole life to His service would not be a sufficient return for what He had done for her. But in spite of her efforts she followed the sacrifice of the Mass in her normal consciousness until the bell rang for the Elevation; and when the priest raised the Host she was conscious of the Real Presence: she raised her eyes a little, and the bent figures of the nuns, their veils hanging loose about them, contributed to her exaltation, and with a last effort, holding as it were her life in her hands, she asked pardon of God for her sins.

Then the pale, etiolated voices of the nuns, the wailing of these weak voices — there were three altos, three sopranos — began again. They were singing an Agnus Dei, a simple little music — nowise ugly, merely feeble, touchingly commonplace; they were singing in unison thirds and

fifths, and the indifferent wailing of the voices contrasted with the firmness of the organist's touch; and Evelyn knew that they had one musician among them. She listened, touched by the plaintive voices, so feeble in the ears of man, but beautiful in God's ears. God heard beyond the mere notes; the music of the intention was what reached God's ears. The music of these poor voices was more favourable in His ears than her voice. Months she had spent seeking the exact rhythm of a phrase intended to depict and to rouse a sinful desire. Though the hymns were ugly — and they were very ugly — she would have done better to sing them; and she sought to press herself into the admission that art which does not tend to the glory of God is vain and harmful. Far better these hideous hymns, if singing them conducts to everlasting life. But every time she pressed her mind towards an inevitable conclusion, it turned off into an obscure bypath. She brought it back like an intractable ass, but the stubborn beast again dodged her, and she had to abandon the attempt to convince herself that art which did not tend to the honour and glory of God should be suppressed — should be at least avoided. Once we were convinced that there was a God and a resurrection, this world must become as nothing in our eyes, only it didn't become as nothing in our eyes; every sacrifice should become easy, but every sacrifice didn't become easy. That was the point; to these nuns, perhaps, not to her. At least not yet.

She had fussed a great deal this morning because she had no hot water to wash with. Seven o'clock had seemed to her somewhat early to get up. But they had been up long before. She had heard of nuns who got up at four in the morning to say the Office. She did not know what time these nuns got up, but she felt that she was not capable of much greater sacrifice than six or seven o'clock. These nuns lived on a little coarse food, and spent the day in prayer. She thought of their aching knees in the long vigils of their adorations. She understood that the inward happiness their lives give them compensates them for all their privations. She understood that they are the only ones who are happy, yet the knowledge did not help her; she felt that she would never be happy in their happiness, and a great sorrow came over her. Mass was over, and again the beautiful procession, with bowed heads and meekly folded veils, glided out of the church. Only the watchers remained.

Last night she had sat watching the stars shining on the convent garden. There were, as Owen said, twenty millions of suns in the Milky Way; beyond the Milky Way there were other constellations of which we know nothing, nebulae which time has not yet resolved into stars, or stars so distant that time has not yet brought their light hither. But why seek mystery beyond this poor planet? It furnishes enough, surely. That we should see the stars, that we should know the stars, that we should place God above the stars — are not these common facts as wonderful as the stars themselves? That those twenty or five-and-twenty women should give up all the seduction of life for the sake of an idea, accepting Owen's theory that it is but an idea, even so the wonder of it is not less; even from Owen's point of view is not this convent as wonderful as the stars?

On coming out of church she was told that in half an hour her breakfast would be ready in the parlour, and to loosen the mental tension — she had thought and felt a great deal in the last hour — she asked the lay Sister who were the nuns who sang in the choir. The lay Sister answered her perfunctorily. Evelyn could see that she was not open at that moment to conversation. She guessed that the sister had work to attend to, and was not surprised that she did not come back to take the things away. Although only just begun, the day had already appeared long. She proposed to herself some pious reading; and wondered how she was going to get through the day. She would have liked to go into the garden; but she did not know the rules of the convent, and feared to transgress them. However, she was free to go to her room. The books she had brought with her would help her to go through the morning.

Berlioz's *Memoirs*! The faded voices she had heard that morning singing dreary hymns were more wonderful than his orchestral dreams. Nor did she find the spiritual stimulus she needed in Pater's *Imaginary Portraits*. Some moody souls reflecting with no undue haste, without undue desire to arrive at any definite opinion concerning certain artistic problems, did not appeal to her. She put the book aside, fearing that she was in no humour for reading that morning; and, with little hope of being: interested, she took up another book. The size of the volume and the disproportion of the type seemed to drag her to it, and the title was a sort of prophetic echo of the interest she was to find in the book, Her thoughts clouded in a sense of delight as she read; she followed as a child follows a butterfly, until the fluttering colour disappears in the sky. And before she was aware of any idea, the harmony of the gentle prose captivated her, and she sat down, holding in her heart the certitude that she was going to be enchanted. The book procured for her the delicious sensualism of reading things at once new and old. It seemed to her that she was reading things that she had known always, but which she had somehow neglected to think out for herself. The book seemed like her inner self suddenly made clear. All that the author said on the value of Silence was so true. She raised her eyes from the page to think. She seemed to understand something, but she could not tell what it was. The object of every soul is to unite itself to another soul, to be absorbed in another, to find life and happiness in another; the desire of unison is the deepest instinct in man. But how little, the author asked, do words help us to understand! We talk and talk, and nothing is really said; the conversation falls, we walk side by side, our eyes fixed on the quiet skies, and lo! our souls come together and are united in their immortal destiny. She again raised her eye from the page — now she understood, and she thought a long while. The chapter entitled "The Profound Life" interested her equally. The nuns realised it, but those who live in the world live on the surface of things. To live a life of silence and devotion, illumined not from without but from within, the eternal light that never fails or withers, and to live unconscious of the great stream of things, our back turned to that great stream flowing mysteriously, solemnly, like a river! The chapter entitled "Warnings" had for her a strangely personal meaning. How true it is that we know everything — only we have not acquired the art of saying it. Had she not always known that her destiny was not with Owen, that he was but a passing, not the abiding, event of her life? She looked through the convent

room, and the abiding event of her life now seemed to murmur in her ear, seemed to pass like a shadow before her eyes. At the moment when she thought she was about to hear and see, a knock came at her door, and the revelation of her destiny passed, with a little ironical smile, out of her eyes and ears.

Her visitor was a strange little nun whom she had not seen before. Her face was delicate and child-like beneath the white forehead-band, and she came forward with a diffident little smile.

"Reverend Mother sent me to you; she is watching now, or she would have come herself, but she thought you might like me to take you round the garden. She will join us there when she comes out of church. But Reverend Mother said you must do just as you liked."

The little nun corresponded to her mood even as the book had done; she seemed an apparition, a ghost risen from its pages. Her face was a thin oval, and the purity of the outline was accentuated by the white kerchief which surrounded it. The nose was slightly aquiline, the chin a little pointed, the lips well cut, but thin and colourless — lips that Evelyn thought had never been kissed, and that never would be kissed. She noticed the dark almond eyes that saved the face from insipidity, the black eyebrows were firmly and delicately drawn. Her complexion, without being pale, was extraordinarily transparent, and the thin hands and long, narrow fingers, half hidden beneath the long sleeves, were in the same idea of mediaeval delicacy.

"I was longing to go out, but I had not the courage. I feared it might be against the rule for me to go into the garden alone. But tell me first who you are?"

"Oh, I'm Sister Veronica. I'm only a novice as yet."

Evelyn noticed that, unlike the other nuns she had seen, Sister Veronica wore neither the silver heart on her breast, suspended by a red cord, nor the long straight scapular which gave such dignity to the religious habit. Her habit was held in at the waist by a leather girdle; it looked as though it might slip any moment over the slight, boyish hips, and by her side hung a rosary of large black beads.

Sister Veronica warned Evelyn that she must be careful how she went down the staircase, as it was very slippery. Evelyn said she would be careful; she added that the Sisters kept the stairs in beautiful order, and wondered what her next remark would be. She was nervous in the presence of these convent women, lest by some unfortunate remark she should betray herself. And when they reached the garden it was Sister Veronica who was the most self-possessed — she was already confessing to Evelyn that they had all felt very nervous knowing that a "real" singer was listening to them.

"Oh, do you sing?" Evelyn asked eagerly.

"Well, I have to try," Sister Veronica answered, with a little laugh. "Mother Prioress thought perhaps I might learn, so she put me in the choir, but Sister Mary John says I shall never be the least use."

"Is Sister Mary John the Sister who teaches you?"

"Yes; it is she who played the organ at Mass. She loves music. She is simply longing to hear you sing, Miss Innes. Do you think you will sing at Benediction this afternoon for us? It would be lovely."

"I don't know, really. You see, I haven't been asked yet."

"Oh, Reverend Mother is sure to ask you — at least I hope she will. We all want to hear you so much."

They were sitting in the shadow of a great elm; all around was a wonderful silence, and, to turn the conversation from herself, Evelyn asked Sister Veronica if she didn't care for their beautiful garden.

"Oh yes, indeed I do. I'm glad you like it.... When I was a child my greatest treat was to be allowed to play in the nuns' garden."

"Then you knew the convent long before you came to be a nun yourself?"

"Oh yes, I have known it all my life."

"So it was not strange when you came here first?"

"No, it was like coming home."

Evelyn repeated the nun's words to herself, "Like coming home." And she seemed to see far into their meaning. Here was an illustration of what she had read in the book — she and Veronica seemed to understand each other in the silence. But it became necessary to speak, and, in answer to a question, Sister Veronica told Evelyn that there were four novices and two postulants in the novitiate, and that the name of the novice mistress was Mother Mary Hilda. The novitiate was in the upper storey of the new wing, above the convent refectory.

"And here is Reverend Mother," and Sister Veronica suddenly got up. Evelyn got up too, and they waited till the elderly nun slowly crossed the lawn. Evelyn noticed, even when the Reverend Mother was seated, that Veronica remained standing.

“You can go now, Veronica.”

Veronica smiled a little good-bye to Evelyn, and left them immediately.

“Veronica told you, Miss Innes, I was taking my watch?”

"Yes, Reverend Mother.”

"I hope she has not been wearying you with the details of our life?”

"On the contrary, I have been very much interested.... Your life here is so beautiful that I long to know more about it. At present my knowledge is confined to the fact that the second storey in the new wing is the novitiate, and that there are four novices and two postulants." The Reverend Mother smiled, and after a pause Evelyn added —

“But Sister Veronica is very young.”

"She is older than she looks, she is nearly twenty. Ever since she was quite a child she wished to be a nun. Even then her mind was quite made up.”

"She told me that when she was a child her great pleasure was to be allowed to walk in the convent garden.”

“Yes. You don’t know, perhaps, that she is my niece — my poor brother’s child. She was left an orphan at a very early age. Hers is a sad story. But God has been good: she never doubted her vocation, she passed from an innocent childhood to a life dedicated to God. So she has been spared the trouble that is the lot of those who live in the world.”

An accent of past but unforgotten sorrow had crept into her voice; and once more Evelyn was convinced that she had not, like Veronica, passed from innocent childhood into the blameless dream of convent life. She had known the world and had renounced it. In the silence that had fallen Evelyn wondered what her story might be, and whether she would ever hear it. But she knew that in the convent no allusion is made to the past — that there the past is really the past.

"I hope that you will sing for us at Benediction — all the sisters are longing to hear you. It will be such a pleasure to them.”

“I shall be very glad... only I have brought nothing with me. But I daresay I shall find something among the music you have here.”

"Sister Mary John will find you something; she is our organist.”

"And an excellent musician. I noticed her playing.”

“She has always been anxious to improve the choir, but unfortunately none of the sisters except herself has any voice to speak of.... You might sing Gounod’s ‘Ave Maria’ at Benediction; you know it, of course; what a beautiful piece of music it is! But I see that you don’t admire it.”

“Well," Evelyn said, smiling, “it is contrary to all the principles I’ve been brought up in.”

“We might walk a little; we are at the end of the summer, and the air is a little cold. You do not mind walking very slowly? I’m forbidden to walk fast, on account of my heart.”

They crossed the sloping lawn, and walking slowly up St. Peter’s Path, amid sad flutterings of leaves from the branches of the elms, Evelyn told the Reverend Mother the story of the musical reformation which her father had achieved. She asked Evelyn if it would be possible to give Palestrina at the convent, and they reached the end of the walk. It was flushed with September, and in the glittering stillness the name of Palestrina was exquisite to speak. They passed the tall cross standing at the top of the rocks, and the reverend mother said, speaking out of long reflection —

“Have I never heard any of the music you sing? Wagner I have never heard, but the Italian operas, *Lucia* and *Trovatore*, or Mozart? Have you never sung Mozart?”

“Very little. I am what is called a dramatic soprano. The only Italian opera I’ve sung is *Norma*. Do you know it?”

"Yes.”

“I’ve sung Leonore — not in *Trovatore*, in *Fidelio*.”

"But surely you admire *Trovatore* — the ‘ Miserere,’ for instance. Is not that beautiful?”

"It is no doubt very effective, but it is considered very common now." Evelyn hummed snatches of the opera; then the waltz from *Traviata*. "I’ve sung Margaret.”

“Ah!”

And as she hummed the Jewel Song she watched the Reverend Mother’s face, and was certain that the nun had heard the music on the stage. But at that moment the Angelus bell rang. Evelyn had forgotten the responses, and as she walked towards the convent she asked the Reverend Mother to repeat them once again, so that she might have them by heart. She excused herself, saying how difficult was the observance of religious forms for those who live in the world.

After dinner, she wrote two letters. One was to her father, the other was to Monsignore, and having directed the letters she imagined the postal arrangement to be somewhat irregular. After Benediction she would ask Veronica what time the letters left the convent. And looking across the abyss which separated them, she saw her passionate self-centred past and Veronica’s little transit from the schoolroom to the convent. It seemed strange to her that she had never had what might be called a girl friend. But she had arrived at a time when a woman friend was a necessity, and it now suddenly occurred to her that there would be something wonderfully sweet and satisfying in the uncritical love of a woman younger than herself. She felt that the love of this innocent creature who knew nothing, who never would know anything, and who therefore would suspect nothing, would help her to forget her past, as Monsignore wished. She felt a sympathy awaken in her for her own sex which she had never known before, and this yearning was confounded in a desire to be among those who knew nothing of her past. Now she was glad that she had refrained from taking the Reverend Mother into her confidence, and she wondered how much Monsignore had told her the day they had walked in the garden; it relieved her to remember that he knew very little except what she had told him in confession.

Someone knocked. She answered, "Come in." It was Mother Philippa and another nun.

"I hope we’re not interrupting.... But you’re reading, I see.”

"No, I was thinking”; and, glad of the interruption, she let the book fall on her knees. "Pray come in, Mother Philippa”; and Evelyn rose to detain her.

The nuns entered very shyly. Evelyn handed them chairs, and as she did so she remarked the tall, angular nun who followed Mother Philippa, and whose face expressed so much energy.

“Good-afternoon, Miss Innes. I hope you slept well last night, and did not find your bed too uncomfortable?”

“Thank you, Mother Philippa. I liked my bed. I slept very well." Evelyn drew two chairs forward, and Mother Philippa introduced Evelyn to Sister Mary John. And while she explained

that she had heard from the Reverend Mother that Miss Innes had promised to sing at Benediction, Sister Mary John sat watching Evelyn, her large brown eyes wide open. Her eagerness was even a little comical, and Evelyn smiled through her growing liking for this nun. She was unlike any other nun she had seen, Nuns were usually formal and placid, but Sister Mary John was so irreparably herself that while the others presented feeble imitations of the Reverend Mother's manner, her walk and speech, Sister Mary John continued to slouch along, to cross her legs, to swing her arms, to lean forward and interrupt when she was interested in the conversation; when she was not, she did not attempt to hide her indifference. Evelyn thought that she must be about eight-and-twenty or thirty. The eyes were brown and exultant, and the eyebrows seemed very straight and black in the sallow complexion. All the features were large, but a little of the radiant smile that had lit up her face when she came forward to greet Evelyn still lingered there. Now and then she seemed to grow impatient, and then she forgot her impatience, and the smile floated back again. At last her opportunity came, and she seized it eagerly.

"I'm quite ashamed, Miss Innes, we sang so badly this morning; our little choir can do better than that."

"I was interested; the organ was very well played."

"Did you think so? I have not sufficient time for practice, but I love music, and am longing to hear you sing. But the Reverend Mother says that you have brought no music with you."

"I hear," said Mother Philippa, "that you do not care for Gounod's 'Ave Maria'?"

"If the Reverend Mother wishes me to sing it, I shall be delighted to do so, if Sister Mary John has the music."

Sister Matry John shook her head authoritatively, and said that she quite understood that Miss Innes did not approve of the liberty of writing any melody over Bach's beautiful prelude. Besides, it required a violin. The conversation then turned on the music at St. Joseph's. Sister Mary John listened, breaking suddenly in with some question regarding Palestrina. She had never heard any of his music; would Miss Innes lend her some? Was there nothing of his that they could sing in the convent?

"I do not know anything of his written for two voices. You might play the other parts on the organ, but I'm afraid it would sound not a little ridiculous."

"But have you heard the Benedictine nuns sing the plain chant? They pause in the middle of the verse — that is the tradition, is it not?"

Meanwhile Mother Philippa sat forgotten. Evelyn noticed her isolation before Sister Mary John, and addressed an observation to her. But Mother Philippa said she knew nothing about music, and that they were to go on talking as if she weren't there. But a mere listener is a dead weight in a conversation; and whenever Evelyn's eyes went that way, she could see that Mother Philippa was thinking of something else; and when she looked towards Sister Mary John, she could see that she was longing to be alone with her. A delightful hour of conversation awaited them if they could only find some excuse to get away together, and Evelyn looked at Sister Mary John, saying with her eyes that the suggestion must come from her.

"If I were to take Miss Innes to the organ-loft and show her what music we have — don't you think so, Mother Philippa?"

"Yes, I think that would be the best thing to do.... I'm sure the Reverend Mother would see no objection to your taking Miss Innes to the organ-loft."

Mother Philippa did not see the look of relief and delight that passed in Sister Mary John's eyes, and it was Evelyn who had a scruple about getting rid of Mother Philippa.

"I was so disappointed not to have seen you the day you came here; and what made it so hard was that it was first arranged that it was the Reverend Mother and I who were to meet you. I had looked forward to seeing you. I love music, and it is seven years since I've spoken to anyone who could tell the difference between a third and a fourth. There's no one here who cares about music."

It seemed to Evelyn that the problem of life must have presented itself to Sister Mary John very much as it presents itself to a woman who is suddenly called to join her husband in India. The woman hates leaving London, her friends, and all the habits of life in which she has grown up; but she does not hesitate to give up these things to follow the man she loves out to India.

"I don't know why it was settled that Mother Philippa was to meet you instead of me; it seemed so useless, meeting you meant so little to her and so much to me; I'm always inclined to argue, but that day the Reverend Mother's heart was very bad; she had had a fainting fit in the early morning; we all got up to pray for her."

"Yet she was quite cheerful; I never should have guessed."

"Mother Philippa and Mother Mary Hilda tried to dissuade her. But she would see you."

"Then it is with her heart disease that the Reverend Mother rules the convent," Evelyn thought, as she followed Sister Mary John up the spiral staircase to the organ-loft. She looked over the curtained railing into the church. The watcher knelt there, her head bowed, her habit still as sculpture, and Evelyn heard Sister Mary John pulling out her music. She could not find what she wanted, and she sat with her legs apart, throwing from side to side piles of old torn music.

"Never can one find a piece of music when one wants it: I don't know if you have noticed that nothing is so difficult to find as a piece of music. Day after day it is under your hands — it would seem as if there was not another piece in the organ-loft; but the moment you want it, it has disappeared. I don't know how it is."

"What are you looking for? Perhaps I can help you."

"Well, I was thinking that you might like" — Sister Mary John looked up at Evelyn — "I suppose you can sing B flat, or even C?"

"Yes, I can sing C"; and Evelyn thought of the last page of the "Dusk ok the Gods." "But what are you looking for?"

Sister Mary John did not answer. She threw the music from side to side, every minute growing more impatient. "It is most strange," she said at last, looking up at Evelyn. Evelyn smiled. With all her brusque, self-willed ways, Sister Mary John was clearly a lady born and an intelligent woman.

"I'm afraid I shall not be able to find you anything that you'd care to sing."

"Oh yes, I shall," Evelyn replied encouragingly.

"It is all such poor stuff. We've no singers here. Do you know, I've never heard a great singer, and I've often wished to. The only thing I regret is not having heard a little music before I came here. But I've heard of Wagner; you sing Wagner, don't you, Miss Innes?"

"Yes, I sing little else. *Fidelio*"—

"Ah, I know some of the music. Do you sing" —

Sister Mary John hummed a few bars.

"Yes, I sing that."

“Well, I shall hear you sing to-day. I’ve been wishing to go to St. Joseph’s to hear Palestrina. You were brought up on music. You can sing at sight — in the key that it is written in?”

"Yes, I think so.”

“But all prima donnas can do that?”

"No; on the contrary, I think I’m the only one. Singers on the operatic stage learn their parts at the piano.”

She could see that to Sister Mary John music was the temptation of her life, and she imagined that her confession must be a little musical record. She had lost her temper with Sister So-and-So because she could not, etc. But time was getting on. If she was to sing that afternoon she must find something, and seeing that Sister Mary John lingered over some sheets of music, as if she thought that it presented some possibility, Evelyn asked her what it was. It was a Mass by Mozart for four voices, which Sister Mary John had arranged for a single voice.

“The choir and I sing the melody in unison, and I play the entire Mass on the organ.”

Evelyn smiled, and seeing that the smile distressed the nun, she was sorry.

"To you, of course, it would sound absurd, it does to me too, but it was a little change; it was the only thing I could think of. We have some pieces written for two voices, but I can hardly get them sung. I have to teach the Sisters the parts separately. Till they know them by heart, I can’t trust them. It is impossible sometimes not to lose one’s temper. If we had a few good voices, people would come to hear them; the convent would be spoken about; and some charitable people would come forward and pay off our mortgages. I’ve lain awake at night thinking of it; the Reverend Mother agrees with me. But in the way of voices we’ve been as unlucky as we could well be. I’ve been here eight years — there was one, but she died six years ago of consumption. It is heart-breaking. I play the organ, I beat the time, and, as I said to them the other day, ‘There are five of you, and I’m the only one that sings.’”

Sister Mary John asked Evelyn if she composed. Evelyn told her that she did not compose, and, remembering Owen’s compositions, she hoped that Sister Mary John had not an "O Salutaris" in manuscript.

"Let me look through the music; we are talking of other things instead of looking.”

“So we are.... Let us look." At the bottom of a heap, Sister Mary John found Cherubini’s “Ave Maria.”

“Could you sing this? It is a beautiful piece of music.”

Evelyn read it over.

“Yes," she said, "I can sing it, but it wants careful playing; the end is a sort of little duet between the voice and the organ. If you don’t follow me exactly, the effect will be like this," and she showed what it would be on the mute keyboard.

“You haven’t confidence in my playing.”

"Every confidence, Sister Mary John, but remember I don’t know the piece, and it is not easy. I think we had better try it over together.”

"I should like to very much, but you will not sing with all your voice?”

"No, we’ll just run through it.”

The nun followed in a sort of ecstasy, and when they came to what Evelyn had called the duet, she played the beautiful antiphonal music looking up at the singer. The second time Evelyn was surer of herself, and she let her voice flow out a little in suave vocalisation, so that she might judge of the effect.

"I told you that I had never heard anyone sing before. If you were one of us!”

Evelyn laughed, and then, catching sight of the nun’s eyes fixed very intently upon her, she spoke of the beauty of the “Ave Maria," and was surprised that she did not know anything of Cherubini’s.

"Gracious, how the time has gone! That is the first bell for vespers.”

She hurried away, forgetting all about Evelyn, leaving her to find her way back to her room as best she could. But Evelyn found Sister Mary John waiting for her at the bottom of the stairs. She had come back for her — she had just remembered her; and Sister Mary John apologised for her absence of mind, and seemed distressed at her apparent rudeness. They walked a little way together, and the nun explained that it was not her fault; her absence of mind was an inheritance from her father. Everything she had she had inherited from him — "my love of music and my absence of mind.”

She was intensely herself, quaint, eccentric, but she was, Evelyn reflected, perhaps more distinctly from the English upper classes than any of the nuns she had seen yet. She had not the sweetness of manner of the Reverend Mother; her manners were the oddest; but withal she had that refinement which Evelyn had first noticed in Owen, and afterwards in his friends — that style which is inheritance, which tradition alone can give. She had spoken of her father, and Evelyn could easily imagine Sister Mary John's father---a lord of old lineage dwelling in an eighteenth century house in the middle of a flat park in the Midlands. She could see a piece of artificial lake obtained by the damming of a small stream; one end full of thick reeds, in which the chatter of wild ducks was unceasing. But her family, her past, her name — all was lost in the convent, in the veil. The question was, Had she renounced the world, or had she refused the world? Evelyn could not even conjecture. Sister Mary John was outside not only of her experience, but also of her present perception of things. Evelyn wondered why one of such marked individuality, of such intense personal will, had chosen a life the very *raison d'être* of which was the merging of the individual will in the will of the community? Why should one, the essential delight of whose life was music, choose a life in which music hardly appeared? Was her piety so great that it absorbed every other inclination? Sister Mary John did not strike her as being especially religious. What instinct behind those brown eyes had led her to this sacrifice? Apparently at pains to conceal nothing, Sister Mary John concealed the essential. Evelyn could even imagine her as being attractive to men — that radiant smile, the beautiful teeth, and the tall supple figure, united to that distinct personality, would not have failed to attract. God did not get her because men did not want her, of that Evelyn was quite sure.

There were on that afternoon assembled in the little white chapel of the Passionist Sisters about a dozen elderly ladies, nine or ten stout ladies dressed in black who might be widows, and perhaps three or four spare women who wore a little more colour in their hats; these might be spinsters, of ages varying between forty and fifty-five. Amid these Evelyn was surprised and glad to perceive three or four young men; they did not look, she thought, particularly pious, and perceiving that they wore knickerbockers, she judged them to be cyclists who had ridden up from Richmond Park. They had come in probably to rest, having left their machines at the inn. Even though she was converted, she did not wish to sing only to women, and it amused her to perceive that something of the original Eve still existed in her. But if any one of these young men should happen to have any knowledge of music, he could hardly fail to notice that it was not a nun who was singing. He would ride away astonished, mystified; he would seek the explanation of the mystery, and would bring his friend to hear the wonderful voice at the Passionist Convent. By the time he came again she would be gone, and his friend would say that he had had too much to drink that afternoon at the inn. They would not be long in finding an explanation; but should there happen to be a journalist there, he would put a paragraph in the papers, and all sorts of people would come to the convent and go away disappointed.

She looked round the church, calculating its resonance, and thought with how much of her voice she should sing so as to produce an effect without, however, startling the little congregation. The sermon seemed to her very long; she was unable to fix her attention, and though all Father Daly said was very edifying, her thoughts wandered, and wonderful legends and tales about a voice heard for one week at the Wimbledon Convent thronged her brain, and she invented quite a comic little episode, in which some dozen or so of London managers met at Benediction. She thought that their excuses one to the other would be very comic.

She was wearing the black lace scarf instead of a hat; it went well with the grey alpaca, and under it was her fair hair; and when she got up to go to the organ-loft after the sermon, she felt that the old ladies and the bicyclists were already wondering who she was. Her involuntary levity annoyed her, and she forced a certain seriousness upon herself as she climbed the steep spiral staircase.

"So you have found your way.... This is our choir," and she introduced Evelyn to the five Sisters, hurrying through their names in a low whisper. “We don’t sing the ‘O Salutaris,’ as there has been exposition. We’ll sing this hymn instead, and immediately after you’ll sing the ‘Ave Maria’; it will take the place of the Litany.”

Then the six pale voices began to wail out the hymn, wobbling and fluctuating, the only steady voice being Sister Mary John’s. Though mortally afraid of the Latin syllables, Evelyn seconded Sister Mary John’s efforts, and the others, taking courage, sang better than usual. Sister Mary John turned delighted from the organ, and, her eyes bright with anticipation, said, “Now.”

She played the introduction; Evelyn opened her music. The moment was one of intense excitement among the five nuns. They had gathered together in a group. The great singer who had saved their convent (had it not been for her they would have been thrown back upon the world) was going to sing. Evelyn knew what was passing in their minds, and was a little nervous. She wished they would not look at her so, and she turned away from them. Sister Mary John played the chord, and the voice began.

Owen often said that if Evelyn had two more notes in her voice she would have ranked with the finest. She sang from the low A, and she could take the high C. From B to B every note was clear and full, one as the other; he delighted especially in the middle of her voice; for one whole octave, and more than an octave, her voice was pure and sonorous and as romantic as the finest ’cello. And the romance of her voice transpired in the beautiful Beethoven-like phrase of Cherubini’s "Ave Maria." It was as if he had had her voice singing in his ear while he was writing, when he placed the little grace notes on the last syllable of Maria. The phrase rose, still remaining well within the medium of her voice, and the same interval happened again as the voice swelled up on the word "plena." In the beautiful classical melody her voice was like a

'cello heard in the twilight. In the music itself there is neither belief nor prayer, but a severe dignity of line, the romance of columns and peristyle in the exaltation of a calm evening. Very gradually she poured her voice into the song, and her lips seemed to achieve sculpture. The lines of a Greek vase seemed to rise before the eye, and the voice swelled on from note to note with the noble movement of the bas-relief decoration of the vase. The harmonious interludes which Sister Mary John played aided the excitement; and the nuns, who knelt in two grey lines, were afraid to look up. In a remote consciousness they feared it was not right to feel so keenly; the harmonious depth of the voice entered their very blood, summoning visions of angel faces. But it was an old man with a white beard that Veronica saw, a hermit in the wilderness; she was bringing him vestments, and when the vision vanished Evelyn was singing the opening phrase, now a little altered on the words Santa Maria.

There came the little duet between the voice and the organ, in which any want of precision on the part of Sister Mary John would spoil the effect of the song; but the nun's right hand answered Evelyn in perfect concord. And then began the runs introduced in the Amen in order to exhibit the skill of the singer. The voice was no longer a 'cello, deep and resonant, but a lovely flute announcing some joyous reverie in a landscape at the close of day. The song closed on the keynote, and Sister Mary John turned from the instrument and looked at the singer. She could not speak; she seemed overpowered by the music; and like one more dreaming than waking, and sitting half turned round on her seat, she looked at Evelyn.

"You sing beautifully," she said. "I never heard singing before."

And she sat like one stupefied, still hearing Evelyn's singing in her brain, until one of the Sisters advanced close and said, "Sister, we must sing the 'Tantum ergo.'"

"Of course we must. I believe if you hadn't reminded me I should have forgotten it. Gracious! I don't know what it will sound like after singing like that. But you'll lead them?"

Evelyn hummed the plain chant under her breath, afraid lest she should extinguish the pale voices, and surprised how expressive the antique chant was when sung by these etiolated, sexless voices. She had never known how much of her life of passion and desire had entered into her voice, and she was shocked at its impurity. Her singing sounded like silken raiment among sackcloth, and she lowered her voice, feeling it to be indecorous and out of place in the antique hymn. Her voice, she felt, must have revealed her past life to the nuns; her voice must have shocked them a little; her voice must have brought the world before them too vividly. For all her life was in her voice — she would never be able to sing this hymn with the same sexless grace as they did. Her voice would be always Evelyn Innes — Owen Asher's mistress.

The priest turned the Host toward them, and she saw the two long rows of grey-habited nuns leaning their veiled heads, and knew that this was the moment they lived for, the essential moment when the Body which the Redeemer gave in expiation of the sins of the world is revealed. Evelyn's soul hushed in awe, and all that she had renounced seemed very little in this moment of mystery and exaltation.

"What am I to say, Miss Innes? I shall think of this day when I am an old woman. But you'll sing again before you leave?"

"Yes, Sister, whenever you like."

"When I like? That would be all day. But I did follow you in the duet, I was so anxious. I hope I did not spoil it?"

"I was never better accompanied. You made no mistake."

As they passed by her the other nuns thanked her under their breath. She could see that they looked upon her as a providence sent by God to save them from being cast back upon the world they dreaded — the world from which they had fled. But all this extraordinary drama, this intensity of feeling, remained inarticulate. They could only say, "Thank you, Miss Innes; it was very good of you to come to sing for us." It was their very dumbness that made them seem so wonderful. It was the dumbness of these women — they could only speak in prayer — it was that that overcame her. But the Reverend Mother was different. Evelyn listened to her, thinking of nothing but her, and when the Reverend Mother left her, Evelyn moved away, still under the spell of the authoritative sweetness which her presence and manner exhaled. But the Reverend Mother was only a part of a scheme of life founded, on principles the very opposite to those on which she had attempted to construct her life. Even in singing the "Ave Maria" she had not been able to subdue her vanity. Her pleasure in singing it had in a measure sprung out of the somewhat mean desire to proclaim her superiority over those who had attained the highest plane by renouncing all personal pride. They had proclaimed their superiority in their obeisance. It was in giving, not in receiving, praise that we rise above ourselves. This was the lesson that every moment of her convent life impressed upon her. Her thoughts went back to the Reverend Mother, and Evelyn thought of her as of some woman who had come to some terrible crisis in her worldly life — some crisis violent as the crisis that had come in her own life. The Reverend Mother must have perceived, just as she had done, as all must do sooner or later, that life out of the shelter of religion becomes a sort of nightmare, an intolerable torture. Then she wondered if the Reverend Mother were a widow — that appeared to her likely. One who had suffered some great disaster — that too seemed to her likely. She had been an ambitious woman. Was she not so still? Is a passion ever obliterated? Is it not rather transformed? If she had been personally ambitious, she was now ambitious only for her convent: her passion had

taken another direction. And applying the same reasoning to herself, she seemed to see a future for herself in which her love passions would become transformed and find their complete expressions in the love of God.

The Reverend Mother again addressed her, and Evelyn considered what age she might be. Between sixty and seventy in point of years, but she seemed so full of intelligence, wisdom, and sweetness that she did not suggest age; one did not think of her as an old woman. Her slight figure still retained its grace, and though a small woman, she suggested a tall one; and the moment she spoke there was the voice which drew you like silk and entangled you as in a soft winding web. Evelyn smiled a little as she listened, for she was thinking how the Reverend Mother as a young woman must have swayed men. Presumably at one time it had pleased her to sway men's passion, or at least it pleased Evelyn's imagination to think it had. Not that she thought the Reverend Mother had ever been anything but a good woman, but she had been a woman of the world, and Evelyn attributed no sin to that. Even the world is not wholly bad; the Reverend Mother and Monsignore owed their personal magnetism to the world. Without the world they would have been like Father Daly and Mother Philippa - — holy simplicities. She looked at the quiet nun, and her simple good - nature touched her. Evelyn went toward her. Sister Mary John broke into the conversation so often that the Reverend Mother had once to check her.

"Sister Mary John, we hope that Miss Innes will sing to-morrow and every day while she is with us. But she must do as she likes, and these musical questions are not what we are talking about now.

But Sister Mary John was hardly at all abashed by this reproof. She was clearly the only one who stood in no awe of the Reverend Mother.

They were sitting on the terrace, and a mauve sunset faded in the grey sky. There was a strange wistfulness in the autumn air and in the dim garden where the gentle nuns were taking their recreation. There was a subtle harmony in the grey habits and floating veils; they blended and mingled with the blue mist that was rising among the trees. And a pale light fell across the faded lawns, and Evelyn looked into the light, and felt the pang that the passing of things brings into the heart. This spectacle of life seemed to her strangely pathetic, and it seemed to mean something which eluded her, and which she would have given a great deal to have been able to express. Music alone could express the yearning that haunted her heart; the plaint of the Rhine Maidens was the nearest to what she felt, and she began to sing their song. Sister Mary John asked her eagerly what she was singing. She would have told her, but the Reverend Mother grew impatient with Sister Mary John.

"You must be introduced to Mother Mary Hilda, our novice mistress, then you will know all the mothers except our dear Mother Christina, who is quite an invalid now, and rarely leaves her cell."

On St. Peter's Path a little group of nuns were walking up and down, pressing round a central figure. They were faint grey shadows, and their meaning would not be distinguished in the violet dusk. It was like a half-effaced picture in which the figures are nearly lost in the background; their voices, however, sounded clear, and their laughter was mysterious and far distant, yet distinct in the heart. Evelyn again began to hum the plaint of the Rhine Maidens. But the voices of the novices were more joyous, for they, Evelyn thought, had renounced both love and gold. The Reverend Mother clapped her hands to attract attention, and one of the novices — it was Sister Veronica — ran to them.

"Ask Mother Mary Hilda to come and speak to me, Veronica."

"Yes, Reverend Mother"; and Veronica ran with the message without once looking at Evelyn. Mother Mary Hilda crossed the lawn toward them, and Evelyn noticed her gliding, youthful walk. She was younger than the prioress or even the sub-prioress. And she had that attractive youthfulness of manner which often survives in the cloister after middle age.

"Here is Miss Innes," said the prioress; "I know you wished to make her acquaintance."

"Yes, indeed."

Evelyn noticed the bright eyes and the small, clearly cut nose and the pointed chin, but her liveliest sensation was of Mother Hilda's hand; so small was it and soft that it seemed like a little crushed bird in Evelyn's hand, and Evelyn did not think that hers was a large hand.

"I am sure, Miss Innes, you feel that you have been thanked sufficiently for all you have done for us, but you'll forgive us if we feel that we cannot thank you often enough. Your singing at Benediction to-day was a great pleasure to us all. Whose 'Ave Maria' was it, Miss Innes?"

Evelyn told them, and, thinking it would interest the nuns, she admitted that her father would not allow it to be sacred music. This led the conversation on to the question of Palestrina, and how the old music had rescued the Jesuits from their pecuniary embarrassments. A casual mention of Wagner showed her that the Reverend Mother was interested, and she said that she might sing them Elizabeth's Prayer. Evelyn spoke of the Chorale in the first act of the *Meistersinger*, and this led her into quite a little account of the music she sang on the stage. It pleased her to notice the different effect of her account of her art on the four nuns. The conversation, she could see, carried the prioress back into the past, but she put aside these

memories of long ago and affected a polite interest in the stage. Mother Philippa listened as she might to a story, too far removed from her for her to be more than vaguely interested; Sister Mary John listened in the hope that Evelyn would illustrate her experience with some few bars of the music — with her it was the music and nothing else; Mother Mary Hilda listened very prettily, and Evelyn noticed that it was she who asked most questions. Mother Mary Hilda was the most fearless, and showed the least dread in the conversation. Yet for no single moment did Evelyn think that she was the most worldly of the four nuns. Evelyn thought that probably she was the least. Her trivial utterances were the necessity of the unimportant moment, and she seemed to bring to them the enlightenment of her own vivid faith. The holiness that shone out of her eyes inspired the calm, tender smile, and was in her whole manner. “She speaks,’’ Evelyn thought, "of worldly things without affectation, but how clear it is that they lie outside, far outside, of her real life!”

Evelyn was saying that it was a long while since she had sung any sacred music, and, referring to the difference of the rule in France and in England, she mentioned that in Paris the opera singers frequently sang in the churches.

"It must be hard on Catholics with beautiful voices like yours that they may not be allowed to sing in church choirs, for there can be nothing more delightful than bringing a great gift to God’s service.”

It was the prioress who broke off the conversation, to Evelyn’s regret.

"Mother Hilda, I am afraid we are forgetting your young charges.”

“Yes, indeed; I must run back to my children. Good-bye, Miss Innes — I am so glad that you have come to us”; and the warm, soft clasp of the little hand was to Evelyn a further assurance of friendly welcome.

XLVI

She was ashamed not to be able to follow the Office in chapel, so at the Reverend Mother's suggestion she consented to employ part of her long convent leisure in taking lessons in Latin. Mother Mary Hilda was to be her instructress.

The library was a long, rather narrow room, once the drawing-room of the Georgian mansion. Only a carved Adams' chimney-piece, now painted over in imitation of oak, remained of its former adornment; the tall windows were eighteenth century, and with that air they looked upon the terrace. The walls had been lined by the nuns with plain wooden shelves, and upon them were what seemed to be a thousand books, every one in a grey linen wrapper, with the title neatly written on a white label pasted on the back. Evelyn's first thought was of the time it must have taken to cover them, but she remembered that in a convent time is of no consequence. If a thing can be done better in three hours than in one, there is no reason why three hours should not be spent upon it. She had noticed, too, that the Sisters regarded the library with a little air of demure pride. Mother Mary Hilda had told her that the large tin boxes were filled with the convent archives. There were piles of unbound magazines — the *Month* and the *Dublin Review*. There was a ponderous writing-table, with many pigeon-holes; Evelyn concluded it to be the gift of a wealthy convert; and she turned the immense globe which showed the stars and planets, and wondered how the nuns had become possessed of such a thing, and how they could have imagined that it could ever be of any use to them. She grew fond of this room, and divided her time between it and the garden. It had none of the primness of the convent parlour, which gave her a little shiver every time she entered it. In the farther window there stood a deep-seated, venerable arm-chair, covered in worn green leather, the one comfortable chair, Evelyn often thought, in the convent. And in this chair she spent many hours, either learning to construe the Office with Mother Mary Hilda, or reading by herself. The investigation of the shelves was an occupation, and the time went quickly, taking down book after book, and she seemed to penetrate further into the spirit of the convent through the medium of the convent books.

The light literature of the convent comprised improving little tales of conversions, and edifying stories of Catholic girls who declined to enter into mixed marriages; and she thought of the novices reading this artless literature on Sunday afternoons. There were endless volumes of meditations, mostly translations from the French, full of Gallicisms and parenthetical phrases, and Evelyn often began a paragraph a second time.

It was not until she opened Teresa's *Book of her Life* that she found the new. But this book was new; it seemed to Evelyn like throwing open the door of a small, confined garden, and looking upon the wide land of the world. It was like breathing the wide air of eternity after that of a

close-scented room; and like one who, standing upon a hilltop, sees a bird soaring, a wild bird with the light of the heavens upon its wings, Evelyn seemed to see this soul waving its wings in its flight towards God. The soul sang Love, love, love, and heaven was overflowed with cries for its Divine Master, for its adorable Master, for its Bridegroom-elect.

"The moment my prayer began to pass from the natural to the supernatural, I strove to obliterate from my soul every physical obstacle. To lift my soul up, to contemplate, I dared not; aware of my imperfection, it seemed over bold. Nevertheless I knew the presence of God to be about me, and I tried to gather myself in Him. And nothing could then induce me to return to the sacred humanity of the Saviour."

But how touching is the saint's repentance for this infidelity to the Divine Bridegroom!

"O Lord of my soul, of all my goods, Jesus crucified, I shall never remember without pain that I once thought this thing. I shall think of it as a great treason, and I stand convicted before the Good Master; and though it proceeded from my ignorance, I shall never expiate it with tears."

Just as every variation of habit, of fashion, is noticeable to those who live outside themselves, so the changes and complexities in the life of the soul are perceived by them who live within themselves. The saint relates how for many months she refrained from prayer, and as we know that prayer was the source of all her joy — a joy touching ecstasy, often above the earth and resplendent with vision — we can imagine the anguish that these abstinences must have caused her.

"To destroy confidence in God, the Demon spread a snare, his most insidious snare. He persuaded me that owing to my imperfections I could not, without being wanting in humility, present myself in prayer to God. This caused me such anguish, that for a year and a half I refrained. For at least a year, for the six months following I am not sure of my memory. Unfortunate one, what did I do! By my own act I plunged myself in hell without demons being about to drag me there."

This scruple is followed by others. The saint suspects the entire holiness of her joy in prayer, and she asks if these transports, these ravishments, these moments in which she lies exhausted in the arms of the Beloved Bridegroom, were contrived by the Demon or if they were granted to her by God. Her anxiety is great, and men learned in holy doctrine are consulted. They incline to the belief that her visions proceed from God, and encourage her to persevere. Then she cries to her Divine Master, to the Lord of her soul, to her adorable Master, to the adorable Bridegroom: —

"Cannot we say of a soul to whom God extends this solicitude and these delicacies of love that the soul has made for our Lord a bed of roses and lilies, and that it is impossible that this adorable Master will not come, though He may delay, and take His delight with her?"

On Friday she had finished the autobiography, and before going into the garden she took down another of the saint's works, *The Way of' Perfection*, intending to look through it in some sunny corner.

She had slipped easily into the early hours of the convent. After breakfast she had the morning to herself, and she divided it between the library and the garden. The leaves were beginning to fall, and in the thinning branches there seemed to be an appearance of spring. From St. Peter's Path she strolled into the orchard, and then into the piece of uncultivated ground at the end of it. Some of the original furze bushes remained, and among these a streamlet trickled through the long grasses, and following it she found that it led her to the fish-pond in the shrubbery, at the back of St. Peter's Path. There was there a pleasant, shady place, where she could sit and read. She stood for a moment watching the fish. They were so tame that they would take the bread from the novices' hands. She had brought some bread, but she had to throw it to them. She divided it amongst them, not forgetting to favour the little ones, and she thought it strange that they could distinguish her from the novices. That much they knew of the upper air. The fish watched her out of their beady eyes, stirring in their dim atmosphere with a strange finny motion.

At that hour of the day the sun was warm enough to sit out; the little shiver in the air was not unpleasant; and, sitting on the garden bench, she opened her book in a little tremor of excitement. Her thoughts fluttered, and she strove to imagine what book the saint could have written to justify so beautiful a title. Her expectations were realised. The character of the book is clearly defined in the first pages: she perceived it to be a complete manual of convent life, a perfect compendium of a nun's soul. On its pages lay that shadowy, evanescent, and hardly apprehensible thing — the soul of a nun, only the soul, not a word regarding her daily life: any mother-abbess could have written such a materialistic book: St. Teresa, with the instinct of her genius, addressed herself to the task which none but she could fulfil — the evolution of a nun's soul. And as Evelyn read she marked the passages that specially caught her attention.

"Do not imagine, my daughters, that it is useless to pray, as you are constantly praying, for the defenders of the Church: have a care lest you should share the opinion of certain folk to whom it seems hard that they should not pray much oftener for themselves. Believe me that no prayer is better or more profitable than that of which I am speaking. Perhaps you fear that it will not go to diminish the pains which you will suffer in purgatory: I answer that such prayer is too holy and too pleasing to God to be useless. Even if the time of your expiation should be a little longer — well, let it be so."

“Oh to be good like that," she thought. And her soul raised its eyes in a little shy emulation.... A few pages further on she read —

“That all may take heed. For neglect of this counsel a nun may find herself in an entanglement from which she may not find strength to free herself. And then, great God! What feebleness, what puerile complaisances this particular friendship may not be the source of. It is impossible to say what number, none but an eye-witness may believe. They are but trifles, and I see no reason for specifying them here. I merely add: in whosoever it is found it is an evil; in a superior it is a plague spot....

“An excellent remedy is to be together only at those times enjoined by the rule; on other occasions to refrain from speech, as is now our custom, and to live separately each in her cell as the rule ordains. And, although it be a praiseworthy custom to unite for work in a community room, I desire that the nuns of the convent of St. Joseph shall be freed from this custom, for it is much easier to keep silence if each works in her cell. Moreover, it is of the first importance to accustom oneself to solitude, in order to advance oneself in prayer; and as prayer should be the mortar of this monastery, we should cherish all that which increases the spirit in us.”

Glancing down the pages, her eyes were arrested by a passage of even more subtle, more penetrating wisdom: —

“Would you know a certain sign, my daughters, by which you may judge of your progress in virtue? Let each one look within herself and discover if she believes herself to be the unworthiest of you all, and if for the benefit of the others she makes it visible by her actions that she really thinks that this is so, that is the certain sign of spiritual advancement, and not delight in prayer, or ravishment, or visions, and such like favours which God grants to souls when He is so pleased. We shall only know the value of such favours in the next world. It is not so with humility — humility is a money which is always current — it is safely invested capital, a perpetual income; but extraordinary favours are money which is lent for a time and may at any moment be called in. I repeat, our true treasure is profound humility, great mortification, and an obedience which, seeing God in the superior, submits to His every order.”

The saint’s delicate yet virile perception, and her power of expressing the shadowy and evanescent, filled Evelyn with admiration; and the saint appeared to her in the light of a great novelist; she wondered if Balzac had ever read these pages.

"The best remedy, in my opinion, that a nun can employ to conquer the imperfect affection which she still bears her parents, is to abstain from seeing them until by patient prayer she has obtained from God the freedom of her soul; when she is so disposed that their visit is a cross, let

her see them by all means. For then she will bring good to their souls, and do no harm to her own."

This seemed not a little grim. But how touching is the personal confession which appears on the following page: —

"My parents loved me extremely, according to what they said, and I loved them in a way that did not allow them to forget me. Nevertheless, I have seen from what has happened to me, and what has happened to other nuns, how little we may count upon their affection for us."

The unselfishness of such conduct seemed open to doubt. But unselfishness is a word that none may speak without calling into question the entire conduct of his or her life. Evelyn remembered that she had left her father for the sake of her voice, and that she had refused to marry Owen because marriage, especially marriage with Owen, did not seem compatible with her soul's safety. Looked at from a certain side, her life did seem self-centred, but allowance, she thought, must be made for the difficulties — the entanglements in which the first false step had involved her. But in any case she must not question the efficacy of prayer, that was a dogma of the Church. The mission of the Contemplative Orders is to pray for those who do not pray for themselves, and if we believe in the efficacy of prayer, we need not scruple to leave our parents to live in a monastery where, by our prayers, we help them to eternal salvation. We leave them for a little while, but only that we may live with them for ever.

"Believe me, my dear Sisters, if you serve Him well you will not find better parents than those the Divine Master sends you. I know that it is even so."

"What beauty there is in her sternness!" Evelyn thought.

"I repeat that those whose trend is toward worldly things, and who do not make progress in virtue, shall leave this monastery; should she persist in remaining a nun, let her enter another convent; for if she doesn't, she will see what will happen to her. Nor must she complain about me; nor accuse me of not having made known to her the practical life of the monastery I founded. If there is an earthly paradise, it is in this house, but only for souls who desire nothing but to please God, who have no thought for themselves; for these the life here is infinitely agreeable."

This passage is one of the very few in which appears the wise, practical woman, the founder of an order and of many monasteries, who lived side by side in the same body, the constant associate of the lyrical saint. Evelyn tried to picture her to herself, and two pictures alternated in her thoughts. She saw deep, eager, passionate eyes, and a frail, exhausted body borne along easily by the soul, and doing the work of the unconquerable soul. In the second picture, there

were the same consuming eyes, the same wasted body, but the expression was quite different. The saint's manner was the liveliest, happiest manner, and Evelyn thought of the privilege of such companionship, and she envied those who had walked with her, hearing her speak.

The little pond at her feet was full of fair reflections of the sky and trees, and the idea of convent life lay on the pages of the book even as fair. In itself it was disparate and vague, but on the pages of the book it floated clear and distinct. She asked if any of the Wimbledon nuns lived a life of that intense inward rapture which St. Teresa deemed essential if a Sister were to be allowed to remain in the convent of St. Joseph at Avila, and the coincidence of the names gave her pause. This convent's patron saint was St. Joseph, and she sought for some resemblance between the Reverend Mother and St. Teresa. She wondered if she, Evelyn, were a nun, towards which of the nuns would her personal sympathies incline: would she love better Sister Veronica or Sister Mary John? It might be Mother Mary Hilda. It would be one of the three. There was not one among the others likely to interest her in the least. She tried to imagine this friendship: it assumed a vague shape and then dissolved in the distance. But would the Reverend Mother tolerate this friendship, or would it be promptly cut down to the root according to the advice of St. Teresa?

Her thoughts pursued their way, now and then splashing as they leaped out of the soul's dimness. Only the splashing of the fish broke the stillness of the garden, and, startled at a sudden gurgling sound, she rose, in time to see a shadowy shape sinking with a motion of fins amid the weeds. That she should be living in a convent, that she should have repented of her sins, that the fish should leap and fall back with strange gurgling sound, filled her with wonderment. The vague autumn blue expressed some vague yearning, some indistinct aspiration; the air was like crystal, the leaves were falling.... We have perceptions of the outer forms of things, but that is all we know of them. The only thing we are sure of is what is in ourselves. We know the difference between right and wrong! She stood for a long time at the edge of the fish-pond, gazing into the vague depths. Then she walked, exalted, overcome by the mystery of things. She seemed to walk upon air, the world was a-thrill with spiritual significances, all was symbol and exaltation. Her past life shrank to a tiny speck, and she knew that she had been happy only since she had been in the convent. Ah that little chapel, haunted by prayers! It breathed prayer; in that chapel contemplation was never far off. She had prayed there as she had never prayed before, and she wondered if she should attribute the difference in her prayers to the chapel or to herself. She had always felt, in a dumb, instinctive way, that to her at least everything depended on her chastity.... She had been chaste now a long while. The explanation seemed to have come to her. Yes, it is by denial of the sexual instinct that we become religious.

As she passed through the orchard she caught sight of the strange little person whom she had seen in chapel with a pile of prayer-books beside her, and who always wore something

startlingly blue, whether skirt, handkerchief, or cloak. She had met her in the garden before, but she had hurried away, her eyes fixed on the ground. Mother Philippa had spoken of a Miss Dingle, a simple-minded person who had been sent by her family to the convent to be looked after by the nuns, and Evelyn concluded that it must be she. But at that moment other thoughts engaged her attention, and she lingered in the orchard, returning slowly by St. Peter's Path. As she passed the Georgian temple or summerhouse, she was taken by a desire to examine it, and there she found Miss Dingle. She was seated on the floor, engaged, so Evelyn thought, in a surreptitious game of Patience. That was only how she could account for Miss Dingle's consternation and fear at seeing her. But what she had taken for cards were pious pictures. Evelyn stood in the doorway, and for the first time had an opportunity of seeing what Miss Dingle was really like. It was difficult to say whether her face was ugly or pretty; the features were not amiss — it was the expression, vague and dim like that of an animal, that puzzled Evelyn.

"Please let me help you to pick up your pictures." Miss Dingle did not answer, and Evelyn feared for a moment that she had offended her. "Won't you let me help you to pick up your pictures?"

"Yes," she said, "you may help me to pick them up, but you must be very quick."

"But why must I be quick? Are you in such a very great hurry?"

Miss Dingle seemed uncertain of her own thoughts, and, to reassure her, Evelyn asked her if she would not like to walk with her in the orchard.

"Oh," she said, looking at Evelyn shyly — it was a sort of childlike curiosity, "I dare not go into the orchard to-day.... I brought these pictures to keep him from me. I know that he is about."

"Who is about?"

"I'm afraid he might hurt me."

"But who would hurt you?"

"Well," she said cautiously, "perhaps he'd be afraid to come near me to-day," and she glanced at her frock. "But I'm sure he's about. Did you see anyone as you came through the furze bushes?"

"No," Evelyn answered; and trying to conceal her astonishment, she said, "I'm sure there's no one there."

"Ah, he knows it would be useless." She glanced again at her frock. "You see my blue skirt, that has perhaps frightened him away."

"But who has gone away?"

"Oh, the Devil is always about."

"But you don't think he would hurt you?"

Miss Dingle looked suspiciously at Evelyn, and some such thought as to whether Evelyn was the Devil in disguise must have crossed her mind. But whatever the thought was, it was but a flitting thought; it passed in a moment, and Miss Dingle said —

"But the Devil is always trying to hurt us. That is what he comes for."

"So that is why you surrounded yourself with pious pictures — to keep him away?"

Miss Dingle nodded.

"What a nice dress you have on! I suppose you like blue. I always notice you wear it."

"I wear blue — as much blue as I can — for blue is the colour of the Virgin Mary, and he dare not attack me while I have it on. But I wear sometimes only a handkerchief, sometimes only a skirt; but now that he is about frequently, I have to dress entirely in blue."

Evelyn asked her if she had lived in the convent long, and Miss Dingle told her she had lived there for the last three or four years; but she would give no precise answer when Evelyn asked if she hoped to become a nun, or whether she liked her home or the convent the better.

"Now," she said, "I must really go and say some prayers in the church."

Evelyn offered to accompany her, but she said she was well-armed, and showed Evelyn several rosaries, which in case of need she would wave in his face.

Sister Mary John was digging in the kitchen garden, and Evelyn told her how she had come upon Miss Dingle in the summer-house surrounded by pious pictures. Leaning on her spade, Sister Mary John looked across the beds thinking, and Evelyn wondered of what. She said at last that Miss Dingle thought too much of the Devil.

“We should not waste thoughts on him — all our thoughts should be for God; there is much more pleasure and profit in such thoughts.”

"But it does seem a little absurd to imagine that the Devil is hiding behind gooseberry bushes.”

"The Devil is everywhere, temptation is always near.”

Evelyn saw that the nun did not care for discussion on the subject of the Devil’s objectivity, and in the pause in the conversation she noticed Sister Mary John’s enormous boots. They looked like a man’s boots, and she had a full view of them, for Sister Mary John wore her skirt very short, so that she might be able to dig with greater ease.

“One of the disadvantages of convent life are the few facilities it affords for exercise and for music," she added, with her beautiful smile. "I must have exercise, I can’t live without it.... It is extraordinary how differently people are constituted. There is Mother Mary Hilda, she has never been for what I should call a good sharp walk in her life, and she does not know what an ache or a pain is.”

The nun pointed with admiration to the bed which she had dug up that morning, and complained of the laziness of the gardener: he had neither done this nor that, but he was such a good man — since he became a Catholic.

"He and I used to talk about things while we were at work: he said that he had never had it properly explained to him that there should only be one true religion.”

"Since he became a Catholic, has he not done as much work as he used to do?”

"No, I’m afraid he has not," Sister Mary John answered. "Indeed, we have been thinking of sending him away, but it would be difficult for him to get another Catholic situation, and his faith would be endangered if he lived among Protestants.”

At this moment they were interrupted by a loud caw, and, looking round, Evelyn saw the convent jackdaw. The bird had hopped within a few yards, cawing all the while, evidently desirous of attracting their attention. With grey head a-slanted, the bird watched them out of sly eyes. "Pay no attention to him; you’ll see what he’ll do," said Sister Mary John, and, while Evelyn waited, a little afraid of the bird, who seemingly had selected her for some purpose of his own, she listened to the story of his domestication. He had been hatched out in the henhouse, and had tamed himself; he had declined to go wild, preferring a sage convent life to the irregularity of the world. The bird hopped about, feigning an interest in the worms, but getting gradually nearer the two women. At last, with a triumphant caw-caw, he flew on to

Sister Mary John's shoulder, eyeing Evelyn all the while, clearly bent on making her acquaintance.

"He'll come on your shoulder presently," said Sister Mary John; and, after some plausive coquetting, the bird fluttered on to Evelyn's shoulder, and Sister Mary John said —

"You wait: you'll see what he will do."

Evelyn remained quite still, feeling the bird's bill caressing her neck. When she looked round, she noticed a wicked expression gathering in his eyes.

"Pretend," said Sister Mary John, "not to see him."

Evelyn did as she was bidden, and, satisfied that he was no longer observed, the bird plunged his beak into Evelyn's hair, pulled at it as hard as he could, and then flew away, cawing with delight.

"That is one of his favourite tricks. We are so fond of him, and so afraid that one day a cat will take him. But there is Mother Mary Hilda coming to fetch you for your lesson."

Evelyn bade Sister Mary John good-bye,, and went forward to meet her instructress.

The morning seemed full of adventure. There was Miss Dingle, her pious pictures, and the Devil behind the gooseberry bushes. There was the picturesque figure of Sister Mary John digging, making ready for the winter cabbages. There was the jackdaw, his story and his humours, and there was her discovery of the genius of St. Teresa. All these things had happened that morning, and Evelyn walked a little elated, her heart full of spiritual enthusiasm. The project was already astir in her for the acquisition of an edition in the original Spanish, and she looked forward to a study of that language as a pleasant and suitable occupation when she returned to London. She questioned Mother Mary Hilda regarding the merits of the English translation; the French, she said, she could read no longer. She described the worthy father's prose as asthmatic; she laughed at his long, wheezy sentences; but Sister Mary Hilda seemed inclined to set store on the Jesuit's pious intentions. The spirit was more essential than the form, and it was with this argument on their lips they sat down to the Latin lesson. The nun had opened the book, and Evelyn was about to read the first sentence, when, raising her eyes and voice, she said —

"Oh, Mother Mary Hilda, you've forgotten!.... This is my last lesson, I am going away to-morrow."

“Even so it need not be the last lesson; you will come and see us during the winter, if you are in London. I don’t remember that you said that you are going abroad to sing.”

"Mother Mary Hilda, I’m thinking of leaving the stage.”

The nun turned the leaves of the breviary, and it seemed to Evelyn that she dreaded the intrusion on her thoughts of a side of life the very existence of which she had almost succeeded in forgetting; and, feeling a little humbled, Evelyn applied herself to the lesson. And it was just as Mary Hilda’s hand closed the books that the door opened and the Reverend Mother entered, bringing, it seemed, a new idea and a new conception of life into the room. Mother Mary Hilda gathered up her books, and having answered the Reverend Mother’s questions in her own blithe voice, each word illuminated by the happy smile which Evelyn thought so beautiful, withdrew like an apparition.

The Reverend Mother took the place that Mother Mary Hilda had left, and, by her very manner of sitting down, showed that she had come on some special intention.

“Miss Innes, I have come to ask you not to leave to-morrow. If you are not already tired of our life, it would give us great pleasure if you would stay with us till Monday.”

"It is very good of you to ask me to stay, I have been very happy; indeed, I dread returning; it is difficult to return to the life of the world after having seen what your life is here.”

“We should be only too happy if you will prolong your stay. You are free to remain as long as you please.”

“Thank you, Reverend Mother, it is very good of you, but I cannot live here in idleness, walking about the garden. What should I do if it were to rain?”

"It looks like rain to-day. We have had a long term of fine weather.”

The nun’s old white hand lay on the table, a little crippled, but still a nervous, determined hand, and the pale sparkling eyes looked so deep into the enigma of Evelyn’s soul that she lost her presence of mind; her breath came more quickly, and she hastily remembered that this retreat now drawing to a close had solved nothing — that the real solution of her life was as far off as ever.

"Then I may take it that you will stay with us till Monday? I will not weary you with our repeated thanks for what you have done for us. You know that we are very grateful, and shall

never forget you in our prayers; but you will not mind my thanking you again for the pleasure your singing has given us. You have sung every day. You really have been very kind."

"I beg of you not to mention it, Reverend Mother; to sing for you and all the dear Sisters was a great pleasure to me. I never enjoyed singing in a theatre so much."

"I am glad you have enjoyed your stay, Miss Innes. Your room will always be ready. I hope you will often come to see us."

"It will be a great advantage for me to come and stay with you from time to time." Neither spoke for a time, then Evelyn said, "Reverend Mother, is it not strange that I should have come back to this convent, my old convent? I never forgot it. I often wondered if I should come here again. When I was here before, it was just as now; it was in a great crisis of my life. It was just before I left home, just before I went to Paris to learn singing. I don't know if Monsignore has told you that I have decided to leave the stage."

"Monsignore has entrusted you to me, and I should like to count you as one of my children. All the nuns tell me their little troubles. Though I have guessed there must be some great trouble in your life, I should like you to feel that you can tell me everything, if to do so can be the least help to you."

Evelyn's eyes brightened, and, trembling with emotion, she leaned across the table; the Reverend Mother took her hand, and the touch of that old benign hand was a delight, and she felt that she must confide her story.

"I have been several times on the point of speaking to you on the subject of my past, for if I am to come here again I feel that you should know something about me. But how to tell it! I had thought of asking Father Daly to tell you. To-day is your day for confession, but last week I confessed to Monsignore, and do not like to submit myself to another director. Do you understand?"

"Father Daly is an excellent, worthy, man, the convent is under the greatest obligations to him, but I could not recommend him as a very enlightened director of souls. That is why the nuns tell me all their troubles. I should like you to feel that you can tell me everything."

"Reverend Mother, if you did not pass from the schoolroom to the convent like Veronica, you will have heard, you must know, that the life of an opera singer is generally a sinful life. I was very young at the time, only one-and-twenty. I knew that I had a beautiful voice, and that my father could not teach me to sing. But it was not for self-interest that I left him; I was genuinely in love with Sir Owen Asher. He was very good to me; he wanted to marry me. From the

world's point of view I was very successful, but I was never happy. I felt that I was living a sinful life, and we cannot go on doing what we feel to be wrong and still be happy. Night after night I could not sleep. My conscience kept me awake. I strove against the inevitable, for it is very difficult to change one's life from end to end, but there was no help for it."

Her story, as she told it, seemed to her very wonderful — more wonderful than she had thought it was; and she would have liked to have told the Reverend Mother all the torment and anguish of mind she had gone through. But she felt that she was on very thin ice, and trembled inwardly lest she was shocking the nun.

It was exciting to tell that it was her visit to the convent that had brought about her repentance, — how that very night her eyes had opened at dawn, and she had seen clearly the wickedness of her life, and she could not refrain from saying that it was Owen Asher's last letter, in which he said that at all hazards he would save her from losing herself in religion, that had sent her to Monsignore for advice. She noticed her omission of all mention of Ulick, and it seemed to her strange that she could still be interested in her sins, and at the same time genuinely determined to reform her life. The nun sat looking at her, thinking what answer she should make, and Evelyn wondered what that answer would be.

"We shall pray for you.... You will not fall into sin again; it is our prayers that enable men to overcome their passions. Were it not for our prayers, God would have long ago destroyed the world. Think of the times of persecution and sacrilege, when prayer only survived in the monasteries."

Evelyn could not but acquiesce: a world without prayer would be an intolerable world — as unendurable to man as to God. But if the Reverend Mother's explanation were a true one! If these poor forsakers of the world were in truth the saviours of the world, without whose aid the world would have perished long since!

But she was going back to London on Monday! In London she would meet Owen and all her former life. She knew in a way how she was going to escape him. But her former life was everywhere. She got up and walked about the room, then she stood at the window, her hands held behind her back. She was sorely tried, and felt so weak in spirit that she was tempted, or fancied that she was tempted, to go away with Owen in the *Medusa*. Or she might tell him that she would marry him, and so end the whole matter. But she knew that she would do neither of these things. She knew that she would sacrifice Owen and her career as an opera singer so that she might lead a chaste life. Yet a life of prayer and chastity was not natural to her; her natural preferences were for lovers and worldly pleasures, but she was sacrificing all that she liked for all that she disliked. She wondered, quite unable to account for her choice to herself. Her life seemed very mad; but, mad or sane, she was going to sacrifice Owen and her career. She might

sing at concerts, but she did not think such singing would mean much to her, and she thought of the splendid successful life that lay before her if she remained on the stage. Again she wondered at her choice, seeking in herself the reason that impelled her to do what she was doing. She could not say that she liked living with her father in Dulwich, nor did she look forward to giving singing lessons, and yet that was what she was going to do. She strove to distinguish her soul; it seemed flying before her like a bird, making straight for some goal which she could not distinguish. She could distinguish its wings in the blue air, and then she lost sight of them; then she caught sight of them again, and they were then no more than a tremulous sparkle in the air. Suddenly the vision vanished, and she found herself face to face with herself — her prosaic self which she had known always, and would know until she ceased to know everything. She was here in the Wimbledon convent, and Owen was in London waiting for her. She knew she never would live with him again. But how would she finally separate herself from him? How would it all come about? She could imagine herself yielding; but, if she did, it would not last a week. Her life would be unendurable, and she would have to send him away. For it is not true that Tannhäuser goes back to Venus. He who repents, he who has once felt the ache and remorse of sin, may fall into sin again, but he quickly extricates himself; his sinning is of no long duration! It was the casual sin that she dreaded; at the bottom of her heart she knew that she would never live a life of sin again. But she trembled at the thought of losing the perfect peace and happiness which now reigned in her heart, even for a few hours. Her face contracted in an expression of terror at the thought of finding herself again involved in the anguish, revolt, and despair which she had endured in Park Lane. She recalled the moments when she saw herself vile and loathsome, when she had turned from the image of her soul which had been shown to her. Then, to rid herself of the remembrance, she thought of the joy she had experienced that morning at hearing in the Creed that God's kingdom shall never pass away. Her soul had kindled like a flame, and she had praised God, crying to herself, "Thy kingdom shall last for ever and ever." It had seemed to her that her soul had acquired kingship over all her faculties, over all her senses — for the time being it had ruled her utterly; and so delicious was its subjection that she had not dared to move lest she should lose this sweet peace. Her lips had murmured an Our Father, but so slowly that the Sanctus bell had rung before she had finished it. Nothing troubled her, nothing seemed capable of troubling her, and the torrent of delight which had flowed into and gently overflowed her soul had intoxicated and absorbed her until it had seemed to her that there was nothing further for her to desire.

She remembered that when Mass was over she had risen from her knees elated, feeling that she had prayed even as the nuns prayed; and she had retired to her room, striving to restrain her looks and thoughts so that she might prolong this union with God.

To remember this experience gave her courage. For she could not doubt that the intention of so special a favour was to convince her that she would not be lacking in courage when the time came to deny herself to Owen Asher. At the same time she was troubled, and she feared that she

was not quite sincere with herself. She would easily resist him now; but in six months' time, in a year? Besides, she would meet other men; her thoughts even now went out towards one. Ah! wretched weakness, abominable sin! She was filled with contempt for herself, and yet at the bottom of her heart, like hope at the bottom of Pandora's box, there was tolerance. Her sins interested her; she would not be herself without them, and, this being so, how could she hope to conquer herself?

Saturday and Sunday were monotonous and anxious days. She had begun to wonder what was in the newspapers, and she had written to say that her carriage was to come to fetch her on Monday at three o'clock.

There had not been a gleam of light since early morning, only a gentle diffused twilight, and the foliage in the garden was almost human in its listlessness; a flat grey sky hung about the trees like a shroud. Mother Philippa and Mother Mary Hilda were walking with her about the grass-grown drive. They were waiting for the Reverend Mother, who had gone to fetch a medal for Evelyn. She heard her chestnuts champing their bits ready to take her back to London, and she could not listen to Mother Philippa's conversation, for she had been suddenly taken with a desire to say one last prayer in the chapel. She must say one more prayer in the presence of the Sacrament. So, excusing herself, she ran back, and, kneeling down, she buried her face in her hands. At once all her thoughts hushed within her; it was like bees entering a hive to make honey. Prayer came to her without difficulty, without even asking, and she enjoyed almost five minutes' breathless adoration.

The three nuns kissed her, and as the Reverend Mother hung the medal round her neck, she told her that prayers would be constantly offered up for her preservation. The chestnuts plunged at starting.... If she were killed now, it would not matter. But , the horses soon settled down into their long swinging trot of ten miles an hour, and all the way to London she reflected. The Reverend Mother had said that the prayers of nuns and monks were the wall and bastion tower which saved a sinful world from the wrath of God, and she thought of the incense of prayer ascending night and day from this convent as from a censer. Men had always prayed, since the beginning of things men had prayed, and, as Ulick had said, wisdom was not invented yesterday. He agreed with the naturalistic philosophers that force is indestructible, only objecting that the naturalistic philosophers did not go far enough, the theory of the indestructibility of force being equally applicable to the spiritual world. The world exists not in itself, but in man's thought.... Often an intense evocation has brought the absent one before the seer's eyes, and that there are sympathies which transcend and overrule the laws of time and space hardly admits of doubt. Life is but a continual hypnotism; and the thoughts of others reach us from every side, determining in some measure our actions. It was therefore certain that she would be influenced by the prayers that would be offered up for her by the convent. She

imagined these prayers intervening between her and sin, coming to her aid in some moment of perilous temptation, and perhaps in the end determining the course of her life.

THE END

Mr. T. Fisher Unwin will publish shortly the sequel to this book under the title "SISTER TERESA."
Price Six Shillings.

Preface to *Sister Teresa* (1901)

After being engaged for two years on the history of Evelyn Innes, I found I had completed a great pile of MS., and one day it occurred to me to consider the length of this MS. To my surprise I found I had written about 150,000 words, and had only finished the first half of my story. I explained my difficulties to my publisher, suggesting that I should end the chapter I was then writing on what musicians would call 'a full close,' and that half the story should be published under the title of *Evelyn Innes* and half under the title of *Sister Teresa*. My publisher consented, frightened at the thought of a novel of a thousand pages — 300,000 words.

I was wrong to yield to the temptation, but the pile of MS. was already high, and I thought how much higher it would be in two more years. True it is that Tolstoi waited until he had finished *War and Peace* before he published it; he even withheld the central idea of the book — the idea which gives it unity — till the last volume. But though we may admire and envy self-restraint and self-confidence, it does not follow that we possess them. I confess that I was not in possession of them at that time, and I may be so unfortunate that no readers may have the patience to study the book in the sequence that I originally designed. But I will not anticipate such ill-luck. I will hope that it will be understood that this is really the second volume of a novel which is meant to be read under one name and within one cover, and which will perhaps be ultimately presented to the public under the single title of *Evelyn Innes*.

XLVI I

She was conscious of her indolence: within and without her there was a strange, lifeless calm, a strange inactivity in the air and in her mind. In the landscape and in her there seemed no before and no hereafter. But a glance inwards revealed to her the ripple of some hidden anticipation moving under the sullen surface. The idea of returning to London stirred a little dread in her, yet she felt that for the moment she had seen enough of the convent. For the moment she could assimilate no more of it. The rhythm of the carriage penetrated her indolent body. The thud of the chestnuts'hoofs in the empty road stirred a quiet wonder in her, and she looked into the sunset as she might into a veil.

The mist had gathered in the suburban streets, and over the scraps of waste ground, changing them to blue; and looking into this dim colour and dimly-suggested form, she seemed to become aware of the presence of a phantom life moving on the hither side of her life, dependent upon it, and yet seemingly not concerned by its affairs, occupied by interests and desires exclusively its own. Her perceptions gathered in intensity, and she waited, tremulous and expectant, for the moment seemed to have come for the invisible to become visible. But in spite of her efforts to keep her attention fixed, to exclude the natural, her attention wandered or it lapsed, or the natural slipped in between, intercepting her vision, and the phantom folk lost their supernatural appearance and took on the likeness of the nuns. She saw the nuns in their convent garden, playing at ball, or in church, sitting in their stalls, turned sideways, with books in their hands. As the carriage entered the Fulham Road, that long, narrow, winding lane, she saw Sister Mary John digging, and she smiled at her strange, brusque ways. Her quaint bird came towards them, hopping over the broken ground, and she remembered how elimination of the spiritual weeds had resulted in other weeds.

As she drove toward London she pondered Sister Mary John’s sensuous enthusiasm for her singing. She knew that she appealed to the nun’s imagination, and she knew that the Prioress appealed to hers — that she was charmed by a wise, sad nun, by the woman that the nun’s veil could not hide, nor an extreme old age. She felt that the Prioress had renounced, whereas the other nuns, or a great many of them, had refused life.

The still autumn evening was like a magic mirror, and looking into it she saw the slow, devotional pose of the old white hands resting on the table edge, and she heard the calm, even voice telling her of the supremacy of the contemplative orders.

As the carriage drove up Grosvenor Place the cries of the pea-fowls in the gardens of Buckingham Palace startled her, and she looked round, terrified to find herself in London again. The carriage turned into Hamilton Place. She was returning to the life of the world, the battle

with herself was about to begin again; and though she felt quite sure of herself, the fact of finding Owen waiting for her seemed like an omen, or at least a challenge. He was waiting for her at the head of the stairs. There was a little nervous smile on his lips and an anxious look in his eyes. As she went upstairs to meet him, confidence in God, and the confidence in herself, which her prayers and the prayers of the nuns had given her, appeared in her face, and Owen wondered at the extraordinary beauty which looked at him out of her eyes. She seemed capable of a more exalted passion, of a more intense feeling, and his desire to win her back grew more acute than ever. She seemed, to read his thoughts in his eyes, and lest she should read them completely he said, —

'I did not know you were coming home to-day; I came on the chance of finding you.'

'Well, Owen, I wrote to tell you you were not to come; but it sounds ungracious to tell you so.'

'You said that I was not to come to see you for three months, but you broke your promise. You wrote to say you would not see me again; that liberated me from my promise not to come to see you for three months, isn't that so?'

She did not answer, and he wondered if she were trying to remember why she had written him that cruel letter.

'I am very glad to see you, Owen.'

'Are things different?' he asked. 'Tell me if things are worse, and they are worse if you will not take me back.'

'Owen, you must not speak like that now.'

'And why not now? Where have you come from — is there any secret?'

'There is none.'

'Merat told me she did not know.'

'And you concluded there was a secret. I have come from the convent. I have been in retreat.'

'Eight days shut up in a convent singing psalms and burning incense — I wonder you're here to tell the tale.'

'It is very easy to speak like that; such sarcasms are easy.'

Neither spoke for a long while, and then they spoke of ordinary things, as if they had forgotten that their lives had come into a crisis. Suddenly, like one retaken by an ache which had left him for a while, Owen said, —

'Ah! if I had married you when I first met you. But you would not have been half as happy as you have been if I had set you up at Riversdale and Berkeley Square to entertain the best people, and had loaded you with diamonds. The mistake I made, Evelyn, was not to have allowed you to have children. The only way a man can keep a woman is through her children. I did not think of that at the time — one cannot think of everything. But I did the best for you, Evelyn, didn't I? Say that I did.'

'Yes, Owen, your conduct was better than mine, for you acted according to your lights.'

He sprang to his feet, and taking a Worcester vase from the table he examined its design; and fearing that he would dash it to the ground Evelyn did not say a word; but his irritation passed without the breaking of the jar, and resuming his seat beside her he saw the autumn leaves, and the faintly-flushed sky, and with a sudden pang he remembered that life is passing away while we are arguing how to live it.

'You may struggle for a while, but the passion for the stage will overtake you.'

But this did not seem to him true. He remembered that the new idea had been growing steadily in her for some while, and, though it might not absorb her entirely, the chances were against her returning to the stage. Nor could he overcome the feeling that her talent for the stage was an immediate inheritance whose roots did not go very deep into her nature. Her dramatic talent might be a passing reflection of her mother's temperament. Suddenly she heard him say that it would be the lust of the flesh that would save her from the cloister; it would bring her back to life, to man, maybe to him. And once again he sat down, and with a new set of arguments he tried to convince her she was not intended for a religious life. Merat brought in tea, and the conversation broke down; and after tea, when they were talking of indifferent things, he noticed that a different mood was preparing in her. She sat, as if fascinated, her huddled knees full of temptation, and following her to the end of the sofa he seemed to lose his reason suddenly in her atmosphere. She did not drive him from her, but once looked up pleadingly. He seemed to dread her displeasure, for he merely kissed her hair, which hung loose and thick over her neck, and he took it in his fingers and lifted it from her neck. He thought that to win her his lips must seek to surprise her senses suddenly in her lips, but while holding her face in his hands he was held back by some strange pity, and in that moment of hesitation she recovered her strength to resist him.

'Owen, you must not make love to me; all that is over and done between us. Owen, do not make it impossible for me to see you. I want to love you, dearest, but not as I have loved you; leave go my hands; you have never yet disobeyed me, and if you are violent I shall never, never be able to see you again.'

For a moment his love of her seemed to move from earth to heaven; that is to say, from all that eyes see, that ears hear and the nostrils inhale; and he felt he must not detain her. Her face expressed such purity that he abandoned her hands, compelled by some grave force which he could not explain or contest. So nothing came of this love meeting except the pinning up of some hair which had fallen; and when he looked at her again he was not quite sure that he had not misinterpreted the affectionate emotions which had carried her towards him a moment ago. But whatever his mistake may have been, her manner towards him had changed, and now her face seemed to express sorrow that he could not be to her what she wished him to be, and she seemed to regret that each should be a temptation to the other. She felt that she ought to send him away, but lacking the courage to do so, she asked if he would come into the Park with her, and they walked by the Serpentine, conscious of the melancholy of the autumn evening. And leaning on the balustrade of the bridge, looking into the mist which shrouded the Long Water, he thought of what he had told her of herself, that her artistic instincts were but a passing reflection of her mother's spirit, whereas the true romance of her life was in the sexual instinct.

The stream's banks were shrouded in a thick mist, out of which the tops of the trees emerged. In the middle of the water there was one space free from mist, and two wild ducks with a whirr of wings dropped into the pool of light; they swam a little way, and a moment afterwards were swallowed up by the mist. He was too sad to be irritated by anything she might say, and he allowed her to say that it was impossible to deny the influence of prayer of others without denying the influence of hypnotism and telepathy.

But what are you going to do? How is all this to end? You are not going to shut yourself up in a convent, nor devote yourself to philanthropic work. You have no plans, I believe, except perhaps to live a chaste life.'

'Owen, I had to change my life. Except for a moment I took no pleasure in anything.'

He noticed how her face became suddenly grave, and that the intimate secret of her nature seemed to rise to her lips when she said that whatever spirituality she might attain to she would attain to through chastity.

'We have only a certain amount of force. A certain amount goes to support life, and the rest we may expend upon a lover, or upon our spiritual life.'

'But this cannot be the last time I shall see you, Evelyn,' he said, when she mentioned that it was growing late and that she must be returning home. 'How shall I live without you, alone in Berkeley Square, nothing to do but to think of my lost happiness?'

'You are lonely because you will not allow anyone to come between you and yourself.'

They were walking towards home, and for a moment he believed it to be his lot to be her husband.

'Will you marry me, Evelyn?'

'Owen, you should have asked me before.'

In that moment it seemed to her too that her destiny was beside her, and she did not dare to look up lest she should see it, and she was mortally afraid of what was happening. For if he had pressed her for a definite 'yes' or 'no' she felt she would never have had the force to resist, particularly if he had said, 'Well, let us go away at once.' If he had pressed an immediate flight, she would have assented, and a fate that would have been quite unlike her would be her fate. But our fate is more like ourselves than we are aware.

It was at that moment that Owen decided that when the door opened he would follow her upstairs, he would say he had forgotten his cigarette-case, any excuse would do, and then in the drawing-room he would overpower the will of the nuns and her will in a kiss. So intent was he on his plans that he could hardly continue the conversation.

'Owen, good-bye,' she said. 'I won't ask you to come up.'

'I have forgotten my cigarette-case.'

'I saw you take it out of your pocket, and you lit a cigarette, do you not remember?'

He searched his pockets and admitted she was right.

The door opened and she entered, hardly pausing on the threshold to say good-bye.

The memory of the summer evening he had taken her away to Paris arose in his mind, and his conduct on that occasion seemed to him to have been much wiser, and he could not recognise the man in the first adventure with the man in the present one. If he had not wavered he would have won her — for a while; and he heard her telling him what suffering chastity is in a woman of her temperament. If he had asked her to go away with him in *The Medusa* her face would

have darkened, and on the morrow she would come to him, her face set in iron determination, or would have written him one of those cold, acid letters, which he dreaded even more than the personal interview. He hated suffering, and it was his hatred of suffering which had made him refrain. He could not have acted otherwise; very likely other men could have, but he had never been able to make love to a woman against her will. He seemed on the point of remembering something, and then he began to remember as one remembers a dream; he was not certain whether he were inventing or remembering, but it did seem to him that he had been prevented from making love to Evelyn by some power, gentle and yet irresistible. His reason rebelled against the admission that others had been in the room. But it did seem as if these nuns had intervened. He exclaimed against the folly of his thoughts, and wandered on. He eventually turned into a club in hopes of finding Harding.

XLVIII

Merat had come downstairs to tell her mistress that a pair of stockings was missing. But Evelyn did not answer her, and she hoped the footman would not bring the lamp yet.

'You must have left them at your father's. If you will write to-night...'

'No, Merat, I did not leave them at my father's. I left them at the convent.'

She wished her maid to know that her relations with Sir Owen would be different from henceforth, and it seemed to her that a mention of the convent would be sufficient for the moment. Better the truth than ugly rumours that Owen had left her for another woman, or that she had left him for another man. She wished Merat would leave her, but Merat was much interested in her mistress's visit to the convent; and Evelyn was surprised to find that her maid's ideas regarding a vocation were more simple and explicit than her own. 'There are those,' she said, 'who slip away from life when they are very young, before life has fairly caught them, and those who have had a disappointment, and feel there is nothing else for them.'

'But you, miss, you could never live their life; you are too old, or not old enough.'

And when Merat left her, Evelyn considered how she had discovered two instincts in herself, an inveterate sensuality and a sincere aspiration for a spiritual life. Which would survive? As she sat over the fire pondering, there came to her what seemed like a third revelation — that the sexual trouble was but the surface of her nature, that beyond it there was a deeper nature whose depths were yet unsounded. But if she had fallen she would have had to confess, and how could she go to Monsignor and tell him that on the very day she came back from the convent she had nearly yielded herself to Owen. He would lose all faith, all interest in her, and his interest in her meant a great deal to her. She had escaped, how she did not know, by accident seemingly. On another occasion she might not be so lucky, and she would go through agonies of conscience and eventually confess her sins, for any long returning to her old life was out of the question. So perhaps she had better write to Owen, saying he must not come to see her. But of what use, since she would be sure to meet him at Lady Ascott's? But Lady Ascott would disappear from her life, and her friends too. Yet she had once looked on these people as her life, and on Lady Ascott as a dear and intimate friend. Now she seemed far away, and her people seemed far away, a sort of distant coast-line, and there were others besides Lady Ascott and they all seemed to be receding. There was no reason why she should not see them, nothing forbade her; but she would not know what to say to them now. There were other friends — men. She feared that men still interested her as much as ever; and the fact that she was going to deny herself did not seem to make any difference. Besides Owen and Ulick there were many

men whom she liked, whom she had often looked at as possible lovers, men who sent her flowers and books and music, and whom she met by appointment in picture-galleries, men whom she wrote to occasionally, for beyond the single net in which we are caught there is a vaster reticulation. If all these men were to be put away she would receive no more letters — women's letters are from men, as men's letters are from women. For the human animal finds in the opposite sex the greater part of his and her mental life. She had heard Owen say that the arts rose out of sex; that when man ceased to capture woman he cut a reed and blew a tune to win her, and that it was not until he had won her that he began to take an interest in the tune for its own sake.

Her own desire of art had been inseparably linked to her desire to please men. Three days ago she had looked down from the organ loft to see if there were any men among the congregation, knowing she would not sing so well if she were only singing to women.

'But how am I to fill the days?' she thought as she rose from her chair, 'without lovers, without an occupation. Three parts of my life are gone; nothing remains but religion.'

Hitherto her life had been lived according to rule, and she had enjoyed her life most when the rule that her art had imposed upon her had been severe. Her happiest hours had been those she had spent in Madame Savelli's class-rooms. Then her days had been divided out, and there had been few infractions of the rule. The little interruptions Owen had pleaded for were not frequent, nor did they last long. His interest in her voice had always been so dominant an interest that he had subordinated his pleasures to her voice. It was she who had wished to play truant and had said, —

'But you go away to your shooting and your hunting, to your London friends. I am always a prisoner, and Olive is a strict warder.'

During the five years in which she had practised her art, she had never escaped from the discipline of art; her life had been a routine.

'Religion always seems to fling me into a waste of idleness,' she said aloud, and she remembered that her first qualms of conscience had led her to the part of Fidelio; she did not think she would have learnt the part of Isolde if she not met Ulick. Her love of him was her last artistic inspiration; the thought amused her for a moment, and she walked across the room thinking of the weariness of freedom. As she took down a book, she paused to remember how her first notes were held in view almost from early morning. How, after mid-day, every hour was a preparation for the essential hours. How on her singing days she avoided all that might distract her thoughts from her part. She opened no letters, and spoke very little; and after having dined lightly she read her music.

On the days she was not singing her accompanist came at ten o'clock, and she was with him for at least three hours; and after we have done three hours' work the rest of the day passes almost without our perceiving that it is passing. We have no need to think how we shall spend it; it just spends itself. It sheds itself like seed.

On her off days Owen was ready with some project, a visit to a picture-gallery, a ride in the country; and if Owen were not with her, Olive was waiting to take her shopping. The choice of her clothes, and the making of them, used to take a great deal of her time; henceforth it would take very little of it. She thought of Olive, of Olive with whom she had lived for six years, and who was no more than an appetite for facile amusement. Owen's materialism was deep, but not so deep as Olive's; in her there was no relaxation, no sighing of the flesh after the spirit when the flesh is weary; she was the same through and through like a ball of lard. Evelyn remembered that she would have to write and tell her that she had retired from the stage. Olive would not take her dismissal easily, and feeling she could not argue with her, Evelyn turned in her chair and sat looking into the fire. Suddenly it occurred to her that it was Owen who should break the news to Olive, and she wrote asking him to explain that she had left the stage. It was not necessary to say any more; she thought perhaps it would be as well to add that he must try to dissuade Olive from sending any information to the papers.

The only one of her former friends whose acquaintance she cared to continue was Louise. Louise's lovers did not trouble her; Louise must look after her own soul. But what would they talk about? Hitherto their art had always been a source of intimate interest to them.... She had given up singing, so what would they talk about? She might go through Louise's parts with her. But she knew she would not care to do that, nor could they talk about singing. She did not want to hear of music, especially of the music with which she had been associated. So all her friends must go — composers and conductors, tenors and basses, all her fellow artistes at whose rooms she liked to make appointments. All the adventure of rehearsals would henceforth be unknown to her, and all those whom she used to meet at rehearsals, various dilettante Bohemians and critics, all would disappear from her life.

She sometimes thought of sending away her piano, for there is something sad in the sight of a person or even of a thing that has absorbed much of our lives, and the sight of her piano and the music scores — the scores which she knew so well, and which she would never open again — caused her to sigh, to yearn, to look back, and this revelation of her life had been brought about by an idea. If Owen were to come to her with proof that there was no future state it would be just the same! She paused like one in front of a great discovery. We have only to change our ideas to change our friends. Our friends are only a more or less imperfect embodiment of our ideas.

And as she stood by the window watching the decaying foliage in the Park, she realised that the problem of her life was the discovery of an occupation. She had just come from a lunch at Owen Asher's. She had met him a few evenings ago as she came out of a concert-room, whither she had been driven by terror of her lonely drawing-room, rather than by a desire of the music. Owen had spoken to her in the vestibule and she could see that he would always love her, whether she were well or ill, glad or sad, failing or successful. She had perceived this as the crowd jostled past her, and she was touched by it, and had promised to lunch with him. But fearing she would not lunch with him alone, he had mentioned a number of names. She would sooner have lunched with him alone, but she did not dare to say so, and he had invited the usual people, women whom she had once considered her intimate friends, and men with whom she had flirted. She remembered that she had once thought them all clever, and now they seemed to her like the toys the showman winds and allows to run a little way along the pavement before he picks them up. The vivid unreality of these people she attributed to the fact that they lived in the mere surface of life; in the animal sensation rather than in the moral idea; and she reflected that she had not only not been happy, but had never seemed to get even into touch with existence until she
had decided that there was a right and a wrong way.

But these women had asked her to dine with them; they had promised to write, and she would have to invent pretexts, and she had no aptitude for the composition of such letters. If she accepted their invitations she would have to talk to them on subjects which did not interest her.

If she were to tell them her ideas — she shrugged her shoulders and walked away from the window. This lunch seemed to have flung her back again. Owen had asked if he might come to see her. He had told her he was going abroad in order that he might forget her, and had asked if he might come again to say good-bye. She hated scenes of parting, but others did not think as she did, and she had given her consent to a last visit. It would have been difficult and disagreeable for her to have refused, but she would have refused if she had not felt singularly sure of herself. Her sex seemed to have fallen from her. For many days she did not seem to know that she was a woman, and feeling sure this visit would prove wearisome she tried to look upon it in the light of a mortification. But from such moods there is always a reaction, and the visit had been an agreeable one. He won her affection in spite of herself. Never had he seemed less hard, less material, and at the end of the week he had won his way into most of his old intimacy. They had been for a walk in the Park and had been to see some pictures, and during the first week of this renewal of their intimacy he neither said nor did anything to which she could raise any objection until one day, after saying he was waiting for a telegram from the yacht, he kissed her on the forehead. He might never see her again, he said, and she thought that it did not matter much as he was leaving. But no telegram came from Marseilles, and his stay in London was indefinitely prolonged. Soon after he produced a text in support of his contention that sin did not begin in a kiss, and he pleaded to be allowed to kiss her on the

forehead and on the cheek. She begged him not to, but it is impossible to resist always, and he assured her that such kisses would not trouble her conscience. The opinion of the Fathers on the danger of kisses was debated; he struggled with her and got the better of her in the struggle and the argument. But his success did not prevail. For on the following day he saw, when he came into the room, that there would be but little pleasure in this visit, and regretted his indiscretions.

'You don't mean to say that you are so absurd as to have scruples of conscience about that kiss?'

'Yes, I think I have. You see, it is all true to me, and things can't be at once absurd and true.'

'It is terrible that you should be like this. But let us change the subject. What about that song of mine?'

She looked in the direction of the clock before beginning to sing, and he guessed something liturgical — Benediction? and his hand dropped on her shoulder.

'Are you offended?'

'Not exactly, but I have often told you I do not approve of kisses unless — '

'Unless what?'

'Unless you are going to make love to me, and as that can never be again — '

'You don't see that an affectionate regard may be — '

'I must send you away now.'

'When may I see you again?'

'I'll write.'

He had kissed her, and she knew how kisses ended, at least in her case, and she was determined to dally with temptation no longer. She had been walking about nearly all last night, and she had convinced herself that as she was determined not to go back to her old life, the only thing to do was to do as Monsignor had told her, and to refrain from seeing either Owen or Ulick again. To do this she must put her old life completely aside. She must sell her house in Park Lane and get another which would be more in keeping with her ideas. Above all, she must get some work to do; she could not live without occupation. On all these points no one was so competent to advise her as Monsignor.

‘You see, Monsignor, one cannot think of one’s soul all day. There is Mass in the morning, and Benediction in the afternoon, and nothing else — neither work nor pleasure.’

He deliberated, and she waited, eager to hear what advice he would give.

‘When I advised you to leave the stage, I did not mean you were to abandon art,’ and he spoke of Handel and Bach, as she expected he would.

‘Well, Monsignor,perhaps you won’t understand me at all, and will think me very wilful; but if I am not to sing the music I made a success in, I don’t want to sing at all. I can’t do things by halves. I am either on the stage or — ’

‘In a convent,' he added, smiling, and Evelyn could not help smiling, for she recognised herself in the antithesis; and it was not until she had got up to go that she remembered she had forgotten to ask him to recommend her a solicitor who would negotiate the sale of her house for her, and invest her capital at reasonable interest.

'This is a matter on which I cannot speak off-hand, and I must send you away now. But I will write to you on the subject, probably to-morrow. Come to see me on Friday.’

To see Monsignor, to hear him, even to think of him, was a help to her, and in the course of the interview she decided she would write that night to Owen, telling him he must not come to see her again. She composed her letter as she went along the street, and wrote it the moment she got home. She expected he would send his valet in the course of the morning with a letter, but the only letter that came was one from Monsignor, recommending a solicitor to her, and for three or four days she was busy making arrangements for the sale of her furniture and her pictures, and looking out for a small flat which she could furnish in a simple way.

‘You are very lucky,' Monsignor said. ‘If Mr Enderwick says you will have four hundred a year you can rely on it, and you will be able to live comfortably and do not a little good. I have been thinking of what you said to me about the need of occupation. I quite agree with you that you cannot live in idleness.’

Returning to the question of concert singing, he begged her to consider the money she could earn, and the good use she could put it to. There were so many deserving cases, really sad cases, which he could bring to her notice; and once we are brought into touch with the poor it is extraordinary the sympathy they discover in our hearts.

'I'm afraid, Monsignor, you are mistaken in me. I do not think I could be of much use in philanthropic work.'

'But, my dear child, you have not tried.'

'You will think me very wicked, Monsignor, but I fear I do not even wish to try — that is not the direction in which my sympathy takes me.'

XLIX

Her pictures, furniture and china were on view at Christie's at the end of November, and all Owen's friends met each other in the rooms and on the staircase.

Lady Ascott sailed in one afternoon, sweeping the floor with a flowing tea-gown, which she held up in front. She wore white satin shoes, and it was debated in distant corners whether she did so from choice or because she had worn them at a party the night before. She was escorted by men of culture of different ages. Her art critic walked on her right hand. He was tall and dark and solemn, and a few years ago he had been good-looking, but lately he had seriously fattened out in the cheeks and in the waist. He strove to ignore the testimony of time by keeping his coat, which was an old one, buttoned, and he still wore the same sized gloves, seven and three-quarters, and his hands looked like little dumplings in them. His eyes were small and malign, and he looked into the corners of the face of the person he was talking to, as he would into the corners of a picture. A lock of coarse black hair trailed across a sallow brow, and he affected an air of aloofness when listening, and there were occasions when he stood apart in carefully considered attitudes. He was a dealer by nature and a critic by accident. He had taken notes of all cracks and restorations; and he had lately returned from Italy where he had been collecting information for his book — *Bellini, His Life and Works*.

Lady Ascott's musical critic walked on her left. He was a tall, thin, angular man, with a small, meagre, clean-shaven face, and pale eyes, in which a nervous despair floated for a moment, and then vanished, for his manner was high-spirited and cheerful. He spoke in a thin voice which suggested the ecclesiastic, and his eyes seemed to reflect back ritual, and his dry, rigid manner suggested one to whom doctrine was a necessity — one to whom rule was essential. He had written on Wagner, Palestrina and the plain chant. He had read all the books; he had been librarian in a ducal library, and curator in a museum.

At parties a sudden lassitude often invaded his mind, and he strayed from the conversation to the piano; and when he returned to his lodgings after the party he looked round the room frightened, and hurried to bed hoping to escape from thoughts in sleep.

Lady Ascott's literary critic followed a few yards in the rear, and occasionally in her rapid excursion down the rooms Lady Ascott called to him, addressing a remark to him, which he answered timidly. He had been lately discovered in the depths of a museum, and had not yet caught the manner of Society. He was feeling his way. He was a man of sixty, gaunt, and wrinkled like a pelican about the throat. He meditated, as he walked, on Harding's objections to his article on style. Harding had said he did not believe in the possibility of writing ineptitudes in good style. Harding had said that he had known Hugo, Banville and Tourgueneff and that

they had never spoken of style. He had said that the gods do not talk theology: 'they leave theology to the inferior saints and the clergy,' and the critic was distressed in his chocolate-coloured overcoat.

This artistic party was met at the end of the room by a fashionably-dressed young stockbroker in whom Lady Ascott was developing a taste for Aubusson carpets, eighteenth-century prints and Waterford glass. On its way round the room it was met by a fox-hunter, who wore his hair long and looked like a tragic actor, by a politician who played Bach, by a noble earl who shot five thousand head of game every year, and painted three hundred water- colours. In the adjoining room this party increased in numbers. Lady Southwick, whose infidelities to her husband were often prompted by her desire to succour her poor people, joined it, and Evelyn's conversion was discussed by all these fashionable people.

Everyone was anxious to express an opinion; but there was a general disposition to hear Lady Southwick's opinion, and smiles hovered round the corners of mouths when she spoke of the money Evelyn might have contributed to hospitals and other charities if she remained on the stage. These smiles vanished when she said she could not see anything for Evelyn but a contemplative order. This seemed reasonable, but Lady Ascott said she could not see Evelyn a good little nun to the end of her days, and her art critic enforced this opinion with a suggestion of suicide. A suicide in a convent had never been heard of; and the idea was considered distinctly amusing. There were fish-ponds in the convent gardens, and the nuns might find her floating in the morning — a convent Ophelia! The literary critic, who, till now, had said little, seized this chance to join in the conversation, and strove to redeem his silence by the suggestion that she might leave the convent and proceed to the East in quest of the ultimate learning. He saw the last of her on board a steamer in the Suez Canal. In the fulness of his idea the critic unbuttoned his chocolate overcoat, but just as his audience were beginning to apprehend his idea, Lady Ascott spied Sir Owen at the other end of the room.

Sir Owen's waistcoat was embroidered, and it still went in at the waist. He wore a tiny mauve necktie, and still a little conscious of the assistance his valet had been to him, he walked down the room with a long swinging stride. Everyone prepared an observation which it was hoped would please him. The art and musical critics spoke of the great loss that Art had sustained, Lady Ascott of the loss that Society had sustained, but the literary critic, who did not know Sir Owen, spoke sympathetically of the religious idea. It was expected that Sir Owen would blaspheme, but he was unexpectedly gentle and sad; and eventually he took Lady Southwick round the room, and explained to her that Wedgwood and Hogarth were England's great artists. He pressed a Wedgwood dinner-service upon her, urging that it would be a souvenir of himself and Evelyn. He told her that the satinwood card tables, which he had bought for ten shillings a-piece, would be sold for thirty or forty pounds a-piece, and that night at dinner Lady

Southwick raised a laugh at his expense, so amusingly did she tell how his sentimental affliction would be alleviated if the sale should prove a vindication of his taste.

The remarkable event of the sale was the selling of the Boucher drawing — a woman lying on her stomach, her legs apart, a drawing in red chalk, drawn very freely and in a voluptuous sense which would make it popular. Sir Owen had bought it at the beginning of the year for eighty-seven pounds, and it was thought that it would fetch three times that sum. All Lady Ascott's set crowded into the auction-room to watch Owen Asher bidding for this drawing. The bidding stopped at a hundred and twenty- five pounds, and the auctioneer waited for Sir Owen; his women friends were looking at him; but he went on explaining his theory on the incompatibility of art and empire to a Jew financier, and while he spoke of the Colonies as a Brixton girdle, the drawing was knocked down to a young Russian. Owen cursed the financier and explained how it had all happened, but everyone wanted to know who the young Russian was, and why he had bought the drawing.

And while her furniture and pictures were being sold at Christie's, Evelyn showed a girl, whom she had met at her father's concerts, over her flat. The interest with which this girl had followed the music had attracted Evelyn's attention; she had spoken to her after the concert, and had discovered she was a metal worker. She had given her an order for some electric-light fittings.

'I should like a twist in the middle of the stem like this.'

'I am afraid we could not twist it like this; this twist was done when the iron was hot; we could imitate the twist, but you would hardly like that.'

'Yes, but how did you learn the work?'

'I have only lately taken it up — I go three times a week to a forge in Clerkenwell.'

Evelyn could see that this girl wore the same black dress all the year through, and the same black straw hat. She probably lived in a room which she shared with another girl; very likely they cooked their own food and did without their lunch in order that they might save money to pay for a subscription for her father's concerts. She saw their lives portioned out in effort to gain their livelihood, and to get now and then an artistic interest. To be with this girl was like the air of the sea-shore after the stale air of London.

At Christmas her moral impulses compelled her to leave her flat and to go to Dulwich to live with her father. She took Merat with her and lived with him for three months; and her whole life was subjected to his wishes. She copied manuscripts for him, and she relieved him of the most wearisome part of his work by undertaking the teaching of the trebles. She played the

viola da gamba at his concerts; she sang the old songs; she taught the girls who came to the concerts how to sing the madrigals, and in the evenings she put aside the subject of her thoughts or her book, and gave him her attention. These hours were the hardest, for she had lost all interest in art for art's sake. She sometimes laughed in her weariness, pretending to herself that she was not certain she hated sin as much as she hated this pattern music; sin was human, at least, but the musical arabesques of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries seemed to her to be divorced from all humanity. She often wondered if her father noticed that Bach irritated her, and she was full of remorse when he took the music away from her, and she implored to be allowed to play it again.

She would not have been able to persevere in the life at Dulwich had it not been for the three days she spent in the convent every week from Saturday until late on Monday, and every Monday it became more difficult to return to the artistic routine of Dowlands. The time was doubtless near when she would not be able to do so any longer, but she could discover no reason for going back to her flat until the nuns lost a further sum of money in Australian securities and the mortgagees threatened foreclosure. Then it became clear that to be of valid help to the nuns she must return to the stage.

She thought of a concert tour in England or America, and was surprised to find herself looking forward to this tour with interest, and when she returned to her flat she sent for her agent. He could not help regretting that she was not returning to the stage. But the idea of the American tour filled him with enthusiasm, and next morning he sent her a large parcel of music. She cut the string and placed the 'Messiah' on the piano, and played it for about an hour. She could see that it was very beautiful, she could see that, but it did not interest her. Her conversion had not influenced her artistic taste. She took out another score; this time it was 'Elijah,' and Mendelssohn appealed to her even less than Handel. She turned to a modern score and discovered in it all the original ingredients hashed up and kneaded into new forms. Then she took a score by Brahms from the heap. 'In Handel there are beautiful proportions,' she said; 'it is beautiful, like eighteenth-century architecture, but here I can discover neither proportion nor design.' She remembered that Caesar Franks' music affected her in much the same way. Shrugging her shoulders, she said, 'When I listen I always hear something beautiful, only I don't listen.'

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Every morning she said, ‘Now I will get up and begin. The moment I begin I shall feel interested in what I am doing, whereas, if I sit by the fire doing nothing, I shall be mad with melancholy before dinner-time.' But she remained reading her paper, and when she rose to her feet she passed the piano and stood by the window, hoping for a visitor. At that moment anyone would have been welcome, and full of contempt for her weakness she yielded to the temptation which the artist spends his life in fighting — the temptation to go and talk to someone. She thought which of her friends she could go to see — Louise? She had been twice to see Louise that week, so she went to Dulwich, but her father was always busy, and feeling like a criminal, she stopped at St Joseph’s. She had nothing to confess but idleness, and vowing to mend her life, returned home. She returned home to sit all the morning recalling her vows, painfully conscious of the presence of her piano. At twelve o’clock she thought she was going to study, but she opened instead the score of 'Fidelio ’; when it had been looked through she opened 'Tannhauser,' and read Elizabeth’s music as a wanderer reads a well-known landscape — the hills and the village street he knew when he was a child. The wanderer passes on, and Evelyn closed the score with a sigh, and stood a long while looking into the street, thinking of nothing definitely — that some of these scores were beautiful, that some were ugly, that none meant anything to her. Her thoughts grew more explicit, and she felt that she could only do things from impulse and to please herself. But how would she make her agent understand that the thinking out a scheme whereby a poor widow might be sent to a convalescent home, and a situation found for her daughter, interested her far more than the singing of all these modern religiosities? Her agent would never understand, and to attempt any explanation would be waste of time. Still, she was glad he was coming, and so worn out was she with.loneliness that she asked him to stay to tea. When he left she looked round the room, wondering what she was going to do. Her dinner would not be ready for at least two hours, and it seemed that she could not stay in the house. Whom should she go to see — Louise? Louise disliked religion and she looked upon nuns as fools, and an argument with Louise troubled and perplexed Evelyn without changing her. So she went instead to see a philanthropic woman who lived in her neighbourhood. This woman was an excellent journalist and could have earned a considerable income if she had been able to put her own wants before the wants of others. Evelyn was always touched by her simple disinterestedness. She had had six callers that morning and had not been able to do any work. There was the woman from the workhouse who wanted a little tea and sugar; there was the woman who wanted a coal-ticket, and there was the woman who wanted to be advised — her husband had just been sent to gaol, and she had three children dependent upon her.

'And what did you do?’

'I had to think out the circumstances of each case, and see what could be done.'

'But that is just what I cannot do. I can spare the money, I can give it, but I cannot think out a plan as you can to start them afresh.'

'It should be easy for one who can think out the gestures, the intonations of voice of Isolde and Elsa, to design a new career for Patrick Sullivan, who has been turned into the street with his five children because he cannot pay his rent.'

At that moment it seemed to her that she was good for nothing except the singing of operas and being Owen Asher's mistress. She could not learn the oratorios, and she could not think out careers for the many Patrick Sullivans who would present themselves. If she could only find something to do which she could do, and which seemed to her to be worth doing. There was a root of some good in her. She had not known till now that this root was in her. She did not know how she could cultivate it; but if she could separate herself from her old circumstances she thought it might grow.

She went home to her lonely dinner, to a few letters to write, and to a book to read, and it seemed as if every day would be the same as the last. But next day, as she was turning over some old clothes to send to her philanthropic friend for her poor people, Ulick walked into the room. Merat had suddenly announced him, and she had not had time to thrust the bundle under the table. He was, however, too much absorbed in the pleasure of seeing her to notice it.

This was the first meeting for many months. It was their first meeting since she had written to him saying he was not to come and see her. She wished to hear what his life had been in France — what music he had written, and he wished to know what encouragement and help the Church had been to her, and what music she had been singing. For her father had only mentioned that he thought she was going to sing oratorios. But before they could talk of music, they would have to talk of themselves. She wanted to know if he still loved her, and she hoped he did not love her in a way that would prevent their being friends; and so intent was she to know this that she did not hear what he was saying about the colourlessness of English music and its want of background.

'It is very good of you to come to see me,' she said. 'I'm very glad you've come. This appears very inconsequent, does it not, after the letter I wrote to you?'

She no longer felt as she did when she had last written to him, and he asked her if she wanted to return to the stage, and if she still held to Catholicism. She laughed at the question, so impossible did it seem to her that she could ever be anything else but a Catholic again. She

could see that he was a little puzzled, and then she told him how much it had cost her in loneliness to send him away.

'We must live according to our ideas,' he said, 'and it is by living for our ideas, and by suffering for our ideas, that we raise ourselves above our animal nature. I was not angry with you for your letter. It proved to me that there was a deeper nature in you than that of the mere singer.'

These were the first words of sympathy that had been spoken to her since she had altered her life, and she was deeply touched. She told him she feared she had little aptitude for parochial work. She was not of much use to the poor. It was the poor who were of use to her. It was the poor who helped her to live. He said he understood, and he told her how he had given up writing a certain kind of music, because a schism in a certain hermetic society to which he belonged had scattered his audience.

'We all require,' he said, 'a group of people in whom we are in sympathy; we require our ideas about us,' and the little anecdote told her how well they understood each other.

He saw that she stood in need of a friend, and she felt that her life would be lonely without one influence. His spiritual ideas interested her, and through their ideas they became extraordinarily intimate. Each visit was looked forward to, and she often went to meet him in the Park by appointment, and walking by the Serpentine in the evening they spoke of the life of the body, which he believed to be an incident in the development of the eternal soul. His creed, that God is everywhere, especially in the twilight which gathered in the great trees, did not seem to conflict, though he said it did, with her belief in the sacrament, and he told her she had only to listen to the silence in her own heart to hear God. The spire of Kensington Church shot up above the trees, touching the very heart of the sunset; and he deprecated a feeble human ritual, exalting the ritual of Nature above it. He asked why man should seek God in scrolls rather than in the sky above, and the earth under our feet, and why a foreign land should be more sacred than the earth underfoot. He spoke more excitedly than he had spoken before. He said that her heart would grow grey and that God would desert her in the cloister, and when she asked him what he thought would become of her, if he thought she would become a nun, he said, —

'Only marriage can save you from the cloister. You have liked me, you seem to like me still; will you marry me?'

He waited a moment for her to answer, and then said, —

'We must go away to-night, so that there may be no turning back. You must meet me at nine o'clock at the railway station — we will go to Dulwich.'

'To-night!'

As they walked back through the chill spring twilight he questioned her closely. She had been falling in love with him again, and was feeling lonely, miserable, and what was worse, she thought, very weak. She had to admit that her life was lonely — unbearably lonely he said it must be — and he admired her strength of character. That she had given up a great deal for her ideas did not impress him so much as the fact that she was living for her ideas. 'But what is the use,' she thought, 'in having suffered if I am to break down?' She could see that he sought to overrule her will with his. He said she must promise to go away with him that very night. That promise she could not give. If she were to marry him her life would be lived among artists and musicians. She would be brought back to all that she had renounced. No, she would not go away with him, she said, as she went upstairs to her room; and she crossed the room certain that she had arrived at an irrevocable decision. Some time passed, and as she went to get a book from the bookcase, she remembered, and with extraordinary intensity, that marriage would give her a hold upon life, and that was what she wanted. She could not continue to live her present life. She was certain of that. Her life seemed like a difficult equation; and after dinner, in spite of the meal, her consciousness increased until she seemed to be trembling in her very entrails.

'In half an hour I shall have to put on my hat — in twenty minutes — in fifteen minutes — in ten minutes I shall have to go.'

The fire began to burn up, and, worn out with thinking, her eyes closed and her brain beat like a pulse. She started in her chair twice, and saw the fire burning very red. Then her eyes closed a third time, and she dreamed she was in a stable where there was a savage horse. So long as the groom remained the horse could not attack her; but suddenly the groom slipped out of the stable, and instantly the horse seized her by the sleeve and held her as a dog might, only with twenty times the power. The stable was divided by a wooden partition, in which there was a door, and it was her object to get behind the door and close it, but the horse held her firmly on the threshold. It seemed to her that the groom had left her to be done to death by the horse, to be trampled and torn by it, and she was unable to imagine any reason why he should have done this. But she saw it was cleverly planned, for her death could not be attributed to him; it would be said that she had foolishly strayed into the stable after he had left.

Her eyes opened, and she sat in a sort of obtuse consciousness, afraid to move, looking into the red glow; and she did not stir, though the fire was burning her legs, until Merat came to ask her if she had any letters for the post.

'Well, Merat,' Evelyn said, 'I wonder what will be the end of it all. Shall I end my days in a convent? What do you think, Merat, you say you know me so well?'

‘I think mademoiselle will go into the convent, but I do not think she will stay in it.’

'Another failure, that would be worst of all. If I once went into a convent, why should I leave it? What do you think would have power to draw me out of it?’

Leaning against the mantelpiece, Merat stood looking at her mistress as at an idol. These little chats were her recompense for the sacrifices she had made so that she might remain in Evelyn’s service.

'A cousin of mine, mademoiselle, is going to be professed to-morrow — would you like to see her take the veil?

Merat described her cousin’s people as well-to-do tradespeople in a midland town. Their business prospered, and there was a nice garden at the back of their house, full of lilac bushes, and on Sunday there was always supper, and the young men stayed to supper. The mother being French, the children spoke French and English. Julia played the piano and Emily sang. During Merat’s profuse descriptions Evelyn thought not of Julia and Emily, but of Sophie, who had decided to become a Carmelite nun. Why a Carmelite nun? In her own words, because if she were to become a nun, she would like a severe order. She would like her life to be as different from the life of the world as possible. WFy did she want this? No one knew — she did not know herself. But she wanted this thing above all other things. She had always been a pious girl, but not more pious than her pious brothers and sisters. She used to romp in the garden on Sunday evenings with the young men. One of the young men had asked her to marry him. She had hesitated at first and then she had refused. Her father had asked her to wait for two years, and she had waited. Young men had come to supper and she had walked with them in the garden, and her voice had been heard laughing. Her sisters had married, and everyone had expected that she would marry. But when the two years her father had asked for were over she had told him that she had not changed. She wished as much as ever to be a Carmelite nun.

LI

Spring was breaking out in the streets — soft white clouds floated at the end of every street, and they drove past green squares. The convent was in a distant suburb, and during the drive there Evelyn hardly spoke. She was far more interested in her own thoughts than in Merat's gossip, and, seeing the sparrows carrying straws into the budding trees, she thought of the girl whose destiny had been revealed to her at eighteen, and who had surrendered life without a sigh, perhaps gladly.

And, seeing lilacs in the convent courtyard, Evelyn wondered if the little sister who had opened the door to them would understand any part of what she was thinking if she were to tell her, or if the cloister had blotted out her human heart.

When they entered the church the candles were being lighted, and on the right of the altar there was an open archway railed off by high rails. The pews were beginning to fill, and while they waited Evelyn thought, 'So a girl is going to renounce the life of the animal — the individual life, the life of conflict. She is led to this, not by instinct, for she renounces the instinctive life; not by the light of wisdom, for she has no wisdom!'

There came a sound of chanting, and looking up they saw the priests and acolytes pass in by a side door; and at the same moment, and by the same door by which Merat and Evelyn had come into the church, the bride came out of the sunlight into the smell of the incense — a healthy-looking girl with flushed cheeks, leaning on her father's arm, and Evelyn thought of Christ as of a tender lover waiting to receive his bride. Behind her followed her mother, and her brothers and sisters, and they sat on some scattered chairs on either side, while the bride, without visible bridegroom, knelt before the altar. Evelyn heard the voice of the priest intone the *Veni Creator*, and the response came from the nuns in thin, quavering notes; so inexpressibly dreary was the intonation, so like the strewing of ashes, that it seemed to her that her way must be with the sun and the lilacs rather than in the dim church, sickly with incense.

The ritual proceeded for a while, and then Evelyn followed the procession. She was so blinded by excitement that she could not observe anything, and it merely seemed to her that many carried tapers in their hands, and that there were acolytes and priests. She longed to ask what would happen next, but did not dare, so intense was the moment. The procession passed down the aisle and into the courtyard. The doors were wide open, and the procession passed through them into the garden, and Evelyn saw the cloaked nuns holding tapers, and, in the doorway, the prioress, tall and graceful, bending like a mother over the bride kneeling at her feet, begging for admission. The bride's father and mother, her brothers and her sisters, pressed forward to kiss her for the last time, and all that remained of Owen Asher in Evelyn rose in revolt, she wished,

in spite of her reason, to snatch the girl from God and give her back to life. Amid the laburnums and the lilac, in the heat of this voluptuous day, the immolation seemed to be pitiful, too awful to be borne.

'I must see her,' Evelyn said; 'she will be able to tell me the secret of her great discovery and how she came to make it.'

She followed Merat through a side door, and through various passages until they came to a bare room, and at the end of the room she saw merely an iron grating, and behind it a Carmelite nun. She pressed forward, eager to ask her why she had done this, to ask what circumstances in her life had driven her to do this, but the rush of questions escaped with her breath, for the middle-class girl had dis- appeared, and in her place she saw a being, seemingly more spiritual than human. There were traces of tears drying on the girl's hot cheeks, and her look seemed to enfold Evelyn in its sanctification, and it followed her when she drove home in the hansom — and she saw nothing of the world around her. All the links in the chain seemed broken — centuries seemed to have passed, and when she entered her room she sat down, unable to speak, lost in the contemplation of something great and noble. All the familiar objects in the room seemed strange and unreal, yet she was clearer in her mind than she had ever felt before, and she seemed to see through life for the first time, and, seeing it, she cared nothing for it.

She stood like one alone on an empty island, seeing the house-lined shores from a distance, and she did not awake from her dream till the door opened.

She wore a maroon-coloured dress, and her figure looked very slight in it. She had grown thinner, and her arms were slender in the tight sleeves; white lace fell over her hands, making them seem fragile and beautiful, and Ulick read in her pale, nervous eyes, that she would be led far from him, and she read misery in his while she told him of the nervous irresolution she could not overcome, but she had to tell him why she had not gone to Victoria. And as she told him of her terror, and of the sudden sleepiness which had fallen upon her, she watched his eyes for any trace of anger that might appear in them. But they only reflected the pain in his heart — the pain which he felt for her.

He was dressed in the tweed suit which he wore from the beginning of the year to its end, a loose, well-worn cravat floated about his throat, but his simple dignity made Owen's artificial dignities seem small and almost mean in her present eyes. His hair was tossed over his forehead, and she liked it as he wore it. She liked everything about him, even his clumsy boots, for the idea he represented was so much greater than any externals could be. His clothes seemed but a little shadow. The picture was all sky — the quiet of the sky and the wistfulness of the sky at evening; the sorrow and the pity and the immortality of the sky were reflected in his eyes, at least they were for her; and when she told him how the sublime act she had witnessed

that morning had impressed her, he listened to her with a pity for her in his eyes that nearly broke her down. He seemed to her like some woodland creature who, hearing monks chanting in his woodland, divines in some half-conscious way that an idea in which he has no part has come into the world.

LII

The porteress's pretty smile seemed less cheerful than usual, and as soon as Mother Philippa came into the parlour Evelyn divined a serious money trouble.

'But what is the matter, Mother Philippa? You must tell me about it. I can see there is trouble.'

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

'At all! You must have some money.'

'No; we have none. And Mother Prioress is so determined not to get into debt that she will not let us order anything from the tradespeople, and we have to manage with what we have got in the convent. Of course there are some vegetables and some flour in the house. But we can't go on long like this. We don't mind so much for ourselves, but we are so anxious about Mother Prioress; you know how weak her heart is, and all this anxiety may kill her. Then there are the invalid sisters who ought to have fresh meat.'

Evelyn thought of driving to the Wimbledon butcher and bringing back some joints.

'But, Mother, why did you not let me know before? Of course I will help you.'

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

'Well, never mind, I'm ready to give you a great deal of help.... As much as I can. Ah, here is the Reverend Mother.'

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

'Thank you, my child, thank you.'

'I have heard of your trouble, Mother. I'm determined to help you, so you must sit down and tell me all about it.'

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

'I'm better to-day.'

And speaking, Evelyn thought, very slowly and feebly, the Reverend Mother told Evelyn the amount of their liabilities. The house and grounds had been mortgaged for twenty thousand pounds, and when the interest on this had been paid, the margin they had to live on was not large, and this year it had been reduced unexpectedly.

As she was about to explain this new misfortune, she paused for breath.

'Some other time, dear Mother, you will tell me the details. Now I want to think how I can help you out of your difficulties.'

And Evelyn took the nun's hand and looked into the tired, wan eyes, and she understood quite well how this woman, so firm and resourceful in her own convent, shrank from the trouble which fate had forced upon her with a material world, eager and merciless in its greed, and anxious to acquire valuable property regardless of the sufferings of others.

The weight of debt on the convent surprised her, but she hoped her face had shown no surprise. She had once been offered a large sum of money to go to America, and it seemed to her a heroic adventure to go there to sing the nuns out of debt. But to do this she would have to return to the stage, and she would if she could overcome herself; and in her anxiety to cheer the two elderly and helpless women, who seemed to have become oddly enough dependent upon her, she thought that she would be able to. To relieve their immediate necessities would be easy; she would send them twenty pounds at once. But how to cope with so large a debt she had not the faintest idea at the time. It was not until she was on her way back to London that the idea of a series of concerts in several large towns, beginning in London and ending in Glasgow, occurred to her. She would make at least a couple of thousand pounds in a six months' tour, and this sum she would give to the nuns to hand over to their mortgagees. The nuns were paying four per cent., so next year they would be eighty pounds a year richer. It could not be that some Catholics would not be found to subscribe; once an example is set it is quickly followed. But next day her agent told her he could not hold out any hope to her of a successful tour before the autumn; during the summer months she would not draw half as much money as she would in September and October. He thought she could not do better than sing the music she was famed for.... London was more ready to welcome a new departure than the provinces. The provinces were conservative, and would want to hear what she had sung in London. Her agent left her to discuss the matter with Ulick, who had just come in, and after some consultation they decided to go to Dulwich and refer the matter to Mr Innes.

Her father did not consider whether it was the sensual or the religious idea which had led her back to her art. He merely rejoiced in the fact that she was to return to art, and began to compose a programme for her — Wagner and the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. The

provinces had not yet heard the old instruments, and he felt sure they would be appreciated. He went to the harpsichord and asked Evelyn to sing, and then went to the piano, and she sang again. He appealed to Ulick, and Ulick agreed with him, but so readily did he agree with her father that Evelyn guessed he was brooding something. He stood looking into space, or sometimes he looked at her with a sad, pitying expression which troubled her. It was the convent that troubled him. He would have had her return to art for some other reason. She could see that he was hostile to the conventual idea, and she wondered why, for she knew no one more truly religious than he.

She had expected he would have tried to dissuade her, but he refrained, and when she told him of the convent, he listened, and on the first opportunity spoke of something else, and she was touched when he said as he bade her good-night, —

'You will want an accompanist; let me be your accompanist; it will save you a good deal of money, and I shall be helping the nuns in my own way.'

The mornings were henceforth passed at the piano. After lunch they went into the Park, and they talked of all the things in the Park in the late afternoons. It was pretty to stray through the groves, talking alternately of art and religion. At any hour — even if you were to wake Ulick at three o'clock in the morning, he would not complain, if it were to talk of art or metaphysics. He would, there is not the slightest doubt, sit up in bed, and after rubbing his eyes, begin to discuss Wagner's meaning regarding the Valkyrie, or the meaning of the Druids when they said that men had made the world. Evelyn liked to watch his reveries and hear him say that the Druids meant when they said that man had made the world, that he had made it out of his thought. He invented metaphysics and mythologies, as they walked, and love of him awoke in her heart when he explained what Father Railston had tried to explain. The priest had prosaically assured her that she should not expect sensible belief at every hour of the day, that to acquiesce in all the teaching of the Church was sufficient. But Ulick had said that if we believe in the moments when our life reaches its highest point, that is to say, in the moments when our animal nature is at wane, it should matter little to us if we should feel less certain about God in our ordinary, passing life. The conversation passed on, and Ulick told her that he had believed in one God in childhood; he had once believed in Jehovah, and about this great God he imagined a sort of pantheism. Christ had not interested him at that time, and he now understood the Son as a concession to polytheism. Man, he said, alternates between polytheism and monotheism.

'And the Virgin,' she said, 'is another concession, and the canonised saints are further concessions, so that the divine idea may be brought within the reach of simple minds.'

It was July, and the leaves were already beginning to grow crisp, and a yellow tint to come into the green; and she said, —

‘We shall never know each other better than we do to-day; our affection can do nothing but decline.’

‘My heart, Evelyn, is like a mirror in which nothing changes and nothing passes.'

'But I am spoiling your life; I can give you nothing for your love.’

‘You give me all my inspiration — you are the source of all of it.’

'I beseech you,' he said after a long silence, 'do not separate yourself from me because you think that.’

She promised him she would not, and an indefinable sensation of joy passed into their hearts, and it lasted while they looked into the sunny interspaces.

She feared him no longer; it was herself she feared, for though he did not make love to her his gentleness was compelling her, and she repressed the impulse to take his hand, lest to do so should break the love spell of those long summer days. They had reached the summit of their happiness, and both foresaw the day when they would have to begin the descent.

LIII

In their long strayings by the Serpentine she often wondered what she should say if they were to meet Owen. He would pass them quickly, with a cynical smile on his lips and in his eyes, for he would think the worst.

Ulick had asked her if he might accompany her on her concert tour, but she had refused, feeling she could not hold out against his tenderness much longer. The moment would have come when she would have thrown herself into his arms. He had not tried to kiss her as Owen had done, and it would have been easy for any other woman to have seen him every day without danger, but she was different. She could resist once, twice, even three times, but the time came when she could resist no longer. Love with her was like one of those poisons which remain in the body; it is not the actual dose which kills, but the accumulation of doses, and she knew that men had again become a feverish curiosity in her.

At Edinburgh the larger part of the stalls was taken up by Lady Ascott's party. Lady Ascott had had a large house party at Thornton Grange, and she brought all her friends to Edinburgh to hear Evelyn. She brought many of the county people with her, and after the concert came to see Evelyn. Evelyn was thinking of the men whom she heard talking behind her, and almost independently of her will she turned from the women who were complimenting her on her singing, and it was only by an effort of will that she engaged in conversation with Lady Ascott or some amiable old gentleman.

The temptation pursued her and kept her awake. She lay on her left side, seeing in the darkness the faces she had seen during the evening. And every day the danger seemed to grow more threatening. She would have abandoned her concert tour had it not been for the nuns — for their sakes she was obliged to go on with it. Every day her danger grew more imminent. Lady Ascott had asked her to Thornton Grange, and after all Lady Ascott had done to make her Edinburgh concert a success she did not see how she could refuse to spend the interval between the Edinburgh and the Glasgow concert with her.

Thornton Grange was thirty miles west of Edinburgh, so it would be on her way to Glasgow, and as she went there she thought of the people she would meet. She would be sure to meet there some of the men whom she had met last autumn when she lunched with Owen, and the women she had met there too, for they went about in gangs. She knew what the party would be like; she knew it all before it began. It would consist principally of an exasperated desire to do something to escape from the tedium of leisure. Everyone would be divided as if the Atlantic divided them, even when they lay in each other's arms; her friendship with which had taught her that physical intimacies are but surface emotions, forgotten as soon as they are satisfied,

whereas spiritual intimacies live in the heart; they are part of our eternal life and reach beyond the stars.

Then why was she going to Thornton Grange? Because it was difficult to refuse Lady Ascott's invitation? Yes, and because she liked to go, and because she was drawn there. She knew these people would weary her; she despised them. She knew that they knew no more of life than animals, but these thoughts were in her brain merely. She felt she had lost control over herself; her brain was on fire, and outside the country was lit up by swift lightnings.

A high wind had been blowing all day, and the storm had begun in the dusk, and when she arrived at the station the coachman could hardly get his horses to face the rain and wind. She took the storm for a sign, but she could not go back now, and she tried to think of something else. She had heard of the trees in the park, and she peered through the wet panes. 'It is a miserable thing,' she thought, 'to linger on the threshold; it is only the daring spirits who pass across and close the door.' But she put these thoughts out of her mind, and for the first time yielded to the temptation to think of the men she was going to meet that night at dinner.

'How are you, my dear Evelyn? I am so glad to see you; you will find some friends here,' said Lady Ascott, who had come forward to meet her.

They were on the threshold of the shadowy drawingroom, and out of a background of rich pictures, china vases, books in little inlaid cases on marble console tables on which stood lamps and tall, shaded candles, Owen came forward to meet her.

'I am so glad to see you, Evelyn; you did not expect me. You are not sorry, I hope?'

She hardly answered. She went past him into the drawing-room, and with a scared look sat down by herself on a sofa as if to watch the card players.

Lady Ascott asked Owen what he thought was the matter with her. He shrugged his shoulders and went towards Evelyn. But at that moment some other guests arrived. They had come from a different station, and were greeted with little cries of facetious intimacy, and amidst a reiteration of Christian names they narrated their journeys, and their narratives were chequered with the names of other friends who had been staying in the houses they had just come from. It seemed to Evelyn that the desire of these people was to pretend to be all members of one family. Their jokes implied an intimate acquaintance with the idiosyncrasies of a large number of people, and it seemed that they often spoke with a view to giving prominence to this fact. They knew each other's intrigues, mercenary and sensual, and each other's plans for the winter months, and the object of their house parties; their race meetings and intrigues were vanity and distraction. Suddenly Evelyn heard one of the women say of a poet whose acquaintance she had made she

was afraid Society would get hold of him and spoil him. ‘She’s like me,' Evelyn said to herself; ‘she sees through it all, but cannot escape from it. I run a little way, and am brought back again.’

And like one watching a revel, she sat apart, hearing the tingling of the temptation in her flesh; and in despair she went up to her room, where Merat was waiting to dress her for dinner. As she stood before the glass she asked herself what was the meaning that lurked in the dress she wore, in the wine and the meats which awaited them.

These people did not meet to exchange ideas. Everything — dress, flowers, wine, food and conversation were but pretexts and stimulants; the pleasure of, consciously or unconsciously, sex was the object of this party.

It was Owen who took her in to dinner, and amid the influence of food, wine, conversation and the scent of the flowers the combat within her grew denser.

After dinner the card players withdrew, and Owen sat beside her telling how this meeting had been devised. Her manner implied acquiescence, and when she was asked to sing she walked to the piano gravely like one who had come to a sudden decision. She sang all that Owen asked her to sing — that song in which lovers sit in the hot July night, under the moon, among flowers that flourished and fell; and that other song in which desire moves mysteriously like wind among tall grasses by the cliff’s edge, and nothing else is heard but the vacant pipe of the shepherd.

She had yielded herself, and the sensual intoxication that flowed through her lips thrilled in everyone; and men and women came forward together to thank her for the pleasure she had given. She was ready to sing again, but Owen excused her, and they went away to sit in the scent of some lilies drooping in a great china vase set on a marquetry table in the library.

The moment had come, and he spoke to her of love, and only of love, and his conversation alternated between descriptions of love’s tenderest whisperings to love’s violent gratifications, and all he said was interpenetrated with recollections of passionate hours, and she sat listening, not daring to speak, her nervous eyes alone telling him of the flame he was blowing up in her heart. Their hands touched, sometimes their knees, and she was borne, as it were, out of her reason.

The roar of the wind up and down the glen was uncanny to listen to; it moaned in the chimneys and threw itself against the house in swift and determined attacks. Rain was dashed against the window-panes, and Owen and Evelyn looked at each other in alarm. He spoke of the high pines, for an admission of his desire was trembling on his lips. In spite of himself he spoke of the love affairs of one of the women present, and in spite of herself she asked him which

woman he was making love to. A sudden thickness came into his throat; their bodies swayed a little, they might have fallen into each other's arms if Lady Ascott had not come upon them, and startled out of her mood, Evelyn looked up and saw Lady Ascott standing by her.

'The women yonder will go on playing cards till one o'clock in the morning, but as you have been travelling I thought you might be tired.'

Lady Ascott took her to her room and stood talking to her for some time, and Merat, who thought she knew every trick and turn of her mistress's mind, had already guessed that she had given Sir Owen permission to visit her, and no shadow of doubt remained when Evelyn said she would not go to bed yet; Merat need not stay, she would undress herself.

When the maid had left the room Evelyn walked a few steps forward, and then leaned against the bed, for she was taken in a sudden terror of the inevitable. She felt all resistance to be dead in her; she was helpless as one enfolded in a flame. Her brain would not think for her, and between desire and her terror of it questions flashed. 'What did Lady Ascott mean — had she done it on purpose? Would Owen come to her? Did he know her room? After all, it might end in nothing.' Her hands went to her dress to unhook it, but they fell tremblingly. She looked towards the door like one waiting. She took a book and then laid it aside, for she could not fix her thoughts, and she sat looking into the fire, thinking of the delight it would be to hear the handle turn in the door, to see him pass into the room. The moment the door was closed behind him he would take her in his arms and hold her, both speechless with desire.

The storm had abated and there was overhead a large clear space of sky through which the moon was whirling brightly, and in the wind-tossed landscape she seemed to see her own soul, and the vision was so clear and explicit that she drew the curtains back and returned to the fire and sat looking into it, frightened, like one who has seen a ghost.

An hour later she heard the card players in the passage. They went to their rooms, and from that time there was no sound in the house, only the soughing of the wind in the trees outside.

She loved Owen no longer, and if she yielded, an hour's delight would be followed by a miserable terror and despair so abject that she might kill herself. But God seemed far away, and as she lay staring into the darkness images of fierce sensuality crowded upon her, the fever that consumed her was unendurable, her will was being stolen from her, and with the rape of her will her flesh hardened and was thrust forward in burning pulsations. She held her breasts in both hands, and bit her pillow like a neck, and her reason seemed to drift and sicken, and her body was her whole reality. Once more she argued it out. This was desire separated from imaginative passion and therefore sin, even according to Ulick's code of ethics. But she could not think; her only consciousness was of the burning of her blood which would not let her lie

down. She got out of bed and she tried to think of Ulick — of any subject that might distract her thoughts from Owen. He was sleeping but a few yards away, and her door was not locked. She lay down again, wearied by this hot struggle with herself. But memories arose, and like ghosts they passed under the sheets and lay beside her, and she was now too exhausted to repulse them.

Then her eyes closed, and she lay with the temptation in her arms, its breath mixing with her breath. It lay still, like a child, between her breasts, and she lay afraid to move. It mastered her slowly. Opening her eyes she saw Owen in his room waiting for her. The anguish of the struggle was nearly over, and a sweet ease had begun in her; and raising herself up in bed she paused to listen, for voices were singing. It was a sad, wailing song; she seemed to have heard it before, voices singing as they walked in procession. She was not sure whence the voices came — outside or within the house, or if they were echoes borne from afar by the wind, or if they were in her own brain. The voices grew more distinct, and she recognised the hymn — the beautiful *Veni Creator*. One voice was clear and true — to whom was she listening? The voices grew louder, they seemed to come nearer, and whether they were echoes borne on the wind, or memories singing in her own brain, she was not sure. Soon the room was filled with the plain chant, and then, almost without her being aware of any transition, the voices seemed to grow fainter, suddenly, and she heard them in the far distance. She sat on her bed listening, and when she could hear them no longer the hymn continued in her brain, and she could not tell at what point hallucination ended and memory began.

She fell back on her pillow, wondering, and hearing and seeing only the nuns, her lips began to whisper prayers. Suddenly she awoke. It was morning, and lying between dreams and waking thoughts she remembered the miraculous midnight intervention with a strange distinctness. She could not doubt the miracle, and was overcome by the thought of the great danger she had escaped; she thanked God for sending the nuns to help her, and she realised her own unworthiness. She understood that her summer spent in the Park with Ulick had been a preparation for this breakdown. Their long talks under the trees, their long musical reveries at the piano, and this concert tour, everything had led her to this disaster. She thought of the music she had sung last night, and of how she had sung it — of the house she was staying in, and of its inmates, and she resolved to leave at once. She must abandon what remained of her tour, and this was the sorest part, for the nuns would suffer through her sin. But her first business was to purge herself; she must destroy this terrible sensual beast within her, and she told Merat she was to pack her things and be ready to leave after breakfast.

And amid the glitter of silver dishes, and the savoury odour of kidneys and omelettes, amid the elaborately-dressed people and the pomp of footmen she broke the news to Lady Ascott.

'I am sorry,' she said, 'but I am obliged to leave to-day by an early train.'

'Sir Owen, will you try to persuade her? Get her some omelette and I will get her coffee. Which will you have, dear, tea or coffee?'

There was no train till mid-day, and she could not refuse to go into the garden with Owen.

'You are not leaving?'

'Do not let us go through it all again, Owen.'

But he insisted, and reminding her of her last night's mood — how different she was then — he besought her to tell him what had happened.

'You cannot have been to confession — you did not get out of your bed and run to a priest, did you?'

She smiled; they walked on a few paces, and then she spoke of the weather, for traces of last night's storm were visible everywhere — in the cold air, and in the long chestnut leaves which filled the roadway.

A squirrel cracked a nut and let the shells fall. A blackbird whistled, but stopped when the sun was swallowed up in great clouds again. The sweet peas were worn by the wind, the sunflowers hung, shabby on their decaying stalks, and out of a faint odour of dying mignonette they passed through the wicket into the woods. On either side of the pathway two robins were singing their rival roundelays.

'But where are you going, Evelyn? You are not going to enter the convent?'

'I am determined, Owen, to separate myself from those whose ideas conflict with mine, that is all.'

'But that is everything.'

'Yes, it is everything, Owen. You see the carriage has come. Good-bye.'

They walked up the drive, and he put her into the carriage, and when it drove away he turned and stood watching the waterfowl swimming in the pool below, stealing mysteriously into the reeds when the guests who walked on the lower terrace approached too close.

‘That damned, stupid creed, which has reduced half Europe to decrepitude, has robbed me of her,' he said, as they sat down to lunch, and like one unable to contain himself any longer he told the whole story, how he had discovered her in Dulwich and had taken her to Paris and made a great artist of her. For a moment he was ridiculous, but when he said, 'A time comes in every man’s life when all past passions are as nothing, or seem to collect into one supreme passion, which can never change or leave him,' his words awoke an echo in every heart.

Someone suggested that a spiritual message had come to her in a dream, and instances were given. Owen, nervously irascible, denied all belief in omens, portents and visions. The others were not so incredulous, and they got up from the table impressed, and anxious for the moment to learn something of the spiritual life.

'It is all very interesting,' someone said, ‘so long as you are not called upon to practise it;' and the remark sufficed to change the conversation, which had been unduly prolonged.

Some of the guests were taken to climb the cliffs which commanded an extensive view; others walked through the woods, and they counted the number of trees which had been blown down.

Evelyn’s mysterious departure haunted these pleasure-seekers, and beguiled by the mystery which had collected in the autumn park, they looked into the shadows; and when they came suddenly upon some patient cattle standing by the hedge side they were obliged to stop, and they gazed perplexed. Unending flights of rooks came through the sky, and the clamour of the wings in the branches was part of the mystery too. They questioned the light of the first star, and the elliptical flight of the bats. Owen, when he went up to his own room to dress for dinner, drew the curtain, and with a strange grief in his heart he stood looking out on the moon-lit world and on the strange silence of the windless night.

LIV

When Owen left Thornton Grange he sent a telegram to Harding asking him to dine with him that night; and sitting alone in their old-fashioned club the men talked of their sentimental lives till nearly midnight.

‘At the bottom of your heart you are glad you did not marry her,' Harding said. 'Nature has condemned us to celibacy.’

'So you have often said, my dear fellow; but will you come to Egypt with me at the end of the month?’

The man of letters felt that his life was not with Owen, and Owen sailed from Marseilles alone, resolved to seek forgetfulness of Evelyn in adventure. So he welcomed the storm off the Algerian coast which began his adventures. He penetrated with a caravan to where summer is stationary, and from well to well of brackish water to Egypt, metaphysical and monumental.

His first attempt in water colours was made on the Euphrates. In Japan he collected some ivories and indifferent prints, and visited many tea houses. In San Francisco he nearly proposed to a beautiful American girl, and in New York he talked so continuously of Evelyn to a Spanish dancer that she left him for a young man with a less brilliant past.

A week after his rupture with the Spaniard he returned home, having been away a little more than a year; and at the beginning of April he was sitting in his house in Berkeley Square, perplexed as to how to employ the rest of his life. Men and women, he reflected, married in order to acquire duties. They did not know that was the reason, theirs was the wisdom of the ages, and from the beginning he had avoided all duties. He had not married because he desired to dedicate his life to self-culture. He had avoided marriage and his relations, and had swept every duty aside lest it should interfere with his life. He had nephews and nieces, but he did not even know their names, and he had asked himself if he should bring them to live with him, but no sooner was the idea conceived than he thrust it aside. The only sacrifice he had allowed to come between him and the world was Evelyn; she had saved him from himself, and that was why he loved her. But even towards Evelyn his conduct had not been what it ought to have been; many times he had left her for shooting and hunting; of course he could not be with her always, but when he went to the bottom of things he had to admit to himself that if he had not been a perfect lover it was because he could not. He had been as kind to her as he knew how. He had done his best.

He took a cigar from a silver box which Evelyn had given him; he possessed a few other relics, a pocket-handkerchief, a pair of shoes and a tortoiseshell comb, and it was always a sad but tender pleasure for him to look at and touch these things. In his secretaire, in a pigeon-hole on the right, were her letters, and one day he counted them over and found there were exactly two hundred and ninety-three; not a large number for a liaison that had lasted for six years. Nearly three hundred she had written him, and he had written her many more, and this correspondence, amorous and artistic, had been one of the special pleasures of this liaison. He put away the letters, and taking another cigarette he sat dreaming of the dead years, his eyes fixed on her portrait. It had become the familiar spirit of his room, and in this room he was never lonely — the Evelyn that dwelt in his heart he had learnt to think of as an immortal delight as well as a mortal woman, and this idea he could read in Manet's picture.

The grey background, in which a casual ray of sunlight awoke tints more beautiful than in any eighteenth-century watered silks, delighted the eyes and held the mind prisoner; and out of all this miraculous grey the figure seemed to have arisen like an incantation, seemed to have grown as naturally as a rose grows among its leaves. Out of a grey tint and a rose tint a permanent music had been made, and Owen often remembered the seeming accident which had got him to bring Evelyn to see the great painter, whose genius he had recognised always.

The portrait was one of the most beautiful; it was not as complete as an Old Master, but Owen's connoisseurship rose above such difficulties. Things which the painter had not observed, things which had not interested him, he had omitted; he had not tried to rival the completeness of nature; he had been content to paint a portrait, which, Owen often said to himself, would be like her when the gold had faded from her hair, and no pair of stays would discover her hips.

He had painted the essential, a young woman of genius, who had gone to Paris on the mission of her genius, and in the eyes he had fixed the untamable light of genius, and in the thin small mouth a thirst which no spiritual Paradise could wholly allay. It was all this to Owen, but Owen's friends, who saw only the superficial appearance, said it was merely a very unflattering portrait of an attractive woman.

One morning Evelyn had happened to sit on the edge of a chair in the same attitude as the painter had seen her sit in by the side of her accompanist one morning, and he had told her not to move; remembering her grey shawl, he had hurriedly fetched a shawl and had placed it about her shoulders. And this seemed to most critics a most commonplace and inartistic way of painting the portrait of a great singer. But she was very probable in this picture; her past and perhaps her future was in this disconcerting compound of the commonplace and the rare, and the confusion which this had created in the mind of Owen's friends was aggravated by the strange elliptical execution. The face had been achieved with a shadow and a light, the light faintly gradated with a delicate shade of rose; and in the midst of this almost ungradated colour,

the right eye had been drawn without the help of any shadow. In a bad light the picture looked ridiculous, and the loose drawing, which was inseparable from the genius of the painting, fretted the eye, but with a ray of light the beauties of the picture reappeared.

Owen knew well that it proclaimed the room in which it hung to be the room of a man of taste. And with his eyes fixed on the picture, his thoughts wandered back and forward from the past when she was his, to the future when she might be his again. He wondered what she was doing now, where she was, and if she would write to him again; for she sometimes wrote to him, being unwilling, as he thought, to abandon her power over him.

One evening, wondering at his own credulity, he strove to throw his will out to reach her brain, to overpower her will with his, and force her to come to see him. The next post brought him a letter from Evelyn, and though his subsequent experiments in telepathy were not so successful, he retained sufficient belief in the possibilities of influencing another's mind to try again. Having nothing else to do, he strove to cultivate a visionary power, and he sometimes thought that he saw her; but the room or landscape he saw her in soon reverted to some room or landscape familiar to him, and he sat wondering if it were the collective will of the convent which thwarted and rendered him unable to reach and influence Evelyn's.

He began to believe she was dead. He drove the thought out of his mind, but it returned, and he felt that he must get news of her. From no one except Mr Innes could he get news of Evelyn. Six years ago he had gone away with his daughter. But what had he done for Evelyn — he had made her a great success, he had made her an artist. Mr Innes would appreciate that. He remembered, and with satisfaction, that he had asked Evelyn to marry him. His conduct had been irreproachable, and seeing things in a new light he wondered why he had not gone to Mr Innes long ago. Perhaps Mr Innes would help him to get Evelyn back again, and conscious of his rectitude he went to Dulwich.

'Mr Innes,' he said, as he came into the room before the door had closed behind him, 'I have come to you for news of Evelyn. She never writes to me now, and I am overborne with anxiety.'

'Evelyn is in London, but she has retired from the world, and has asked me not to give her address to anyone, that is why she is not here.'

'I am sorry that I prevent your daughter from coming to live with you; but you can tell her that I will not try to seek her out; and will you ask her to write to me sometimes, and if that is impossible will you write to me? If you will do this, Mr Innes, you will confer an obligation. I know that — But you know the whole story; she has told it to you, and truthfully, no doubt; there was no reason why she should not; moreover, she was always very truthful.'

'Yes; I think I know the whole story, and I am sorry for you.'

They spent the afternoon talking of her, and Owen felt that with her father for an ally he might induce Evelyn to marry him. The afternoon had been a charming one; not once had Mr Innes rebuked him — yes, once, when he had asked him if Evelyn sang as well as her mother. And Owen reflected how strangely her art had been driven out by another instinct.

The idea of inherited tendency at once interested him, and he began to invent for her a religious grandmother. He came of a scientific generation, and the idea of a sudden revelation did not occur to him. If Ulick had suggested it to him — this would have been Ulick's explanation of Evelyn's conversion — Owen would have repudiated it as ridiculous. And as he walked away from Dowlands he wavered between a grandmother and a great-aunt, and the idea did not leave his thoughts until his attention was attracted by the chestnut bloom which was shedding upon the pavement. These trees were to him Evelyn's trees, and he stopped to think of the first time he had seen her cross the road. She wore an old dress. She had a letter in her hand, and she had been ashamed of her house slippers.

But at that moment Ulick, who was going to Dowlands, caught sight of this tall, meditative man, and he hurried to the other side of the street. Owen hurried after him, and encouraged by his success with Mr Innes, he attempted to win Ulick over. He began by asking him if he might walk back with him as far as Dowlands, and on the way there he spoke against doctrinal Christianity and the monastic idea so sympathetically that Ulick was led into the conversation, and he communicated several ideas on the subject.

Owen's appearance was distasteful to Ulick — the varnished boots, the turned-up trousers, though the day was dry, the large shirt cuffs, the scarf pin, and some few other suggestions of careful dressing annoyed Ulick, and he wondered how a man could waste so much time on his appearance. At the same moment Owen wondered at Ulick's rough suit of clothes; they were creased, but they looked well upon him, and Owen was not wholly displeased by Ulick's rough appearance. He could not imitate it, habit was too strong, but he could admire it. There were moments when Owen was broad minded. He understood how Evelyn could admire this young man better than Ulick could understand how she could have liked a man whose chief concern, if not his whole concern, was with things rather than with ideas. It seemed to him difficult to believe that Owen should have any serious love of music. But his belief on this point was subsequently modified by the very sincere admiration which Owen showed for nearly all Ulick's compositions. He talked of them, and with conviction, because he liked them and because it seemed to him of the very first importance that he should see Ulick again. The desire of the moment was with Owen the most important desire, and he was so anxious for Ulick to come to dinner that he pressed him almost indecorously to accept the invitation. To pass the evening with Owen Asher, he knew, would be disagreeable, but Ulick was always prone to find

a soul of goodness in evil things; and Owen's sorrow had put him into a favourable light for Ulick's eyes to see him, and Ulick had suddenly begun to think that he might awaken in Owen some spiritual aspiration; and it was in this absurd hope that he nodded his head when Owen said, —

'Then at a quarter-past eight.'

If he had said eight, the hour would not have brought into view their hostility, which circumstances had, for the moment, hidden from them. It was the quarter after that reminded Ulick that he would have to wear evening clothes, and he wrote to Owen asking that he might be excused going, giving as a reason that he never wore evening clothes. The letter astonished Owen. It was difficult for him to believe that anyone ever sat down to dinner except in evening clothes, at least, anyone whom he could ask to dine with him. But he was so anxious to see Ulick that he wrote a letter saying he might come in any clothes he liked, and he sent his valet with it.

Ulick had said in his letter that he had not a suit of clothes, and the tone of the letter, though polite, showed Owen that Ulick was indifferent to the honour of Sir Owen's friendship. Owen's face darkened for a moment, but he put the thought aside, for the temptation of the moment was always an irresistible temptation for him, and he desired Ulick's company, for he felt he must find someone to whom he could talk of Evelyn, of her beautiful voice, and the mysterious scruples which had led her away from art and love. Moreover, Ulick was an accomplished musician, and he would be able to ask his opinion about some songs he had just finished, in which there were a few passages which Ulick would put right in a moment.

The meeting of the men was very formal. Owen had put on a smoking suit, so that the discrepancy between his appearance and Ulick's would not be too marked, and he asked, —

'Have you been writing much lately, Mr Deane?'

The conversation then turned upon Wagner and Mr Innes's concerts, and a few minutes after the butler announced dinner was ready. They sat down in a shadowy room, with two footmen besides a butler attending upon them. The footmen.moved mysteriously in the shadows of the sideboard, obeying signs and whispered words, and it seemed to Ulick as if they were assisting at some strange ritual.

The conversation halted many times, for both men were thinking of Evelyn, and it seemed to Owen that, for the present, at least, her name must not be mentioned. The butler's voice acquired a strange resonance in the still room; he offered Ulick many different kinds of wine, and Owen intervened in vain — Ulick only drank water. At last Evelyn's name was mentioned,

and the conversation at once became more animated, and it seemed to Ulick that even the servants must feel a relief. Nevertheless, Owen had only mentioned Miss Innes's Elsa, and he passed rapidly on to the inferiority of the tenor, and the inadequacy of the scenery in the second act. But the ice had been broken, and when they left the dining-room and lit their cigarettes, Owen felt that he must speak unconstrainedly.

'But can nothing be done?' he said. 'Why don't you go to her and tell her that in the interests of art she must return to the stage? That is a matter which interests you more than anyone, for are you not writing an opera on the subject of Grania, and who could play Grania but she?'

He was ashamed of his curiosity, for he burned to know if Evelyn had loved Ulick as passionately as she had loved him, and he studied the young man, trying to solve the enigma of personal attraction.

'She talked so much about you,' he said, 'I know she liked you very much,' the words caused him an effort to speak, and yet it was a relief to speak them. 'She liked your opera and was enthusiastic about it. I wish you would use your influence. I think you might persuade her from that infernal convent.'

That he was afraid she would never return to the stage was the only answer Owen could get from Ulick, and as he showed no desire to continue the conversation, Owen told Ulick how Evelyn had studied the part of Leonore. 'She used to sit reading and re-reading the music, until she became possessed of the character, and when she went on the stage, every look, every gesture, every intonation was inspired.'

Owen spoke like one speaking in a dream; and as if awaking to its echo, Ulick compared Evelyn's spontaneous acting to the beautiful movement of clouds and trees, and to the growth of flowers, and turning over the leaves of an album Owen read from it an article by a German critic.

'"Her nature intended her for the representation of ideal heroines, whose love is pure, and it does not allow her to depict the violence of physical passion, and the delirium of the senses. She is an artiste of the peaks, whose feet may not descend into the plain and follow its ignominious route"; and then here, "He who has seen her as the spotless spouse of the son of Parsifal standing by the window has assisted at the mystery of the chaste soul awaiting the coming of the predestined lover," and "he who has seen her as Elizabeth ascending the hillside has felt the nostalgia of the skies awaken in his heart." Then he goes on to say that her special genius and her antecedents led her to "Fidelio" and designed her as the perfect embodiment of Leonore's soul, that pure, beautiful soul made wholly of sacrifice and love. But you never saw her as Leonore, so you can form no idea of what she really was.' But seeing that Ulick was far away, he

wondered how this ambiguous young man thought of her. He divined Ulick's thoughts very nearly, if allowance be made for the translation, which had necessarily caught something of the tone of his mind. 'He thinks of her as some legendary heroine, some abstraction, and not as a real woman to be looked upon with delight and kissed with rapture.'

So far he was right that Ulick hardly thought of her at all as a woman to be kissed, though he remembered her mouth and recognised that the senses had enabled him to understand a great deal that he would not have otherwise understood. But in him sensual remembrance was now merged in a spiritual glamour. He thought of her as an eternal loveliness in life, one of the immortal essences which, as it put off its vesture of sense and circumstance, as it passed beyond the obscuration of the sensual illusion, he could see more clearly and understand more devoutly. The difference in their present appreciation of her was merely a slight difference in form. She had become to both what the heart ponders and the imagination perceives, rather than what the flesh enjoys.

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

'Is it not amazing that a woman who could think like that should be capable of flinging up her art — the art which I gave her — on account of the preaching of that wooden-headed Mostyn?' Suddenly sitting down, he opened a drawer, and taking out her photograph, he said, 'Here she is as Leonore; but you should have seen her, this gives you no idea of her; but you have not looked at her picture, I suppose it means nothing to you — the most beautiful thing that Manet ever painted — the most beautiful in the room, and there are a great many beautiful things in the room.'

Surprised by a discriminating remark, Owen was encouraged to take Ulick round the room, and explain to him his pictures, his furniture and his china; but their thoughts were not with these things, but with Evelyn, and they were glad when they got back to their armchairs in front of her portrait.

'Yes, she must have been wonderful as Leonore,' Ulick said, waking from his reveries, and getting up from his chair, and forgetful of Owen, he began to walk up and down the room. Owen watched him, silent with anticipation, anxious to hear him tell the tale of his grief. But Ulick paced to and fro, seemingly forgetful of Owen's presence, until at last Owen's patience was over. 'She is mad beyond doubt; no one who was not would give up the stage because that wooden-headed Mostyn thought it was wrong. Don't you agree with me?' he said.

At last, in reply to Owen's importunities whether he could tell Evelyn's future, he said that she had fallen into an entanglement of that most material of all spiritualities — Catholicism, and he seemed to doubt if she would be able to set herself free for a long time. 'Monsignor's influence will not endure,' he said suddenly. 'Twice she sailed forth, and he or she who adventures twice will adventure a third time.'

'But this third time; what will the third adventure be?'

'We may know that certain things will happen, but we cannot tell how they will happen. After Bran returned from the islands of many delights he was warned that if he set foot on earthly shores he would be turned to dust, so he sailed the ship along the coast of his native land, but did not leave the ship.'

When Ulick had gone Owen sat thinking, wondering what he had meant by Bran who had sailed the ship close to the shore but had not dared to leave the ship. The first adventure was, as Ulick had put it, in quest of earthly experience; the second was in quest of spiritual peace — what would the third be? But it was past two o'clock, and still conjecturing what the third would be he went to bed. He wished these evenings to happen frequently. He was weary of Society, of shooting and hunting and all the pleasures of his class, and whenever he had an evening to spare he sent his valet to Bloomsbury with a note asking Ulick if he would dine with him.

But Ulick could not be persuaded after the third dinner to accept another. Owen strove to shake himself free of his habitual thought and to get nearer to Ulick's. But he had to speak of his shooting, and his mistresses and the parties he went to, and Ulick, when he walked home the third evening from Berkeley Square, understood the aversion which had awaked in Evelyn for the life of things — even the monastery seemed to him to be a welcome refuge from the futility of Berkeley Square.

LV

One day Owen's cabman took a short cut through a slum. Owen hated the way, and as he was about to say so he saw a tall figure in brown holland whom he believed to be Evelyn. He called to her and put up his stick; but before the driver could stop his horse she had passed through a bare door — a grim-looking place, a sort of workshop or factory! But where Evelyn had gone he must follow. The door was opened at once, and he discovered her among a swarm of children. Children swarmed on the staircase — he thought he must be in a school. Raising his voice above the din, he expressed surprise at finding her in such a place; and no sooner had he spoken than he regretted his words, fearing he had displeased her. But she gave him her address, and told him if he would go there she would be with him in about half an hour.

And in the full enjoyment of the accident which had unexpectedly befallen him, he wondered what the flat was like, he thought how she would come into the room, and how their long talk would begin. He was driving along the Bayswater Road, and the world seemed throbbing like his heart; a soft wind carried the foliage to and fro, and the deep blue sky seemed brimmed with love like his heart. The cabman stopped before a new cut stone doorway, and in the lift his excitement increased — first floor, second floor, third, fourth. The lift man pointed out the door. The common brass knocker seemed trivial and unworthy of her. Was Merat still with her? She was, and he would learn from Merat all about Evelyn — if she were as religious as ever — if there were any hope of her going back to the stage; he was anxious to know whom she saw and how she spent her time. But first of all he had to tell where he had met her.

Merat knew that Evelyn had gone to Kelsey Row to arrange about a day in the country for some school children; but she was unable to imagine the accident which had brought Sir Owen to such a slum, and he listened to Merat's tale of her mistress's foolhardiness in going to such places.

Fleas had come back with her, and nastier things, and she feared lest mademoiselle should one day catch a dangerous disease.

'Such a woman as she is, Merat. Her voice and her talent! I don't say I don't admire goodness, but there are others who could do that kind of work better than she.'

He sat with his long legs crossed and his hands clasped, hearing that she went to Mass every morning and that there were few afternoons she did not go to Benediction. All her old friends had dropped away, there was only one she cared to see how — Mademoiselle Helbrun, and Mademoiselle Helbrun was seldom in London.

'But where does she dine?'

'Here, Sir Owen.'

'Alone?'

'Yes, Sir Owen.'

'And she spends all her evenings here, alone?'

'Yes, here, Sir Owen, reading in that chair or writing at that little table. She spends hours and hours quite contented, writing.'

'Does she not see Mr Ulick Dean?'

'Mr Dean comes occasionally to see mademoiselle, but — '

'But what, Merat?'

'Mademoiselle is very much changed, Sir Owen, and Mr Dean knows it, and he says nothing that clashes with her opinions. You understand, Sir Owen; I am sure mademoiselle would like me to speak straightforwardly to you. What I mean is that the opera singer is quite dead in mademoiselle,'

'You think she will never go back to the stage?'

'I don't think so, Sir Owen; it would not be natural after all she has been through.'

'Do you think she will marry?'

'I could not say, Sir Owen.'

'Not Mr Dean?'

Merat shook her head.

'Then what do you think will be the end — there must be an end — the convent?'

'Mademoiselle goes every week to the convent, and spends from Saturday to Monday there.'

'Good heavens!'

He got out of his armchair and walked into the small hall, and, looking round, he wondered how she could live in such discomfort; and he asked Merat if he might see the dining-room.

'This is not what we are used to, is it, Merat? Not quite up to the level of Park Lane.'

They continued to deplore the change that had come over Evelyn. They exaggerated their disapproval in the hope of convincing themselves that they were right and she was wrong, that she was a poor misguided person, worthy of their pity, but they only succeeded in convincing themselves superficially. Even while he insisted on her folly, Owen was aware of something great and noble, and the image which did not define itself in his mind, but passed at the back of it, was of a tall tree which had grown above the original scrub.

Suddenly they heard her latch-key in the door, and when she came into the room he sat looking at her, trying to puzzle out the enigma of the change which, in spite of himself, he could not but admire. She was not cleverer than before, nor more beautiful, but she had gained in character, and he could not hide from himself that her present self was superior to her former self, that she was nearer to the truths of life than when she used to act on the stage.

'I don't think you would ever have understood my love of my poor people if you had not met me in that slum; seeing me there explained more than any amount of conversation.'

He swallowed a dryness out of his throat and said it was more than a year since he had seen her; he spoke of their parting at Thornton Grange, one morning among ruined flowers and blown leaves. That sudden change was more difficult to understand than this gradual change which had come over her between midnight and noon. They had stood talking together the night before, an amorous mood had grown up in her, and he had expected her to allow him to go to her room. And he had never understood why she had not come — why she was so different the next morning.

He waited for her to answer, and to avoid answering, she asked him where he had been. She had heard he had been round the world, and he told her of the silent Arabs passing from one side of the street to the other seeking the shade, and he found it interesting to tell her of his cry when he got to Egypt, — 'Give me a drink of clean water.'

She asked him where he had gone when he left Egypt, and he entered into an account of his travels in Mesopotamia, but he had hardly reached the brick mounds of Babylon when he broke down — he could not talk to her of Mesopotamia, nor of Japan nor America. These places were but shadows, hardly more rememberable than shadows. She was his consciousness of life, he

said, and he took her hand; and withdrawing her hand, she told him her present plan was to enter the convent as a postulant so that she might sing every day at Benediction. She hoped to attract attention to the convent, and when its necessities became known, some pious Catholic would come forward and pay the mortgages. Her concert tour had not been a success; she might lose money in a second tour; then the nuns would be dispersed, the house and the chapel would be pulled down, and the trees would be cut, and rows of stiff stucco villas would overlook the Common.

'Yes, I should like to be a nun,' she said, and her face became suddenly absorbed; 'but I am afraid I have not a vocation.'

'And when your postulancy is over you will be a novice — and when your noviceship is over you will pass out of my sight for ever. I shall never see you again; it will be the same as if you were dead.'

She stood looking at him, and he was conscious of the mystery of her character; it seemed to float round her as she sat on the sofa looking at him. He grew frightened — and in the nervous silence he studied the outline of the freckled face.

He had always recognised himself a little in the long straight nose and in the blonde skin, and one of her attractions for him was a curious sense of some mystic kinship of blood which he could not explain, and from which he could not disentangle himself. It was only in those intense, almost nervous eyes that he did not discover himself. He traced some fancied similarity in the deflecting line of her chin and in her thin hands. And they were alike in their feverish desire of life. She had grasped the elusive shadow with the same obstinate eagerness; and in their hearts was the same passionate melancholy. They lived for the sake of the memory of life rather than for life itself.

'I see,' he said, 'that all this while the convent has been drawing you nearer — absorbing you. You think I don't understand, but I understand all that concerns you. Every time you go there the spell upon you is a little stronger; is not that so?'

'Yes, I think it is. I have been drawn into love of the convent, and I am conscious of its influence and yield to it; the aspect of the nuns — their quiet eyes and their tranquil life — their minds always fixed on one thing — attract me, and, as you say, I am drawn nearer each time.'

'But you once liked the strong, the self-willed — now you seem to like the weak who surrender, not daring to continue the struggle.'

‘Yes, I think that is so. It is now the weak who attract me. I have changed in everything. The things that interested me once interest me no longer. Everything is different, that is what you do not seem to understand. You have changed in nothing.’

‘Yes, I do understand, but I can’t believe that our lives are divided. Think, Evelyn, of the years and years we have been together. Never to see you again — to know you live, yet never to see you! ’

‘You have not seen me for a year, and you would have lived on just the same if we had not happened to meet in that slum.’

‘I went away determined to forget you, Evelyn, but absence has only made you dearer to me. You see Ulick, and Ulick was your lover and you have not sent him away.'

'Ulick is not my lover now.’

‘That is no consolation,' he exclaimed passionately; 'better Ulick a thousand times than the convent.’

It was the convent he dreaded and hated, and when the strain of argument became intense, when she answered, ‘It is impossible to live with those who hold different ideas; there is neither happiness nor comfort in such relations,' he looked at her despairingly, not able to utter a word, and in pity for him she turned the conversation from herself, and he talked mechanically of indifferent things, hardly aware of what he said; words were as a veil behind which calamity hid itself for a while.

'But, Evelyn, you cannot become a nun; nature forbids it,' he said, starting from his chair.

'How is that?’

'Have you no thought for your father?’

‘You mean that I should go to live with him.’

'Of course.’

He told how he had found her father sitting at his lonely dinner.

‘I lived with my father all this winter; and I heard of nothing but music all the time I was there.’

‘And has music no longer any interest for you? Do none of your old friends interest you? Lady Ascott?’

‘I hope I remember them kindly; they were kind to me, as they understood kindness, and they liked me.’

‘As they understand liking,' he said, starting to his feet.

‘I am sorry, Owen.’

‘Your clear duty is by your father’s side; any priest will tell you that. There is no use having a religion and not acting up to it. What are you laughing at?’

‘Only that it seems odd to hear you telling me my duty is towards my father.’

He sat and argued this point with her for a long while, reminding her and forcing her to admit that she had avoided marriage from the first.

He said the same things over again — things he had said a hundred times before, and when he had said them he felt it would have been better if he had said nothing.

‘I must send you away, Owen.'

‘Well,' he said at the door, 'I may never see you again, Evelyn. But remember truth is truth from whomever it comes. Monsignor will tell you that you cannot leave your father in his old age.’

LVI

The truth had come to her from a strange side, but it does not matter from what side the truth comes so long as it is the truth. She had neglected her father during the last year, and now she was planning to leave him for three, four or six months. But he did not seem to care whether she came or stayed away. His ideas seemed to fill his life completely — there seemed no place for her in it. When she went to see him, he was glad to see her, but he never seemed to want her; and Wimbledon was but a few miles from Dulwich; if he wanted her he would be able to go to see her, and she intended to get him a good servant who would look after him and see that he had his meals regularly. But now Owen had awakened a scruple in her, and she could not deny to herself that her place was by her father's side. Yet, to abandon the poor nuns seemed cruel, and she thought she might lay the matter before her father — he alone could say whether he wanted her, and if he did not want her she would be wasted. But he would say he did not want her; he would let her go to the convent because he would not thwart her wishes. Owen had challenged her to lay the matter before Monsignor, and Owen was right; and she smiled as she sat writing to the priest. That Owen and Monsignor should agree on one subject amused her not a little. Next day she went to Monsignor.

She told him that the Prioress had said she would not be able to endure the strain of staying with them as a visitor; and as she would not say that she intended to become a nun, the Prioress had hesitated whether she could accept her under such conditions. To make the Prioress's way a little easier, she had said that her constant visits to the Wimbledon convent had left no doubt in her mind that true spiritual elevation can only be attained through the cloister. She had admitted that she would like to become a nun if she could realise the ideal which some three or four in the convent seemed to her to have realised — the Prioress, Sister Mary John and Mother Hilda. She knew the nuns very well by this time, and these were the only ones who had reached a high degree of spiritual perfection. The larger number were pious women who had accepted the cloister from commonplace motives. Some had accepted it in order to escape from freedom — to many freedom is irksome and a rule of life a necessity; some few, no doubt, had entered the convent from disappointment.

It seemed strange to Monsignor that the Prioress should accept her as a postulant, knowing that she did not intend to stay in the convent; and Evelyn had to admit that she had said she hoped that six months in the convent would discover a vocation in her.

'And if you find you have a vocation you will leave your father for ever?'

Monsignor spoke of the duty of children towards their parents, and of the age of Mr Innes, and he pointed out that his interest in artistic things rendered him incapable of dealing with the

practical affairs of life. He laid stress on the fact that if she were to leave her father and anything were to happen to him she would never be able to forgive herself, nor did he think she would find in the convent any nobler mission than she would find waiting for her in Dulwich. He said that if the Prioress had consented to relax the rule, as she had been advised, and had built a laundry, these monetary difficulties would not have arisen, and Evelyn, whose sympathies were all with the contemplative orders, gathered up her courage and spoke of Martha and Mary; Mary had been content to worship at the feet of Christ; but Martha had fussed about external things, and these, though intended to give him honour, were not so valuable to him as the mere loving worship of Mary. Christ himself had said that Mary had chosen the better part, and was not this a vindication of the contemplative orders? Monsignor answered that Christ had mixed with the publicans and Pharisees.

She had put her case in his hands, and was going to abide by his decision. She would go to her father, live with him, attend upon him, do all that a daughter should do. She had not realised that her postulancy could not have been more than an experiment. Monsignor had made this clear to her; and, as if to reward her for her obedience to him, she found a letter from her father on her table, asking her to go to the British Museum to copy some music. She had had nothing to do for a long time, and it was a pleasure to spend the morning in the Museum; and she went to Dulwich in the afternoon, delighted with her transcriptions.

And while he praised her copying she waited for an opportunity to tell him she was giving up her flat and coming to live with him.

He played the bar twice over, and asked if she had copied it correctly. Yes, she was sure she had copied it correctly.

'I was beginning to fear that your artistic life was dead, but it will come back to you. I remember the time when a piece of music like this would have interested you. Did it bore you to copy it?'

'I liked to copy it because I was copying it for you. I can see that it reflects a time when men's lives must have been very beautiful.'

Her father was sixty years of age, and he might live until he was eighty. So for twenty years she would play the old music and sing Elizabethan songs; and this was going to be her life, however unlike herself it might seem.

The absurd dish of hard mutton which her father could not eat and forgot to complain about, helped her to understand that the simple duty of seeing he had wholesome food was her duty before all other duties — her supposed duties towards art, and her duty towards the nuns, the duty she had lately invented for herself. Ulick came in after dinner, and she wondered how he

could drink the thick mixture which the servant put on the table, calling it coffee. They did not waste much time over it. Ulick had brought part of his second act with him, and she was asked to sing it. 'Manuscript music at sight,' she said, and though it was Ulick's music she could feel no interest in it. Her thoughts were often carried back to the nuns and she forgot her cue. Her inattention annoyed her father, and she wondered what he and Ulick were arguing about so hotly — about a dramatic situation, she thought, and all the while she sat thinking what Ulick would say when she told him that she had been intending to enter a convent for six months. She remembered how sympathetic he had been when he returned from Ireland; she could not think of him otherwise than as sympathetic; but the monastic ideal conflicted as much with his ideas as it did with Owen's tastes.

They were going back to London together, and on the way back she would tell him.

'I cannot wait another minute,' she said, interrupting the conversation, 'I shall miss my last train.' Mr Innes wished her to stay, but she felt she must confide to Ulick her decision to live with her father and leave the convent to the mercy of Providence.

They hurried away; and he felt she had something to confide to him, and she told him the moment they were outside what had happened.

He took her hands, and he held them, but he held them so gently and looked at her so fondly that she felt his gentleness to be the most exquisite thing in the world.

'Ulick, you did not hear me; I said I was sorry to abandon the nuns, I'm going to live with father.'

'You will go to your father for a while; you will do all you can to live with him, but something is drawing you from him, Evelyn; your life is not with him, and we cannot live except where our life is.'

He addressed her earnestly about her soul, saying that the grey pieties of the cloister could not enclose all there is of God on earth for her. And becoming suddenly impassioned, he spoke with scorn of those who renounce a great deal in order to gain a little; and he told her that she had been appointed to express spiritual truths in art, and that she had done this with extraordinary power and purity, and that she made a great mistake in forsaking the higher medium for the lower.

He asked her why she believed that God was more in the host on the altar than in the cup of this great lily, and leaning over a pretty paling they held the flower in their hands. She might have answered, and she was minded to answer, that if we believe God is everywhere we hardly

believe that he is anywhere. But she refrained from argument, knowing it to be useless, and she liked to hear him, even when she did not agree with him, and with his wide grey eyes looking at her earnestly, he spoke of the great joy there is in flinging off the fear of creeds and living in our spiritual instincts and in our bodily instincts; and he asked her if she did not think she could serve God by tendance on flowers, and by tendernesses to the beasts in the fields and the beasts by the hearth.

She wished he would forget the convent, she wished to forget it herself; it were better to do so since she could never enter it. She was thinking now of the beauty of the night, and of him, and of his ideas, which, though they were not hers, were near enough to her to be appreciated by her; for what Ulick said might easily have been said by Saint Francis d'Assisi.

As they walked along the moonlit road a little of his music came back to her, and she tried to remember it, but it was hardly rememberable. But it pleased him to hear her try to remember it, it pleased them to sit on a bench and try to read the score by the light of the moon. The blossoming branches above them showered white dust upon the manuscript in their hands.

Art was to Ulick what it had become to Evelyn, a means rather than an end, and seeing her soul in peril he could not talk to her of his music, obsessed as his imagination was by the thought that she was going to lose her soul in abstinences and rituals.

'I think you would sooner see me dead, Ulick, than in a convent.'

'Many times; there is something unspeakably painful in the death of a soul.'

'I know what you mean, that piety is not sufficient. Many nuns lose themselves in mechanical pieties.'

'Since life has been given to us it is given to us for acceptance and not for refusal. You will lose your soul, Evelyn, by stripping yourself of your womanhood which God gave you to serve Him with, and by renouncing your art which was given you that you might reveal Him to others. You will lose your soul by seeking God in prayerbooks rather than in the stars, and by seeking Him in scrolls rather than in the sunset and in the morning winds. The convent is an unspeakable degradation of self, and therefore a degradation of God. Nothing fills me with such terror as the convent.'

She tried to speak to him. of his music, but he only listened for a moment.

'Music,' he said, 'is only a medium, the soul is the important thing.'

To keep her soul he said she must fly from the city where men lose their souls in the rituals of materialism. He must go with her to the pure country, to the woods and to the places where the invisible ones whom the Druids knew ceaselessly ascend and descend from earth to heaven, and heaven to earth, in flame-coloured spirals. He told her he knew of a house by a lake shore, and there they might live in communion with Nature, and in the fading lights, and in the quiet hollows of the woods she would learn more of God than she could in the convent. In that house they would live, and their child, if the Gods gave them one, would unfold among the influences of music and love and long traditions.

‘Wandering in the woods and underneath the boughs we shall know that the great immortal presences are by us, and the peace they instil into our hearts will be the proof that they applaud our flight from priests and creeds.’

Every star that the eye can see was visible that night, and the interspaces were filled with a pale bloom, the light of stars so distant that their light is but a milky whiteness on the sky.

Nothing had been said for some while, and Ulick wondered if what he had said had influenced her in the least, and he watched for some sign; but she sat without speaking, her eyes fixed on the sky, lost in contemplation of the extraordinary diagram extending into space without end. Her thoughts returned suddenly from the infinite space, and she said, —

'I shall always consider, Ulick, that the convent ideal is the highest, and that they are wisest who choose it.’

'But you give no reason,' he answered.

‘Everything is faith in the end,' she said; ‘all things come to be matters of faith.’

They had missed their last train, and she was glad of it. She said she would not go back to Dowlands, for on this dry, windless night she would enjoy the long walk under the stars, and he must go on telling her his dreams, his ideas, and his visions.

LVII

One morning at the end of the summer her father came to her with a letter in his hand.

‘It is from Rome. You will never guess what it is about. It is from the Pope asking me to go to Rome to reform the singing of the papal choir.’

They sat down to consider the matter, and when everything had been said they talked it all over again. The invitation had come through Monsignor; no one else believed in the reformation of ecclesiastical art, no one else cared.

Walking to and fro, sometimes stopping to look out of the window, Mr Innes spoke of the opposition his ideas would meet with in Rome. But he would be given a free hand, otherwise what would be the use of bringing him all the way from London?

'When do you go to Rome?’

'Go? Well, I suppose at once.’

He had read no more than the first page of the Cardinal’s letter, and appeared unable to collect his thoughts sufficiently to read the somewhat difficult handwriting. Evelyn took the letter out of his hand, and when she read that it was not necessary for him to go to Rome before the autumn a shade of disappointment passed over his face; he would have preferred that the Cardinal had said that he must be in Rome in forty-eight hours.

Then, as if ashamed of his egoism, he asked her when she was going back to the stage. The naveté of the question raised a smile to her lips, and he said, —

'Oh, I know you won’t go back to the stage; but I met Hermann Goetze the other day, and he said he would engage you, that is why I asked.' And he stood looking at her, his thoughts divided between her and his appointment.

‘Yes, father dear, I feel I am a great failure, and I am sure I wish I were different; but you see one can’t change.’

She stood thinking of the day she had told him she was going away with Owen. They were nearer to each other then than now; and his joy at his appointment reminded her of her delight the day Madame Savelli had told her she had a beautiful voice.

‘But, Evelyn, what about the American tour? You could easily make the money the nuns need in America.’

'I should like to go to Rome with you, dear.’

‘Well that would be very nice, and I might give some concerts of the old music in Rome.’

‘We must never be separated again, and I shall be able to help you with your music.’

He seemed to be in Rome already; she could read in his face that he was thinking of the choir that awaited the rule of his baton. And very soon he began to imagine strange intrigues, conspiracies of cardinals to keep him from coming to Rome.

‘But, Evelyn, there is no reason why we should do the journey together; there is this house to be sold, and you will have to get rid of your flat. Somebody must be here to look after things; I cannot stay, I must be in Rome next week. Besides, I am going to stay in Rome with the friars. You would not like to stay in an hotel alone, and it would be expensive. Far better to wait until I find rooms for you. You are in no hurry to get to Rome, I suppose? The autumn is the better time — early spring the best time of all. But why do you stand looking at me? You are afraid you will be lonely? Then come with me; we can put this business into the hands of an agent.’

She tried to put back her joy but her heart was overflowing. She was going to the convent for a while. Her escape had come about of itself, and it pleased her to look upon her father’s appointment as miraculous. She could not find a protest, her lips seemed sealed, to see him was to know that he was determined to go to Rome, and at once; and she tried to silence her conscience by packing his clothes, by arranging his journey for him, by giving him a list of the places where he might dine and breakfast, and where he might break the journey if he pleased. He would have to go straight through on account of the harpsichord, and she was afraid the carriage of it before he reached Rome would nearly equal the price of the instrument.

He superintended the packing of his viols and lutes, but if it had not been for her care he might have forgotten his portmanteau. She packed it herself and she saw that it was labelled, while he looked after the musical part of his luggage.

Having told him about Avignon, she looked up and down the platform, and thought she had forgotten nothing; and while she told him that each case had been carefully labelled, the train began to steam out of the station. She might have spoken to the guard. But he only went as far as Dover. The guard to speak to was the guard of the train from Paris to Avignon. She knew the length of the journey, and her father had promised to take a sleeping-car.

Rome is so beautiful in the autumn, and Owen had only shown her pagan Rome; there was also a Christian Rome, and she began to consider her own journey there. She was bringing with her all her father's books, and they would weigh a great deal, and some silver and pictures. Almost the last words he had spoken were about her mother's picture, and thinking of them, she remembered his letter to Owen Asher six years ago: —

'I will arrive about nine with the big harpsichord and Evelyn.'

She liked him none the less for his absorption in his art; she envied him rather, and she went to Dowlands thinking of the great case the harpsichord was packed in and the difficulties that would arise at every frontier town. It had been packed in the music-room, and a charwoman was sweeping the litter away when Evelyn entered. She spoke a few words to the woman and walked through the empty rooms thinking of the passing of Dowlands. Dowlands had played quite a little part in the history of art; it had been very individual, and some day she thought someone would write its history. It would be a very interesting history — her father, her mother and herself. She threw the windows open and let in the air. These were her mother's classrooms, and she remembered how she used to sit on the stairs listening to the singing, and how pleased her mother had been one day when she said, though she was only four at the time, 'But, mother, that lady can't sing at all.' A shelf in the store-room reminded her of the time when she used to wonder if anyone had ever eaten as many apples as she wanted to eat, and a patch in an old brocaded chair of her mother's maid — a discreet woman who never made any definite statement, but who was full of insinuations.

She found two Chelsea figures which she had not seen for many years in a forgotten corner, and she tried to remember if the old servant had ever mentioned them to her. The shepherdess had lost an arm, and the bower the shepherd stood in was also a little broken; perhaps that was why they had been put away in the storeroom. They were very pretty figures, but she would not take them to Rome. Her father had evidently had them put away.

She suddenly discovered a book which they had been looking for for many years, a book by Morley on the singing of the plain chant; and the number of pictures dismayed her. Every picture represented a musician playing some sort of old instrument, and so long as these were correctly drawn Mr Innes's artistic taste was satisfied. He had given her explicit instructions regarding all these pictures, indeed for some time he had been uncertain if he would not take them with him. But Evelyn had at length dissuaded him by exaggerating the cost, and by promising not to forget anything.

The portrait of our father or our mother is a sort of crystal ball into which we look in the hope of discovering our destiny, and Evelyn looked a long while on her mother's cold and resolute face. It was exactly as she remembered her — there was the thin wide mouth, there were the cold

eyes, and she could hear the smooth, even voice, and she remembered how she had often wondered why so many men had been in love with her mother. Her mother had always seemed to her stern and cold, the opposite to what she thought she was herself, though sometimes she fancied she was a little cold. It was from her mother she had got her voice — maybe her temperament.

She turned away from the portrait, perplexed, and stood listening to the woman who was sweeping; and feeling she must talk to someone, she told her what she was to say to the auctioneer who would call next morning.

Most of her furniture had been sold at Christies, and the few things that were left she had resolved to sell. She knew how little influence circumstance has on the mind — nevertheless, she wished to rid herself of everything that reminded her of her dead life. She had thought of taking her piano to the convent; it was a beautiful instrument and the nuns would be glad of it, but she could not bring herself to take it with her. Merat came with a heap of papers, and said, —

'Will you look through these, mademoiselle, and see if they can be destroyed?'

She glanced at them and threw them into the grate, and there was danger of the kitchen chimney catching fire, so great was the flare of the papers.

It was sad to think that she would never wear any pretty underclothes again, nor any evening dresses. One of her stage dresses remained, and Merat asked for it, saying, 'Give me this one, mademoiselle; I saw you wear it in "Lohengrin."' Merat said she would keep the dress Evelyn had worn at Owen Asher's ball two years ago. She was more than kind — she was an affectionate human being, and Evelyn was much touched.

She had worn this hat the last time she had walked with Owen in the Park, and she remembered having worn the one with the blue feather the evening she and Owen had stood looking across the Long Water. Merat could not think how the feather had got broken. There was a hat she had not worn for many years; it took her back to St Petersburg, to one long summer evening on a hilltop overlooking the Neva. She had met a young man there by appointment; they had sat looking at the distant shipping, and he had admired this hat, and she could not think why she had never worn it again.

One day a man came to buy her clothes. He offered ten shillings apiece for her dresses. Merat protested, and he produced a sack and threw her dresses in without even thinking of rolling them up.

Three days after her furniture, her books and her china were sold by auction. Ulick bought an inkstand and a score of 'Parsifal,' and a china bowl. She could see he was very much moved, and when the Jews began to bid for her writing-table, he said, 'Why should we stay here? The sun is shining, let us go into the Park.'

When they returned the workmen were removing the furniture, and Evelyn remembered the time had come when they must say good-bye.

'Merat will call me a hansom. I must get to the convent before five.'

Merat came downstairs with a parasol; but parasols were not conventual, and Merat said she would keep it till mademoiselle came out of the convent, for Merat had agreed to go into another situation only upon the condition that she might return to Evelyn when she came out of the convent.

She waved her hand to Ulick, and he seemed so sorry for her that it seemed very harsh for her to be glad, yet she was glad. Providence was deciding for her. Sooner or later she would be a nun. Now that she was on her way to the convent she was quite happy.

She wished that the next few days were over. Then she would have settled down in her work, and she began to think of the music she would sing, and of the pieces which would be most popular.

LVIII

During the winter and spring she had been kept waiting many times in the convent parlour, but this time the Prioress did not keep her waiting. She passed suddenly into the room, and taking Evelyn's hand in hers, kissed her, in convent fashion, on both cheeks.

'So you have really come to us, Evelyn,' she said, 'you are really going to be one of my children?'

'Well, I have come to try, Reverend Mother.'

'But tell me, Evelyn,' said the little old nun, laying her hand on Evelyn's knee, and looking straight into her face, 'are you quite happy at coming?'

'Yes, I am quite happy, for I know that I am doing what I was appointed to do, and there is always happiness in doing that. I'm not frightened as I used to be. I lived in a state of fear, but to-day I don't feel afraid, though I may be coming here for good.'

'Indeed, I hope you are; and I may tell you I never wished any postulant to succeed as I wish you to.'

'Dear Reverend Mother, you are much too kind to me, I shall never deserve all your kindness; but a vocation is such a mysterious thing. I have come here because I feel that God has sent me to help you and — well, because I feel that outside the convent there is nothing to hold on to.

She wondered at her own instability of character, and this very instability in the next moment seemed to her like a more elaborate design of life than she had imagined. Looking down the road which had brought her to the present moment of her life, many things which had seemed devious and tangled now seemed simple and plain. She must, just as the Reverend Mother said, put herself into the hands of God; and she listened, deeply interested, for the Prioress said that very often those who least desired a vocation were irresistibly called to a religious life.

The old nun spoke out of the remembrance of a long life lived and meditated. Her pale blue eyes were fixed on Evelyn, and they looked so weary with wisdom that Evelyn watched them, striving to read in them the secret, the death of some loved one; and in striving to pierce the enigma she felt herself drawn into a new influence. The sensation was not unknown to her, and she remembered suddenly Lady Duckle and the French café.

‘You must not allow yourself, my dear child, to think that you will not succeed. We shall all pray for you, and I feel that the will of Heaven is that you should succeed.’

Mother Hilda and Mother Philippa came in; and they, too, kissed her affectionately, and their manner showed her that they knew she had decided to enter the novitiate; they treated her as a member of the community, but she could see they were not of one mind. The Prioress and Mother Philippa had been in favour of admitting her; Mother Hilda seemed a little doubtful.

That very morning Mother Hilda had asked if it were wise to admit a girl into the novitiate who confessed that she was entering the religious life somewhat as an experiment. Even with all that was at. stake, was not the risk too great? Might not Miss Innes's presence have a demoralising effect on the other novices — simple, pious girls with no knowledge of the world? And what good would her money be to them if the spirit of the house were to suffer? But her scruples had been overborne by the Prioress, and her objection that she would find Evelyn’s moods very hard to understand was not entertained by the Prioress.

The Prioress was aware of her personal influence over others, and she did not believe that she might fail to mould Evelyn according to her idea. Mother Philippa's motherly heart had been won by the singer the first time they had walked together up and down St Peters Path. Her perception of Evelyn’s past life was less clear than Mother Hilda’s, but she divined a lonely soul, and had gone forth to meet her on the road, as it were; and it was characteristic of her to think that all things came right in the end. Moreover, they would pray, and her regret, if she had a regret, was that her pleasant little chats with Evelyn in the parlour must now come to an end; and she thought of the rare opportunities she would have of talking to her during her noviceship. All they were thinking about her seemed afloat in the manner of the three nuns as they gathered round their new Sister. Mother Hilda diffident, Mother Philippa expansive, and the Prioress confident in the strength of her wisdom.

'So you have decided to enter the religious life? Mother Hilda asked, with a note of insistence in her quiet voice.

‘I have come to try,' Evelyn said, ‘and I am going to stay, if my father does not call me to Rome.'

‘I have not told you,' said Mother Philippa, 'how delighted I am that you have come. I always believed you would come, didn’t I, Reverend Mother? and I began to pray for it long before anyone else. I seemed to see the hand of Providence in your coming here. We shall have your beautiful voice to sing for us every day at Benediction. But we must not pay you compliments now you are going to be a nun. Do have some cake, my dear. You look tired after your long drive;' and the kind old nun began fussing round the tea things.

Suddenly it seemed that there was nothing more to say, and the Prioress put the question to Evelyn if she would prefer to be a visitor until to-morrow, or to go into the novitiate at once. Evelyn cried impulsively that she would like to begin at once, and the Reverend Mother asked Mother Hilda to take her charge to her cell.

'And, Mother Philippa, will you see that Evelyn's box is sent upstairs at once? You will have just time, Evelyn, to get into your dress and veil before supper; it is half-past five.'

She followed Mother Hilda into the hall, and through the swing door, past which she had never been, and down the short broad corridor, out of which the main rooms of the ground floor opened.

That is the refectory,' Mother Hilda said; and Evelyn saw the long narrow tables and tin plates; 'and this,' Mother Hilda added, turning to a little winding staircase built in an angle of the passage, 'is the way to the novitiate.'

At the top of the staircase there was a short passage, with a door at the further end, and several doors on either side. They were of polished pine, and not of mahogany, and she saw that now they had left the Georgian house and that this was the new wing.

'That is the novitiate at the end of the passage, and these are the novices'cells. You are to be next to me.'

The little narrow iron bedstead, without curtains and covered with a check cotton counterpane, nearly filled the space, and there was nothing else in the room save a wooden chair, a small washstand near the window, with a cupboard underneath. It was in this cupboard she would keep her clothes. The colourless, distempered walls were bare save for the crucifix over the bed, and the bare window did not look over the garden and the Surrey hills but northward towards a tall bank of trees, and the apse of the church partly intercepted the view.

Reading in her silence some inward disappointment, Mother Hilda thought she had better give Evelyn something to do at once.

'Don't you think, Evelyn, you had better unpack your things? Shall I help you?'

Thank you; but I have only a few things, just what you told me. The greater part of my box is full of music.'

She unfolded her little convent trousseau before the eyes of the Mother Mistress. Her calico nightdress, so plain that she had had to have it made for her; and Merat had nearly wept at the

idea of mademoiselle wearing anything so coarse. Her petticoats were frill-less, but on unpacking her black merino dress she discovered that Merat at the last moment had added dainty little velvet cuffs, and Evelyn, in her desire to immolate her vanity on the very threshold of the convent, was genuinely vexed.

‘Oh, Mother, I expressly told Merat to make the sleeves quite plain, but I can take the cuffs off in an instant.’

‘They are not usual, but there is no necessity for taking them off.’

'Oh, yes, but I must take them off,' and in a moment she had found a pair of scissors, and cut through the stitches. 'It is entirely my maid’s fault. How could she have been so stupid?’

The very newness of her plain linen collars made them seem out of place, but Mother Hilda did not seem to think there was anything amiss, and left Evelyn to change her dress, promising to return for her in a few minutes.

She changed her dress almost gaily, thinking that she had not come to the convent for ever, only till her father wanted her — that would be in three months, maybe six, and in that time she hoped her mission would be accomplished. And it was a very demure Evelyn, in her straight black gown, and her dark gold hair neatly brushed back off her face, who was waiting for Mother Hilda when she returned, bringing with her a white cap and black veil, and a prim little black cashmere cape.

‘Will you come with me to dear Mother’s room?' said the Novice Mistress; ‘she always gives the postulants the cap and veil herself. It is the outward sign that they are admitted as aspirants to the religious life.’

The Prioress’s room was on the ground floor, and its long French windows opened on to the terrace walk. Once no doubt it had been a boudoir; and catching sight of the curiously carved scrolls on the tall wooden mantelpiece, Evelyn thought of the women who had sat there dreaming of their lovers, and waiting for them. Now it was the workroom of a busy woman. The crowded writing-table, on which stood a beautiful crucifix in yellow ivory, occupied the space by the window, and papers and tin boxes were piled in one corner. There was no carpet, and the one armchair was worn and shabby. There were flowers in vases and bowls, and in a large cage canaries uttered their piercing songs.

'I like your room, Reverend Mother; will you let me come and see you here sometimes now I am a nun? ’

‘This is where I do all my scolding; perhaps you won’t like it when you are sent for,' said the Prioress, but she smiled at Evelyn when she said it, and the words lost their severity. 'Now we must hide all this fair hair under a little cap.’

Evelyn knelt in front of the Prioress, so that the little old nun could put the white cap on her head, and pin the black veil over it. When she had done this, she drew Evelyn to her and kissed her.

'Now you look like my own child, with all your worldly vanities hidden away. I believe Monsignor Mostyn would hardly know his penitent in her new dress. And now,' she went on, 'let us go to the chapel together and thank our dear Lord that He has brought you to His feet. Give me your arm, my dear child, I am not very strong to-day.’

She laid a faint hand on Evelyn’s arm, and they walked slowly down the corridor to the door leading to the nuns' choir, and Evelyn was conscious of a sudden new growth of affection for this frail old woman whose spirit stood undaunted amid much adversity. She followed the nun into the choir of the church, and found herself for the first time on the inner side of the high iron grille. The Prioress knelt in her stall, and Evelyn remained kneeling on the floor beside her, and those few moments of silent prayer seemed to unite the two women closely in the purpose which had brought them together.

Mother Hilda had explained to Evelyn that the community assembled for supper immediately after the Angelus. All the customs were unknown to her, and more nervous than she had ever felt before, she placed herself at the head of the procession next to a giggling novice. The refectory doors were thrown open, the Mother Prioress began the processional psalm in Latin, the Sisters repeated the alternate verses. Evelyn felt the novice nudge her, and they began to walk slowly towards the refectory, their eyes fixed on the ground. In the middle of the long room Evelyn and the novice stopped and bowed to the great crucifix which hung between the windows over the table of the Superior. Then they placed themselves in front of one of the tables at the lower end of the room; they were followed by the rest of the novices; the lay Sisters occupied a similar position opposite; the upper portions of the table were reserved for the choir Sisters, and the places of the three Superiors were in front of the table at the top of the room. The Mother Prioress then recited the larger portion of the grace. There were responses and versicles, and these were repeated by the Sisters. The opening sentence of the *paternoster* was spoken by the Prioress, and it was continued in silence by all, and at the Gloria all bowed their heads.

Then one of the Sisters slipped out of her place, and kneeling before the Prioress murmured a few Latin words, to which was given a Latin reply; she then went to a high reading desk in the corner by the Superior’s table and read aloud a few verses from Holy Scripture. When the

reader had finished the whole community responded *Deo gratias*; and all went to their places in silence, the novices passing this time in front of Evelyn. She found herself at the bottom of the long wooden bench, behind the polished oak table.

In each place there was an enamelled plate and a check blue and white napkin, and a large china mug. Two Sisters went round with cans in their hands, and filled every mug with hot, weak, sugary tea. A large platter piled high with slices of bread and butter was passed down the table, and above the clatter of the knives upon the tin plates the voice of the reader was heard; it was a monotonous chant, and the subject of the reading Evelyn gathered to be the life of some female saint, famous for her austerities.

It was a disappointment to her that she could only see what was trivial and prosaic, and a long line of silent meals stretched out before her through days and years, and she could not eat. Suddenly she was astonished by Sister Veronica's appearance by her side — slim and straight like a figure in an old Italian picture she stood by her, holding in her hand a plate on which there was a poached egg. None of the Sisters were eating poached eggs, and Evelyn nearly refused it, but Veronica smiled, saying under her breath, 'You must eat it,' and she put the plate down before Evelyn with a resolute little gesture.

Soon after a very plain cake was handed round, and the eating of this cake was perhaps the hardest part of the meal. She hesitated a moment, and then decided that the eating of this cake should be her first act of mortification, and she tried to avoid watching the novice beside her, who she noticed had eaten four slices of bread and butter, and was enjoying her cake. As the nuns finished, they folded their hands and sat with eyes cast down. The monotonous voice of the reader droned on, until suddenly, with a little wooden hammer, the Prioress struck the table, giving the signal to rise. The long grace was repeated, with the necessary variations, and the procession passed slowly out in the same order as it had entered.

In the passage the novice at Evelyn's elbow whispered to her to go up the novitiate stairs. The voice of the professed nuns died away as they turned towards their own community room; and it was a little party of five that walked ahead of Mother Hilda into the room at the end of the novitiate passage.

LIX

They knelt before the large crucifix which occupied the centre of one of the walls.

Mother Hilda recited the Litany of our Lady, and when it was done, and they had risen to their feet, she said, —

'Now, Evelyn, you must be introduced to your sisters — Sister Barbara I think you have met, as she sings in the choir. This is Sister Angela; this tall maypole is Sister Winifred, and this little being here is Sister Jerome, who was the youngest till you came. Are you not pleased, Jerome, to have one younger than yourself?' The novices said how do you do, and looked shy and awkward for a minute, but their interest in Evelyn was forgotten for the moment in their anxiety to know whether recreation was to be spent indoors or out.

Mother, we may go out, mayn't we? Oh, thank you so much, it is such a lovely evening. We need not wear cloaks, need we? Oh, that is all right, just our garden shoes; and there was a general scurry to the cells for shoes, whilst Evelyn and Mother Hilda made their way downstairs and by another door into the still summer evening.

'How lovely it is,' Evelyn exclaimed, and she felt that if she and Mother Hilda could have spent the recreation hour together, her first convent evening might have been in a way happy. But the chattering novices had caught them up, and when they were sitting all a-row on a bench or grouped on a variety of little wooden stools, they asked her questions as to her sensations in the refectory, and Evelyn felt a little jarred by their familiarity.

'Were you not frightened when you felt yourself at the head of the procession? I was,' said Winifred.

'But you didn't get through nearly so well as Sister Evelyn; you turned the wrong way at the end of the passage, and Mother had to go after you,' said Sister Angela; 'we thought you were going to run away,' and they went into the details as to how they had felt on their arrival, and various little incidents were recalled, illustrating the experience of previous postulants, and these were productive of much hilarity.

'What did you all think of the cake?' said Sister Barbara, suddenly.

'Was it Angela's cake?' asked Mother Hilda. 'Angela, I really must congratulate you, you will be quite a distinguished *chef* in time.'

Sister Angela blushed with delight, saying, ‘Yes, I made it yesterday, Mother; but of course Sister Rufina stood over me to see that I didn’t forget anything.’

‘Ah, well, I don’t think I cared very much for the flavouring,’ said Sister Barbara in pondering tones.

‘You seemed to me to be enjoying it very much at the time,’ said Sister Evelyn, joining the conversation for the first time, and when she added that Sister Barbara had eaten four slices of bread and butter, the laugh turned against Barbara, and everyone was hilarious. It was evident that Sister Barbara’s appetite was considered an excellent joke in the novitiate.

Evelyn marvelled that grown-up women should be so easily amused; and yet was their conversation more silly than that of a London drawing-room? It was only that it was a different kind of silliness, to which she had not yet grown accustomed; and with a sinking heart Evelyn tried her best to keep up a polite interest in the recreation. The novices were all dressed alike, but Evelyn had quickly decided that besides Sister Veronica only Sister Winifred was a choir Sister; the others were clearly lay Sisters. Sister Barbara and Sister Angela were very young — not more than one or two-and-twenty; Sister Jerome looked over thirty and had a plain, sad face. They worked while they talked, and Evelyn had to confess that she hated needlework, and had never learnt to knit. They told her that she had better begin at once or she would have no stockings. It was Sister Barbara who was told to teach her, but as neither needles nor wool was available at the moment, the lesson was postponed till next recreation.

Presently Sister Veronica came running down the garden path and joined the little group; she had waited at supper and had had to have her meal afterwards.

'I came as quickly as I could,' she said, 'for I didn’t wish to miss all of Sister Evelyn’s first recreation,' and she looked at Evelyn with such a tender little smile of welcome that Evelyn was cheered, and when Mother Hilda said Veronica might sit next her, and pulled up a little wooden stool for her, she felt almost absurdly grateful.

The little babble and talk meandered on, checked and guided by Mother Hilda, who saved it from falling into absolute silliness. And presently, by a clever turn given by her to the conversation, they were all talking of Italy, and Evelyn found that Mother Hilda knew Rome and Milan quite well, and she herself was encouraged to talk of her travels, whilst the novices listened open-eyed. Suddenly the bell rang out its warning notes and the recreation hour had come to an end. Mother Hilda stood up and began the *De Profundis*, the Sisters repeating the alternate verses. The beauty of the prayer, of this appeal for the peace of departed souls sounded strangely beautiful in the still evening air; its beauty entered Evelyn’s heart, and in a thrill of anticipation she seemed to foresee that this cloister life would mean a great deal to her

one day. She seemed to divine the spiritual fulness which lies beneath the childish triviality which had tried her all the evening; and, kneeling among the community in church she began to understand the importance a church is to a community; how much it means to each individual member, and how, on entering her church, each enters the mysterious and profound life of prayer. She felt she was no longer a solitary soul fighting a lonely battle; now she was a member of a spiritual community, and her wandering thoughts would be drawn into the streams of petitions going up to God. A nun whispered that she need not stay for the night office, and she refrained from saying that it was now eight, and that for many years she had not been to bed till past midnight. This was her first act of obedience.

'This mattress,' she said to herself as she turned restlessly, 'is very trying, but it is a means to an end,' and she foresaw a wider life than she could have known in the world.

LX

There are hours of the day which are unknown to those who live in the world, and six o'clock in the morning was an hour unknown to Evelyn. It was at that hour she awaked from a shallow, restless sleep, and heard with a drowsy brain that she would be expected in chapel in half an hour. She rolled herself out of bed, and still only half conscious, she hurried through her simple dressing. Her small basin and water-jug seemed to her miserably insufficient, but her desire not to be late for chapel saved her from further reflection regarding excessive cleanliness.

The convent day began with half an hour for meditation,and this was just over when Evelyn entered the chapel. At half-past six there were morning prayers, followed by Prime and Tierce; at seven Mass and Exposition, and at a quarter to eight breakfast; and a breakfast of weak tea and bread and butter made Evelyn feel that before the end of the week she would be back in her Bayswater flat. But taking her purpose between her teeth, she determined not to yield so easily. She followed Mother Hilda and the novices to the novitiate, and tied on the blue apron that was given to her. Every novice was expected to make her own bed, and to tidy and sweep out her cell before she did any other work. They divided between them such work as dusting the novitiate and sweeping the stairs and passage, and keeping the Mother Mistress's cell in cleanliness and order.

Evelyn had done plenty of housework in her younger days, but she seemed to have forgotten how to use a broom, and the making of her bed had exhausted her, and she felt more inclined to get into it than to follow the Mother Mistress down to Sext and None at nine o'clock. She managed, however, to overcome her weakness, and she and Sister Winifred and Sister Veronica preceded Mother Hilda in the cloister, where they joined the rest of the community. After Sext and None a pause came, and none too soon did it come for Evelyn, who felt she was giving way; and perceiving her condition the Mother Mistress asked her to come to the novitiate. Evelyn felt that to sit in a cheerful sunny room, with windows looking on to the garden, hearing the voice of the quiet nun speaking to her, was the pleasantest hour she could hope for.

'The centre of our life,' said Mother Hilda, 'is the perpetual adoration of the blessed Sacrament exposed on the altar. Our life is a life of expiation; we expiate by our prayers and our penances and our acts of adoration the many insults which are daily flung at our divine Lord by those who not only disobey His commandments but deny His very presence on our altars. To our prayers of expiation we add prayers of intercession; we pray for the many people in this country outside the faith who offend our Lord Jesus Christ more from ignorance than from malice. All our little acts of mortification are offered with this intention. From morning Mass until Benediction, our chapel, as you know, is never left empty for a single instant of the day; two silent watchers kneel before the blessed Sacrament, offering themselves in expiation of the

sins of others. This watch before the blessed Sacrament is the chief duty laid upon the members of our community. Nothing is ever allowed to interfere with it. Unfailing punctuality is asked from everyone in being in the chapel at the moment her watch begins, and no excuse is accepted from those who fail in this respect. Our idea is that all through the day a ceaseless stream of supplication should mount to heaven, that not for a single instant should there be a break in the work of prayer. Our Sisters are taught to feel that, next to receiving Holy Communion, this hour of prayer and meditation in the presence of our Lord is the central factor in their spiritual life, the axis on which their spiritual progress revolves. If our numbers permitted it, we should have perpetual adoration by day and night, as in the mother house in France; but here the bishop only allows us to have Exposition once a month throughout the night, and all our Sisters look forward to this as their greatest privilege.'

'It is a very beautiful life, Mother Hilda; but it is hard to bear.'

'Only at first; you will bear it more and more easily as you realise its beauty. Once a week, in the novitiate, I give instructions to the novices on our rule and its object, and perhaps this will prove a help to you.'

'And when shall I take my watch?'

'I don't think dear Mother has fixed your hour yet. She did not wish you to begin to-day; we must not overburden you with piety in the beginning. In any case, the novices are not allowed more than half an hour's watch in the day — only the professed choir Sisters take an hour.'

Obedience, the Mother Mistress declared, was the beginning of the religious life, and Evelyn must bear in mind she was as a child in school, with nothing to teach and everything to learn.

'The experience of your past life,' said Mother Hilda, with a smile, 'which you may think entitles you to consideration, will probably only be a hindrance to you in the new life that you are beginning. I would beg you to put all the teaching of the world as far from your mind as possible, it will only confuse you. What we think wise, the world thinks foolish, and the wisdom of the world is to us a vanity.'

After the rule of obedience came the rule of silence, and that, too, had to be followed in what seemed to her a painfully literal sense. Silence from the saying of the *De Profundis*, after evening recreation, until after Mass the next morning!

'Conversation is never allowed except at recreation, and all whispering in the passages and visits to each other's cells are forbidden. The novices,' Mother Hilda added, 'are not allowed to speak to any of the professed without special permission; but in your case the Mother Prioress

has decided that an exception will be made in favour of Sister Mary John, as you and she will of course have music to discuss; but you must keep the rules strictly as regards everyone else.'

'Mayn't I even speak to Mother Philippa?'

'Not unless Mother Philippa first speaks to you.'

Evelyn had not expected this complete interruption of all human intercourse, not only from the outside world, but even from those who were actually within the walls of the convent.

Perhaps Mother Hilda saw what was passing in her mind, and feeling that her new postulant had received as much instruction as she could absorb in one day, she looked at her watch, remarking that she expected Sister Winifred and Sister Veronica for their Latin lesson; and a few minutes after the two novices appeared, each with her breviary in her hand.

The Latin lesson consisted mainly of explanation of the offices for the day, and reading aloud for practice and pronunciation, and the translation of one or two of the psalms. Evelyn applied herself to the lesson which Mother Hilda made interesting by her enthusiasm for the subject and her intimate knowledge of all that the breviary contains; and the books were only closed when the Angelus rang at twelve o'clock.

LXI

Then Evelyn remembered that she had not had a word with the Mother Prioress, nor had she had a word with Sister Mary John, though this was necessary and could not be delayed much longer if she were going to sing at Benediction. She had looked forward to speaking to this nun in the recreation hour; but Mother Hilda, having regard for their health, had kept them walking up and down St Peter's Path. The sun was hot, and the conversation seemed more trivial and disjointed than it had done the night before; and in her weariness Evelyn had asked herself if she could endure this life to the end of a week.

Rosary followed recreation, and Vespers followed Rosary, and Evelyn had just gone up the novitiate stairs, feeling that her patience and her piety were equally exhausted, and wondering what would be the next duty required of her, when Sister Veronica appeared, and with her sweet, demure smile, she said, 'Reverend Mother would like to speak to you in her room.'

'Oh, thank you so much; I had just begun to think I was never to see Mother Prioress again.'

'I expect you are tired, aren't you? The life is hard at first.'

'Yes, I am dreadfully tired,' Evelyn said, conscious of a sudden inclination to tears.

'I am sorry, but you know we shall all help you, and you will feel better when you have had a little talk with dear Mother. But you must come at once,' the little novice added in sudden alarm, for Evelyn had shown no sign of immediate obedience. 'You must never keep Reverend Mother waiting; and please take off your apron; we never go into her room with our aprons on.'

Evelyn untied her apron, and flinging it on a chair, hastened from the room. Veronica picked up the discarded garment with a smile, and folding it neatly in four, rolled it up and twisted the strings carefully round it, and laid it on Evelyn's bed in her cell.

At the same moment Evelyn was impetuously knocking at the Prioress's door, with all the effusiveness of the actress, and none of the demureness of the novice. Sitting with the Prioress was Sister Mary John, her strong, expectant face full of pleasure at the sight of Evelyn.

'Dear Mother, it is nice of you to have sent for me; I was pining to see you.'

'Oh, but postulants must learn patience, you know; and how are you getting on, my dear child? Have Mother Mistress's instructions filled you with misgivings?'

'I do feel rather bewildered, Mother, and I am beginning to realise that no one outside the convent has the slightest idea of what it is like inside.'

'Well, perhaps you will feel more at home talking music with Sister Mary John for a bit.'

Evelyn saw that Sister Mary John was longing to interrupt the Reverend Mother, but she managed to restrain herself.

'Well,' the Prioress continued in her clear, even tones, 'it is she and you who must be responsible for the convent music in future, and you must talk over what is best for you to sing. You will both see, I am sure, that in the little musical reformation you are going to undertake, you should be guided in your choice of music by what will best serve the interests of the community. Now, as regards the reformation and the singing of the plain chant, the Benedictine gradual *versus* the Ratisbon, do you really think that our little lay congregation would take an interest in the question? Is the difference between the two sufficient for the uncultivated to distinguish? That must be a question for the future; the immediate question is, how can we render our daily Benediction service more popular? You have brought some music with you, Evelyn, I believe?'

'I have brought a good deal, Mother; whatever seemed most likely to be of use.'

'Well, you and Sister Mary John had better take it into the library and look through it together, and decide what to begin with. You can use the harmonium there.'

'The library harmonium is out of tune, Mother,' broke in Sister Mary John.

'If it is out of tune, we will send for the tuner tomorrow and you will be glad to hear that I am going to arrange for more time to be given to choir practice, but it will require some consideration.'

'Well that is a comfort at any rate,' said Sister Mary John, as they left the Prioress's room; 'your coming amongst us has accomplished something already. For years I have been telling the Reverend Mother that two hours a week are insufficient for practising, but I could never make her see the necessity for more.'

'But we must practise every day if we are to accomplish anything,' said Evelyn.

'I have not yet told you,' said Sister Mary John, 'how glad I am that you have come. You don't know how I have prayed for you,' and the brown eyes gazed at Evelyn with their radiant smile. 'I do hope you will stay; you must try your hardest.'

‘I don't know, I am sure; at recreation to-day I began to think I could not stand it much longer.’

'Why, Sister Evelyn, you have only been here half a day. You do not yet know what our life is. You must not judge by the mere outside like that; is it the food, or what? Of course, I know the food is a trial to everyone at first.’

‘No, it is not so much the food,' said Evelyn, as the two friends laid their bundles of music on the library table, ‘that is trying, but one can outlive the food. No, it is the sense of having all one’s day parcelled out for one in a round of trivial little duties; not a minute to call one’s own, not a moment left to oneself, and I, who have been my own mistress for years, I feel as though I should choke, or scream and do something desperate.’

‘Yes, I understand,' said Sister Mary John, kindly, 'I know the feeling.’

‘I knew you were the one person here who would understand. I wonder if I shall be able to bear it — oh, those recreations, I don’t think I can get used to them.’

'I know, I know,' repeated Sister Mary John, and her clear comprehension soothed Evelyn’s spirit. ‘I know our life seems trivial from an outside point of view. But is the conversation of the novices sillier than that of the ordinary Society woman? You are troubled because you do not yet see the spiritual life that lies so close beneath the trifling surface — all our real love of our Lord, all our eager desire to serve Him, all our anxious endeavour not to be wholly unworthy of our vocation.’

As Sister Mary John talked, her face lit up and her eyes shone, with a clear, passionate joy, and Evelyn saw that her submission was no half-hearted one, that she had embraced the life with her heart and her intellect, and if the yoke fretted here and there, it was borne with the splendid courage of a strong nature. In her there was nothing petty or narrow, her warm sympathies had never been chilled by separation from the world, and though Sister Evelyn recognised that Sister Mary John might have many human faults — impatience and rash judgment and self-will, from which Mother Hilda’s well-balanced and deeply religious nature was free — yet it seemed to her that she would receive more help from the impulsive enthusiasm of the one than the delicate spirituality of the other.

‘The first thing,’ the nun said, ‘is to grasp the great ideal that permeates our life; I am sure Mother Mistress has spoken to you of it already.’

Evelyn nodded.

‘We must keep it always in the front of our thoughts; to us it must be the only real thought that life has to offer. The externalities of our life are of no account. What can they matter in the light of eternity? The petty routine which distresses you is only the envelope, which will fade from your eyes, you may be sure, and you will soon enter into the enjoyment of the spiritual life, without which life lived here would be unendurable, with it the convent is an earthly paradise.’

‘Yes, but how may I arrive at this enviable state of detachment?’

‘By prayer,’ said Sister Mary John, and Evelyn noticed how her face became suddenly absorbed. 'We must learn to pray. We come here because we can pray better here than in the world. We can do nothing without prayer; but by prayer we can do almost everything. Once we enter the life of prayer this miserable world falls behind us, and we
enter the real world. Let us kneel down at once and pray, before we do anything else.’

They fell on their knees before the almost life-size crucifix which hung between the windows, and they rose from their knees with shining eyes which smiled at one another.

‘There, you look better already,' said Sister Mary John. 'Now, what about the music?’

When they had looked through all the music, making separate heaps of pieces that seemed within the compass of their little choir, Sister Mary John said, ‘What will you sing to-day at Benediction? Will you sing Stradella’s Chanson d’Eglise or will you sing Schubert’s Ave Maria — nothing is more beautiful than that.’

'I will sing the Ave Maria.'... The nun sat down to play it, but she had not played many bars when Evelyn interrupted her. ‘The intention of the single note, dear Sister, the octave you are striking now, has always seemed to me like a distant bell heard in the evening. Will you play it so?’

LXII

And the idea of a bell sounding across the evening landscape was in the mind of the congregation when Sister Mary John played the octave; and the broken chords she played with her right hand awoke a sensation of lights dying behind distant hills.

It is almost night, and amid a lonely landscape a harsh rock appears, and by it a forlorn woman stands — a woman who is without friend or any mortal hope — and she commends herself to the care of the Virgin. She begins to sing softly, tremulous like one in pain and doubt, 'Ave Maria, hearken to the Virgin's cry.' The melody she sings is rich, even ornate, but the richness of the phrase with its two little grace notes does not mitigate the sorrow at the core; the rich garb in which the idea is clothed does not rob the song of its humanity.

Evelyn's voice filled with the beauty of the melody, and she sang the phrase which closes the stanza, a phrase which dances like a puff of wind in an evening bough, so tenderly, so lovingly, that acute tears trembled under the eyelids. And all her soul was in her voice when she sang the phrase of passionate faith which the lonely, disheartened woman sings, looking up from the desert rock. Then her voice sank into the calm beauty of the Ave Maria, now given with confidence in the Virgin's intercession, and the broken chords passed down the keyboard, uniting with the last note of the solemn octaves, which had sounded through the song like bells heard across an evening landscape.

'How beautifully she sings it,' a man said out loud, and his neighbour looked and wondered, for the man's eyes were full of tears.

'You have a beautiful voice, child,' said the old nun, when they came out of church, 'and it is a real pleasure to me to hear you sing, and to know that for the future your great gift will be devoted to the service of God. Shall we go into the garden for a little walk before supper? We shall have it to ourselves, and the air will do you good.'

It was the month of June, and the convent garden was in all the colour of its summer — crimson and pink; and all the scents of the month, stocks and sweetbriar, were blown up from St Peter's Walk. In the long mixed borders the blue larkspurs stood erect between Canterbury bells, and the bushy peonies, crimson and pink, and, over all, the great vagrant poppies showered their gay petals. Roses, like pale porcelain, clustered along the low terraced walk and up the house itself, over the stucco walls; but more beautiful than the roses, were the delicate petals of the clematis stretched out like fingers upon the walls.

An old nun was being wheeled up and down the terrace in a chair by one of the lay Sisters, that she might enjoy the sweet air.

‘I must introduce you to Sister Lawrence,' the Prioress said, ‘she will never forgive me if I don’t. She is the eldest member of our community; if she lives another two years she will complete half a century of convent life,'

As they drew near Evelyn saw two black eyes in a white, almost fleshless face. The eyes alone seemed to live, and the shrunken figure, huddled in many shawls, gave an impression of patriarchal age. Evelyn saw by her veil that Sister Lawrence was a lay Sister, and the old nun tried to draw herself up in her chair as they approached, and kissed the hand of the Prioress.

'Well, Sister, how are you feeling? I have brought you our new musical postulant to look at. I want to know what you think of her. You must know, Evelyn,’ said the Prioress, ‘that Sister Lawrence is a great judge of people's vocations; I always consult her about my new postulants.’

Sister Lawrence took Evelyn's hands between hers, and gazed into her face so earnestly that Evelyn feared her innermost thoughts were being read. Then with a little touch of wilfulness, that came oddly from one so old and venerable, the Sister said, — , .

'Well, Reverend Mother, she is pretty, anyhow, and it is a long time since we had a pretty postulant.’

'Really, Lawrence, I am ashamed of you,’ said the Prioress with playful severity; 'Sister Evelyn will be quite disedified.’

‘Mother, if I like them to be pretty it is only because they have one more gift to bring to the feet of our dear Lord. I see in Sister Evelyn’s face that she has a vocation. I believe she is the providence that God has sent to help us through our difficulties.’

‘We’re all praying,' said the Prioress, that it may be so.’

LXIII

‘Sister Cecilia, who is our sacristan, is a little slow.and forgetful,' the Prioress said one day. ‘She wants a little help, and you are just the one, Evelyn, to help her, and you will soon learn the work.’

The sacristy was a large, cool room, wainscoted in oak, and Evelyn followed the Prioress into a sweet fragrance of lavender and orris root. She was shown how the vestments were laid on the shelves, with tissue paper between them, and how they were covered with holland wrappers. These vestments were the pride of the convent. They dated from its prosperous times; and Evelyn thought, as she was shown the white satin vestments for the priest, deacon and sub-deacon, used on Easter Sundays, the professed days of the Sisters and the visits of the Bishop, and the white embroidered vestments with the figure of Our Lady in a blue medallion in the centre of the cross, used for all feasts of the Virgin, how the altar raiment had always been the pious labour and vanity of women who inured their bodies to the discomfort of coarse habits and lived in bare cells; how women’s natural desire for embroidered silks and richly-assorted colours had found expression in the adornment of the altar and the garmenting of a priest.

There were two sets of red vestments, one made of red and green brocade, and the colour of its lining, Evelyn said, reminded her of beetroot, and she got into the habit of calling them the ‘beetroot ones,' and it amused her to avoid putting them for wear whenever she could. On another shelf were the great copes in satin and brocade, gold and white, with embroidered hoods, and orphreys with veils to match. The processional banners were stored in tall presses, and with them, hanging on wire hooks, were the altar curtains, thick with gold thread.

The pride of the convent in its vestments and banners never ceased; how much had been paid for them, and how much they were now worth, was a constant subject of conversation. Once a whisper had gone round that the white satin vestments might have to be sold, and the nuns had said they would rather live on bread and water always than part with them. This was a little while before Evelyn had come to their help, and she had been told that it was she who had saved the vestments; so when they were in use she raised herself in her place so that she might see them better, and she kept a special watchfulness over them for moth and dust.

In the sacristy they were always busy and always behindhand with their work. For the high altar there were the curtains and embroidered frontals and the tabernacle hangings, and as these had to harmonise with the vestments it often happened they were changed every day; and on the day before Mass for the Dead the whole altar had to be stripped after Benediction and black hangings had to be put on, and these had to be changed the next morning after Mass was over. Then the management of the candles demanded much attention. They had to be all of equal

length when the altar was lighted for Benediction; and to be economical, with as splendid a show as possible, was the ambition of the sacristan. It was essential to make sure that no candle should ever burn into its socket, leaving less than the twelve ordained by the Church for Exposition.

The work of the sacristy seemed to Evelyn to be arranged with a view to giving the greatest amount of trouble to the sacristan. It was the Prioress's whim never to use the ordinary altar cloth with an embroidered hem, but always cloths on which lace frontals were lightly tacked, and the sewing on of the lace without creasing the beautiful white linen required great care and dexterity, and the spilling of a little wax at once condemned an altar cloth to the wash. Then, every member of the community seemed to have an interest in the business of the sacristy. Apart from the canonical directions for divine service, there existed an unwritten code of customs of pious observances. Some saints were honoured by having their banners exhibited in the sanctuary throughout the octave or the feast, whilst others were allowed little temporary altars on which some relic could be exposed. The Sisters themselves were often mistaken as to what had been done on previous anniversaries, but the Prioress's memory was unfailing, and in cases of doubt every point had to be referred to her. One of the strictest rules of the house was that the sacristan took orders from none but the Prioress; and Evelyn rejoiced that this was so, for it gave her frequent excuse for little hasty visits and chats in the Prioress's room.

To arrange the high altar for a great feast Evelyn would sometimes rob one of the other altars, especially if it were dedicated to a saint who did not appeal to hei; and the Piioress, coming one day to see what progress was being made, found St Joseph's altar stripped save for a single pair of candlesticks and two flower vases filled with artificial flowers. Evelyn was admonished, and she dared to answer that she was not interested in Saint Joseph 'though, of course, he was a very worthy man.'

'My dear Evelyn, I cannot allow you to speak in this way of Saint Joseph, who is one of the patrons of the convent, nor can I allow his altar to be robbed in this fashion.'

On another occasion the Prioress held to her opinion regarding the vestments to be used, but Evelyn answered, 'Yes, Mother, I know. I always use the common ones for the martyrs; but the apostles — well — are the apostles, and you would not like them to be put off with the beetroot things.' Behind them stood Sister Cecilia, listening with growing astonishment that a mere postulant should dare to speak to the Prioress on terms of equality! She took no pride in her position as sacristan, seeming to see in her duties only a great deal of work and a responsibility from which she would like to be free. Evelyn could see that Sister Cecilia looked upon her enthusiasms as amateurish, and that she was convinced they would soon wear off. Meanwhile, the nun was glad to relinquish her work and retire to the chapel to indulge in pious reverie. She was the type of nun who is the despair of every Reverend Mother — the idle devout — her

common complaint being that she had no time to say her prayers. The Prioress thought that the community prayers according to the rule of the convent were sufficient, and one day she compelled her to return to the sacristy, and had then compared Sister Cecilia's work with Evelyn's. If she did not, the Prioress said, put more fervour into her prayers than she put into her work, they would avail her little enough.

Evelyn had brought her experience of stage decoration and her own talent for personal decoration for the parts she had played into the decoration of the chapel, and poor Sister Cecilia wondered at the marvels which Evelyn accomplished with the scantiest materials. But fired by the Prioress's remarks she henceforth refused to Evelyn any share in the work of the altar, and on the feast of the Assumption she laboured until she could no more, anxious to accomplish a decoration which would win words of approval from the Reverend Mother. But when she stopped to view her work at the end of the day the conviction that it was worthless forced her to ask Evelyn to put it right.

Evelyn tried to rearrange the altar as quietly and as unobtrusively as she could, pretending that her alterations were few and slight, and keeping herself from looking towards the nun who prayed for strength to conquer her sinful jealousy. Sister Cecilia had told Evelyn she was not to tend the sacred lamp any longer; but forgot this piece of spitefulness in her contrition, and left the chapel without filling the lamp; and that night, for luck was always against her, the Prioress came down to say her prayers when the community was in bed. She found the chapel in darkness, and had to return to her room for matches. Now it was a point of pious observance that the Easter light, struck on Holy Saturday, should be preserved through the year, each new wick being lighted from the dying one. Sister Cecilia's carelessness had broken the continuity; she was severely reprimanded and dismissed from the sacristy. She ate her meals that day kneeling on the refectory floor, and for many a day the shameful occurrence was remembered.

Veronica was appointed in her place, and delighted at her promotion, she wore a quaint little air of importance, and hurried about with a bunch of keys hanging from her belt by a long chain.

It amused Evelyn to find herself under Veronica's orders, but the little novice was quite composed; she merely said, 'I cannot help it, Sister Evelyn; of course you ought to be in my place, and I cannot think why dear Mother has arranged it like this.'

They might talk in the sacristy, and Evelyn began to see into Veronica's nature; and her innocent nature revealed itself in little questions.

'Why do you want to be a nun, Sister Evelyn?' she said as they folded up the vestments after Mass.

‘Is it strange that I should wish to be a nun?’

'Yes, for you are not like any of us, nor has the convent been the same since you came.’

'Are you sorry I want to be a nun?’

‘Sorry, Sister Evelyn? No, indeed. God chose you from the beginning as the means He would employ to save us, only I cannot see you as a nun, always satisfied with the life here.’

'Everyone does not know from childhood what they are going to do. You always knew your vocation, Veronica.’

‘I can’t imagine myself anything but a nun, and yet I’m not always satisfied. Sometimes I’m filled with longing, a great longing, and I feel as though I could not live without it; yet I don’t know what I want. It is an extraordinary feeling. Do you know what I mean, Sister Evelyn?’

‘Yes, dear, I think I do.’

‘It makes me feel quite faint, and it seizes me so suddenly; I’ve wanted to tell you for a long time, only I haven’t liked to. There are days when it makes me so restless that I cannot say my prayers, and so I know the feeling must be wrong.’

The nun’s words stirred an old scruple in Evelyn, and she did not dare to answer, but Sister Veronica continued as if talking to herself, —

‘It is something in the quality of your voice. It thrills through me, and brings on this feeling worse than anything. But as no one else seems affected by your singing as I am, I fancied that it was because you felt the same.’

‘I would not worry over it, Veronica. You’ll get over it. It will pass.’

‘I hope it will,’ Veronica said. Her eyes were full of reverie, and behind her the open press exhaled a thin fragrance of lavender.

LXIV

Father Ambrose was a Carmelite monk, a great preacher and a man of the highest sanctity, who was a very old friend of the house, and the spiritual adviser of the Prioress and many of her nuns. He came once or twice a year, and his visits were among the great events of conventual history. He was coming to them that week; he would stay with Father Daly some days, and this visit was the subject of conversation during the morning's recreation.

It was pleasant to sit talking of him under their great tree. The air and the earth were warm, and Mother Hilda sat in the midst of her novices and postulants, helping the conversation, guiding it occasionally. Everyone was anxious to talk, but everyone was anxious to think, too, for everyone knew that she would be questioned by the aged monk, and that the chances of her being accepted as a nun depended in no small measure on his opinion of her vocation. But in the midst of their personal interests in the monk, Evelyn noticed that the eyes of the novices were frequently turned to Veronica, and that they were all laughing at her.

'Have you noticed, Sister Evelyn, how beaming Sister Veronica has looked for the last day or two? I can't think what has come to her.'

'Yes, isn't it lucky for her to have been put in the sacristy just before Father Ambrose's visit; now she will be able to put out his vestments herself.'

'Yes, and you may be sure we shall have all the best vestments every day; and she will be able to have any number of private interviews behind our backs.'

'Now, children, that will do,' interrupted Mother Hilda, as she noticed Veronica's crimson cheeks as she bent over her work.

Evelyn wondered, and that evening in the sacristy Veronica broke into expostulations with an excitement that took Evelyn by surprise.

'How could I not care for Father Ambrose? I have known him all my life. Once I was very ill with pleurisy, I nearly died, and Father Ambrose anointed me and gave me the last sacrament. I had not made my first communion then, I was only eleven, but they gave me the sacrament, for they thought I was dying, and I thought so too, and I promised our Lord I would be a nun if I got well. I never told anyone except Father Ambrose, and he has helped me all through to keep my vow — so you see, he has been everything to me. I have never loved anyone as I have loved Father Ambrose. When he comes here I always ask him for some rule or directions, so that I may have the happiness of obeying him till his next visit, and it is so trying, is it not, Sister

Evelyn, when the novices make their silly little jokes about it, and of course they do not understand, they can't; but to me Father Ambrose means everything I care for, besides, he really is a saint. I believe he would have been canonised if he had lived in the Middle Ages. He has promised to profess me. It is wrong, I know, but really, I should hardly care to be professed if Father Ambrose could not be by.'

'So this,' Evelyn thought, 'is the passion of this child's life, this spiritual love of an aged monk, a love which is part and parcel of her highest and holiest thoughts. It is the most real thing in a life wholly purged of external events.'

And to Evelyn, always curiously interested in the mystery of sex, this spiritual love within the convent was strangely pathetic. Evelyn noted the change that had come over the little sacristan; her eyes shone, and her pale oval face had a pretty fresh colour, and she seemed to dance through her work.

Evelyn watched her sympathetically, understanding instinctively that Veronica was jealous that any other hands than hers should lay out the vestments he was to wear, and she turned her head so that Sister Veronica should not think she was being watched; and the little nun was happy in the corner of the sacristy laying out the gold vestments he was to wear, putting the gold chalice for him to use, and the gold cruets, which Evelyn had never seen used before, and she left out the finest towels for him to dry his hands. Being a monk he had a larger amice than the ordinary priest, and Veronica produced a coloured strip of embroidery, which she tacked on to the outer hem of the amice so as to give it the desired appearance when the monk drew it over his head on entering or leaving the sacristy. Weeks after, Evelyn came upon this amice with the embroidery attached put away in a secret corner so that it should not be used in the ordinary way, and when on the second evening of his stay Father Ambrose preached familiarly to the nuns, choosing his text from the Song of Solomon, and dwelling upon the mystical union between Christ and His earthly spouse, Evelyn felt that of all the nuns it was probably Veronica who penetrated most fully into his meaning.

LXV

Suddenly she noticed in herself a little of that childish gaiety which had seemed to her to be one of the characteristics of the Sisters, and she reflected that she owed her peace of mind to her daily practice of obedience. She liked to break off in the middle of a sentence, at the first note of the Angelus or the *De Profundis*. She liked to hurry in answer to any summons of the Prioress or the Novice Mistress.

Obedience and chastity were the familiar spirits of the place, and like guardian angels they watched over her, and in the convent it seemed simple and natural to believe in God and all the dogmas of the Church.

In her first letter to her father she wrote: —

> 'I am so happy here that I wonder why I remained in the world so long. Behind love and behind fame there is the ache of living, and it only ceases in a convent. I often look round wondering how it was that I could have passed happiness by so often; that I should have searched for it so eagerly, missing it always; that I should have gone so far in quest of it, when all the time it was at hand. You will think that I am mistaken, that I am deceived by the novelty of a new life, that I am enchanted by a new adventure. It may be so, though I do not think it is; but of this I am sure, that those who have been in the convent longest are the happiest of us all. I shall never forget how one day last autumn, when the grass was soaked with cold dew and the crisp leaves hung in a death-like silence, I met one of the lay Sisters, Sister Bridget, coming down the path. She was carrying a pail of water, and I noticed that she was going to our graveyard. She was going, she explained, to scrub the tiles which covered the late Reverend Mother's grave. "Ah, well, Mother's room must have its weekly turn out," she answered, and when I pointed out to her that the tiles were still clean, her answer made it clear that she regarded the task of attending to the grave not as a duty but as a privilege. Her face, withered and ruddy like an apple, reflected an extraordinary contentment, and I felt that if she were asked what she would do if she had to begin life again, she would answer: I would begin it again in a convent. She has worked for the community for nearly thirty years; she has been through all the early years of struggle — a struggle which has begun again — a struggle the details of which were not even told her, and which she had no curiosity to hear. She is content to work on to the end, believing that it was God's will for her to do so. The lay Sisters can aspire to none of the convent offices; they have none of the smaller distractions of receiving guests, and instructing converts and so forth, and not to have as much time for prayer as they desire is their penance. They are humble folk who strive in a humble way to separate themselves from the animal, and they see

heaven from the wash-tub plainly. In the eyes of the world they are ignorant and simple hearts. They are ignorant, but of what are they ignorant? Only of the passing show, which every moment crumbles and perishes. I see them as I write — their ready smiles and their touching humility. They are humble workers in a humble vineyard, and they are content that it should be so.'

Speaking again of the happiness she had discovered in the convent, she said: —

'I sometimes look around a little dazed by my own happiness, and the happiness of those I see about me. I can hardly believe it is all true; life moves so easily from the early morning until bedtime. It flows (my comparison is a commonplace one, I know) like a beautiful stream, a steady current which bears onward happily and surely towards eternity. Everyone here has her work to do, everyone is busy and no one is overworked. If ever I felt disinclined for my work and wished for idleness I should find no one to idle with me. At every hour everyone is in her appointed place, doing her appointed duty. The food is not very good, nor very plentiful, for the nuns are poor. It is a little trying, I admit, to feel always a little hungry. But this inconvenience is slight, when we compare it with the great inconvenience which we have to bear with if we live in the world. Here, at all events, *ennui* is unknown. The remarks which we hear so often in the world, which I used to hear so often in Owen Asher's society, in the country houses where we used to visit — "What shall we do this evening? What shall we do to-morrow? Whom can we go and see?" are never heard here. Nor is there spitefulness nor jealousy, nor any divergence of aim; our ambition is the same, and it is the greatest and the noblest, for it is to love God, to please Him and to put sin away. It is such happiness to feel that we are all working for one common end. We know one another intimately here, although we talk very little, and were the hardships of convent life a great deal worse than they are, they would be worth bearing with because of that spiritual intimacy which we find only in the cloister.'

In another letter she said: —

'I am not yet happy as the other nuns are happy, because I am thinking of you. The ache of life is still in me, and I rarely wake in the morning without thinking of you. I see you in Rome, living in your lonely rooms, with no one to look after you, and then my life becomes bitter, for I think that the happiness which I find here has not come to me by right, that I have snatched it. My duty is with you, and we can never be happy except when we are doing our duty. But you said you did not wish me to come to you in Rome; you left me to look after the sale of Dowlands and of my flat; you said you were going to live with the friars, and that I should be in your way until you had had time to find lodgings for me. Indeed it was by your wish that I came here. As you did not want me I

came here to help those who did want me, and I am helping them. My singing brings crowds to Benediction every day. I am not in the least vain about my singing now. But I am praising myself. So I will tell you instead of the Prioress, who is certainly a wonderful woman. I see a great deal of her, and she seems to read me through and through, and to see things in me which I do not know myself, but which are, nevertheless, quite true. The other day, when I told her I had never been happy until I came here, and that it seemed to me I had found out my life at last, she said, —

'"My dear Evelyn, you have hardly any perception of what our life is, you know it only from the outside, you are still an actress, you are acting on a different stage, that is all." 5 '

'I could not answer her, for I felt I had adapted myself to the convent as I might to a new part; I do not say that the new part is not the part I shall play to the end, but now and again I catch myself playing a part. We are always playing parts in our life, no one is ever perfectly natural; we are all conscious of our actions — at least I am. An example will explain what I mean. The little penitential exercises, such as kissing the floor, as a sign of contrition for some petty fault, or kneeling for permission to pass to one's place in choir or refectory if one should chance to be late, are much more distasteful to the other nuns than to me. The other novices run from the furthest end of the convent at the first sound of the bell, to avoid the risk of what seems to them a humiliating ordeal. I look upon these things as the etiquette of the convent, just as it is the etiquette of the stage to allow a man to kiss you whom you do not care for in the least. The Prioress did not suspect how true her remark was, and I did not tell her that in the first week I was deliberately late for dinner in order to test the sensation of kneeling before the entire community on the bare refectory floor.

'The other day when I was washing dishes in the scullery, I laughed aloud. Of course there is nothing strange in it at all, but from the point of view of the world it is difficult to imagine a stranger transformation than the transformation of a *prima donna* into a scullery maid. But the world! Does it matter what it thinks? Shall I ever forget Owen Asher's persistent worldliness; he sacrificed everything to the enjoyment of the moment, and was the unhappiest man I ever knew. He was unhappy always, and the happiness which I could not give him and which he could not give me I see shining out of the eyes of the nuns, out of the eyes of these women who have renounced everything that is said to make life pleasant.

'The nuns have their trials, and they bear them as well as may be, for they are merely women, not angels, and are not possessed of any supernatural power of detachment from the ills of life. I have seen them struggle against weariness and failing health, and

the novices sometimes astonish me by candid little grumbles, generally about the food. There is a good deal of irritability in the convent, but I am sure that the nuns do possess a divine something which outbalances the discomfort of their lives. They possess an extraordinary serenity of mind, and their optimism is delightful. As far as the rule allows them they are kind to one another, and I have seen none of that petty spite which is said to exist wherever a number of women gather together.'

In a letter to Monsignor she said: —

'Mother Philippa is our manager, all the house accounts are in her charge, and her watchful economy saved the convent from shipwreck these many years. Her talent for domestic economy found an excellent outlet in the administration of an impecunious convent. If she had stayed at home, her abilities would have withered and she would have become as useless as her dull sisters; not one of them is married, and it is not likely that Mother Philippa would have married if she had remained at home. She is the one success in the family — three dull sisters and a dull mother come to consult the nun as to what they shall do in every emergency. Unfortunately they do not always take her advice, and when they do not mistakes are the result. Mother Philippa's one trouble is her relations; she dreads their visits. "Poor Fred," she said the other day, speaking of her family, "is only an expense." Was not that clever of her? What an admirable summing up! I can picture him coming back from Canada and quite cheerfully accepting the welcome of the doleful sisters. But this admirable woman is apparently not more pious than you or I.

'Forgive my irrepressible levity, dear Monsignor. The Reverend Mother often reproves me for it, but my levity has helped me through five months in a nunnery. Mother Philippa is one side of Saint Teresa, and she exists in every convent, but the other side of Saint Teresa I have not been able to discover in anyone. Mother Philippa is wholesome prose — the very best and plainest prose. The nearest thing to Saint Teresa here is certainly Sister Mary John. She does not fall to the ground and remain rigid, but the other day after Benediction she forgot to give the sign to go. It is the custom for the eldest Sister present to give the sign to leave the chapel. We waited for Sister Mary John, but no sign came. She remained kneeling, lost in her delight, no doubt seeing God in heaven quite clearly. The novices coughed and moved their feet, but Sister Mary John did not hear them. At last one of the novices nudged her, and she awoke as from a dream, and heard as in amazement that the half-hour was over. Half an hour! what is half an hour to one who has been in eternity? Centuries looked out of her eyes.

'She and the Reverend Mother represent to me what is most personal in the convent, and what is nearest to me. Veronica is set apart; she is an abstraction, she is perfect innocence

walking on earth, a white robe on which no speck of dust of the way has fallen, an angel by Fra Angelico; but the Reverend Mother and Sister Mary John, like myself, have breathed the breath of the world; and those who have breathed the breath of the world are easily recognisable from those who have not. I have often thought this mixture of worldly alloy is necessary to give hardness and durability to the metal. If the whole of the community were composed of nuns like Veronica and Mother Hilda it could not continue, and I think the pecuniary difficulties of this convent are largely owing to the fact that the late Reverend Mother was without experience of the world. She, like Veronica and Mother Hilda, had passed from the schoolroom to the novitiate; but the present Prioress is a woman who has had experience of the life of the world, and I confess to a great curiosity to know what forced her to give up the world. I feel sure that some calamity fell upon her suddenly. I cannot otherwise explain this subtle intelligence, lithe and hard as steel, and eyes which divine at once a state of soul, and out of which some far-off sorrow shines. I can see the Prioress in the world, and the world crumbling away at her feet, and every path crumbling away except the path that led her to the convent. But I cannot see her in the intermediate stages.

'Regarding myself, what have I to tell you? — that I am beginning to fear I have not a vocation.'

In another letter to her father she said: —

'Oh, to be in Rome and to hear the wonderful choir you write to me about! To exchange the wailing and wobbling of half-a-dozen nuns trying to sing a piece of plain chant for a Mass by Palestrina. How I long for Rome now that spring should be here, a spare scant spring in England, a beautiful, gracious, Southern spring in Rome, the sweet Easter time chiming over scent-laden hills and plains. Here on the edge of the Common the winter is still bitter, loud winds are still blowing against our door. The Common is covered with snow, and the gorse is burnt up with frost. This Common land is all we can see of the world. In summer horsemen gallop along the hillsides, and the golf players appear in silhouette on the evening skies But in winter the Common is a waste. Yesterday I saw a bent figure making its way against the blast. A frost-bound and a soaking Common I have seen from the windows of the novitiate until my eyes turn from it in despair. Once, half in jest, half in earnest, I suggested to our Novice Mistress that we might have the blinds down and light the lamp. And when I look away from this terrible Common land I am confronted with the continual childishness of the nuns and the triviality of their interests; and the childishness within and the barren land beyond the walls seem to interact upon each other, and enforce the impression of living death. Of course I know that the triviality which shocks me is merely an outer skin which covers a great purpose. I try to remember this, but it is difficult for one who has lived long in the

world to accept the trivial externality of scapulars and candles. And the trite religious instruction which we receive in the novitiate often jars. One of the things that shocks one most is the discovery that there are fashions in pieties as well as in petticoats. Not being able to imitate each others' bonnets, the nuns imitate each other's pieties. If one says the Rosary at a special hour, others want to do the same, and saints come into, and go out of, fashion. The Prioress's special saint, or the saint of any favourite nun, attracts a great deal of admiration, and for the proper stimulation of these special pieties it seems necessary to put up little shrines in the passages, and the erection and the maintenance of these shrines fall on me. The way the novices and postulants run to me for candles for the shrine of the saint that attracts their devotion at that particular moment is very trying; and it is hard not to tell them that they have merely exchanged their dolls for saints. So I philosophise in this fashion: "There are trivial-minded women," I say, "in convents as there are in the world, and the trivial-minded pray, as they play, in trivial fashion. To the fashionable woman the gown she is going to wear is the centre of things, and the whole of her life is spent seeking to escape from herself in little distractions. Only a year ago the important [thing] to me was whether I could sing a scene as easily as another singer. The truth is, the external life is, and always must be, trivial."

In another letter to Monsignor she said: —

'One of my greatest consolations is to watch the evening as the sun sets in the violet distances of Richmond Park. I think it was Ulick Dean who first taught me to see the country in the fairy-like way in which I see it now. Or perhaps it is, and I think it is, that the country is a great consolation to everyone who has passed their first youth. The country you see has always been, there never was a time it did not exist. The country is nearly as immortal as the sky, and it is nearer to us. I don't think I could live in town again. When I leave here I shall live in the country. The last time I returned to Monmouth Mansions I looked round and I felt suddenly that I could not go on living in a flat. I felt I could not endure the daily routine, that I should have to do something else; then I felt the selfishness of it — getting up in the morning to discuss with my servant what we should eat. That is always the first thing one does in a flat, and then one thinks how one can spend the day most pleasantly to oneself. One thinks of the visits one may pay in the afternoon, and of the concerts and the theatres one may go to in the evening. To lead such a life year after year, knowing well that thousands have not sufficient food, nor a room to sit in, has become impossible to me. Then I need occupation. I am no longer interested in the things that used to interest me, and since I have been in this convent I have gone much further on the road on which I started when I first went to confess to you. So when I leave here, whether I live in England or in Italy, I shall live in the country, for my own sake and for the sake of others; for I have a little plan. I have thought that if I save two-thirds of my income I shall have enough money in three years

to buy a cottage and a large garden. Once you get away from London land is not dear, and in Italy I daresay it is cheaper still.

'I used to do housework when a girl, and the convent has brought me back to it again, for here everyone has to sweep and to scrub and to brush. So I have thought that with another woman to help me, a sort of lady help, or a nurse, one who has been trained as a hospital nurse, we might be able to attend on ourselves and the six little cripple boys whom I would take to live with me. The little boys could work in the garden, and we could sell the vegetables and the eggs and the chickens, for of course we shall keep a poultry farm too ; and I hear there is a good deal of money to be made by poultry. We could keep a pony and light cart, and one of the little boys, the one that was the least crippled, could look after the pony. There would not be much work to do in the cottage; for things do not get dirty in the country as they do in town, and there would not be much furniture — some plain tables and plain cupboards and plain shelves. The shelves will be painted green, and some nice green and yellow pottery will stand upon them. I must do something when I leave here, and I can think of nothing better than that; I am indeed very full of it, I think of it all day, and only fear that something will happen to prevent the realisation of my little plans. For things never come quite right in this world; the threads seem to slip out of our hands as we are going to tie the knot. There will be no wall round our garden, but a yew hedge will make a good background for flowers, lilies especially. The wall is one of the things that spoil the convent for me. But round my cottage, as I have said, there will be no wall, only a hedge, and all round for miles that sort of rich swelling country which I love — shady hillsides, and a little distance off a stream twisting through flat meadows by a sleepy town; such a stream as brought the swan to Elsa of Brabant; you see one cannot quite forget one's past. I long for the country and for my little home for crippled children. I once saw a hare beating a tambourine in Regent Street, and the beating of the tambourine by this woodland creature seemed to make an infinitely pathetic picture, and one which is strangely symbolic of many human lives. I long, as the poor hare must have longed, for wide hillsides; and, landing on the highest point in the garden, I lose myself in the blue distances. I cannot tell you how I long for the return of the spring — I want to see the garden returning to life. Saint Francis used to sit talking to the fire, and worshipped the sun, or very nearly, and I like to watch the tall trees. How gaily they talk in a light wind, and how sadly they whisper when the wind dies, and in the dense winter rain they stand as miserable as animals in the rain.'

LXVI

'You see, Evelyn,' the Prioress said, 'it is contrary to the whole spirit of the religious life to treat the lay Sisters as servants, and though I am sure you did not intend any unkindness, they have complained to me once or twice of the way you order them about.'

'But, dear Mother, it seems to me that we're all inferior to the lay Sisters. To slight them — '

'I'm sure you did not do so intentionally.'

'I have said, "Do hurry up," but I only meant that I was in a hurry. I do not think anything you could have said could have pained me more.'

Seeing that Evelyn was hurt, the Prioress said the Sisters had no doubt forgotten all about it by now. But Evelyn wanted to know which of the Sisters had complained, so that she might beg her pardon.

'She does not want you to beg her pardon.'

'I beg you to allow me; it will be better that I should, the benefit will be mine.'

The Prioress shook her head, and the conversation passed from the lay Sisters to the difficult question of the contemplative and the active orders. Evelyn had lately been reading the story of a servant girl, who had discovered genius in herself, genius, Evelyn said, compared to the genius of Joan of Arc. It had all happened in a little seaport town, and it had begun in a sudden conviction which the new priest had felt when he entered the town for the first time. As he ascended the avenue leading to the town he had heard a voice,

'What have you come here for if not to rescue the aged poor?'

He wondered, not knowing how he was to do this, being bereft of all money. But. the tissue of things had woven itself out miraculously — miraculous hands had always seemed weaving on that woof, and the first lives to be woven into it were the little seamstresses, who had sat amid the rocks on Sunday in front of the bright gorse asking each other what the priest had meant when he had made them promise never to be wanting in their duties of charity towards the aged poor; very likely the priest did not know himself when he exacted the promise from them.

Not till then does Jeanne, the marvellous, extraordinary Jeanne, appear in the story.

She had been a goat-herd in childhood, and the single event of her life in any way ominous of her mission was her refusal of an offer of marriage. A young sailor had been anxious to marry her, and she had at first seemed willing, and then, without knowing why, from some impulse, she had hesitated, and when he returned from a voyage she had told him she never intended to marry. The wonder of this lies in the fact that she never knew in the least why she had refused the sailor, nor why she was determined not to marry, and it was not for nearly twenty-seven years afterwards that the importance of this early act of renunciation had been revealed to her. For twenty years she worked in humble service. She attended a priest till he died and then she went to live with his sister, and remained with her till she died. During all these twenty years Jeanne had saved only twenty-four pounds, and with this money she returned to her little seaport town, where there was no provision for the aged poor, where the aged poor starved in the streets or in garrets, in filth and vermin, in hunger and thirst, without hope of relief from anyone.

To this cruel little village Jeanne returned with her twenty-four pounds. She rented a garret with an old woman who was hardly able to help herself at all; and every day she went to the market-place to find some humble employment; and so she lived till she was forty-seven. It was then that the two little seamstresses heard of her, and the Curé sent for her and told her of the good that might be done for the aged poor and the blind beggars and such like who prowled about the walls of the churches in rags and vermin. On leaving the priest she had said, —

'I do not understand, but I have never heard anyone speak so beautifully.'

But how were they, who could hardly support themselves, to support the poor? She did not know, but next day, when she went to see the priest, she understood everything, and it was in her garret that she harboured the first pauper, a poor blind woman, whom the seamstresses had discovered in the last stage of neglect and age. It was Jeanne who had discovered how they might support those who could not support themselves. It was she who seized the basket and said, 'I'll beg for them.'

'There is a genius for many things besides the singing of operas, the painting of pictures and the writing of books,' Evelyn said, 'and Jeanne's genius was begging for her poor folk. There is nothing more touching in the world's history than her journey in the milk cart to the regatta.'

She was accustomed to beg from door to door, but to intrude upon the crowd of fashionable folk bent on amusement she did not dare. Her courage almost failed her, but clasping the cross which hung round her neck, she entered the crowd of pleasure-seekers, saying, 'Won't you give me something for my poor folk?'

She begged with genius — a tall, thin, curious, fantastic figure, considered simple by some, but really gifted for the task which had been discovered to her in her middle age.

She begged that day and every day with genius. It is told that, bored by her persistence, a man had slapped her in the face, and that she had answered, 'That is perfectly right, that is just what is suited to me; now what are you going to give me for my poor folk?' On another occasion at some regatta or fancy fair, where wealth and pleasure had collected, some young men had teased her, and having teased her they apologised and had given her five francs, and she had answered, 'At that price you may tease me as much as you please.'

'It is extraordinary to think how this woman, unlettered, unread and uncouth, had been able to invent a system of charity which has penetrated all over Europe. I do not know which,' Evelyn said, 'I realise most clearly, Jeanne or Teresa; they do not seem to me like women who have existed, but like women who always exist who are part of the spiritual substance with which the world is made.'

The Prioress reminded Evelyn of Jeanne's start in the morning, when, after having made the beds and cleaned the garret, she took down her big basket.

'Now do not forget to ask for the halfpenny a week which I used to get at the grocery store.'
'Now I am sure you will forget to ask for my soup.'

Many used to hide their food under the bedclothes, and sell it surreptitiously for food for the pigs, leaving the Little Sisters almost starving; but their good humour was unfailing, they only said, 'So-and-so has not been so nice as usual this afternoon.'

'Yet, I cannot but feel — dear Mother, how am I to say it? — that the Little Sisters — '

'Do not be afraid, Evelyn,' the Prioress said; 'you mean that their way is perhaps a better way than ours.'

'It seems so, Mother, does it not?'

'My dear Evelyn, it is permissible to have doubts on such a subject — which is the better, acts of mercy or prayer? It is impossible not to doubt; we have all had our doubts on this subject, and it is the weakness of our intelligence that causes these doubts to arise.'

'How is that, Mother?' said Evelyn.

'It is so easy to realise the beauty of the relief of material suffering — the flesh is always with us; we realise so easily what it suffers, and the relief of suffering seems to us the only good. Suffering appeals to us through such direct channels. A hungry man always seems more real than a man who prays. But in truth bread and prayer are as necessary to man, one as the other. When the veil of materialism is woven too densely, someone always comes to draw it aside.

'You have never heard the story of the foundation of our order. It will not appeal to the animal sympathies as readily as the foundation of the Little Sisters of the Poor, but I do not think it is less human.'

Then the Reverend Mother told how, in Lyons, a sudden craving for God had occurred in a time of extraordinary prosperity. Three young women, daughters of bankers and a silk merchant, surrounded with every luxury, wearied of their wealth and the pleasures which wealth brought them, had almost simultaneously decided, without any intercommunication, that this world is a vanity, and that they were willing to forego it.

This story went to the core of Evelyn's life. For she too had had wealth and fame and pleasure, and had found them to be nothing.

'But how,' she asked, 'had these women found that the world was not worthy of their seeking? Did they grow weary of it as I did, or was there a revelation?'

'There were three distinct revelations,' the Prioress replied. 'Their souls were long prepared for the revelation; they wearied of the luxury and materialism of their lives and the pleasures with which they were surrounded, and sought to escape from it. They were good women and they waited for a sign, which was vouchsafed them. They were not women who were specially gifted like Jeanne to attend on the poor. At Lyons, at that time, the poor were not so plentiful as they were in the little seaport town, and it was towards prayer the souls of these good women turned rather than to good works. It appears they suddenly craved for prayer as they might have for light. They felt the world was dying, for no one prayed. But how to give a practical form to their idea they didn't know. Maybe they doubted, as we all doubt in moments of weakness, the utility of prayer, and argued against their instincts. One certainly did. She herself tells how, unable to decide whether she should embrace a practical or a contemplative life, she knelt down while a great fire was blazing in the town. Owing to the strength of the wind, the firemen could not extinguish it. The fire was in one of the great silk warehouses, but it was not for the preservation of her father's wealth that she prayed, but for the safety of an asylum for the aged which adjoined the warehouse, and which at that moment seemed sure of destruction. She was hardly on her knees when the wind suddenly lulled, and the flames were extinguished. And at the same moment she heard a voice in her heart saying to her quite plainly, "If one prayer can do this, what might not an order do whose mission it is to pray." Her father, of

course, told her that she was mistaken, and that she had heard no voice. But of what use is it [to] tell those who have heard a voice that they have not heard it?'

'And the other two girls — were each of them vouchsafed a sign?' Evelyn asked.

'Yes, in each case there was a sign. One was to be married to a rich silk merchant — a man whom she could not care for under any circumstances, and who was doubly repugnant to her now she had conceived the idea of a religious life — a man full of worldliness, and concerned only with this world. There seemed no escape for her, and she felt she had not the power to resist the will of her entire family, so she turned to God and begged of Him to provide some means of escape. Next day her suitor told her he could not marry her. In the night it had been revealed to him that this could not be. He had struggled against the conviction, and he had argued with himself, but in vain. He could explain nothing, except that it was so.'

'And the third one?' Evelyn asked.

'The third incident was perhaps even more striking. She was walking through a wood, and on the other side of the river she saw two men engaged in a duel. She heard afterwards that this duel was to be fought to the death. But they were evenly matched and neither could vanquish the other. They returned to the contest again and again, and, in the face of this murder to be committed, she knelt down and prayed that it might be averted. Suddenly one declared he could fight no further, a conviction having been borne suddenly in upon him that he was doing wrong, and, unable to resist it, he told his enemy what had happened, saying, "It matters not in the least to me if you consider me a coward, I cannot continue this fight." These three women confided their experiences to the same confessor. The priest himself had long been meditating a convent for men or women whose lives should be wholly devoted to prayer, for it had been borne in upon him too that some make-weight was necessary in this city wholly devoted to the making of money and to the pleasures which money can buy.'

Evelyn was interested in the story of these three founders of the order — these three women born among the sins of luxury in a materialistic society, to whom had come three distinct revelations. She was about to ask the Prioress the intimate history of the first foundation when the Reverend Mother interrupted, as it were, her thoughts, and said, —

'Any depreciation of the active orders is of course out of the question, but the desire to understand them is not depreciation. The good done by the active orders in the world is more obvious, more readily understood by the average man, who will say, "Ah, the Little Sisters of the Poor — I understand that; but the Carmelites, who merely pray, of what good are they?" But all that the average man does not understand is not necessarily useless. The truth is that the active orders and the contemplative orders are identical when we look below the surface.'

'How is that, Mother?'

'The mission of the active orders is to relieve physical suffering, and they accomplish a great deal, but not in the direction which the world thinks. The world thinks that the object of the Little Sisters of the Poor is the elimination of suffering from the world, or at least the reduction of suffering.' .

'Surely their efforts make an appreciable difference in the sufferings of the world?'

'My dear child, a certain amount of suffering is inseparable from human life. If you eliminate on one side the growth is greater on the other. By preserving the lives of the old people you make the struggle harder for others. There is much the same amount of suffering in the world as there was before the Little Sisters of the Poor began their work. It is very doubtful whether the suffering to-day is not equal to the amount of suffering that existed fifty years before the order came into existence. That is what I mean.'

'Then, dear Mother, the order does not fulfil its purpose?'

'On the contrary, Evelyn, it fulfils its purpose, but its purpose is not that which the world thinks. It is by the noble example they set that the Little Sisters of the Poor achieve their purpose. It is by forsaking the world that they achieve their purpose, by their manifestation that the things of this world are not worth considering. They pray largely in outward acts, whereas the contemplative orders pray only in thought — the purpose, as I have said, of both is identical, that this world is a negligible quantity. The good they do is by the creation of an atmosphere of goodness. There are two atmospheres in this world — the atmosphere of good and the atmosphere of evil, and both are created by thought, whether thought in the concrete form of an act or by thought in its purest form, an aspiration. All those who devote themselves to prayer, whether their prayers take the form of good works or whether their prayer passes in thought, collaborate in the production of a moral atmosphere, and it is the moral atmosphere created by prayer which enables man to continue in human life.

'Of the power of thought over matter I have given you three instances; but you, my dear Evelyn, need less proof of it than any other, for have you not often told me how our prayers, on more than one occasion, have saved you from the evil designs of your lover?'

'As you state it, Mother, it seems clear; I did not think of it in that way before.'

'How interesting it would be to write the history of an order, the central idea of which should be the power of thought over matter.'

But the three nuns who came to England about thirty years ago to make the English foundation did not interest Evelyn very keenly. Her interest was not caught until the Prioress told her how, just at the time when they seemed on the point of failure, a young girl, in the best society, rich, beautiful, and surrounded by admirers, came to think, just as Evelyn had done, that the life of the world was a mere vanity, and had decided to dedicate her life to God. Her story was this: —

'She had been educated in a convent, and when she left, after her first ball, she told her father and mother that she wished to be a nun. Her parents besought her to consider her resolution and she agreed to do this, and for two years she went to balls and parties, seemingly the most worldly among her companions; but at the end of a year of her probationship in the world she said, " I have waited a year, because you wished me to, and now I have come to tell you that I wish to enter a convent." You see how analogous her story is to yours, Evelyn. It was the same vocation that brought you both here. It was with five thousand pounds out of the thirty thousand that this girl gave that the nuns bought the old country house in which we are now living. The late Prioress is blamed for this extravagance, and I think very unjustly, for how could she have foreseen the increased taxation. As a growing suburb the taxation became heavier.'

Then Evelyn heard that a portion of the old house had been put aside for guest-rooms; but the boarders who came were of the non-paying sort — penniless converts turned out by their relations, governesses, etc. And she heard how no more rich postulants came to the convent, and of the money the convent had lost in the railway, and how it came to be lost at a most unfortunate time, as only a few days before the lawyer had written to say that the Australian mine, in which most of their money was invested, had become bankrupt. So there was no help for it, they had to mortgage the property, and that was the beginning of their real difficulties, for as the land became valuable, the mortgagees became more and more anxious to foreclose. Once the convent had been late in paying the yearly interest on the money they had borrowed, and the mortgagees had insisted upon the penal interest.

'But, my dear Reverend Mother, I have offered to lend you the money.'

'It is impossible for us to take your money, Evelyn; we want a great deal of money, and a more legitimate means must be found than borrowing from you. The convent roof wants re-slating and the chapel wants re-decorating, and we spare every penny we can from our food and clothing to buy candles for the altar; and the twelve candles that have to burn there are quite an item in themselves; and another item, and a very considerable one, is the expense of the resident chaplain. The nearest parish is some distance, and cannot supply a priest every day. Frankly, Evelyn, we are at our wit's end.'

‘You have no idea, Mother, how all you have said interests me, and the personal application I make of it to my own life. You said just now that you hoped one day I should become a member of this community. I am well aware how incongruous it would be to have me in a convent, and how ill my past life accords with your lives; but I have long wished to be a nun — the idea has been growing within me, and as far as I know it is quite a sincere one; but there is an impediment, and it is that that is breaking my heart — I do not see how I can become a nun. I am so happy here that I dread the letter which will come and order me away from you.’

'Then your anxiety is not that you should fail to live according to our rule?’

‘Not in the least, Mother, the reason is not a personal one; it is on account of my father. You see I cannot forsake him a second time; forgive me, Mother, for of course the motive is quite a different one, but I cannot forsake my father.’

The Prioress asked her if she had spoken to Monsignor on this subject or if she had laid the matter frankly before her father, telling him that she believed she had a vocation for a religious life.

She said she had not consulted Monsignor at all nor her father in the explicit manner in which the Prioress seemed to think she should have done. The blood flew to her face, and she laughed a little, and then confessed, with some reluctance and a sense of incongruity, that it was Owen Asher who had told her that her duty lay with her father
and not at all with the convent, and that by going into a convent she was only obeying a personal inclination, and according to her new conception of life personal inclination was the very thing which should be avoided on all occasions. He had therefore bidden her go to her father, this was her last obedience to him; and she had promised her father to go to him as soon as he was settled in Rome and was ready to receive her.

The conversation paused, and then Evelyn asked the Prioress to advise her.

'I cannot forsake my father, can I? Owen Asher was quite right when he told me I must go and live with my father.’

'The advice comes to you in a very doubtful way, my dear child, and from an equivocal side; I will only say you have reason to doubt the counsel of a man who was capable of acting towards a young girl as he acted towards you; I will not say any more — at least not for the present.

‘But you will think over it, dear Mother, and tell me.’

Late that night a telegram came from Rome telling Evelyn that her father was dangerously ill, and that she was to start at once for Rome.

LXVII

The wind had gathered the snow into the bushes and all the corners of the common, and the whole earth seemed but a little brown patch, with a dead grey sky sweeping by. For many months the sky had been grey, and heavy clouds had passed slowly, like a funeral, above the low horizon. The wind had torn the convent garden until nothing but a few twigs remained; even the laurels seemed about to lose their leaves. The nuns had retreated with blown skirts; Sister Mary John had had to relinquish her digging,and her jackdaw had sought shelter in the hen-house.

One night when the nuns assembled for evening prayer, the north wind seemed to lift the roof as with hands; the windows were shaken; the nuns divined the wrath of God in the wind, and Miss Dingle, who had learnt, through pious incantations, that the Evil One would attempt a descent into the convent, ran to warn the porteress of the danger. At that moment the wind was so loud that the porteress listened perforce to the imaginings of Miss Dingle's weak brain, thinking, in spite of herself, that some communication had been vouchsafed to Miss Dingle. 'Who knows,' her thoughts said, 'who can say; the ways of Providence are inscrutable;' and she looked at the little daft woman as if she were a messenger.

As they stood calculating the strength of the lock and hinges the door bell suddenly began to jingle.

'He would not ring the bell; he would come down the chimney,' said Miss Dingle.

'But who can it be,' said the porteress, 'and at this hour?'

'This will save you;' Miss Dingle thrust a rosary into the nun's hand and fled down the passage; 'be sure to throw it over his neck.'

The nun tried to collect her scattered thoughts and her courage. Again the bell jingled; this time the peal seemed crazier than the first, and rousing herself into action, she asked through the grating who it might be.

'It is I, Sister Evelyn; open the door quickly, Sister Agnes.'

The nun held the door open, thanking God it was not the Devil, and Evelyn dragged her trunk through the door, letting it drop upon the mat abruptly.

‘Tell dear Mother I want to speak to her — say that I must see her — be sure you say that, and I will wait for her in the parlour.’

'There is no light there; I will fetch one.’

'Never mind, don’t trouble. I don’t want a light; but go to the Reverend Mother and tell her I must see her before I see anyone else.’

There could be no doubt that something grave had happened, and the porteress hurried down the passage. Evelyn sat at the table looking into the darkness, thinking of the last time she had been in this room. It was just a month ago that she had been called away to Rome. For days he had fluctuated between life and death, sometimes waking to consciousness, then falling back into trance. In spite of the hopes the doctors had held out to him, he insisted that he was dying. ‘I am worn to a thread,' he said. 'I shall flicker like that candle when it reaches the socket — and then I shall go out. But I am not afraid of death — death is a great experience, and we are all better for every experience. There is only one thing — ’

He was thinking of his work; he was sorry he was called away before his work was done; and then he seemed to forget it, to be absorbed in things of greater importance.

And Evelyn thought she must have drowsed a little as she sat waiting for the sound of the nun’s soft woollen slippers in the hall, for now the Prioress stood beside her she had not heard her come in.

'My dear Evelyn, you need not tell me, I know what has happened. Come, let us kneel down and say a prayer.

She was about to say she needed no prayer, but the impulse to obey the Reverend Mother was stronger, and the prayer they said seemed to quiet her grief, and she began to speak of the month she had spent in Rome. Once the Reverend Mother sought to dissuade her from the painful story, but seeing that it relieved her to tell it she allowed her to tell, and she told it in her impetuous way. Sometimes the wind interrupted the Prioress’s attention, and she thought of the safety of her roofs, and once Evelyn noticed the wind, and her notice of it served to accentuate the terror of her grief. 'I waited by his bedside seeing the soul prepare for departure. The soul begins to leave the body several days before it goes; it flies round and round like a bird that is going to some distant country. I must tell you all about it, Mother. He lay for hours and hours, looking into a corner of the room. I am sure he saw something there; and one night I heard him call me. I went to him and asked him what he wanted; but he lay quite quiet, looking into the corner of the room, and then he said, “The wall has been taken away.” I know he saw something there. He saw something, he learnt something in that last moment that we do not know. That

last moment is the only real moment of our lives, the only true moment — all the rest is falsehood, delirium, froth. The rest of life is contradictions, distractions and lies, but in the moment before death I am sure everything becomes quite clear to us. Then we learn what we are. We do not know ourselves until then. If I ask who am I, what am I, there is no answer. We do not believe in ourselves, because we do not know who we are; we do not know enough of ourselves to believe in anything. We do not believe; we acquiesce that certain things are so because it is necessary to acquiesce, but we do not believe in anything, not even that we are going to die; for if we did we should live for death and not for life. Oh, Mother, I am very different from the woman who left the convent a month ago. To sit by a dying man, day after day, and talk of death is a great experience. It is not so much what he says to you about death as what you can read in his face; no, not read, you guess the truths which he is beginning to experience.

'I know that my father knew the truth before he died. Yes, he was always a Catholic — that is not what I mean; I mean the real belief that comes at that moment, when we know what we are and where we are going. We are certain of everything then. Then we believe as we have never believed before. You will tell me that those who live in the world believe in God — so they do, I suppose, in a way; they acquiesce; but if they really believed, if they knew, as my father knew before he died, they would give up everything and go about in rags, and pray, and lose themselves in thoughts of God. They would forget to eat, they would not notice hunger or thirst; and they would fade away, their eyes fixed upon something that we may not see — that something which my father saw before he died. Even here, in this convent of perpetual adoration, you do not seem to me to believe enough, for if you believed that God were really there, on the altar, you would neither eat nor drink; you would remain kneeling until you lost yourselves in death — until you found your true selves.'

'After an experience like yours, Evelyn, one sees life quite differently, and it is through such experiences that we discover our real selves and the way that God intends us to walk in. It is only through great grief that we come to know ourselves. We can easily dispense with our joys; but no one would forego any great sorrow they have been through. I believe we would endure it all over again rather than that we should be as we were before.'

'Mother, all that is real in life is our sense of its unreality.'

'But we are here for God's own purpose; we must remember that. We must live because it is God's holy will.'

'Sometimes it is difficult to live; there are times when it seems much easier to die.'

'My dear child, I have been through what you are going through now, and it may help you to know that in times of great sorrow it is easier to live in a convent than it is to live in the world. You know what our life is. You will find its simplicity a help.'

'Will you have me in the convent?'

'Yes, of course we will. You did not think we should close our door on you in your trouble. You came to us in our trouble.'

'I knew you wouldn't, Mother.'

She stretched out her hand, and clasping the old nun's hand she told her of her journey to Rome, of her life in Rome, of her daily prayers in a certain church. She spoke of the nurses, of the doctors and the funeral, and then burst into tears, and the Prioress strove to calm her in vain. Evelyn reproached herself for having allowed her father to go to Rome without her. The convent had been a temptation, and she had yielded to it as she had to other temptations. Then seeing that she had pained the Reverend Mother, she asked her to forgive her.

'It is hard to distinguish sometimes between right and wrong; it should be easy, but it isn't, and I know that it pleased me to help the convent with my singing. I do not know that that is not why I have come here. Is my grief real grief? Sometimes I forget it; sometimes I find myself thinking of indifferent things — of what I shall sing for you at Benediction — at other times I am overwhelmed in grief and then through all my grief the thought comes: that this is as it should be.'

The wise Prioress did not answer her. A few moments seemed a great while, and she awoke from her trance to hear the Prioress telling her that she had experienced a great sorrow very early in her life; it had been the means of awakening in her that sense of the unreality of things which comes to us all sooner or later; and in the midst'of her grief Evelyn wondered how this woman had survived her grief for forty years; how she still ruled her convent according to her idea.

Evelyn did not know it, but the Prioress knew that her will had gone out to Evelyn like a friend, and she knew that her eyes had a power; and she wished Evelyn to lose her individuality in a rule of life clear and explicit. And Evelyn wished the same. Obedience had come to seem the only sweetness left in the world. Her past life, all of it — she did not except a single year, not even her postulancy — it all seemed trivial and amateurish: now she was to begin the serious business of life.

LXVIII

Next morning she felt that to make her own bed in the morning and to eat simple food in silence were part of the serious business of life. After breakfast she was sent to the sacristy to assist Veronica, and she was glad to be sent into the garden to get some laurel leaves. But she wandered, unable to collect her thoughts sufficiently to find what she was sent for, until Sister Mary John came from her digging and asked her what she was seeking. Evelyn had forgotten, and it was with an effort she remembered. She had been sent to gather laurel leaves.

'I will gather them for you; I know where they are. Take my spade and dig a little while.'

'I do not know how to dig.'

'I'll show you. This is a bed for spring onions, and it wants digging out. You press the spade in as far as you can, pull down the handle so, and take out the earth.'

She did as she was bidden, and suddenly she felt that she must dig to live. The smell of the earth refreshed her, and as a bleak wind was blowing, she had to dig hard to keep herself warm. She worked on till she had to pause for breath, and, leaning on her spade, she looked round, and saw that the trees before breaking into leaf had become grey. She wandered a little way from her digging, and, watched some crocuses pushing through the loose earth. She pondered, wishing herself alone with Nature amid mountains or by the seashore. Suddenly she heard a singing in the air; a lark flew from the common, uttering its incessant song — a quaint interval, reminding her of the bagpipes, and then a passionate cry of joy — two notes uttered again and again. 'A love call,' Evelyn thought it must be, and the bird fell suddenly, swooping, gliding along the air. 'To its nest,' Evelyn thought, 'to its mate.'

She had forgotten her work, but she was not thinking of her father; her mind was vague, and the lark had rearisen, or was it another bird flying towards her? 'It must be the same,' she thought; 'the same common cannot produce two birds that sing so beautifully.' She had never cared to hear a bird sing before, and she wondered if the reason were that she had moved a little nearer to Nature.

Miss Dingle stood at a little distance, exorcising some gooseberry bushes with her rosary. She withdrew like a timid animal, but curiosity was stronger than fear, and she came back like one who wanted to talk to someone, and, hoping to encourage her, Evelyn asked her if she had seen the Devil lately. She hung down her head and retreated, but when she turned away, Evelyn heard her say that she had not seen much of him lately, only once that morning.

'He gets more artful, you know, but he is about; I know he is about.'

She came back to Evelyn and began to tell her where she might see the Devil if she wished, if she were not afraid.

'The bushes grow very thick in that corner, and I don't like to go there.... I have hunted him out of these bushes. He is not here. You needn't be afraid. My rosary has been over them all.'

Evelyn could see that Miss Dingle wished her to exorcise the dangerous corner, and she offered to do so.

'You have two rosaries; you might lend me one.'

'No, I don't think I could. I want two; one for each hand, you see.... I have not seen you in the garden this last day or two. You have been away, haven't you?'

'I have been in Rome.'

'In Rome! Then why don't you go there,' she said, pointing to the dangerous corner, 'and frighten him away? You don't need a rosary if you have touched the precious relics. You would be able to drive him out of the garden, and out of the park too, perhaps, though the park is a very big place. But here comes Sister Mary John. You will tell me another time if you have brought back anything that the Pope has worn.'

Sister Mary John came striding over the broken earth, followed by her jackdaw. The bird stopped to pick up a fat worm, and the nun sent Miss Dingle away very summarily.

'I can't have you here, Alice. Go to the summer-house and drive the Devil away with your holy pictures. There's not time for you, dear, either,' she said to the jackdaw, who had just alighted on her shoulder. And, looking up and down a plot of ground twenty yards long and about ten wide, protected from the east wind by a high yew hedge, she said, 'This is the rhubarb bed, and this piece,' she said, walking to another plot between the yew hedge and the gooseberry bushes, 'will have to be dug up; we were short of vegetables last year.'

At the prospect of so much digging Evelyn's courage failed her, and she was relieved to hear that one of these beds had been dug in the autumn, and that no more would be required from her than the hoeing out of the weeds.

But she found hoeing harder work than she had expected, and when she had cleared a large piece of weeds she had to go over the ground again, having missed a great many.

At dinner time she thought she was too tired to eat, but Sister Mary John consoled her with the assurance that she would soon get accustomed to the work, and in order that she might do so, the nun kept her digging from week's end to week's end. Evelyn said she had found salvation in the garden, but Sister Mary John answered that an absentminded person was no saving of labour in a garden; and without further words the nun told her she was to go in front with a dibble and make holes for the potatoes, for Sister Mary John said she could not be trusted with the seed potatoes, that she would be sure to break the shoots. Sister Mary John seemed to think that she should know by instinct that French beans need not be set as closely together as the scarlet runners; nor could the nun understand that it was possible to live twenty years in the world without knowing that broad beans must be trodden firmly into the ground.

In about three weeks their work was done in the kitchen garden, and Sister Mary John said they must weed the flower beds or there would be no flowers for the Virgin in May. They weeded the beds for many days, filling in the gaps with plants from the nursery. Soon after came the seed sowing: mignonette, sweet peas, stocks, larkspurs, poppies and nasturtiums, all of which should have been sown earlier, the nun said, only the vegetables had taken all their time, and there was no one but she who cared for the garden. They all liked to see the flowers on the altar, 'but not one of them will tie up her habit and dig, and they are as ignorant as you are, dear.'

'Sister, that is unkind. I've learnt as much as could be expected in a month.'

'You're not so careless as you were.'

'I had a friend,' Evelyn said, 'who used to hear the earth as we hear voices, or very nearly.... How mysteriously soft the wind blows over the common.'

'God created the earth before He created man,' the nun said, as she passed on, weeding rapidly and skilfully. 'Our love of the earth is deeper than our love of art.'

Sister Mary John pointed to the daffodils that a warm night had nearly brought to blossom, and Evelyn followed the nun with her eyes, as she wandered by the beds. She moved so silently and worked so instinctively that she seemed as much a part of the garden as the wind, or the rain, or the sun.

LXIX

Evelyn perceived the wisdom of the Prioress in these long mornings spent in manual work. Veronica, on account of her age, could not reprove her, nor could she submit herself so easily to Veronica's authority, and she often stood looking through the sacristy forgetful of the half-cleaned candlestick in her hand. In these moments the cup of life seemed unendurably bitter; a long life in the convent affrighted her, and she could not return to the world. To remember that she was alone and would have to go on living had become a grief that pierced her like a sword; a sense of desolation swept over her mind; sometimes in the midst of her singing she would lose control over herself, and the Sister would look round from the organ, fearing she would not be able to continue her song.

'She must take the veil,' the Prioress said to herself as she knelt in her stall; 'nothing else will set her free from her grief.' The Prioress remembered the great relief that the mere putting on of the habit brings to the soul; and she rose from her knees quite determined. She would be opposed by Mother Hilda, but Mother Hilda would not have Mother Philippa's support.

'I look upon her past life,' the sub-Prioress said, 'as so much dead wood; all the rubble and wreck must be cleared away before the new growth can begin in her. You will agree, Mother, that the veil makes a great difference; it's like marriage after a long engagement — you know what I mean, dear Mother.'

'Yes, I think I do,' the Prioress answered, looking approvingly at the sub-Prioress. 'When one has taken the white veil, the past is behind us, one knows where one is going. But I fear, Mother Hilda, that you are not with us in this matter.'

'It's because of Evelyn's present state of mind that I do not feel sure that this is the best moment for her to receive the white veil. When her mood passes, as it will pass, she may think quite differently.'

'I do not think that,' the Prioress said. 'A more serious objection is that she has only been in the novitiate three months.'

'And her postulancy has been broken by a month in Rome. It should begin again,' said Mother Hilda.

'On that point the bishop will have to be consulted,' and she tried to conciliate Mother Hilda by reminding her that Monsignor had telegraphed for Evelyn. 'Her journey to Rome, you will

admit, was quite unavoidable. Will you tell her, Mother Hilda, when you go downstairs, that I shall be glad to see her in my room?'

And when Evelyn came to the Prioress's room she was addressed as *Sister Teresa*, and the Prioress told her that she had chosen that name on account of Evelyn's admiration for the saint's writings and character.

'I felt I should like to call you Teresa, and you will prove yourself worthy of the name, my dear child.'

'But, Mother, my postulancy!'

'Hasn't the Mother Mistress told you that I intend to lay your case before the bishop. To-morrow you go into the week's retreat which precedes the clothing. And now you must think of your past life as being really behind you; you are Evelyn Innes no longer, you are Sister Teresa.'

'But my past, dear Mother, has been behind me this long while. There can be no manner of doubt about that. I am filled with wonder when I think of the life I used to lead before my conversion.'

'You feel that you could not return to the world?'

'To my old friends, to those who still pursue shadows? No, dear Mother, I could not go back to the world, to the stage, and sing operas for the money and applause I should get by singing.'

'That I believe; but do you think that the life here is the most suitable to you? Is it the life of your deliberate choice? Remember that there are many other rules of life — there are the active orders.'

'Dear Mother, there is no time for thinking any more; I must act. I cannot tell you if the rule here is more suitable than some other rule which I have not tried. I have had some experience of your rule; if you will take me I am yours. If you do not' — she stopped, and stood looking at the Reverend Mother — 'I cannot think what will happen. I've been through a great deal, and feel that I am unequal to any further experiments. Don't you know what I mean?'

'Oh, yes, I think I know very well indeed.... You are still suffering from the shock of your father's death.'

'My father's death, dear Mother, was a great shock to me, but his death was only a link in a very long chain; from the very beginning it was all ordained, every step was marked out. At the time

I did not understand why I was perplexed, why I had doubts, but things have become much clearer. In my youth I accepted the conventions, but there was always an uneasy feeling in my heart. This feeling was in me in the beginning, but it died away; for years I think I must have lived without scruples of any kind. My tether was a long one; I wandered far, but suddenly I came to the end of it. That's how it was.'

'You see, my dear child, my responsibility in admitting you to the convent is a great one. Convince me that you have a vocation, and I shall not mind the responsibility.'

'How shall I convince you, Mother?'

'By telling me your story, by telling me everything you know about yourself. If I am a nun, I am an old woman, and I suffered deeply before I came here.'

Evelyn told her story from the day she met Owen Asher to the day she went to confession to Monsignor.

'And the strange part of it is that I would not marry. Owen Asher often asked me to marry him, but something always held me back from marriage. Ulick Dean nearly succeeded;' and she told of the extraordinary lassitude which had overcome her one evening, how she had sat in her armchair looking at the fire, unable to get up. 'My tether was a sense of that one sin, for I always felt it to be wrong to live with a man who was not your husband; but it was not until my father died that I began to perceive that my life was wrong from end to end. It usen't to seem wrong to me to spend months learning an opera and singing it for a great deal of money, or to spend as much on a dress as a workman and his family could live on for a whole year. But I think I always thought it wrong to live with Owen Asher, and as I did not want to give up living with him, I was forced to deny God. Owen Asher knew all the atheistical arguments very well, and I read the books he gave me to read. But to live without faith, dear Mother, is a nightmare. Driving home in the brougham after singing, I never failed to ask myself, What is the use of all this? it is all over now. Sometimes before I went down to the theatre I used to say, "In three hours — in four hours it will be all over, and then it will be the same as if I hadn't sung at all!" If one doesn't believe in God, life ceases to have a meaning; that is the atheist's difficulty. Owen Asher used to feel the same as I did. I remember his once stopping me; he looked round suddenly and there was such conviction in his eyes when he said. "Evelyn, there's nothing in it. I've tried everything and there's nothing in it." Still he goes on living, pursuing pleasures in which he knows there is nothing except disappointment.

'Looking back upon my life, that is how I see it. I cannot live without faith, without authority, without guidance. I am weak, I require authority. I am bound to tell you all these things so that you may be able to decide whether I have a vocation.'

‘The ways by which we come back to God are many, and I think I understand very well how you have been brought back. This convent was but an instrument in His hands for the purpose of bringing you back, and it may be it has served its purpose now and you can return to the world. One can love God in the world and serve Him in the world. Some serve Him best in the world, some in the convent. When your grief has died down a little you may be able to return to the world.’

The Prioress waited for Evelyn to answer, but she did not answer, and she said, —

'My dear child, tell me of what you are thinking; confide in me.’

‘It’s just that, Mother — what I have told you. I cannot live without faith, and if I leave the convent I lose my faith, or part of it. Even in the month I spent in Rome I lost something. Dogma does not appeal to me as much as practice, and Rome is full of worldly ecclesiastics who quarrel and abuse each other and contradict each other. I hardly dare to say it, but their worldliness, or what seemed to me their worldliness, was near destroying my faith again. It is only here that I can believe as I want to believe. Here everyone is humble, here everyone has renounced the lust of the flesh; so I know that you all believe, for your lives prove it.’

'We prayed, and our prayer was answered. Prayer is the only real power in the world, my dear Teresa, and you have had proof of the efficacy of our prayers; and if anyone here needed proof of the efficacy of prayer she would find it in you — how you came here, how you were brought here, is surely one of the most wonderful things in the world, and yet one of the most natural, if one thinks of it.’

The Prioress got up from her chair, and Evelyn followed her to the novitiate, where the novices were making the dress that Evelyn was to wear when she received the white veil.

'You see, Teresa, we spare no expense or trouble on your dress,' said the Prioress.

'Oh, it’s no trouble, dear Mother;' and Sister Angela rose from her chair and turned the dress right side out and shook it, so that Evelyn might admire the handsome folds into which the silk fell.

'And see, here is the wreath,' said Sister Jerome, picking up a wreath of orange blossom from a chair.

'And what do you think of your veil, Sister Teresa? Sister Rufina did this feather-stitch; hasn’t she done it beautifully?’

Evelyn examined the veil, and her interest was sincere in it, for she believed that the ritual and its symbolic garments were necessary to complete the inward conviction that she was liberated from the world.

'And Sister Rufina is making your wedding-cake. Mother Philippa has told her to put in as many raisins and currants as she pleases; yours will be the richest cake we have ever had in the convent.' Sister Angela spoke very demurely, for she was thinking of the portion of the cake that would come to her, and there was a little gluttony in her voice as she spoke of the almond paste it would have upon it.

'It is indeed a pity,' said Sister Jerome, 'that Sister Teresa's clothing takes place so early in the year.'

'How so, Sister Jerome?' Evelyn asked incautiously.

'Because if it had been a little later, or if Monsignor had not been delayed in Rome — I only thought,' she added, stopping short, 'that you would like Monsignor to give you the white veil — it would be nicer for you, or if the bishop gave it,' she added, 'or Father Ambrose. I am sure Sister Veronica never would have been a nun at all if Father Ambrose had not professed her. Father Daly is such a little frump.'

'That will do, children. I cannot really allow our chaplain to be spoken of in that manner.'

The Prioress and Evelyn descended the novitiate stairs together, and the Prioress said, —

'I think, dear Teresa, your retreat had better begin to-morrow.'

LXX

The silence of the convent had once seemed to her a hardship, and now these extra hours of silence seemed to her no hardship at all, and she passed a whole week without speaking, and in special humility of the spirit. She accepted all Mother Hilda's instruction as a patient accepts her medicines. She looked forward to the gown, the veil, the wreath and the ceremony as the patient looks forward to the doctor's ordinances, and she was anxious to exceed the rule, to do a little more than it required of her. The stage had enabled her to escape from herself, her vows were a more serious escapement, and on the day of her clothing she was the most infantile nun in the convent. She joined in all the babble and laughter, and her appreciation of the wedding-cake exceeded Sister Agatha's. But she over-did it a little, and in the midst of her gaiety her mood changed, and she asked if she might go into the garden. Sister Jerome was particularly noisy that afternoon, her unceasing humour had begun to jar, and Evelyn felt she must get away from it.

It was a relief to watch the gardener.

He was mowing between the flower-beds, and the thick young grass that had just grown up after the winter lay along the lawn in irregular lines; and she noticed that the summer had not yet covered the earth, and that brown patches showed among grey-green tulip leaves, the tall May tulips which the Dutchmen used to paint. She looked towards the orchard, where the white pear blossom was shedding, and the apple blossom was beginning to show in tight pink knots amid brown boughs.

The convent pets had increased, and Evelyn in her walk round the garden met three goslings straying under the flowering laburnums. She returned them to their mother in the orchard, and a little farther on she came upon the cat playing with the long-lost tortoise. He had found the tortoise among the potato ridges, and, sitting in front of it, tapped the black head whenever it appeared beyond the shell. And holding the great grey tom cat by his front paws she decided to carry him to the other end of the garden, to where sparrows were pecking up the sweet peas. And then she wandered in St Peter's Walk, watching the young leaves swinging.

The mystery of the spring seemed afloat in the misty distances, and standing on the terrace, her eyes fixed on the wooded horizon, she thought of the Birmingham girl whose renunciation of the world had been much more complete than hers had been that morning. For the order of the Carmelites was more severe than that of the Passionists. She remembered the lilacs in the courtyard, and the smell of the wax inside the church, and the quavering voices of the nuns, and the priest's intoning of the Veni Creator. She did not linger over these external appearances — she was more concerned with her personal impression. Three years ago the ceremony had

seemed to her like a gross mediaeval superstition. She remembered how it had frightened her. That a girl should choose to forego lover, husband, children, riches, fame — everything! All these things might have been hers, but she had put them away, knowing them to be vain things.

Evelyn remembered how even then she had begun to perceive the unreality of the things which the world calls real things. Yet on the day of the girl's clothing it had seemed to her that for a time one should be the dupe of that illusion which the world calls reality. It had seemed to her that the girl should have tasted of the cup before she had refused it. She could have sympathised with a renunciation, but she could not then sympathise with a refusal. She could not admit that anyone should know from the beginning that the world was a vain thing; such precocity; and conflicted with her prejudice. She remembered how she had been taken with a sudden impulse to ask this girl what reason had compelled her to refuse life, and how she had followed Merat through a side door and down a passage. She had come to a room divided by a grating, and behind the grating she had seen the girl, her face suffused with tears, and she had not been able to ask what she had come to ask. The conviction that the girl could not answer her had stayed the question on her lips. The mere sight of the girl had told her that she had been led by a sublime instinct beside which the wisdom of all the philosophers was very little....

That girl had known the truth from the beginning, and had confirmed her conviction by an act, and Evelyn remembered that even at that time her own feet were on the way that had led her to the convent. But how incredulous she would have looked if anyone had told her then that in a little while she would stand a nun on the terrace of the Wimbledon convent.

There was no doubt that she was greatly changed, and yet it was the strange discomfort of her clothes that reminded her she was a nun — the voluminous trailing habit with its wide, hanging sleeves, and, smiling, she thought that this stiff, white head-dress made her feel more like a nun than her vows.

She stood, her eyes fixed on the horizon. It had changed from blue to violet, the evening was growing more beautiful. Evelyn had begun to feel that she would stand looking at it for ever, and it was at that moment that the rosy-cheeked porteress came tripping down the terrace to tell her that a lady had called to see her.

'The lady is in the parlour. Mother Hilda is with her, and she has sent me for you.'

It was Louise who had called to see her, but when Evelyn entered the parlour Mother Hilda was not there, and she was not certain if she should remain.

'I can see you are doubtful whether you should stay with me, Evelyn; how is it that you can accept such obedience? And that ridiculous gown, those sleeves and that head-dress! I hear you

were Clothed to-day. You have had your hair cut off. But is this the Evelyn, the Evelyn with whom I used to sing?'

'Yes, dear Louise, it is I; and it is kind of you to come here. But how did you find me out? Let me know before Mother Hilda returns. We shall not be able to talk freely before her. This opportunity is quite exceptional.'

'But, Evelyn, your gown distracts me. Well, it was accident that gave me your address. Owen Asher did not know it.'

'Louise, you must not talk to me of him. Thougn I should like to know he is well. Nor must you talk to me of the stage. All that is past.'

'Then what shall we talk about? '

'Tell me how you found me out.'

'You look so serious that I shall find it hard to tell you anything.... I was singing Schubert's "Ave Maria," and a man told me he had heard a nun at Wimbledon sing it more beautifully than anyone — myself, of course, excepted. Something told me it was you, and the moment I heard you I knew.'

'I have not sung it for some weeks.'

'It is about three weeks ago, but I was with a friend and could not call that day, and the following day I went to Paris. I have just returned. This is the first free day I had.'

'It is very good of you to come, Louise. I am glad you have not forgotten me.'

'But tell me — I want you to tell me how long this fancy — this whim of yours — is going to last.'

'You surely cannot think that I am not serious. I assure you that living in a convent is no joke at all.'

'Then you are not happy?'

'On the contrary, I am happy, and I grow happier every day. When I said that to live in a convent was not a joke I meant that it would be horrible if one were not sure of one's vocation.'

'But you will tell me, Evelyn, what reason led you here, what impulse.'

'Ah, that is what everyone wants to know. The question you have asked me is the question everyone wishes to put to a nun. I remember longing to ask a Carmelite nun why she had refused the world. She was only eighteen or twenty.'

'And what answer did she give you?'

'I asked her nothing; the reason was plain upon her face. But I will tell you why I came here. I came here in quest of happiness. The same reason that took me to the stage took me here. The happiness I seek is not the happiness I sought in art and lovers. But I came here in quest of happiness.'

'And you have found it?'

'Nuns are far happier than actresses. They seem to me to be perfectly happy, and they have surrendered everything.'

'And are you happy?'

'I am happier than I used to be. But I have not yet taken the vows which separate me irrevocably from the things which make us unhappy; I am not so happy as the nuns who have been here for twenty years, but I am sure I am happier than you are, Louise.'

'I am not happy at all.'

The conversation paused and then Evelyn said, 'The moment we come to see that life is something more than a set of adventures (that is how I used to look upon my life), the moment we come to see that life has a spiritual meaning, we find ourselves propelled to alter our lives.'

'One can alter one's life without shutting oneself up in a nunnery?'

'We must go where we feel we shall find health.... A person suffering from a contagious disease would leave the infected place as soon as he was cured.'

'Perhaps your convalescent might think it his duty to remain to tend the sick.'

'Ah, which is the better, the active or the contemplative order? which is it better, to pray or to act?'

‘My dear Evelyn, you were always a little mad. I know all about convents and nuns. I was brought up in a convent, and I, too, was tempted by the religious life, but I did not give way to the temptation. But what are you striving after, Evelyn? You can never know for certain that there is a future life.’

‘Even so. It interests me more to pursue a moral idea than to sing difficult music for applause and gain. The inward satisfaction one gets by living for an idea is infinitely greater than one gets by the pursuit of artistic or other pleasure. It is delicious to feel that one is not prompted by selfish motives. I assure you I would sing the ugliest music ever written to get money to pay the convent’s debts. To pay off these debts is the object of my life.’

'You think that it is a sufficient object?’

'It is sufficient for me. London had come to seem like a stuffy omnibus. Moreover, I could not breathe in London.’

LXXI

The door opened and Mother Hilda came in, and, after a few words, Louise asked if they might go into the garden. Mother Hilda assented readily, and, as they walked down the terrace, they stopped to listen to the nuns who were singing in the library. Louise spoke of a school, of the advantages of the situation.

'And what an inducement,' she said, 'for mothers to send their children to you. Where could girls learn singing as they could here?'

Mother Hilda did not perceive that Louise's remark was intended to be satirical, and she explained that they could not have a school without altering the rule of the order. Louise regretted that this was so, and spoke of the convent where she had been educated. Mother Hilda knew the convent and several of the nuns, and they were soon talking of their friends, of their tempers, their ailments and their amiabilities. Sister So-and-So was dead, Mother So-and-So was getting very old. Evelyn knew none of them, and her thoughts turned to Louise, and the annoyance this visit caused her seemed out of proportion. She had wished this day to pass in meditation, and her meditations had been interrupted for no good reason, to argue about matters which this day had settled for ever. She did not wish to think unkindly of Louise, but she hoped she would not come to see her again. Visits are only agreeable when they are prompted by the desire for mutual benefit and when they are an exchange of mutual ideas. What benefit had come to her or to Louise by this visit? They had not a thought in common, and once all their thoughts had been common. She had lived with this woman, she had sung with her, they had travelled together, and now Louise was merely a faded recollection, a something that had once been.

By this time Mother Hilda and Louise had exhausted their memories of the French convent, and the conversation had begun to flag, and Evelyn wondered what would happen next. At that moment the porteress appeared — she had come to say that the Prioress would be glad to speak with Mother Hilda. Evelyn and Louise walked on, and they spoke of Mother Hilda, without feeling any interest in what they were saying, until they came to the fish-ponds; then to keep the conversation from falling Evelyn had to tell Louise how tame the fish were. Louise began to sing the song of the Rhine Maidens. Evelyn joined her for a few bars and then Louise asked her to throw away the ring.

'What ring, dear?'?

'The ring that was put on your finger to-day.'

'No ring was put on my finger. I shall not get the ring till I am professed. That will be in a year from now.'

'Evelyn, let me implore you.'

'But, my dear Louise, if I am happier here than I was in the world I had better remain here.'

'The nuns only want your money. When you have given them your money you will be unhappy.'

'These women are my dearest friends. It is painful to me to hear them spoken of in this way.'

A slight mist was rising, a thin moon floated like a pale feather in the sky, and the convent roofs were clear in the luminous air. A nun had come with a message to Evelyn, and she said, —

'Now I must say good-bye.'

'Shall I not see you again, Evelyn? Have we nothing in common any more? Have we faded from each other? I cannot tell you how indescribably sad it seems to me.'

'Only because you put all your faith into the things of this world, which are passing. But I shall pray for you, Louise; I shall always remember you in my prayers.'

'Only in your prayers, Evelyn?'

'My name is no longer Evelyn. I am Sister Teresa.'

LXXII

One day, in the last month of Evelyn's noviceship, Sister Mary John sat at the harmonium, her eyes fixed, following Evelyn's voice like one in a dream. Evelyn was singing Stradella's 'Chanson d'Eglise,' and when she had finished the nun rose from her seat, and, clasping her friend's hands, she thanked her for her singing with effusion and with tears.

For some time past their eyes lighted up when they met in the passages, and it was delicious to think for a moment how closely they were dependent upon each other. Once Evelyn had noticed that the Sister seemed to avoid her; it might be only a seeming, she thought, for a few days after Sister Mary John had hurried to meet her. On another occasion she had noticed a flutter as it were in the nun's eyes and a change of colour in her cheeks and then an appealing look in her eyes, like one whose heart misgives her. Evelyn knew the nature of her own feelings, but she feared that Sister Mary John would one day suspect that hers was neither permissible nor valid; and then, whatever it cost her, she would put it aside; she would not allow anything to come between her and her love of God. Evelyn knew that this nun would not hesitate to leave the convent if she felt her vocation to be endangered by remaining. The possibility of such a leave-taking frightened her, and she resolved she would avoid all casual conversation for the future. But it was difficult to do this; their musical occupation left them constantly together, and Evelyn's coldness increased the nun's desire for her affection.

This friendship, which had begun in the music, caught root in the Latin language, in the Holy Office. It was from Mother Hilda that Evelyn had learnt the groundwork of the Office, but it was from Sister Mary John that she had learned the great place the Office should take in the life of a nun. The nun had caught Evelyn's eyes fixed upon her as she scolded against those who are content with a mere recital of the words and shrink from the labour of learning to appreciate the wonderful appropriateness, acquired not in a single composition, but built up bit by bit in the centuries like some great epic. She had guessed that Evelyn was ready and willing for further instruction.

And they had read the Breviary together, four great volumes, one for every season of the year; the language was in itself a beguilement, and behind the language there was the rich, mysterious tradition of the Church. Sister Mary John had taught her Latin, and Evelyn had learnt how these books of ritual and observances can satisfy the mind more than any secular literature. There was always something in the Office for them to talk about, something new amid much that remained the same, and the communication of her pleasure at the reappearance of a favourite hymn was always something to look forward to.

In this personal intimacy, so rare in a convent, but which peculiar circumstances had allowed to them, she had become aware of Sister Mary John's extraordinary passion for God. The nun had tried to hide it from her, but she had discovered it, and it was during this time that Evelyn had made her first real advance in piety. It was from the example of Sister Mary John that she had learned how we may think of God even to forgetfulness of our own identity, living while on earth, as it were, in the very atmosphere of His bosom. To watch her friend in prayer was in itself an instigation to prayer; and Sister Mary John had begun to think she had discovered a genius in Evelyn, which, if cultivated, would give a new visionary to the Church. She believed that Evelyn would attain an extraordinary sanctity, that she would acquire marvellous power, and all her prayers were directed to this end. She even neglected the prayers she should say to release her own soul from purgatory, thinking that a few more years would matter little for so great an end. To excite Evelyn's enthusiasm she even did violence to her own humility, speaking of her own visions and ecstasies — poor though they were and inferior to those which would be given to Evelyn if Evelyn would devote herself wholly to God.

Sister Mary John was the only nun in the Wimbledon convent who reminded Evelyn of the nuns she had read of in the lives of the saints. Ecstasies, she felt sure, were not Mother Philippa's religious lot, nor Veronica's. Veronica was far too trim and methodical for a vision. But certain as she was of the somewhat lowly spirituality of the other nuns, she was sure that Sister Mary John succeeded in living beyond herself. That was her own phrase; her admonition was always that we should strive to live a little beyond ourselves. When the sensible realities faded, she said the Word of God became clearer, and this evacuation of sense had often taken her when she sat alone playing the organ in the church; and after these transports the return to the physical world was slow and painful.

'I have written down some of my visions in a book; I have never shown them to anyone, but I will show them to you.'

Beguiled by the immediate moment, and believing it would be to her friend's advantage to read her manuscript, she sought for it among the music, explaining that she had written it as if it were a translation from some mediaeval French writer.

'Do not read it now; take it to the library.'

Evelyn took it to the library at once, and she read how the Sister had been met suddenly in the midst of a great darkness by a shining light which unfolded and revealed to her the Divine Bridegroom, who took her in His arms, saying that He loved her. The anecdote was told so simply that it convinced, and Evelyn paused in her reading to think that whoever attains to any knowledge of the unseen world does so by foregoing some part of her knowledge of the natural world. Whoever prays sees God in a greater or less degree, and visions are but the revelations of

the spiritual world about us. ‘Yes,' she said, speaking to herself, 'the spiritual world is revealed to us by prayer, just as the material world is discovered to us according to the measure of our senses.’

She read that while looking at a picture of St Francis, whom Christ had taken to His bosom, Sister Mary John had heard a voice saying, 'I will gather thee, oh, my bride, to my bosom in a far warmer embrace, and our communion shall be so perfect that it may not be seen.' Evelyn wondered if the nun had had any scruples regarding her visions, and, turning the pages over, she discovered that once a scruple had entered her heart.

One night she had been awakened, she knew not how or why. It seemed as if she had been awakened to see a soft light shining in the corner of the room, which was quite dark. She lay with her feet and hands folded, watching the light which grew wider until it descended upon her; and when she awoke again she was lying on her left side, and an angel was beside her. She could just see him in the faint and tremulous light which his flesh emitted, and he folded her in his arms, and his white wings closed about her, and it seemed to her that she had never seen anything so beautiful as his flesh. He folded her closely in his arms, and told her how he loved her, and watched for her, and he held her so closely that the two seemed to become one. Then her flesh became beautiful and luminous like his, and she seemed to have a feeling of love and tenderness for it. She saw his face quite clearly; she seemed to have seen it in some picture. 'But oh, how much more beautiful is the real face,' she thought; and then she hoped he would kiss her; but he did not kiss her, they only seemed to become one — one perfect soul united for ever and ever. He said that she was the counterpart he had been waiting for in heaven, and she fell asleep in his arms — a beautiful sleep, deep and refreshing as the sea, and when she awoke he had left her.

Sister Mary John confessed that she was unable to explain the words, ‘I am your counterpart and await you in heaven.' For it was Christ who awaited her in heaven, and for this reason she prayed, if it were God’s holy will, that the angel might not visit her again.

The next day at Mass she had feared she would never gather strength to go to the sacred table. But suddenly she had heard a voice saying, 'Come, come, my beloved spouse, I wait for thee; I will descend into thee and take my joy in thee.' Evelyn laid down the book. This passionate materialisation of God’s love she felt she could never feel. She did not see the wounds, nor could she count the nails, nor did her soul ever escape into the wound in the side and find a divine beverage in the flowing blood. The Christ to whom her thoughts went out was neither the victim nor the bridegroom, but the young man who had appeared in Galilee, preaching a doctrine which could alone save men from themselves. It was not God, but it was the wonder of the moral law that delighted her, and her heart remained dry, if it did not rebel against a physical love and perception of God.

She resolved to say very little when she gave back the manuscript; but something had to be said, and Evelyn confessed her opinions. But the Sister did not understand her scruples, and she charged Evelyn's love of God with being cold.

'We are the brides of Christ; Saint Teresa has spoken quite plainly on that point. And St John of the Cross speaks of the union of God in much the same way, and so did all the saints. Oh, Sister, your scruples are morbid; we should surely set no measure to our love of God. There is no lover like God. He is always by you and you can turn to Him at any moment…. God wishes us to keep all our love for Him.'

The Sister's innocent candour made her feel ashamed and she resolved never to suspect Sister Mary's love of God again. She even denied to herself that she had ever suspected it, and accused her sinful imagination. But in the secret life of her soul this intimate and almost sensual love of God continued to perplex her, and while mistrusting it she half desired it, asking herself if faith in God were possible without passionate love. She was aware that her belief in God was more a moral than a sensible conviction. She did not see Christ in the Host as Sister Mary John had done, and she was not certain whether she accepted the Host as an extraordinary symbolic interpretation of God's constant descent into man, of the union of the human and the Divine kind, or as the actual body of the Creator and administrator of things. If her faith on this essential point was not clear, could she live in a convent dedicated to perpetual adoration! She was not quite certain on this point, and while thinking she remembered that no other nun but Sister Mary John was possessed by sufficient faith to allow her to see the Divine flesh in the Host. Evelyn reflected that if she were to leave the convent she might lose her faith. She could conquer her sinful nature only among those whose lives proved to her that they held the world to be worthless. She could live safe from sin only amid a stream of petitions going up daily to God for her safety. Moreover, her belief in the great sacrament had increased since she had come back from Rome; she desired faith, an ardent, irrevocable, sensible faith, and it would not be withheld from her if she prayed.

By a special dispensation from the Reverend Mother, her watch before the sacrament was increased from half an hour to an hour; she was therefore put on an equality with the choir nuns; and kneeling before the sacrament she thought of God as intimately as she dared, excluding all thought of the young Galilean prophet and seer, allowing herself to think only of the exquisite doctrine. She did not wish Him to take her in His arms until one day starting suddenly from her prayers she asked who it was who stood before her. She seemed to see Him among His disciples, sitting at a small table with a love-light upon His face. She scrutinised the face, fearing it might not be His. She seemed to have seen it. Presently she discovered Ulick; and tremblingly she remembered the night she found him among his disciples. So she did not dare to think of Christ any longer; and with regret and tenderness, and yet with a certain exaltation

of the spirit, she turned to the Father, to the original essence which had existed before the world needed a redeemer. She lost herself for a time in the vast spirit which hears the song of Nature through space and the ages. But very soon she turned to the young Galilean prophet again, and His exquisite doctrine seemed to her to be all that man needs to bring to perfect fruition the original germ of immortality implanted in him.

The Prioress divined her trouble, and in consideration of it allowed her to communicate every day, and henceforth He and she were no longer divided. Time passed so quickly in thinking of Him that only a few moments seemed to have divided them, and she awoke at dawn conscious that the hour of the Lord was nigh.

On Sundays the interval with God was longer, for on Sundays the choral Mass was at nine for the convenience of strangers, and the nuns received holy communion at an earlier hour. So there was a long interval in which God brooded in the heart, in which she walked enfolded in the Divine atmosphere. Then the spirit and flesh ceased to battle, and the flesh received the spirit at every pore. But unhappily this state was forfeit to any slight interruption, and the object of all the nuns was to make it last as long as possible. As sacristan Evelyn was especially liable to interruptions. There were occasions when the server did not attend, and it befell Evelyn to recite the Confetior aloud to the communicants, to make the final responses and to put out the candles when the priest left the altar; and to do these things lost her the joy of her communion. She was dragged out of the unbounded joys and tenderness which had gathered in her heart.

When communion was carried to the sick, to old Mother Lawrence, who could not come down to the chapel at so early an hour, Evelyn and another novice, each with a lighted candle, and Sister Veronica, with a little bell to announce the coming of the Host, preceded the priest through the cloister and up the novitiate stairs to the infirmary. The novices knelt, with their candles in their hands, at the foot of the bed, and the aged nun, wasted with age and abstinences and prayers, waited, tremulous with expectation, her withered hands feebly clasped, for the priest to lay the Host upon her tongue. Once she was very ill indeed; they thought she was dying, yet in her mortal weakness she strove to get on her knees to receive the sacrament, and Veronica, who perceived Sister Lawrence's intention, passed her hands under the armpits, lifting the old nun, but the knees, in which there was no strength, slipped away, only in her eyes was there any life — little spots which awoke out of their dulness at the approach of the sacrament. The gravity of the moment ennobled their different sentiments — Father Daly's faith gross and obtuse, Veronica's faith inherent and unsullied, Evelyn's faith passionate and febrile. The two women were in tears, and their tears only made them more beautiful, and their hearts grew happy and confident as they looked at the old nun now lying peacefully among the pillows, her face calm, seemingly lighted up with a vision. Of what happy eternity, Evelyn thought as they left the bedside, and to the sound of the tinkling bell they passed into the chapel.

Evelyn loved this solemn office; it gave her an intimate sense of personal service on Christ, of walking with Him on earth, and never from repetition did the sight of the nuns prostrated in their stalls as the sacrament was carried back to the altar become trite and formal. This visible manifestation of their undaunted renouncement of the vulgar world exalted her, and new courage came into her heart. She noted the accumulated heads and the joined hands clasped convulsively, with perhaps one face lifted for a moment to gaze on God that went by, eager for some deeper pang of faith, fearful and yet eager to approach God. What are all the manifestations of personal vanity, she thought, whether in art or war or statesmanship, compared with this undaunted self-effacement?

LXXIII

She was writing in the library, and Veronica had just opened the door, and though her back was turned to the door she seemed to know it was Veronica. She had seen very little of her lately, and at one time Evelyn, Veronica and Sister Mary John had formed a little group. But since Evelyn had become attached to Sister Mary John, Veronica had withdrawn herself from their friendship, and she now treated them to little disdainful airs, and she did not at once answer Evelyn, who, with the prettiest smile, had asked her whom she had come in search of, and there was an accent of concentrated dislike in her voice when she said she was looking for Sister Mary John.

'I heard her trampling about the passage just now; she is on her way here, no doubt, and won't keep you waiting long.'

Evelyn understood the word 'trampling'as an allusion to the hobnails which Sister Mary John wore in the garden. Veronica had lately been indulging in bitter remarks, but it was not the rudeness of the present remark that startled Evelyn, but Veronica's manner. She did not give Evelyn time to answer her, but left the room instantly, and Evelyn sat nibbling the end of her pen, thinking of what had happened. The little jealousy with which she had credited Veronica did not seem sufficient to account for so much dislike, and she was forced towards the conclusion that Veronica's dislike of Sister Mary John went deeper than she had suspected. She seemed to foresee some unpleasantness, and she sat thinking till the door opened; she hoped it was Veronica, but it was Sister Mary John.

'I can't think what is the matter with Veronica,'she said. 'I passed her in the passage just now, and when I asked her if she had seen you, she said she was really too busy to speak to me, and a moment after she stopped for quite a long while to play with the black kitten which was catching flies in the window.'

Evelyn stood looking at the nun, thinking of Veronica's remarks regarding the hobnails.

'Do you know what it means? Has she ever been rude to you?'

'No, I don't think she has.'

But, in spite of herself, she began awkwardly and hesitatingly to tell of the little passage-of-arms between herself and Veronica. And while laughing at Veronica's jealousy, she stopped suddenly to ask Sister Mary John of what she was thinking.

'She is quite right; it is we who are in the wrong. We have been disobeying the rule this long while.'

Evelyn could not find words to answer her, and an ominous silence was broken by the smiling, ruddy-cheeked porteress. . .

'Sister Teresa, Monsignor has come, and is waiting to see you in the parlour.'

The colour rose to her cheeks, and so excited was she at the thought of seeing Monsignor that she forgot Veronica's rudeness, and very nearly forgot the rupture her jealousy might cause in a friendship which had been the principal interest in her life for the last three months; and asking the Sister if she were tidy, she hurried away.

As the door closed Sister Mary John looked round the library, and a little sadness appeared in her face, and many things became clear to her which, until now, she had only half understood. It was Monsignor who had converted Evelyn — Evelyn was therefore attached to him in a special way; but she saw that part of Evelyn's exultation sprang from her instinctive interest in men.

'A man always comes before everyone else, whether she is on the stage or in a convent. So she goes flying to him, her heart in both hands, eager to confide and to trust.'

Sister Mary John walked across the library, cruelly perplexed, for it had suddenly been revealed to her that to bring this friendship to an end she must leave the convent. She must go straight to the Prioress and tell her her life was being absorbed in Evelyn, and beg her to transfer her to the Mother House in France.

Evelyn was now talking to Monsignor in the parlour, and the nun could see him listening, encouraging her to reveal herself by an attentive silence. The Prioress had sent for him, so that he might advise her regarding Evelyn. When the interview was over the Prioress would go to the parlour to hear Monsignor's opinion. So the opportuneness of the moment for her to confide her difficulty to the Prioress was evident to Sister Mary John. The very words she should say rose up in her mind, yet she hesitated, and she stopped in the middle of the room to ask herself why she hesitated. Questions would be intolerable and shameful; but the Prioress would understand, and there would be few questions.

As she turned from the door a voice of extraordinary sweetness began to whisper in her, and she heard that for the sake of retaining Evelyn for a few short years she would lose her through eternity. Were it not better to see her in heaven? And then a strange confusion of thought happened in her. She was tempted by the thought that even in

heaven they would be separated by their love of God, and she remembered with horror that it was since love of Evelyn had begun in her that that passionate love of Christ, which was her vocation, and without which she could not live in a convent, had declined. She must choose between Christ and Evelyn. Well, had not Evelyn chosen Monsignor before her? She was conscious of an exceeding wickedness; her thoughts faded, and she became, as it were, vague pain and irresolution.

But suddenly a great strength was vouchsafed to her, and she went to the Prioress's room.

It was always easy to talk to the Prioress. In their confessions the nuns spoke as if they were thinking aloud, and Sister Mary John explained how this friendship had come to be a disintegrating influence, how her spiritual character had fallen away since Evelyn had become to her a sensible pleasure. She had known this a long while, but had stifled the voice of her conscience. Veronica's jealousy had brought her, as it were, to bay, and in a flash she had realised how deeply she was involved in the entanglement of her senses. Speaking quickly, she said that Evelyn had absorbed her life, that she lived immersed in her as she should live immersed in God.

'My dear child, you exaggerate unconsciously, for enough power remains in you to break silence and to put the matter into my hands.'

'I could do nothing else; I had to come to tell you, Mother. The truth is I am losing my vocation, and to regain it I must leave. Dear Mother, I have come to ask you to transfer me to our house in France.'

A shadow flitted across the Prioress's face, and the nun anticipated a refusal.

'I am thinking, my dear child, of what is best to be done.'And while the Prioress thought of the best way out of the dilemma, the nun regretted the trouble she was giving this old woman. There was a swish of wind and rain on the window, and the trees waved disconsolately in the wet air, and their waving carried her thoughts out to sea, where there were sails and rigging, and she saw herself on her way to France. France was to be the end of her life, and she was thinking of the end of her days in the Mother House at Lyons, where she knew no one, when the Prioress said, 'Mrs Cater is going to France next month. You can travel with her.'

'So a month must pass. I had thought of leaving to-day or to-morrow, but I see that that is impossible. A month — how shall I endure it?'

'No one will know,'the Prioress answered, with a little vehemence; 'it is a secret between us, and I forbid you to tell anyone the reason of your leaving.'

'May I not tell Teresa?'

'Teresa will be professed in the next few weeks, I hope, perhaps next week; she has reached a critical moment of her life, and her mind must not be disturbed. The raising of such a question at such a moment might be fatal to her vocation.'

The Prioress rose from her chair, and following Sister Mary John to the door, impressed upon her again that it was essential that no one should ever know why she had left the convent.

'You may tell Teresa before you leave; but she must hear nothing of it till the moment of your leaving. I give you permission merely to say good-bye to her on the day you leave, and in the interval you will see as little of each other as possible.'

But when Sister Mary John said that Sister Elizabeth could accompany Evelyn as well as she could, the Prioress interrupted her. 'You must always accompany her when she sings at Benediction. You must do nothing to let her suspect that you are leaving the convent on her account.'

And at that moment the Prioress remembered that Evelyn was talking with Monsignor.

'She thinks him a Bossuet,'the Prioress said to herself, as she returned to her chair; 'they have corresponded for months on literary questions.'She hoped Evelyn would not be effusive in her admiration, and so convey a false impression of herself, and then a little smile hovered round the corners of her mouth, a sign of the thought that had passed. She began to arrange her papers, and as she did so Evelyn asked the prelate to tell her about Rome.

The last time she had seen him was in the early summer, soon after her clothing, and she had hardly been able to speak to him. She had not recovered from the shock of her father's death; and he recalled all the circumstances of it so vividly, the very moment when he had led her from the room.

Her father's death was almost as much before her now as then, but differently. Her grief had gone, as it were, out of flesh, and was reflected now merely in her imagination. It looked at her out of the sky like a star, the sign whereby the wayfarer directs his steps. The old poignant grief which the sight of Monsignor had reawakened in her only endured for a moment; she had recovered herself, and was asking him to tell her about Rome and its ecclesiastics. She thought of them because of her father's relations with them; she talked gaily and eagerly; and yet she had, perhaps, never felt so clearly, nor had the feeling ever been so conclusive, that the personal

life was dead in her, that she now lived for the nuns, in order to help them out of their difficulties; and that when that was done her mission would be accomplished.

All her surface characteristics remained, but in her deeper self had been changed. It seemed to her that she had been lifted out of animal life, to some extent, and had been carried forward, if not into, at least towards the life of the soul. She felt this very clearly now, and yet she wished to hear of the little externalities of religion to which pious women devote so much time.

She reminded him of things which he had almost forgotten, and he was surprised that she wished to hear the end of the disputation in which he had been engaged with a certain cardinal, who had taken a reactionary view regarding the value of the Biblical account of the Creation. She reminded him of the arguments he had used, but he had forgotten them, and she recalled his very words. He had said that the cardinal had committed the Church as far as he could commit the Church to certain opinions which might afterwards have to be reconsidered. Monsignor had said that religion had nothing to fear from science. Science is exclusively concerned with man's physical surroundings; religion is, with equal exclusiveness, concerned with the
development of his moral consciousness. She said that this way of putting the question had struck her at the time; and his face lighted up, and he expressed surprise at her memory of his opponents and
the details of the disputation.

'Ah, you don't know what it is to be shut up for more than a year with a lot of women in a convent.'

'But I came here to talk to you about your vocation, to discover whether you are called to separate yourself from all worldly interests.'

'I have made up my mind to be a nun, but now you are here I want to talk about Rome and of its people.'

She had kept all his letters, and knowing his bent for theological discussion she had allowed certain little heresies to creep into her letters, in order that he might disprove them to her admiration. He had replied at length, and his letters were the letters of a man of liberal intelligence, pragmatical and astute. But these letters coming into the conventual monotony had seemed like great manifestations of a great central mind, and she insisted that the book he was writing would give new impetus to Catholic life. She exhorted him to take the lead, to assert himself, for without him Catholic ideas could make no
further progress in England. She deplored that he had not been made a cardinal and with an enthusiasm that impressed him.

Taking advantage of a pause in the conversation he mentioned that the writing of the last portion of his book had been delayed, but he hoped to find time to finish it this winter. Then he asked her, somewhat abruptly, if certain scruples regarding the Holy Communion had passed. She answered that they had passed, and the conversation came to an awkward pause.

'You have come here,' she said, 'to talk to me about myself, whereas I want to talk to you about you; it will interest me so much more. You want to find out if I have a vocation, but the more I tell you about myself the less you will believe in my vocation.'

The prelate persisted, and after some hesitation she said,—

'My duty was to go to Rome with my father, but I could not bring myself to accept that duty, so great was the temptation to separate myself from the world. For this wrongdoing I was punished; my father died, perhaps through my fault. His death however wrought a great change in me, a change which had been preparing a long while back. I felt clearly, what I had always felt indistinctly, that there is no value in human life at all except in so much as it enables us to develop our spiritual life. You remember that I wrote to you about a man not being given a soul, but a germ which might become a soul if he cultivated it. It now seems to me that that belief in the mortality and the immortality of the soul is what is most natural and inherent in me. It is the original seed of my nature, but it was buried very deep, and it took a long time to grow out of the ground. Now I have told you all I know of myself, Monsignor, all that I have learned in the long year of my novitiate. I have told you the whole truth so far as I have gone.'

'And you have determined to take the veil? Tell me, you do not find this rule difficult and arduous?'

So long as we live with those whose ideas correspond with ours, the rest matters very little.'

'Remember that the step is extremely grave. Nothing could be more unfortunate than that you should take vows merely because you are friends with these nuns and wish to relieve them from their pecuniary embarrassments.'

'You are very sceptical, Monsignor. What can I say to convince you? That I do not like the rule, that I find it very difficult? '

She laughed and pressed him to admit that that was what he was minded to say. And he admitted if she had said she found the rule difficult he would have found it easier to believe in her vocation.

'Ah, my past life — you cannot forget it; you are like the others,' and she reminded him that the Prioress herself had not refused the world, like Veronica, but had renounced the world, like herself.

'Yet she is our Reverend Mother. Who knows, Monsignor — I succeeded on the stage, why should not I succeed equally well in the convent? Promise me this, that if the nuns vote for me, you will profess me, and that if one day I should be Prioress you will write and advise me on doctrine and on the daily life of my convent.'

He could not refuse to promise what she had asked, and they laughed and stood looking at each other until a bell rang.

'Now I must go to the sacristy.'

As she went there she met Sister Mary John, and she said, —

'I think I have convinced Monsignor, and he has promised to profess me.'

'Then it is settled?'

'Yes; but why do you look so strange? Do you think the nuns will not vote for me?'

The nun stood looking at Evelyn, conscious that the entanglement was even more intricate than she had imagined. If Evelyn were not elected she might leave the convent and return to the stage. She was one who would travel a certain distance with admirable perseverance, surmounting every obstacle, until one, very likely a smaller obstacle than those she had already passed, opposed her, then without any very clear reason she might quickly return the way she had come. 'Should Evelyn leave,' Sister Mary John thought, 'I may stay. Nothing is decided, except that we are to be separated.' The nun asked herself if she were deceiving Evelyn by withholding her intention to leave the convent as soon after Evelyn's profession as possible, and the question whether she should vote for her, or abstain from voting, or vote against her, perplexed her. What matter, she thought, since in any case we are to be separated.

'But what is the matter, Sister? Why do you stand looking at me like this?'

The nun could not answer, and Evelyn was about to hold out her arms to her, thinking she was going to fall. At that moment the Prioress called. The Prioress was on her way to the parlour, and divining the difficulty that had arisen, she sent Sister Mary John with a message to Mother Philippa. Her hand was on the door handle, and she entered the parlour as soon as the nun was out of sight.

‘I hope you are pleased, Monsignor, with the excellent condition of mind in which you have found our dear Sister Teresa? She told me she intended to ask you to profess her. I am sure it would be of great assistance to her if you would.’

'Sister Teresa and I have had a long talk, and I find her very earnest. I think I may say that I found her very much improved. She seems to have read and thought a great deal since I last saw her.’

‘Yes, Sister Teresa reads a great deal; theological questions present a great attraction to her mind.’

Monsignor did not answer, and he left the Reverend Mother to continue the conversation. She did this with alacrity, and they talked round the subject. At last there seemed to be nothing more to say, and the Prioress found herself obliged to ask him if he thought Sister Teresa had a vocation.

'I find her, as I have said, my dear Reverend Mother, extremely earnest; she has evidently thought a great deal on spiritual matters. But she has only just fulfilled the required time in the novitiate; are you sure she has acquired that solid piety so necessary for a religious life? She is very emotional. What I mean is, should you say that her attitude towards the life was normal?’

‘Sister Teresa,' the old nun replied, ‘will never be normal, but her genius has enabled her to assimilate our rule.’

In reply to further questions, he said that he had only seen Sister Teresa once in the last six months. Besides, no one was so capable of deciding on a nun’s vocation as the Prioress herself, and he begged her not to be influenced by anything that he had said.

‘When the question is decided, let me know, for I have promised Sister Teresa I will profess her myself.’

The Prioress looked at him sharply, and as she went to her room she thought of what might have happened if she had been refused election, and she thought of the grave responsibility which she and the other Mothers would incur by refusing to vote for Evelyn.

LXXIV

It was with this argument that she sought to overcome Mother Mary Hilda when the Mothers met in council. Their council was held in the Mother's own room after evening prayers, when no light burned anywhere, and the nuns and the canaries were asleep in their cells and cages. The Prioress began by saying that she had consulted Monsignor, and that he had said nothing would give him greater pleasure than to see Sister Teresa professed, but he left the ultimate decision entirely to them.

Mother Mary Hilda held the opinion of Monsignor in high esteem, but she did not withdraw her opposition, and she questioned the Prioress closely as to Monsignor's precise words, and was manifestly relieved to hear that he thought on the subject of a nun's vocation the nuns were the best judges. So she gained an advantage over the Prioress, but it was only momentary, for when she spoke of the shortness of Evelyn's postulancy, laying stress on the fact that it had been broken by her journey to Rome, the Prioress said, —

'But all that has been decided by the Bishop; we need not go into that again. No one has so much right to form an opinion of Evelyn's vocation as you have, but I cannot forget that from the first your instinct was against her, and when that is so we are never convinced, I am afraid.'

'But, Mother, I am sorry if I seem to you stubborn.'

'Not stubborn, but I would hear you explain your reasons for thinking Sister Teresa has not a vocation, and Mother Philippa is most anxious to hear them too.'

Mother Philippa listened, thinking of her bed, and wondering why Mother Maty Hilda kept them up by refusing to agree with the Prioress.

Mother Hilda, with quiet obstinacy and determination, reminded them that they could hardly point to a case in which a novice had been elected who had been with them for so short a time as Sister Teresa.

'But we have known Teresa for a long time — for more than three years. Her thoughts have been inclining towards a religious life ever since we have known her. You do not deny her piety. Her religious fervour gives promise of the highest sanctity in the future; she is animated with the sincerest love of God.'

'I have no doubt whatever on that point, nevertheless I find it difficult to believe that she will prove a satisfactory member of the community. She is quite different from any of us.'

‘I have heard that phrase very often, and confess it conveys no idea to my mind. We are all different from one another. Peter was not like Paul, nor was Catherine of Siena like Saint Teresa. We are anxious to know, Mother Hilda, what is your precise reason for thinking that Sister Teresa has not a vocation.’

‘You have set me a difficult task, Mother. It seems to me that her piety, although very genuine, does not penetrate much below the surface. A good deal of it seems to me incidental, and to be brought about by the great grief which she experienced at her father's death. I have noticed this too, that her piety does not stimulate others to piety but rather the reverse. Since she has been in the convent you will not deny that she has been a source of distraction to us all. We are always thinking of her, and talking of her when we can. Inquiries are always on foot concerning her. She is the one that all the visitors want to see. Our visitors are excellent people, no doubt; but they spend a great deal of time in the parlour, and they have to be waited on there, and the teas do not end till nearly six o clock. Now comes another matter on which I would not speak if speech could be avoided. It is a matter so delicate that I fear, whatever words I use, my words will misinterpret my meaning — what I want to say is that Teresa influences.us all. I would remind you that Sister Mary John and Veronica are absorbed in her influence, though I am sure they are not aware of it. But it would seem to me impossible not to notice it. Have you ever noticed it?' Mother Hilda said, appealing directly to the Prioress and Mother Philippa. Mother Philippa shook her head, and then confessed she had not the slightest notion of what Mother Mary Hilda meant.

The Prioress asked if she thought Sister Teresa had shown any undue vanity in the attentions which were paid to her.

'No, indeed; her humility is so striking that very often I feel that I may after all be misjudging her.’

'I confess I completely fail,' said Mother Philippa, 'to understand your objections to our visitors; without them we cannot live. They are our means of subsistence, and it was in the hope of attracting visitors...’

'I know, I know.’

And Mother Hilda said she was quite willing to refrain from voting, but this was not what the Prioress wished. Every nun must accept the responsibility. ‘And it would seem,' she said, ‘though I do not feel it myself, that very great responsibility attaches to Sister Teresa’s election.

'Dear Reverend Mother, I can only repeat that I think we should wait. Another year in the novitiate, perhaps six months, will prove whether her desire is a passing desire or a true vocation.'

'But our necessities!'

'Ah, Reverend Mother, our necessities should not influence us, surely.'

'Our necessities should not influence us either way. But they seem to influence you against her. Don't they?'

'Yes, I admit that they do.'

'Then, if you feel like that,' said Mother Philippa, waking from a light doze which had not prevented her from hearing the conversation, 'I think that you should abstain from voting.'

Instead of answering, Mother Hilda asked the Prioress for her reason for objecting to a slight delay.

'If we accept Evelyn her salvation will be secured, and if we yield to your scruples we make ourselves responsible for all that may happen to her. I ask if you are prepared to see this house and garden confiscated. Although our order is very poor, some of us may find refuge in another convent. But many of us, the younger ones, would have to return to their homes, and there are our poor lay Sisters; what will become of them?'

'Our circumstances are very trying, I know, but I do not think we should allow them to influence us.'

'But you have said,' rejoined the Prioress, 'that they do influence you against Teresa, whereas Mother Philippa and I can truthfully say that they do not influence us in her favour.'

On that the Prioress rose to her feet, and the other two nuns understood that the interview was at an end.

'Dear Reverend Mother, I know how great your difficulties are,' said Mother Hilda, 'and I am loth to oppose your wishes in anything. I know how wise you are — how much wiser than we — but however foolishly I may appear to be acting, you will understand that I cannot act differently, feeling as I do.'

‘I understand that, Mother Hilda. We must act according to our lights. And now we must go to bed; we are breaking all the rules of the house.’

LXXV

The Prioress had wished Sister Mary John to leave Evelyn in doubt that any change had come into their friendship but no one can act a part when their deepest feelings are engaged, and Sister Mary John had hurried past Evelyn when they met, and during the week Evelyn noticed that Sister Mary John had not spoken to her once except to ask her what she was going to sing. At any other time Evelyn would have been seriously troubled by this break in their friendship, but she was thinking now of her vows and of her election,and she dismissed all other matters from her thoughts only allowing herself to hope that this estrangement was temporary, that when she was elected a choir Sister she and Sister Mary John would be friends as they had always been.

And when Sister Mary John looked across the chapel and saw Evelyn absorbed in prayer, she was certain that her love had not been a temptation to Evelyn, and it was a bitter gladness to see that separation from her caused Evelyn no pain.

And listening to the beautiful voice she thought of the Prioress's great age, and of how friendless Evelyn would be when she was dead. She remembered that the nuns were jealous of Evelyn's voice, and that they resented the attention that always hummed round Evelyn in the parlour. She foresaw nothing but unhappiness for Evelyn; she had begun to doubt whether she had any true vocation, and she could not help feeling that the best thing that could happen would be for Mother Hilda's opposition to succeed.

But Mother Hilda's opposition was overruled, Evelyn was elected almost unanimously, and Monsignor was coming to put the ring on her finger. In a week she would be plighted to Christ, a most desirable and beautiful bride, Sister Mary John thought. It seemed as if her heart were about to break, and she longed to run away to her cell, for it seemed impossible to restrain her tears. What account could she give of herself to the other nuns, and the Prioress would know why she was weeping. It seemed impossible to stifle her weary heart any longer; nothing would relieve her except to tell the entire community of her miserable condition, but she had promised the Prioress not to speak to Evelyn of her decision to leave the convent until Evelyn had made her vows. Now this promise seemed to her most horrible and wicked, and to break it seemed to be her duty. There is a vocation which admits of no doubt whatever, and there is a vocation which is dependent on certain circumstances; and how did she know that Evelyn's vocation was not dependent upon the support of her friendship in this convent? how did she know that Evelyn would take the final vows if she knew how friendless she would be when her friend was away in France, and when the Prioress was dead?

She knew none of these things, but she had made a terrible promise, and all the week she lived in the terrors of nightmare. And on the day of Evelyn's profession, when she saw her walk between the Prioress and Mother Hilda in her habit and white veil, it seemed to the broken-hearted nun that she could contain herself no longer, and that she must get up from her place and make a public declaration. Even in this last moment it were better to make it than to keep silence; yet she remained kneeling, watching this ceremony. But there is a limit to suffering. She seemed to forget everything, and awaking from a melancholy trance she listened to Monsignor, who was asking Evelyn what she had come to ask from the Church. She heard her reply that she sought to enter the religious life.

Then Monsignor began his address, and Sister Teresa stood listening to the exhortation, confident in herself while she heard the priest speak of the difficulties and the crosses of the religious life. She was asked again if she were prepared to embrace it, and to all questions she answered 'Yes,' and she looked so joyful that Sister Mary John felt that Evelyn was following her true vocation. She said to herself, 'When one is certain of one's self nothing matters; Evelyn will be happy in the convent even when the Prioress was dead.' Then she saw the tall figure cross to the gospel side of the altar with the two nuns; she saw her sign her name to the vows she had made, and when she came back Sister Mary John saw Monsignor put the ring on her finger. Evelyn knelt at the feet of the Prioress, who gave her the black veil, and all the nuns sang the 'Veni spousa Christi.'

And the few people in the church who had witnessed the ceremony felt as Evelyn had felt when she saw the Birmingham girl leave the vanity of the world for the true realities of prayer. Within the cloister the nuns gathered round Evelyn to congratulate her, and their congratulations seemed to her more valid than those which she used to receive for her singing 'Elsa's Dream.' But as they pressed round her she noticed that Sister Mary John was striving to absent herself, and breaking from them she called to her, —

'How is this, Sister? I do not hear you say anything; and why would you go away yourself?'

'I am glad, Teresa, indeed I am glad,' and she added under her breath, 'More glad than I expected to be.'

'Did you doubt my vocation, then?'

Sister Mary John strove to disengage her hands, which Evelyn held, and the other nuns had begun to wonder; in another moment they would have begun to surmise that something was wrong, but the Prioress intervened and took Evelyn into the garden and told her that her dearest wishes had been realised.

'I am glad, too, dear Mother; and you are accountable for a great deal of what has happened; for I doubt if I should ever have had the strength without you. But, dear Mother, tell me what has happened to Sister Mary John? Did you notice that she was the only one who did not come to congratulate me? For some time I have noticed that she avoids me in a way she never did before.'

'It was necessary, Teresa, for you and Sister Mary John to see a great deal of each other, but a nun must always remember that she belongs wholly to God.'

'Dear Mother, it was Sister Mary John's example that brought me to God. She has been almost as great a help to me as you, and this estrangement has spoilt the pleasure of the day for me.'

'You will remember what I say, Teresa: a nun belongs wholly to God, and you must not try to force upon Sister Mary John a friendship which she does not wish.'

The Prioress's voice had suddenly become cold; almost cruel. Evelyn's heart misgave her. She felt that something had happened — something terrible, and she lay awake thinking of it. Her thoughts roved about the truth, not daring to approach it, whereas Sister Mary John knew it and she foresaw that Evelyn would question her. Her unhappiness was so great that her exile seemed to her less than the explanation that awaited her on the morning of her departure. Every day was a great labour, but the morning was now at hand, for the lady with whom Sister Mary John was to travel had written to the Prioress saying that her departure had been unexpectedly hastened. She hoped that it would suit dear Sister Mary John's convenience equally well to travel this week as the following week. Sister Mary John looked upon this shortening of her torment as providential, for yesterday Evelyn had stopped her and begged her to explain why she no longer spoke to her. Evelyn had written an impassioned letter, and Sister Mary John had begun to feel that she could not bear the strain any longer.

Next morning she opened the library door, and Evelyn's eyes lighted up, thinking they were about to be reconciled; but the light died out of them instantly, for Sister Mary John wore a long black cloak over her habit, and she had a bird cage in her hand, and Evelyn saw the sly jackdaw with his head on one side looking at her.

'I have come to say good-bye to you, Teresa; I am going away.'

'Now I understand why you have not spoken to me for so long. This is the reason of the change. Now I understand it all, and you are taking your jackdaw with you.'

'Yes; I was afraid he might pine and die, and dear Mother said I might take him with me.'

Evelyn asked her about the journey, for she did not dare to ask her if she had told the Prioress the reason why she wanted to leave. She did not like to ask her if she had consulted the other nuns or Father Daly, and they wasted a good deal of this last time together talking of indifferent things. But when Sister Mary John took up the cage, she cried, —

'For how long?'

'For always.'

'Oh, Sister, you must hear me before you go! You know how fond I have been of you. I shall not be able to live in the convent without you. I have no scruples whatever; so why should you have scruples regarding your affection for me? '

'Each one, dear Teresa, is guardian to her own soul, and if I feel I am losing my soul by remaining I must go.'

'But, Sister dear, you brought me nearer to God. Had it not been for you, I might never have had the courage to take the final vows.'

'I am glad if, through me, you learnt to love God better. That is so much to the good.'

'I thought this estrangement was only temporary. I am distracted. I cannot think of what I want to say to you; but when you are gone I shall remember, and ask myself why I did not say this to her and that to her. One moment. Tell me — it is only fair that you should tell me — how our love of each other has altered our love of God.'

'I can never tell you, Teresa. I can only say I understand — perhaps as I never did before — that nothing must come between the soul and God, and that there is no room for other love in our hearts. We must remember always that we are the brides of Christ — you and I, Sister — and I am leaving you that we may both give our love more wholly to our crucified Lord.'

They stood holding each other's hands, and some of Sister Mary John's spiritual exaltation passed into Evelyn, and she began to feel that this parting was inevitable.

'Won't you kiss me before you go?'

'Please let me go. It will be better not. The carriage is waiting, I must go.'

She went to the carriage that was waiting for her in the lane, and Evelyn took up her pen as if she were going to continue her writing, but she put it down, and she walked up the room like

one dazed. If anyone had spoken to her she would not have been able to answer reasonably, and she was staring blankly out of the window when the Prioress entered the library.

‘Mother, what does all this mean? Why did you let her go?’

The Prioress sat down slowly, and looked at Evelyn without speaking.

'Mother, you might have let her stay for my sake.’

'I allowed her to see you before she left, and that was the most I could do in the circumstances.’

Evelyn stared out of the window, and the old nun sat still in the armchair.

The terrace, and the trees at the end of St Peter’s Walk, and the grass plots and the flower beds seemed to mock her, and in a flutter of terror she thought of the pain of intermittent memories, for the grief she suffered now would multiply in her heart.

‘Mother, you might have advised her to wait, for I believe she acted on mere scruples.’

‘She felt that by staying here she was imperilling her vocation and yours, and it was not, I assure you, without due reflection that she decided she must go. I insisted on her waiting to see if she would think differently.’

The words suggested to Evelyn that this leave-taking had been held over until she had taken the final vows, and she said that she should have been told of this before. But the Reverend Mother could not allow a nun’s mind to be troubled during the time of preparation for her vows; it had to be held over. Evelyn did not answer. It was terrifying to remember that no one had ever believed in her vocation except the Prioress. Mother Hilda had not believed; Monsignor had had doubts. So much had depended on her joining the community; she had wished to help them, and it did not seem possible in any other way.

'Do you still believe in my vocation, Mother?’

‘Yes, Teresa, I feel quite certain. Put all such doubts away from you.’

'Ah, if I could. My vocation has been so different from anyone else’s.’

'Don’t think I blame either you or Sister Mary John for what has occurred. I only blame myself. I ought to have foreseen it. It all comes from having exempted you from the rules on account of

the music; no one deplores infraction of the rules more than I do; it never answers, only in this case there seemed to be no alternative.'

'It was necessary to me to become a nun, so the rule was broken. What is it that guides these things? It is not we.... It is God; Providence is behind it all. I can see the hand of Providence in it all as I look back. But Sister Mary John might have stayed. I feel sure that this is a mistake; her scruples were imaginary, and her going has done nothing except to trouble my peace of mind. And what will the Sisters think of it? Are they to know that it was because of me?'

'The Sisters will never know,'the Prioress answered with a little vehemence. 'It is a secret between you and me and Sister Mary John. I forbid you ever to tell anyone the reason for her going. Teresa, I know this is a heavy trial for you, and I am ready to do all in my power to turn it to good account. Dear Teresa,' and the old nun took her hand, 'our greatest happiness comes when we have put away every worldly recollection; it is often very hard to do this, but when we have made the sacrifice we are glad of it. I had a photograph of one who was very dear to me once, and it was a long while before I could bring myself to destroy it; but when I burnt it I was glad. We must try to understand that the things of this world are nothing; that this world is passing always like water and that our lives pass with it. Your grief will fade as all the things of this world fade. There is only one thing that does not fade, love of God. We are happy in it, and we are always unhappy outside it. Doing His work is the only happiness. You have discovered it yourself; it was that that brought you here.'

'Oh, Mother, all you say is right; but life is difficult, at this moment it is inexplicably so. It was she who taught me to love God, and now she leaves me for God's sake. If I should love Him less now that she has gone, what a misfortune that would be. Then I should have lost all.' And turning suddenly to the Reverend Mother, Evelyn said, 'But she need not have gone, Mother. Why did you not make her stay? Hers was only a scruple; she fancied she was giving to me what belonged to God. But God had all of her: I know better than anyone how entirely He possessed her.'

'Believe me, Teresa, there was no choice for her but to go. She confided in me, and I could not bring myself to say she was not to go; you only look at it from your point of view. For you there was no danger in this friendship, for you are different women — your lives have been so different.'

'I wonder, Mother, if you know how miserable I am? Before my profession I was sure of myself, or nearly, and I thought my vocation quite sure. But for this last two weeks I have been despondent and doubtful, so this comes as a greater shock now than at any other time.'

'The clothing brings great relief, and everyone is happy after her clothing; but I think everyone is despondent and doubtful after the final vows. You see profession brings such a change into a nun's life. During her noviceship she is as a child; there is always the Novice Mistress to run to when she is uncertain or despondent. She will find help and cheerfulness in her. When the final vow releases her from the novitiate, all these supports are taken away from her. For the first time she has to rely upon herself, to judge for herself — I have never known it otherwise. You may be sure, Teresa, that you will be quite contented and happy in a few months.'

'It seems impossible, Mother.'

'When we are despondent happiness seems as if it would never come again, and when we are happy our happiness seems inherent in ourselves, and we do not believe that it can ever pass from us.'

LXXVI

All sorts of reasons were given for Sister Mary John's departure; the nuns chattered like moon-awakened birds, and then the convent fell back into silence.

As the year closed, the old Prioress began to think that the incident was dead and that no consequences would be begotten. But the friendship of the two nuns remained unconsciously associated in everyone's mind with the sudden departure of one of them from the convent; and behind these ideas there lay a half-reticulated background of suspicion regarding Evelyn. Without knowing why, the convent had begun to resent its dependency upon her singing. In the beginning of the following year Sister Winifred, who had done a set of caricatures of the lay Sisters cooking under difficulties, when the pipes were frozen and there was no water in the kitchen, conceived the idea that she might contribute to the general purse by selling her sketches in the parlour. They had amused the visitors, and encouraged by the sale of a copy of the convent Murillo, she had applied herself to a set of altar pieces. One of these had been bought by the lady who had given her the paints. Sister Winifred had been given a painting room; it had become the fashion to visit it, and the departure of the visitors, whom it was already difficult to induce to leave the convent after Benediction, was still further delayed. Sister Winifred had become a considerable person in the convent, and the fact that the Prioress did not admire her painting did not discourage Sister Winifred. She had answered, 'Dear Mother, you can only admire Evelyn's singing.'

A few months later Sister Agatha discovered an unsuspected talent in herself. She did not make it known to the Prioress until she had accumulated a large heap of manuscript on the life of her favourite saint, and her proposal was that the proceeds of the work should be devoted to paying off the convent debts. Another nun knew French, and a second remembered that she knew German. Then someone spoke of a school, and the idea seemed to them the very happiest; a school would give them all an opportunity of doing something for the convent, and the conversion of Wimbledon to Rome became a subject of conversation. Sister Winifred's pictures and Sister Agatha's manuscripts had never been taken very seriously; they had merely served as a pretext for the Sisters to discuss what was in their minds. But the idea of a school seemed to formulate many aspirations; it seemed like the solution of all their difficulties, and at every recreation groups of nuns collected to discuss the financial possibilities of the project, and to tell each other of the visitors who offered to send their daughters to them.

'They all seem to forget,' the Prioress said to Mother Hilda, as she passed down St Peter's Walk, 'that to start a school would mean to alter the rule of our order.'

'You know that I do not approve, dear Mother, but what they say is that since the contemplative side of our house has been so largely infringed upon it might be well to go a little further and undertake a school.'

The Prioress winced a little; she knew Mother Hilda held her to be personally responsible for the change. For, according to Mother Hilda, the change was inherent in Evelyn's election, which the Prioress had directly forced upon the convent. Mother Hilda would go further back still. The Prioress knew she would trace the origin of the disaster to the admission of Evelyn into the convent.

Nothing more was said at the time, but a few days later the matter came up for general discussion in chapter, and the Prioress pointed out that the teaching of music and painting, and French and German, was contrary to the rule, and could never be lawfully undertaken, that if teaching were undertaken without the express permission of the Mother General it would mean cutting themselves off from the Mother House in France. It would mean practically the establishment of a new foundation, which would be classed among the active rather than the contemplative orders.

The dissidents had Mother Philippa on their side, and the Prioress's argument regarding the new foundation did not frighten them. They admitted that the Passionist Sisters had never kept a school before, but they said there was nothing in their rule to prevent them from doing so. Sister Winifred held that the Prioress's faith in their work as contemplative nuns amounted to fanaticism, and that she clung to the letter of the rule with mistaken rigidity — the rule was made for them, and not they for the rule, etc. During the next recreation fresh arguments were discovered in favour of the relaxation of the rule. It was pointed out that many of the enclosed orders had schools and lived by teaching, that to refuse the advantages which a rich suburb like Wimbledon held out to them was narrow-minded; and the Prioress was held up as the type of a mediaeval Catholic. It was said that an appeal to the Bishop must end by a decision in their favour, for the whole tendency of modern Catholicism was to look more favourably on the active than on the contemplative orders. The prospect of Wimbledon's conversion would win the Bishop to their side, and Sister Winifred spoke of the high place their community would take in the annals of the Church. She obtained the unqualified approval of some, but there were two Sisters who inclined towards a poultry farm. The little orchard at the end of the garden could be turned into an excellent chicken run, and they had calculated that three hundred hens would pay the convent debts in less than three years. After some discussion it was discovered that the poultry farm and the school did not conflict, so the poultry farmers and the educationalists made common cause against the contemplatives, and at the end of the month the two factions sat on different sides of the garden, congratulating themselves on their admirable self-control in refraining from speech.

Schism provokes schism, and the patient lay Sisters grew discontented with their lot. One day Sister Agnes was heard saying that her idea of an order was 'the Little Sisters of the Poor'; and a few days after she told a group of choir Sisters, as she passed up the garden, that they were merely fashionable ladies, mostly converts. In extenuation of Sister Agnes's rudeness a nun mentioned that she was merely a lay Sister, and another mentioned that the chaplain held very strong views about the active order. He was a favourite with the lay Sisters — he was of their class and shared their ideas.

Evelyn felt that she could not take sides, and these dissensions filled her with misgivings, for was she not the cause of them? There had been none till she came, and she wondered if she would always be a discord and what change would have to happen in her to bring her into the common order. She had been the cause of confusion before, and apparently worse confusion was about to follow. She had come to the convent because the world was lonely, and in this convent they had lived enfolded in an exquisite spiritual atmosphere. Each one knew the other, though the other spoke very little; the convent was a spiritual camp; and the prayers of each one were a contribution to the common weal. It was from this intimacy of thought and endeavour that they derived their happiness. But they had fallen from their high estate, they had grasped at the things of this world, they had conspired like the angels.

It had seemed to the sub-Prioress that she could manage a school. Her capacity for business had attracted all the business of the convent to her, but it had not been enough to satisfy her energy, and Sister Winifred tempted her alternately with a school and a laundry, and whenever she came to her cell to consult her regarding some business detail, they indulged in a little chaff; the temptation to talk about the Prioress was irresistible.

'We all admire the Prioress,' said Sister Winifred; 'no one understands her merits better than I; it is indeed a pity she should be so narrow-minded upon one point. Don't you think you could influence her?'

'I have known her these many years, she is an admirable woman in many ways. I doubt, however, we shall never induce her to agree to any relaxation of the rule.'

Then Sister Winifred spoke of the Prioress's influence with Father Ambrose and the bishop, but she did not tell her hopes of throwing Father Daly into the opposite scale. She took no one into her confidence and waited her opportunity; and thinking over the arguments she would use, she remembered with a little thrill of delight how bitterly he resented the usurping Prioress, who had reduced his spiritual administration to the mere act of absolution. This was clearly the point of attack, and seeing him a few days after, pacing the garden alley reading his breviary, she went tripping down the pathway, asking in a little insidious tone, which at once caught his attention, if she could consult him on a matter of importance.

She was a tall, thin woman, with a narrow forehead, a long, thin nose and prominent teeth, extremely plain at first sight, but at second sight her quick brown eyes revealed an eager and alert mind. And she began by telling him that she had chosen this opportunity to speak to him because she did not dare to do so in the confessional.

'It would take too much time.' And there was a little kindly malice in her brown eyes as she said, 'You know how strict the Prioress is that we should not exceed our regulation three minutes.'

'I know that quite well,' the little man answered abruptly, 'a most improper rule; but, however, we will not discuss the Prioress, dear Sister Winifred; what have you come to tell me?'

'Well, in a way, it is about the Prioress. You know all about our financial difficulties, and you know that they are not settled yet.'

'I thought that Sister Teresa's singing — '

'Of course Sister Teresa's singing has done us a great deal of good, but the collections have fallen off considerably, and as for the rich Catholics who were to pay off our debts, they are like the ships coming from the East, but whose masts have not yet appeared above the horizon.'

'But does the Prioress still believe that these rich Catholics will come to her aid? '

'Oh, yes, she still believes; she tells us that we must pray, and that if we pray they will come. Well, Father, prayer is very well, but we must try to help ourselves, and we have been thinking it over, and in thinking it over some of us have come to very practical conclusions — '

'You have come to the conclusion that perhaps a good deal of time is wasted in this garden which might be devoted to good works.'

'Yes, that has struck us, and we think the best way out of our difficulties would be a school — a school! Something must be done,' she said, 'and we are thinking of starting a school. We have received a great deal of encouragement. I believe I could get twenty pupils to-morrow, but Mother Prioress won't hear of it. She tells us that we are to pray and that all will come right. But even she does not depend entirely upon prayer; she depends upon Sister Teresa's singing.

'A most unsatisfactory source of income, I should say.'

'So we all think.'

They walked some paces in silence until they were within a few yards of the end of the walk, and just as they were about to turn the priest said, —

‘I was talking at the Bishop’s to a priest who has been put in charge of a parish in one of the poorest parts of south London. There is no school, and the people are disheartened, and he has gone to live among them in a wretched house in one of the worst slums of the district. He lives in one of the upper rooms, and has turned the ground floor, which used to be a greengrocer’s shop, into a temporary chapel and school, and now he is looking for some nuns to help him in the work. He asked me if I could recommend any; and I thought of you all here, Sister Winifred, with your beautiful church and garden, doing what I call elegant piety. The more I see of it the less I like it. It has come to seem to me unbearably sad that you and I and those few here who could do such good work should be kept back from doing it.’

‘I am afraid our habit, Father, makes that sort of work out of the question for us,' and Sister Winifred dropped her habit for a moment, and let it trail gracefully.

'Long grey habits that a speck of dirt will stain are very suitable to trail over green swards, but not fit to bring into the houses of the poor, for fear they should be spoiled. Oh,' he cried, 'I have no patience with such rules, such petty observances. I have often asked myself why the Bishop chose to put me here where I am entirely out of sympathy, where I am useless, where there is nothing for me to do really except for me to try to keep my temper. I have spoken of this matter to no one before, but since you have come to speak to me, Sister Winifred, I too must speak. Ever since I have been here I have been longing to do some work which I could feel to be the work I was intended to do, which I could feel was my work. It is terrible to continue all one’s life doing work that is not one’s work.’

'It is the fate of many of us here, Father Daly.’

‘If we could make a new foundation — if some three or four of you — if the Bishop would send me there.’

‘Of course we might go and do good work in the district you speak of, but I doubt whether the Bishop would recognise us as a new foundation.’

'You were telling me of your project for a school, Sister Winifred.’

Sister Winifred entered into the details of her plan, jerking out little sentences and watching Father Daly with her quick brown eyes. But she had unduly excited Father Daly; he could not listen to her. ‘My position here,' he said, interrupting her, 'is an impossible one. The only ones

here who consider my advice are the lay Sisters, the admirable lay Sisters who work from morning till evening, and forego their prayers lest you should want for anything. I am treated very nearly with contempt by nearly all the choir Sisters. Do you think I do not know that I am spoken of as a mere secular priest? Every suggestion of mine meets with some rude answer. You have witnessed a good deal of this, Sister Winifred. I daresay you have forgotten, but I remember it all. You have come to speak to me here because the Prioress will not allow you to spend more than three minutes in the confessional, arrogating to herself the position of your spiritual adviser, allowing to me nothing more than what is to her the mere mechanical act of absolution. I am a mere secular priest, incapable of advising those who live in an order! Have I not noticed her deference to the very slightest word that Father Ambrose deigns to speak to her? with what deference she waits for his words! Now, as to her rule regarding my confessional, I can only say that I have always regarded it as extremely unorthodox, and I'm sure that the amateur confessional which she carries on upstairs would be suppressed were it brought under the notice of Rome. I have long been determined to resist it, and I beg you, Sister Winifred, when you come to me to confession, that you will stay as long as you think proper. On this matter I now see that the Prioress and I must come to an understanding.'

'But not a word, Father Daly, must we breathe to her of what I have come to tell you about. The relaxation of our order must be referred to the Bishop, and with your support — There is the bell, now I must fly. I will tell you more when I come to confession.'

There was enough, even in the very subdued account which Sister Winifred gave of her conversation with the priest, to frighten Mother Philippa. She thought Sister Winifred had gone too far, and that Father Daly was too venturesome. But Sister Winifred quieted her by saying that her proposal did not go any further than to submit the entire matter to the Bishop, and Mother Philippa said, 'I will agree to anything that the Bishop says.'

Sister Winifred's alert eyes were always smiling; she was always thinking, and her thoughts could very nearly be read in her eyes. She was thinking now of her confession; she was determined to stay ten minutes in the confessional; for if she were to stay ten minutes, the length of her confession could not fail to reach the ears of the Prioress, and this would bring matters to a crisis. By remaining ten minutes in the confessional she would challenge the Prioress's spiritual authority, and in return for this Father Daly would use his influence with the Bishop to induce the Prioress to relax the rule of the community.

So before slipping into the confessional she purposely loitered a moment, and that in itself struck the Prioress, who had just entered the chapel, as peculiar. For the moment she did not think of it further, having her prayers to say; but at the end of five minutes she began to grow impatient, and at the end of ten minutes she felt that her authority had been set aside. Fifteen

minutes passed, and then the Prioress resisted with difficulty the temptation to go into the confessional and order Sister Winifred out of it.

The next penitent was the Prioress herself, and Father Daly heard her confession in alarm, wondering if she had been in the chapel all the while.

'It is hard indeed, dear Mother, if one is not even allowed to confess in peace,' Sister Winifred answered, and she tossed her head somewhat defiantly.

'All the hopes of my life are at an end,' the Prioress said to Mother Hilda. 'Everyone is in rebellion against me, and this branch of our order itself is about to disappear. I feel sure that the Bishop will decide against us, he will go with the majority — I think there is a majority against us, and what can we do with this school? Sister Winifred will have to manage it herself; I will resign. It is hard, indeed, that this should happen after so many years of struggle, and after redeeming the convent from its debts — to be divided in the end.'

Mother Hilda did not answer. It seemed to her that the Reverend Mother had read the future aright. But accident, or what seems to us accident, overthrows the best imagined theories.

Next Sunday Father Daly had taken for his text, why he never knew — accident had apparently guided him to do it — the apostolic injunction to work good to all men, and especially to all those of the household of faith, that prayer does not fulfil the whole duty of man towards God, that work holds an especial place in the course laid down for man's redemption. Father Daly usually spoke with difficulty; his ideas were generally confused, and his sentences involved and very often imperfect. On this day he spoke like one who is inspired. He had foreseen the danger that lay before him in the amplification of the text he had chosen, but it seemed as if he could not stay his words; even the sight of the wax-like face of the Prioress could not stay his ideas on the subject of work. The words sprang to his lips, and he said that he often thought that in their convent they were apt to overlook the necessity of work. Theirs was a life of prayer; but was that incompatible with some measure of active charity? The terrible words forced their way, and he felt himself like a leaf in the current of inspiration. He heard himself say that they did not visit the sick and poor. He heard himself say that he often wondered how they could fill their days. To say this implied that the community lived in the sin of idleness, and the cool chapel seemed suddenly to grow hot, a dryness came into his throat, and he heard the nuns coughing in the silence. The sunlight seemed to fade, and he began to see the bowed heads as through a mist. He began to observe them, and it seemed to him that every nun instinctively drew herself up, and he waited, thinking that one of them, the Prioress — no, she was too proud, Mother Hilda, perhaps — would get up from her stall and leave the chapel, but no one moved, and he mopped his forehead with his handkerchief and went on. He spoke of the monetary difficulties of the convent, and he mentioned that he knew these very well, though he had not been

honoured with their confidences in this matter. He said he might have been tempted, if they had honoured him with their confidence on this matter, to suggest they should start a school for young ladies, for which the convent offered exceptional advantages. A school seemed to him a more Christian remedy than the unliturgical musical experiments they had been indulging in. He said he had no belief in attracting people to church by turning the service into a concert, and then paused, frightened at his own indiscretion. It was a terrible moment, and he added hurriedly that he hoped they would reflect on this matter, and try to remember he was always at their service and prepared to give them the best advice.

When Mass was over, the nuns hung about the cloister, whispering in little groups, forgetful of the rule. The supporters of the Prioress could not hide their indignation at the impertinence of the priest daring to insult the community, and the most ardent supporters of the school felt that he had gone too far.

Sister Winifred walked about aimlessly, in terror lest she should be sent for by the Prioress. Mother Philippa avoided her. The greatest anxiety was shown for the health of the Prioress; the nuns remembered her weak heart and the strain that had been put upon her. Might not the Prioress be in need of help? Was it not their duty to go to her? The infirmarian fetched some sal volatile from her cupboard, but no one, not even Mother Hilda, had courage to knock at the Prioress's door. The tension of the morning was drawn out to an extreme, and when the bell rang summoning them in to dinner, the nuns scarcely knew whether they ought to eat their meal or not. Suddenly the door opened, and the Prioress appeared in all her usual calmness. She took no one into her confidence; she told no one what she had done, not even Mother Hilda. But that night a firmly-worded letter went to the Bishop, and before a month was over Father Daly was transferred to another parish.

LXXVII

It was the hour of evening meditation, and the nuns were in choir, all a-row, aslant in their stalls, and so still were they all, and so rigid their attitudes, that they would seem to a spectator like a piece of mediaeval wood-carving. One by one the books had been laid aside. Each nun held her book on her knee, the first finger of the right hand between the leaves to keep the place, so that she could turn in her need to the passage which had inspired her meditation.

In a convent where circumstance is unchanging and no interest is allowed in external things, the government of thought becomes a science, and Evelyn had seen that she must acquire this science. If the subject of the meditation were the cross she must learn to think of the cross and of things immediately related to the cross for half an hour without allowing her thoughts to wander. But this was impossible to her. She could not control her thoughts for more than a few minutes, if for that; and a few minutes.meditation exhausted her more than an hour's dusting or sweeping. Yet there were nuns who could, it was said, meditate for an hour. Evelyn had determined to excel. She had addressed herself to Mother Hilda, who had put the exercises of St Ignatius into her hands, and she had in company of the novices received instruction in his method. But Evelyn could do nothing by method. Her piety, like her acting, was the impulse of the moment, and she had told Mother Hilda that she would never be able to compose time and space, nor would she ever be able to gather up the spiritual bouquet at the close with any satisfaction to herself.

'My dear child, Mother Hilda had answered, 'no sooner do you find that you can toddle a little way than you want to run. It requires years of practice.'

But Evelyn desired a greater proficiency than she had admitted to Mother Hilda, and after a moment's hesitation she had answered, —

'But surely, dear Mother, it would be better to place oneself in the presence of God and stay there. Why not dispense with active thought altogether; active thought only interferes with the ecstasy of contemplation.'

Mother Hilda had told her of Madame Guyon, and the quietist heresy which had been denounced by Bossuet and condemned at Rome. Evelyn feared heresy very little; and Madame Guyon became one of her heroines. But this sublime heresy she found difficult in practice, and the practice of it was so beset with perils, that she understood
why Rome had denounced it. On ordinary days she had failed to keep her thoughts fixed, and on those special days when she forced herself into the Divine Presence and stayed there till the close of the meditation, her ecstasy was followed by lassitude and a contempt for ordinary

prayer. Then, again, she was an inveterate castle-builder; in her, dreaming was a vice like dram-drinking, and on her knees she could pass into an enchanted land where all things were according to her desire. The dream face was as potent as the real face, her dreams were invaded by memories. Now that the convent had become a habit, the past drew nearer. The past had come to watch for her at the hour of meditations. Just now she had waked up from a dream of a day when she and Owen were alone in a German town. It was a Gothic town through which a sluggish river flowed, and its cathedral walls were full of saints. She remembered two virgin saints, but these were in the museum, on either side of a doorway. Their thin, spiritual faces were raised, and about their limbs their draperies fell in straight, thick folds. Her thoughts had not stayed with these saints; they had wandered on with Owen. They were harmless thoughts, and on awaking she had murmured a Hail Mary, for her rule was to say a prayer whenever Owen's or Ulick's face rose up in her mind. And her prayer finished, she returned to the subject of meditation. But the folds of the habits distracted her attention; she noticed Veronica's eyes; they were wondering eyes, and she wondered which of the nuns were thinking most intimately of God. One cannot always be exalted, she thought; it is only by working at piety just as one works at art, that one prepares oneself for the great moments of inspiration. God is scattering the seed always, but it is only in those hearts which are prepared to receive it that it flowers. The poet must write verses every day, the singer must sing every day, and the nun must pray every day, so that they may be inspired one day in the seven. But was this true of everyone? She remembered that Madame Savelli had said she was an exception to this rule, that she was one of the fortunate ones from whom the burden of work had been almost lifted, and she felt that what was true of her art was true of her religion. Just as there were times when she could hardly sing at all, there were times when she could hardly pray at all, and she had entered upon one of these barren periods. For the last few days she had been depressed and restless, and all the little external pieties of the convent had jarred. The convent was the same as it had always been — they had always talked about vestments and prelates during recreation, and there had always been little wranglings about who was to have candles for her saint and who was not. But these things had not jarred so much as they had done in the last three days, except, perhaps, during the last month or so of her postulancy, before she had been summoned to Rome to see her father die. Since then she had noticed the external convent hardly at all. She had lived in an idea, and all the little discomforts of conventual life and its trivialities had hardly been perceived. Long, long ago Veronica had said to her that she could think of no fate more terrible than to live in a convent without a vocation. She had forgotten that Veronica had ever said this, but now it had been flashed back upon her out of a long past — out of four years, and yet these years had seemed like a single minute. She could think of nothing so like as these convent days; she thought of eggs and of leaves and of sheep, and of all things that are supposed to be alike, but none seemed to her so alike as these convent days.

Suddenly she remembered the day she had seen the convent for the first time. She had driven Monsignor and Father Daly there in her carriage. Ah! those chestnut horses, what had

happened to them? were they dead? Maybe they were drawing cabs. A few days later she had gone to confession to Monsignor, and to escape from her lovers she had returned to the convent for a retreat. She remembered the drive back to London, and how she had found Owen Asher waiting for her in the Park Lane drawing-room. How long ago all that seemed now, and how strange that she should remember it. She, a nun, sitting in the choir, her book upon her knees. What strange romance of destiny had brought her here? She saw that afternoon in Park Lane as one sees a sail blotted on the horizon — the very mood in which she had nearly yielded to Owen. She was sure she would have yielded if he had persisted, but he had refrained. The convent, she supposed, was still in her eyes. The prayers of the nuns had restrained him — could it have been that? And then she remembered one long afternoon in the Park with Ulick. They had stood a long while looking at the spire of Kensington Church, and as they walked home in the twilight he had asked her to marry him, and she had almost consented. He had tried to overrule her will with his, and she had promised to meet him at Victoria. They were to have gone to Dulwich together to her father; they were to have been married at once, so that there could be no turning back. But while sitting by the fire after dinner, thinking every moment she must get up to go to meet him at Victoria, she had been overcome. Never had her will been so completely overcome. She had not been able to get up from her chair. She remembered putting the moment off from five minutes to five minutes and her strange dreams. When she awoke Merat was by her. She had come to ask her if she had any letters for the post, and to tell her that on the morrow her Cousin Sophie was to take her vows. They had gone together to the convent, and she remembered the Carmelite nun whom she had seen afterwards at the grating. A few days after she had found the Wimbledon convent starving and had arranged a concert tour in order to get a little money for them. It had been a success until she had gone to stay at Thornton Grange. Lady Ascot, where was she? Owen had made love to her the whole evening, and she had nearly left her room to go to his; but as she was about to go she had heard voices singing the *Veni Creator*, and the hymn had brought appeasement to her senses. She had fallen asleep. The next morning she had left Thornton Grange, and abandoned her tour.

She thought of the year she had lived in Bayswater, looking after Patrick Sullivan and his like, and she remembered how she had met Owen in the slum. He had tried to persuade her that she must not leave her father however great the necessities of the nuns might be, He had offered to bet that Monsignor would say the same, and Monsignor had taken Owen's view of her duty; and she agreed to abandon the convent to its fate, but how vain her resolution had been. Her father had been summoned to Rome, and she had gone to live in the convent for three months, until he was settled in Rome and had found a house for her to live in. At the end of a few months, when she thought she would have to leave the convent and return to her father, when she wished to leave it, when she was weary of it, a letter had come from Monsignor saying her father was ill, and she had gone to Rome to see him die. But notwithstanding the break in her postulancy, the Bishop had given his consent to her clothing…. She paused, abashed at finding so much design in her life — all incoherences vanished. She thought of a fish swimming in front

of a net. At first the net is so far away that the fish does not perceive it, then gradually the meshes drift nearer, and the fish perceives that it narrows to a thin neck from which there is no escape…. Her life seemed to have been ordained from the beginning; she seemed to have been created for a special purpose.

She used to think that she was deficient in will, and then that she had a great deal of will, for she resisted all the pressure that the world could bring against her. There was Owen's love and his wealth, and Ulick with a different spirituality from that of the convent, and there were all the innumerable influences — the influence of Louise and Lady Ascot, and other influences half forgotten and half remembered, and all had proved unavailing. She had come to the conclusion she had an exceptionally strong will, and now it seemed to her that she had neither a feeble will nor a strong will, but had been created to do a certain work, and her life seemed to her like a long skein. A great deal of the skein was already unwound, and was the end of the skein the redemption of the convent from debt? Was it true that God managed our affairs, even in such small particulars as the financial difficulties of a convent? She had sometimes wondered at her own disinterestedness, but to redeem the convent from debt it was necessary that someone should be supremely disinterested.

The nuns got up and the procession left the chapel, and during recreation she walked with the Reverend Mother, speaking very little, unable to think because of the caressing touch of the air upon her check, excited by the colour of the border that had begun to light up, and stirred into sympathy with the brook that babbled through the underwoods on its way to the river. Remembrance of Owen and Ulick flashed through her mind, and no sooner had she put one set of memories aside than another arose. Again and again she caught herself thinking of her lovers, wondering if any one of them would have inspired her with the love which she now felt herself capable of giving. She had never really loved — not Owen, not Ulick, though she had loved Ulick better. The thousand and one distractions of her life at that time had prevented her loving then as she could love now. It seemed to her that she had learnt to love; but she did not think a man could love a nun. Yet who could love so well as a nun?

It seemed to her she must have been thinking a long while; and a few days after she caught herself questioning the usefulness of their lives in this convent, nor could she deny to herself that she sympathised with the schismatics who had wished to turn the contemplative into an active order. Would an active order satisfy her? She thought not. She was afraid she desired the personal life — the life she had told Monsignor was dead to her; to attain that she would have to leave the convent, and the very thought of breaking her holy vows filled her with terror. But when she lay down to sleep the thought of the personal came upon her between sleeping and waking. If she were to leave the convent what would she do? A nun who had broken her vows would always be an anomaly. She would be out of place wherever she went. And sitting up in her bed, seeing her cell in the light of the moon, she remembered how she had written to

Monsignor telling him that when she left the convent she proposed to take a cottage in the country with a large garden, and that she would have five or six little cripple boys to live with her. If her father had not died she would have done this somewhere near Rome, or in England — somewhere within easy reach of her father, But God had designed her for another purpose, and she must thank Him that she had been allowed to accomplish that purpose, or nearly. She wished that it had not been accomplished so soon, for until it was accomplished she had something to live for. Though she might not question the will of God, she might pray that He would be kind to her, and treat her very gently like one who has done her work and has earned some peaceful years. She hoped He would not allow her to be tempted again by the flesh; that He would take out of her mind all thoughts of the men she had known and of the men she had sinned with.

The sin of fornication — that terrible sin — had always been her trouble, and in the years she would have to live in the convent now, doing nothing, having accomplished His work, she prayed that He would take pity on her, and never allow her to be tempted again.

LXXVIII

She was so weary of singing Gounod's 'Ave Maria' that she had intentionally accentuated the vulgarity of the melody, and wondered if the caricature had been noticed. 'The more vulgarly it is sung, the more money it draws.' Smiling at the theatrical phrase that had arisen unexpectedly to her lips, she went into the garden. There she heard that she had never sung so well; all the nuns seemed to agree with Sister Elizabeth, and Evelyn looked from face to face, not finding the slightest perception of the truth in any one. Suddenly they seemed divided from her, and wondering what her father would have said if he had lived to hear her sing as she had sung that afternoon, she walked aside, pretending an interest in the flowers. It was then that the Prioress joined them in the garden, and she told Evelyn that a lady had been so moved by the beauty of her singing that she had promised to send them a cheque for fifty pounds.

'So you see, God has given you strength to accomplish what you intended to accomplish. Now we are free from debt.'

The sun was setting; the earth drew a calm deep breath under the lovely sky, and Evelyn's soul dilated and was drawn into mysterious sympathy with the flowering earth. 'How beautifully the evening wears its sacramental air,' she said, and she lifted the cup of a lily as she would lift a sleeping child from its cradle, and wondered why a prayer should be more pleasing to God than simple attendance on this flower. And thinking of the flower she walked with the Prioress to the end of the garden. There were many visitors in the garden that day, and it seemed to these two nuns that they might leave their visitors to be entertained by Sister Jerome and Sister Winifred for a little while longer.They might do this without impropriety; and they wandered as far as the fish pond, and stood listening to the stream, loath to return to the ladies, who wished to compliment Evelyn on having freed the convent from debt.

'I'm afraid we must go back, Teresa.'

'Dear Mother Jerome is amusing them. I heard her telling them that St Joseph's statue had to go up to town to get a new coat of paint, and that the Virgin had to go with him to be mended.'

The Prioress smiled, and at that moment Sister Jerome appeared on the pathway, and they had not walked many yards when they met the lady who had sent Sister Jerome to fetch them.

'I remember hearing you sing at Covent Garden,' said the effusive woman.

'You must not speak to me of my unregenerate days,' and then, becoming serious, she said, 'All that is far away.'

'My favourite piece of music is that "Ave Maria," and I did not know it was so beautiful till I heard it sung to-day. Are you not very proud, Sister Teresa, of being able to get so much money out of the public?'

'I take very little interest in my singing. I thought I had sung very badly this afternoon — in fact, I know I did, but it seemed to please.'

The Prioress continued the conversation, and Evelyn regretted she had been told that the last portion of the debt had been paid. Henceforth there was nothing to strive for, nothing to hope for, and every day would be the fellow of the same as the day before. The idea of the school seemed to have gone with Father Daly, and the schism which seemed too terrible at the time now seemed better than the noiseless monotony which was to be the future. Henceforth nothing would happen to break the peace of their lives, and she saw the days and nights folding and unfolding like heavy curtains. Her life would be like Sister Bridget's, and she thought of what Sister Bridget's life had been. She had been more than forty years in this convent; the thirtieth of this month would be the fortieth anniversary of her vows, and Evelyn remembered that she too might live till she was seventy. With the exception of Mother Lawrence, who was now completely bedridden, Bridget was the oldest member of the community. Yet she continued to scrub, and to sweep, and to carry up coals and water regularly as she had done these last forty years. Everyone loved Sister Bridget's funny old face, and it was felt that something ought to be done to commemorate the anniversary of her vows.

'I should like to see her on an elephant, riding round the garden; what a spree it would be,' said Sister Jerome.

The words were hardly out of her mouth when she regretted them, foreseeing allusions to elephants till the end of her days; for Sister Jerome often said foolish things, and was greatly quizzed for them. Of course she knew they could not get an elephant. She knew too that they would not be able to control an elephant if they did get one. But this time it seemed as if her foolish remark were going to escape ridicule. Sister Agatha said she did not see why they should not make an elephant, and in a moment everyone was listening. Sister Agatha's notion was to take the long table from the library and pile it up with cushions, stuffing it, as nearly as possible, into the shape of an elephant.

'That is exactly as I had intended,' said Sister Jerome.

And the creation of the beast was accomplished in the novitiate, no one being allowed to see it except the Reverend Mother. The great difficulty was to find beads large enough for the eyes, and it threatened to frustrate the making of their beast. The latest postulant suggested that

perhaps the buttons off her jacket would do. They were just the thing, and the legs of the beast were most natural and life-like; it had even a tail.

As no one out of the novitiate had seen this very fine beast, the convent was on tiptoe with excitement, and when, at the conclusion of dinner, the elephant was wheeled into the refectory, everyone clapped her hands, and there were screams of delight. Then the saddle was brought in and attached by blue ribbons. Sister Bridget, who did not seem quite sure that the elephant was not alive, was lifted on to it, and held there, and wheeled in triumph round the refectory. The nuns clapped their hands, and rushed after the beast, pushing it a little way, beseeching Sister Bridget not to get off but to allow herself to be drawn once more round the room. Flowers were fetched and scattered. There was no reason why Evelyn should disapprove, nor did she disapprove. She tried to remember that she had often seen grown-up people acting quite as childishly, nevertheless she asked, —

'Am I going to spend the whole of my life with these women who are no better than little children?'

The novices rushed about screaming with delight, and the professed too — the older the nuns were the more eagerly did they enter into the sport, and in the midst of a dispute as to who was to ride it next Evelyn stole away into the garden.

The parched ground was cracking, and, filled with pity for the thirsting plants, she filled a can with water, and shed a refreshing sprinkle over them, not drowning them under a torrent as Sister Elizabeth did when she helped her in the garden. 'But they do not like this cold well water,' she said, and she looked at the cloudless sky for a cloud. A cloud had passed some minutes ago, but it was high up in the sky, and it had flown away. 'The flowers would give a great deal for three hours of fine, small, dense rain. How they would enjoy it,' and standing with her eyes fixed on the dusty horizon, she began to sing some of Isolde's music.

It was five years since she had sung it, and in five years she had forgotten nearly all of it. Other ideas had absorbed her. Yet it was in quest of this idea that she had gone to Ireland. She remembered Chapelizod, a few cottages, a miserable inn, and a dirty river. But Tristan and Isolde had walked together there. Afterward she had gone with Ulick to see some Druid altars, and sitting on the hill above the altars, they had talked of the primal mysteries, of gods, demi-gods and great heroes.

The childish gaiety of the nuns streamed through the windows into the garden.

'Can they be still dragging that elephant about?'

She got up abruptly like one moved by a sudden intention.

'Does another quest lie before me?' She tried to stifle the thought, but it cried across her life, like a curlew across waste lands.

LXXIX

It seemed to her that the server trudged too and fro carrying the book as if it were a bundle of sticks. He seemed to ring the bell stupidly; the ritual seemed ridiculous; and she hid her face in her hands in order that she might fix her thoughts on the mystery of the bread and wine. But she could only think of the enigma of the stars; a vast cobweb spun into endless space; and in such a pantheistic mood she felt that she dared not go to the sacred table. The priest waited a moment, thinking she had forgotten, and when she went to the Prioress's room at the end of the week the Prioress's first words were, —

'My dear Teresa, I noticed that you did not communicate once this week.'

She could only say that an overwhelming sense of her unworthiness had obliged her abstention. She could not bring herself to confess that she, Sister Teresa, a nun dedicated to perpetual adoration, did not believe, or had doubts regarding the actual presence of God in the sacramental wafer.

There was a time, she remembered it well, when her communions alone marked the passage of time. She remembered how she used to count the hours which divided her from God, how she welcomed sleep, for sleep obliterated consciousness of time. And she remembered how she used to awake in the morning thinking that the hour of the Lord was by. She used to go to the communion table with a wonderful flutter in her breast, keen hunger for the divine food. As she knelt, her head bowed, she was conscious only of her soul and God; she hardly dared open her mouth; and as the sacrament dissolved she was taken with a great fear, for to swallow seemed like sacrilege, and she covered her face lest the action of swallowing should be perceived. When she had swallowed, the sense of happiness and immortal union grew more intense; her senses seemed to consume one by one, and she was conscious of an exquisite harmony, in which every atom seemed to beat in unison with another atom. In those days she used to live in God, God was always about her, and the sense of God's presence enveloped her, and looking back upon that time it seemed to her that she had been dead or sleeping ever since, and it seemed as if the thick besetting dream of circumstance would never break again.

She noticed the quality of the food and the length of time in chapel, and every day she found it more difficult to think of God, more difficult to keep her lovers out of her mind, and the music that she used to sing for their delight. One day she began to play the prelude to 'Lohengrin' from impulse and to see what an effect it would have on Veronica, and when she had finished she asked her for her idea of it.

'It seemed to me,' she said, 'as if I stood waiting on some mountain top, somewhere where there is no boundary. The dawn seemed to be breaking, light seemed to increase, the rays grew brighter, and my soul seemed to be waiting amid the increasing light.'

'Yes, it is that, Veronica — that is a very good description; how did you think of it?'

'I did not think it.... I felt like that.'

'Elsa sings a beautiful melody in the balcony — listen. After singing it she said, 'It is deep as the hush of the summer night. How the voice falls on the word *calme*'

'Oh, Sister, that music is not like our life here.... It is far away. You used to sing that music, and yet you came here.'

'Perhaps I came here to escape from it, Veronica.'

The prelude to 'Tristan' and the 'Forest Murmurs,' and the Rhine journey could not but trouble the quiet souls of Sister Elizabeth and Sister Veronica, and Evelyn knew that in playing this music to them she was doing a wicked thing. But a strange will had taken possession of her and she had to obey it. She stopped in the cloister to remember that she had saved the convent, and now she wished to destroy it. Was this really so? She could not believe it. Good heavens! Why did she hate those nuns? Was it possible that she hated them? Did she wish to destroy the peace of mind of her innocent companions? No, she did not desire such wickedness. She could not help herself; something was behind her, and she began to fear she was possessed by the devil.

And though she feared her brain was going the way Miss Dingle's had gone, she could not resist the temptation to wear a blue scapular. And she listened more attentively than she ever did before to Miss Dingle's experiences. At last, unable to bear her present state of mind any longer, she resolved to consult the chaplain.

'I have come to consult you, Father, about a great many things; if you have finished with your other penitents perhaps you may be able to give me a little more time than usual.'

He seemed to awake from a pious lethargy. The new chaplain reminded Evelyn of Sister Cecilia.

'Father, I have come to confess certain sins and obtain forgiveness for these sins. But over and above my sins I have come to consult you, and I feel you will be able to give me the advice I want.'

It seemed to her that she had better begin by telling him her general attitude of mind towards the convent, for she wished him to understand that a change had come, whether transitory or permanent she did not know. An enumeration of her little criticisms of the nuns would convey no true picture of her trouble, and yet it was all so instinct with her trouble that she felt she must tell him that she had smiled at the excitement of the novices and the younger nuns over the shrines in the passages and in the garden.

'I have been lacking in humility — that, I suppose, is what it comes to.'

Fearing any inclination to extenuate, she entered into details, and then her confession seemed to her sillier and more trivial than the pious fancies that had excited her irony, and she hurried on, trying to hit upon something definite, some less evanescent emotion, which could be expressed by words. If she could say something that the priest would understand, something that would help him to divine the very real trouble and unrest of soul. But she could express nothing of what she felt. The fact that she had emphasised sentences, which even caricatured the sentiment of a popular piece of music did not seem to him a serious sin; and settling his cassock over his knees, he reminded her that singing had paid off the convent's debts.

'Yes, I know,' she said, 'and that very day a lady was so delighted with the "Ave Maria" that she sent the last fifty pounds required to pay off the debt.'

'On that very day! Now I will give you absolution.'

'But, Father, there is a real burden on my mind, and you must have patience with me, for my trouble is very real, and I want your advice.'

Again the priest settled his cassock and concentrated his attention.

'I have thought of men whom I knew before I entered the convent, whom I knew sinfully. I have not been able to keep their faces and recollections of my sins out of my mind. I do not know if you know that I was an opera singer before I became a nun.... I thought that the opera singer was dead in me, but the other day I played some of the music I used to sing. I don't know if I am deceiving myself, but it seemed to me that I played that music to the nuns in order to trouble their lives as mine has been troubled. I can imagine no sin more horrible, and I hope I have not been guilty of it.'

The priest asked her what music she had played, and when she told him he said, —

‘But I do not know any more devotional music than the prelude to “Lohengrin,” and the other music you speak of seems to me to be entirely unobjectionable. I have taken great pleasure in it myself — the prelude to “Parsifal,” for instance.’

‘But I wish to forget that music; it is full of associations for me, and my intentions in playing it were — ’

'I do not think, my daughter, that you are in a frame of mind to judge your intentions. We are not responsible for passing thoughts.’

There still remained her doubts regarding the Real Presence, and she said, — .

'I cannot imagine anything more terrible than to be a nun, vowed to perpetual adoration, and not to believe implicitly in the Real Presence.... I can imagine no more terrible fate, and that fate may be mine — I was going to say is perhaps mine already.’

'But, my dear child, you do not say that you do not believe in the Real Presence, and if you do not deny you believe.’

'Does that follow, Father? I certainly do not deny. I do not even disbelieve, but I fear my faith in the sacrament is waning. Think what my position would be in the convent if such a thing were to happen.’

'It can only be that the trial you are now enduring has been sent to test you, and you must pray.’

‘But, Father, I seem to have lost control of my thoughts. Only this morning, when you bent down over the altar to take the sacrament, trivial thoughts passed through my mind; is it necessary that I should tell them to you?’

'No,, it is not necessary.’

'They are so vivid and near me, and yet they do not seem like my thoughts, and sometimes I fear to turn my head lest I should see the devil. I have almost come to believe in him as Miss Dingle does — I mean in his visible presence and in his power to lay material hands on me. Think, then, what it must be to kneel before the altar? I cannot shake this haunting spirit out of me. Not only blasphemous, but indecent thoughts rise up in my mind, and they are so distinct and clear that I cannot but think the devil is whispering in my ear. I must tell you all. The moment I kneel to take my watch the voice begins, and the last time I communicated…’

She ceased speaking and hid her face in her hands.

'There is no reason why you should recall these painful visitations.'

'Yes, visitations; they can be nothing else. I dare not communicate; you have noticed my abstention? If these thoughts do not cease I cannot live in the convent — I cannot live in blasphemy.'

'Have you spoken to the Prioress on this matter?'

'No.'

The Prioress reserved the spiritual guidance of her nuns to herself… Father Daly had been dismissed for interference. The chaplain reflected. He could think of no argument which would convince her of the Real Presence in the Eucharist. His brain seemed a little torpid that afternoon. Had he not better refer the penitent to the Prioress? On the other hand, would it be right to avoid the responsibility that had come upon him. But at that moment an argument was being revealed to him, and he began, though he knew he risked a great deal; the three minutes, the limit of time the Prioress allowed her nuns in the confessional, were over long ago.

'My dear child, your position is very serious. But God never deserts those who do not desert Him.'

And while trying to disentangle an argument wherewith to convince her of the Real Presence, he spoke to her of the sin of despair, the most terrible of all sins, and the one to be dreaded most. 'If we accept the evidence of our senses,' he said, 'we would believe the earth to be flat and stationary. But this conflicts with the evidence of our senses regarding the rising and setting of constellations, and so it is with the mystery of Transubstantiation. If we accept our immediate sensation, no change has taken place during the words of consecration, and God is not in the sacred wafer any more than He is in any other wafer; but just as in astronomy we arrive at an absurdity if we do not accept the theory of the motion of the earth, so do we arrive at an absurdity in theology if we do not accept the teaching of our holy Church. To call into question the Real Presence in the sacred wafer not only calls into question the trustworthiness of the Church's teaching, but also the very words of Christ, who. said, "Take and eat, for this is My body," and again, "This is My blood of the New Testament, which is shed for you and for many for the remission of sins." Then this doctrine in the New Testament must be dismissed as a fable, for did not Christ say, "I came not to destroy the law but to fulfil it." So, you see, to deny any one article of the faith involves a denial of everything, and if Christ be not God, and the New Testament a myth, then all the world, and all the stars and everything that happens in life are but a series of chances.'

‘Yes, Father, yes, and it is a great help to me to hear you; and what you say is quite true. I used to believe that this world and human life were due to a series of chances.’

'And the scientific explanation failed to satisfy you. I will give you some books to read on the subject, and with patience and prayer your doubts will pass away, my dear child.’

The priest then said a little prayer with her, and he gave her absolution for any fault that might be hers in not resisting more strenuously the thoughts that had come, against her will, from a far time.

LXXX

One night in her convent bed she saw flames about her, and she began to remember the scene — how it begins with Siegfried's own motive, and underneath it the ripple of the Rhinegold.

The day has begun; the last rosy clouds vanish in light melodies, cool as the wind blowing out of the dawn, and the hero stands on the mountain-top. Below him the warrior woman sleeps in her war gear, surrounded by flames, and at once is heard the mysterious 'Question to Fate.' Evelyn s eyes closed, and she dreamed 'The Love spell,' as it emerges from the orchestra; and the young hero, whose mother she had rescued, descended the rocks to her,side, and amid enchanting melodies — 'Love's Confusion,' 'Love's Rapture,' and 'Love's Delight' — he took her buckler and her helmet from her, and looking upon her breasts, dreamed she might unclasp her girdle for him in the pine wood close by.

The nun strove against the dream, but God seemed to have abandoned her; and she could not resist the temptation of mortal lips; the music overtook her as a net overtakes the escaping fish, she heard her vows die as Siegfried's lips pressed hers apart. The music rose out of the depths of the orchestra; it ascended to the heights on the violins, and she heard the exultant chords expressive of her rapture when she awakens to the beauty of the world. Sitting up on the rock where she has lain for so many years, she asks, 'Who is the hero who has awakened me?' and they both sing the rapture of the meeting.

Siegfried watches her as the sun watches the marvel of the spring. He sings his wonder at her beauty, and a pang of reciprocal longing awakens, and her delight is like earth's answer to the sun. What accents of courage and triumph, and amid them her own 'justification,' for had she not been compassionate to the unhappy parents? The impetuous boy implores her, but in the midst of her desire she remembers she is a goddess, and again amid the temptation to yield to the delight of the senses, she hears the theme of 'Renunciation.' To surrender to love is to surrender her immortal life; and her elemental nature rises up like the wind; and she hears her sisters fly by her. But in spite of her endeavour to resist she turns her eyes to Siegfried, and she sees him leading her into the fir wood, and her senses sicken a little as she thinks how she may unclasp her girdle for his pleasure and for hers. And amid the flutter and rapture of such melodious phrases as 'Love's Confusion' and 'Love's Rapture' the gods strive vainly for her virginity. She turns to the fir wood, her hands fall to her girdle, but she hears the theme of Valhalla.

The nun's face grew pale in her dream, and she tossed on her bed, for she was striving to remember. The next part of the scene seemed to elude her, and she seems to wander through long woods, following some distant and evasive music sung by a bird. At last, coming to a

rocky desert place, ‘The Curse' is suddenly thundered in her ears, and she remembers that death follows all delight. But immediately peaceful memories breathe in her ears. Siegfried is beside her, she is enfolded in her desire of him, though she hears in the quivering air some faint echo of tremulous annihilation. She listens, and the alluring dimness of the Valhalla motive overcomes her, and breaking away she foregoes the fatal gift of love. But Siegfried sings his irresistible phrase, his triumphal 'Come what May,' and the joy of life is accepted amid the tempestuous beat of the flying hoofs of ‘The Ride,' the mysterious call of the bird; and the love themes are repeated, and after them 'The Heritage of the World' is heard. 'Siegfried’s own Motive' rises out of the depths, and the boy and the maid exult in a final trill.

The nun’s eyes opened, and she lay with wide open eyes in a state between sleeping and waking, her thoughts so completely detached from her will that she seemed to be listening rather than thinking. She lay quiescent, and her whole life seemed to be read out to her, and at the end of the long reading she answered, ‘No Siegfried will come to release me from this prison of invisible bars. And if Siegfried came to release me from these flames — for every will is a flame — of what use should I be to him?' 'Of what use' repeated like an antiphone, and at the end of each verse she repeated, 'What use should I be to him?' and this was sometimes followed by the addition, ‘or to anyone? God has cast me off,' she cried, ‘and men have cast me off, and my present singing would appeal to them as little as my body. No man can love me again.’

In the silence of the dawn, the evening she had found Owen waiting for her in her drawing-room at Park Lane returned. She had been near to yielding to him, but he had refrained, though he loved her as much as ever. She had not understood at the time, only long afterwards, and by degrees, that the prayers of the nuns had withheld him from her. The prayers of the nuns had withheld her from him in Thornton Grange. Ah, how dim a spectre she would seem to him now, and to Ulick too, who in his pagan mysticism hated Christianity even more than Owen.

She suddenly became aware that the convent had moulded her to its ideas more completely than Owen Asher had done; her insomnia was like a glass in which she saw herself clearly; the very ends of her soul were revealed to her. It seemed to her that she must die, so great was her fear. She shrank from the convent, the chapel, the refectory, and the passages were reflected upon her brain. The nuns passed by her, and she knew their faces in every minute inflection of line, in every slight difference of colour, and she heard them tell her that this was the end, that no further change would come into her life. As they passed her she asked them if her life would be prolonged, but they passed without answering her question, and she thought how friendless the convent would be when the Prioress died. Sister Mary John was the only one to whom she could tell her trouble of soul, the only one who could help her to bear the trial of her unfaith. It seemed to her that she had been strangely indifferent to her friend’s departure. She had forgotten her quickly, and it seemed to her that during the term of their friendship she had always been curiously unresponsive. Evelyn saw her friend far away in France. She might be

dead, she would never hear of her again, and she cried out, ‘Come back!’ hoping the cry might reach her.

It was Sister Mary John’s faith that had inspired her; it was Sister Mary John’s example that had helped her to believe that the Real Presence was the one true reality. Now she remembered that she had said to Sister Mary John, 'Nothing seems to me so real as the sacrament, not even you, whom I can see and touch with my hands….’ What sin had been theirs? What shadow of sin had Sister Mary John seen in their friendship? Something less than a shadow, and lest this shadow of a shadow should define itself, she had left her alone in the convent.

She had been in bed three hours, and she was weary of thinking, and for three weeks she had hardly slept; and in the lucidity of these white nights she had read her life. At first she had allowed herself to read it for a few moments, just to see if she remembered it, but gradually she had yielded more and more to the temptation of remembrance. Her stage lovers, and her other lovers, even her admirers, men whose names she did not even remember, returned to her. One of these was a young Russian. She remembered the evening they had stood on a hill-top overlooking the city; from where they stood they could see the harbour and the ships; and she remembered the blown trees and the faded grass, and the young man, who was a prince, had pressed her to marry him. If she had done so she would now be a Russian princess living among the Steppes, whereas she was now a nun living in the Wimbledon convent. She never would see him again. Had he discovered someone to marry him, and did he ever think of her? she wondered. Yes, far away in the Steppes he thought of her sometimes.

She remembered the names of actors she had acted with, she remembered when they had sung well and when they had sung badly. Perhaps the pleasantest days to remember were the days when she went to her singing lessons every morning, and when Owen had come from England to visit them. They had given dinner-parties and dances in that house, in the Rue Balzac, and she remembered that Owen had to leave her to escape from the torment of desire. She remembered that it was difficult for them to sit in the same room when others were present.

But this life of sin had been forgiven her, and to save herself from memories of Owen she had to think of Ulick’s gentleness, and the different delight she had taken by his side. She thought of the days they had spent in Ireland, and fell asleep, dreaming of a long beautiful day in the lonely country.

But before the first bird began to sing her sleep had become broken, and when the first bird chirped a cry escaped from her, and she moaned and seemed to resist someone. ‘No, oh, no, Owen, I cannot.' Then her voice sank to a murmur and she waved her arms. 'It is sacrilege,' she cried, and she sank back. ‘Stay here with me, no one will know you are here, but in the chapel you may be seen. I cannot do that, I cannot commit sacrilege; God would never forgive that.’

She lay stark and white beneath the obscene oppression, unable to resist Owen, who led her from her cell to the chapel where the nuns were assembled at Mass. All the way down the stairs she besought him, asking him why he wished this one thing. There was a strange leer in his eyes, and his lips were strangely curled when he said she dared not go for she knew Monsignor was the celebrant. He grasped her by the wrist and dragged her, and though she resisted with the other arm, placing it against the doorpost, she was hurled along, her strength giving way each time. The chapel door was open, and all the nuns were in choir. She could see her empty place, but the nuns did not seem to see it was empty; they were deep in prayer. She was not certain who was the celebrant. It might be Monsignor as Owen had said. She could not see the celebrant very distinctly, but the server she saw quite distinctly. The server was Veronica, and she wore a surplice. She had disguised herself, but her naked feet showed beneath the surplice, and when she changed the book from the right to the left Evelyn feared she would be discovered.

All this while Owen and Evelyn were hiding behind a pillar, and they watched Veronica, who, regardless of the danger of discovery, stood by the celebrant, helping him to find the place in the book. Evelyn besought Owen to come back to her cell with her, but they remained in hiding, and at the Elevation it seemed to her it was not Monsignor who was saying Mass, but a satyr — a satyr whom she had once seen in a picture in the Munich Gallery, and she watched the vestments, catching sight every now and then of the hoofs. Then, forgetting the celebrant, she watched the nuns, thinking every moment one of them would look towards where she and Owen were hiding, and one did look, but to Evelyn's surprise she did not seem to see them.

On the altar a statue lay at length, and Evelyn was puzzled to explain its presence along the altar. The priest continued to say Mass as if he were not aware of the statue, or even inconvenienced by it, and then it seemed to Evelyn not to be a statue but a woman. She noticed that the face was like one of the nuns — she could not tell which, and as the priest bowed his head the woman looked round and watched Monsignor came from the sacred table to give them communion, and as he was about to return to the altar he caught sight of her and Owen, though Owen had shrunk into the shadow of the pillar. He asked him what he had come for, and Owen answered ‘to communicate.' She besought Owen to say that he had not come to commit sacrilege; but Owen begged the priest to give him the sacred Host. He put it into his handkerchief, and as they were about to leave the church a sharp rap at the door awoke her.

It was the Sister who had come to tell her to watch before the sacrament.

'I cannot, I cannot get up.’

'Are you ill, Sister?’

Yes, I am very ill indeed. I cannot watch to-day, I cannot; someone else must take my place.'

LXXXI

There was no will in her to get up; she lay quite still, her eyes wide open and her look was vague like an animal's. She did not dare to rouse herself lest any stir might bring back a glimpse of her dream. There was no sign of life in her, except that her face sometimes contracted in an expression of suffering, and when at last she slipped out of bed and began to dress herself, she was certain that come what may she could not endure another month in the convent. The alternative of leaving the convent no longer frightened her. Even if it were to kill the Prioress she must leave; her own soul was at stake, and every moment she lingered in this convent, she was losing it.

She hastened a little so that she might be in time for Mass, and she had begun to hope she might be able to pray. To pray ever so little would alter everything. But when she knelt among the nuns her heart was empty and prayer seemed like sacrilege. The worst was that at the Elevation she could think of nothing but her dream. She doubted no longer that her soul was a lost soul, and to live with her soul, knowing it to be lost, was really hell. Only by leaving the convent could she save her soul. But she could not see the Prioress till noon, and it seemed as if she could not live through her anxiety. She did not dare to think; and at dinner she crumbled a piece of bread and drank a little water, thankful for the silence, for she would not have been able to answer if she had been spoken to.

After dinner she escaped from recreation and went into the chapel and tried to pray. She called, but He answered not, and unable to control her nerves she left the chapel, and catching sight of the Prioress in the passage she hurried after her, but paused at the foot of the stairs to think the matter out. Thinking did not help her; the knot remained untied in spite of all her trembling thoughts, and she went upstairs.

The firm, white face, and the old wrinkled hands turning over some papers unnerved her, and she thought of the chill eyes reading in the recesses of her soul.

'I know, my dear child, that the great crisis of your life has begun. It began some weeks ago. I did not question you; disease ripens best in silence. Sit down, and we will talk about it.'

Evelyn dropped into a chair.

'If you knew, Mother, what I have to say to you, you could not speak like that. If I am to save my soul I must leave; it has come to that.'

She spoke with feverish simplicity, telling that her motives were spiritual, that it was because she feared she could not believe sufficiently, and not on account of any desire of the world, or of the men whom she had once loved; they were dead to her, the trouble of the flesh had died out of her; such temptations were light, they could be repressed almost at will.

'I feel that I can love God better in the world.'

'But if you were to return to the world, the passion that you control here would subdue you, and all the struggle would have been in vain. Do you not think that this is so?'

'Oh, no, Mother, I do not think so. The struggle would not have been in vain — God would take it into account. That may not be true doctrine; I fear that it is not, and it is the doctrine and not the flesh that I fear. It is not true that the roots of doubt are in the flesh, though I thought so once, and Monsignor once told me so.'

'So you think, my dear child, that you would be safer in the world than you are here, and that you would be leading a life more pleasing to God?'

'Yes, I cannot think otherwise, and if I could tell you all, you too would think so.'

'Should I?'

The two women sat looking at each other, and then Evelyn said, 'I am the unhappiest of women, and the most unfortunate, I think. Imagine a nun, dedicated to perpetual adoration, and unable to believe in the sacrament.'

'You mean, Teresa, that your faith is no longer as complete or as fervent as it was. That may be, nothing is more likely; we should be too happy if a sensible faith were always by us.'

'I have thought of all that, Mother. But my case is different. There is no hope for me — my soul is lost — God has deserted me.'

'But what you say, my dear child, is unthinkable. God cannot withdraw belief in His presence in the sacrament in order that you may return to the world.'

'I see that I cannot make you understand. No one can understand another, and perhaps I am difficult to understand. You cannot understand — I mean sympathise — of course you cannot sympathise with my leaving the convent, that is one of my afflictions. You will always misjudge me, and it is not your fault. No one can lay before another the life that passes in her soul.... Words are ineffectual to explain it. With words you can tell the exterior facts of life; but you

cannot tell the intense yet involuntary life of the soul — that intricate and unceasing life, incomprehensible as an ant heap, and so personal though it is involuntary.'

At that moment a sudden haunting of her last night's dream sprang upon her, bringing her, as it were, to bay, and she said, 'If it were not for my dreams, Mother.'

'Your dreams are involuntary, so you are not responsible.'

'I have thought of that too, but another night like last night, and I should go mad. I thought this morning I should go mad. I can only think that I must be possessed with the devil. If I could but tell you the dream you would think so too.'

'The devil possesses no one who does not desire him. You are excited and cannot control your nerves; but a little time will bring the change.'

Then the Reverend Mother mentioned one who, the Scripture said, had had an evil spirit cast out of her; and Evelyn mentioned another, and the question was discussed for a while. Both were conscious of the irrelevancy, but neither could disentangle herself from it, and it allowed Evelyn to consider the wretchedness of her plight if she returned to the world, and the Reverend Mother to think how she could save her from the fatal step. Suddenly there came a silence, and Evelyn said, —

'I became a nun, I am thinking, too late, or too soon. I can understand the acceptation of the religious life by those who passed, like Veronica, from the schoolroom to the novitiate; and there are those who enter the convent late in life, when the vine of life has perished, in disappointment, in misfortune.'

The two nuns sat a long while without speaking.

'Yes, Teresa, the vine of life gathers round and captures and overgrows our natural love of God. You were seven
or eight-and-twenty, I think, when you came here first — I was twenty-five when my husband died. Before I was married I often used to come to the convent. I was fond of the nuns, and I was a pious girl, and, like you, I once made a retreat when I was sixteen or seventeen. But after our marriage I forgot our holy religion, and thought seldom of God. I was captured by life, the vine of life grew about me and held me tight. One day, passing by the door of the convent, my husband said, "It is lucky that love rescued you, for when I met you you were a little taken by the convent, and might have become a nun. If you had not fallen in love," he said, "you might have shut yourself up in there — fancy you shut up in there draped in a grey habit." I wore that day a grey silk dress, and I remember taking the skirt up as we passed the door and hitting the

kerb stone with it. “Shut up in that prison house! how could I ever have thought of such a thing?” These were my words, but God in His great goodness and wisdom resolved to bring me back to Him. A great deal is required to save our souls, so deeply are we enmeshed in the delight of life, and in the delight of one another. So God took my husband from me after an illness of three weeks. This happened forty years ago — far away from here I used to sit on the seashore crying all day. My little child used to put his arms about me and say, “What is mamie crying for?” Then my child died, seemingly without any reason, and I felt that I could not live any longer amid the desires and activities of men. I will not try to tell you what my grief was; you have suffered grief, and may imagine it. I left my home at once and hurried here, just as you did. When I saw you return here after your father’s death I could not but think of my own returning. I saw myself in you. But we nuns do not speak of our past lives, and if I have told you it is because a force within me impelled me to do so. It may help you; one never knows what may help another — help comes unexpectedly, and from an unexpected side.’

‘Thank you, dear Mother, I know what it must have cost you to speak of these past things. There is a great lesson in all you have said.’

At that moment the question of whether the death of a father was as wide and deep a distraction in the life of a woman as the death of a husband and child set itself before Evelyn. But after considering the question for a while, she put it aside, not daring to think it out, and listened instead to the Reverend Mother, who was speaking to her of what her life would be in the world if she were to return to it.

'You have said that to go back to the stage is out of the question, so I can only think of you as a music teacher. The money you gave to the convent cannot be returned to you unless all the nuns agree. I do not know if it could be managed.’

'Do not speak of such a thing. To put back the weight of debt on your shoulders which it was my mission to lift from them! If I were to do that then indeed my life would be deprived of all meaning whatever. It would be all quicksand — shifting sand. The redemption of this convent from debt is the one thing that I have accomplished. Under no circumstances could I ever take back the money. Never speak of it again.’

'My dear child, I should like to say you are very good, but this is not the moment for saying such things. Yet I think I can say that I do not believe God will allow anyone who is as good as you are, who desires goodness as ardently as you do, to leave the convent and start again in the miserable life of the world, where all is disappointment. We shall pray for you, and we have confidence in our prayers. They have been answered before.’

‘I fear this return to the world. Outside of the convent what can my life be — the life of an obscure music teacher, half remembered and half forgotten — grey and shadow-like I shall pass —

“When I move among shadows a shadow, and wail by impassable streams.”

My sole reality will be the convent. I shall never see you, dear Mother, nor any of the Sisters — Veronica, Mother Philippa, and Mother Mary Hilda, so gentle and wise, and yet I shall see nothing but you all, just as an exile sees nothing but his native land. I had often wondered before I came here what my end would be, and I imagined all kinds of ends, but never one so shadowy as mine will be if I leave you.... The disgrace, too — undoing all the good that I have done, that seems the hardest part. It is my desertion you will remember; not you, Mother, but the convent.’

The Prioress told Evelyn that when the Mothers met to discuss whether they should vote for, or against, her election, Mother Mary Hilda had advised her rejection until she had proved the reality of her vocation by remaining another year in the novitiate.

'But I always believed in your vocation, and I shall believe in it. God will guide us aright, and will listen to our prayers. But if it should so happen that you should feel your spiritual welfare to be endangered by remaining in the convent, you must leave — there can be no question of that. We must all be guided by our consciences. There is so much that we do not understand. We must always place ourselves in the hands of God.’

This admission seemed to disarm Evelyn, and the terrors of the night having worn off she began to think her fears were illusory, and that by strenuous efforts on her part and by the aid of the prayers of the nuns God would give back His grace to her.

The Prioress found wise words, and Evelyn agreed that a month was the shortest time she could give to the consideration of so irreparable an act as the breaking of her vows.

'Oh, the restlessness of life, and how weary I am of it!’ she said, as they went downstairs, for the chapel bell was ringing for Benediction.

LXXXII

The fortitude which had enabled the Prioress to endure her life, after the death of her husband and her child, appealed to all that Evelyn admired most in human character, and she looked at the old woman with affectionate and wondering eyes. The simple words in which she had described the shipwreck of her life enabled Evelyn to see it clearly, and she could picture the young woman, without a hope in this world, driving like a ship upon the rocks, but saving herself by extraordinary force of character. After the death of husband and child, the convent was the only consolation for a woman like the Prioress, and for nearly half a century her life had swung at anchor, like a ship in a safe harbour. Evelyn entered the chapel with her, realising the beauty of her serene age, and the wonder of her life in its faith and its romance. And under this influence Evelyn prayed a little while, and it seemed to her that the troubles of her life had faded from her. But before she had left the chapel, before even she had finished her prayer, her thoughts had strayed back to the sacrament. The faintly-burning lamp had drawn her thoughts back to it, and she could see it white and transparent amid the gold.

Did she believe? Yes, she believed, and that seemed the worst part of her misfortune. She did not wish to defile the sacrament; but she was persecuted by thoughts of how it might be defiled. In her dream Owen had put the Host into his handkerchief, and they were going to take it to her cell to defile it. She awoke as they were leaving the chapel, but the memory of this dream was unendurable, and she felt she could not rid herself of it without leaving the convent. To avoid blasphemy she must get away from the sacrament. To think of God she must go to some beautiful hollow in some delightful land.... As long as she stayed in the convent sin would be with her for a daily and nightly companion. Old sins would revisit her, and her calamity was the unexpectedness of these thoughts. She was weary of putting them back, and in sleep she was powerless against them. Her nights were poisoned by dreams, out of which she awoke — hollow eyed — in the blue dusk of dawn.

She had heard that our dreams are only the continuance of our thoughts at the moment of falling asleep. And though from the moment she got into bed she had prayed without ceasing, it was impossible for her to say that some thought of Owen had not come into her mind, and that her dream was not the sequence of her waking thoughts, and for these she was responsible, and she asked why she should stay in the convent. The convent was a cause of sin, and she could no longer approach God in prayer, so she abstained from prayer, and her state grew more unhappy every day. Every day discovered new misgivings, finer subtleties, and despair settled gradually down on her. She lost control over her nerves, and all the old symptoms manifested themselves... sleepless nights and excessive consciousness of external things. She could see her life from end to end, distinct like an insect under a glass, and at night she noted the quiver of the antennae as she lay staring into the darkness, or as she walked up and down her cell, afraid

to go to sleep. Every argument she had heard against God floated through her brain, leaving her no rest. At half-past six, before she had closed her eyes, or slept at all, she would have to get up for meditation, and, worse than meditation, there was Mass, and worse than Mass was her watch before the sacrament. She had reached the point of denial, and she feared God while she denied God. Her eyes grew hollow, her skin pale, and her health deteriorated rapidly, and before the month of consideration which the Prioress had demanded from her had expired, she was unable to leave her cell. The Prioress came to see her there, but Evelyn could not answer her.

The Prioress said, 'You are certainly very ill, and we cannot accept the responsibility any longer.'

And the next day was appointed for Evelyn to declare that she wished to leave. One of the witnesses would be the chaplain; and Mother Philippa and Mother Mary Hilda, they would be witnesses too if necessary. But feeling that someone from outside, someone more important than the convent chaplain was required, the Reverend Mother wrote, —

'DEAR MONSIGNOR, — Your help is needed very sorely, and no one can help us in our extremity except you — if you can help us. I beg you to come here to-morrow, in the afternoon, about three o'clock, and I will explain the whole matter to you. I am sure I have said enough for you to understand that no other engagement should prevent your coming here. Trusting in God that some way will be found out of our difficulty. — I remain.'

The prelate's face assumed a grave expression as he read the letter. He looked at and turned it over, and he said to himself, 'So it has come at last;' for he had no doubt the matter concerned Sister Teresa. 'It cannot be anything else,' he thought, 'except that she wishes to leave the convent.' He wrote several letters, adjourning some appointments he had made, and when he arrived at the convent he found the Prioress waiting to receive him in the parlour, and her face was so grave and sad that she need not have spoken. Then the chaplain entered the room, and the Prioress said, —

'I will tell Monsignor what has happened.'

He remembered of course the advice that he had given to the Prioress, when it was agitated whether Evelyn should be received into the convent, and he thought for a second of the Prioress's obstinacy, so he did not dare to say, 'Who could have foreseen this?' lest she might suspect his thoughts. And for the same reason he did not dare to say, 'We might have expected this.' So nothing was left for him to say except that it was very sad, and that he hoped that the mood would pass away.

The Prioress shook her head.

'I make no complaint; we all acted for the best, and apparently we have been mistaken.'

She rang a bell, and when the lay Sister appeared she told her to tell Sister Teresa to come to the parlour. 'Tell Sister Teresa nothing more than that I am waiting to see her in the parlour.'

'Do you think,' Monsignor said, 'that my presence will influence her to remain here?'

'I don't know. I put my trust in God.'

The painful silence was broken by the opening of the door and Sister Teresa entered.

She had expected to see the Prioress and the chaplain; but when she saw Monsignor a personal look came into her face, a mist collected in her eyes. She tottered a few steps, and she fell forwards, falling on the floor.

LXXXIII

When she opened her eyes she was in the infirmary, and Veronica was sitting by her bedside, and when she asked where she was Veronica told her, and she said, ‘Yes, I remember, I wanted to leave the convent life because I cannot believe in the sacrament.' Then, seeing Veronica’s face change, she said, 'I should not tell you these things. What will the Reverend Mother say?' She closed her eyes, and when she opened them again she said, 'It is not that I do not believe in the sacrament, but because I do not believe as I wish to believe. Think of the sacrilege — I dread the sacrament because I am not sure; that is it, because I am not sure.’

'Sister Teresa, you must lie quite still and not talk. You have been very ill, and we thought you would die, but now you are a little better.’

'Veronica, you are one of the lucky ones; you came to the convent knowing nothing of the world.’

'Sister Teresa, you must not speak; you will only make yourself worse.’

‘But I cannot help speaking, for I cannot help thinking.... If I get worse I shall have to receive the sacrament or refuse it. Oh, what am I saying? What must you think of me?’'

‘Sister Teresa, you have been very ill, and if you will keep quiet you will get well.’

'I was an actress before I came here, and it was Monsignor who converted me. But why am I telling you these things?’

'I must not listen to you, Sister, I have my rosary to say.’

And while Veronica told her beads Evelyn babbled a little from time to time. She spoke of Ulick, who had taught her the music of 'Isolde’; she had not wished to learn it, but he had persuaded her to; and Evelyn continued, half in delirium, to talk about the Irish Princess and King Mark.

'How badly the nuns are singing and how ugly that hymn is. Close the window. If you do not I shall not remember what Isolde answers.' And so that she might not hear her Veronica joined in the hymn under her breath. ‘Ah, you will not listen, you are afraid to listen to my music. Listen to it. It is much more beautiful than that hymn.’

She did not speak again for nearly half an hour. Looking towards Veronica, who was telling her beads, she said, —

‘I have not been a success as a nun, but I cannot go back to the stage. You’ve drained all that out of me. I should be a failure if I went back — “among shadows a shadow.” Shadows, shadows everywhere; but what is failure? It cannot be said that I have not striven, and perhaps it is the striving that counts. In the way of the world I am not a success, and in the way of the convent I am not a success. But I know one who saw God everywhere — in every flower, in every star, in all the interspaces — and maybe there is a judgment of which we know nothing, quite different from the judgment in the narrow hearts of men and of creeds.’

Then suddenly Evelyn cried out that God had forsaken her, and she began to sing some of the music from 'Isolde.' She was singing it when the Prioress came in, and she continued singing and babbling, only half-conscious of what was passing around her. The Prioress asked Mother Philippa if the doctor should be sent for, but before the SubPrioress could answer Evelyn declared that she must see him.

So there was no choice but to send for him, and when he had sat by her bedside and watched her he held out very little hope to the Prioress of her recovery.

Evelyn was at first anxious to know what he had said, then she did not seem to care, and it was difficult to get her to take her food or medicine. She asked them not to trouble her with medicines. She seemed to desire death. Hour after hour she wasted away in intermittent delirium, and the convent for which she had given up so much seemed hardly to concern her at all. Sometimes she listened, hearing imaginary music, and she beat the time. Then the orchestra would be changed in her ears to a piano, and she would cry to her accompanist, 'Ah, there you have given me a wrong chord — begin again;' and she would sing fragments from ‘Tristram' and ‘Lohengrin.’

'I beseech you, Sister Teresa, listen to me, and cease to sing. You are making yourself very much worse, and I am responsible,' Veronica said.

The doctor’s orders were that she should be kept perfectly quiet; but as he seemed to regard her life as practically lost, the Prioress took advantage of a sudden abatement in the delirium to ask her if she would like to see the chaplain. She spoke about confession, and communion, and besought her to make her peace with God.

‘But, Mother, I am at peace with Him; so long as I do not communicate, I am at peace with Him. I am very weak, but I have no fear now.’

'But, my child, think of it, if you should die unreconciled to our holy Church. Will you see our chaplain?’

'Mother, I dare not. He will bring the sacrament with him. Oh, I'm so frightened. Do not ask me.'

'He will not bring the sacrament if you do not wish it.'

'He will talk to me about it. There is nothing to say.'

And the Prioress left her without having obtained her consent to see Father Matthews; but in the course of the morning she called Veronica and said she would like to see him.

'You have doubts, my dear child, I know, in the Real Presence of God in the sacrament.'

'I believe that God is everywhere.'

'Do you believe that God is more immediately in the sacrament than elsewhere?'

'Yes, since we have chosen the Eucharist as the symbol of our belief in the omnipresence of God.'

'But, my dear child, when life hovers, as it were, on the edge of death?'

'But, Father, I have no fear. I ought to have, perhaps, but I feel no fear. I feel that I have done my best.'

The priest could elicit no more definite declaration of adherence to Catholic dogma, and he left the infirmary perplexed. It seemed to him that he would not be able to administer the sacrament to her unless she was more intimately possessed by the dogma than her words would seem to indicate, and this point was discussed with Monsignor, who called that afternoon. But Monsignor was inclined to a more liberal comprehension of belief. Belief, he pointed out, was not a definite nor ponderable quality. It was impossible for anyone to assign limitations to their belief in God, and he seemed even to insinuate that there was no criterion of belief. The Church only required that the sinner should declare her submission to the teaching of the Church; but the quality of her belief in God and in the sacrament could only be assessed by God Himself.

'If Monsignor thinks so, there can be no further doubt. On a theological question I should be sorry to put forward my poor opinion against his. Perhaps then Monsignor will accept the responsibility.'

'But, my dear Father Mathews, I should be sorry…'

‘No, no, I think it will be better so. You have influence with our dear Sister Teresa, which I have not; it was you who brought about her conversion, so it is then for you, Monsignor, to administer the sacrament, if she will accept it.’

This seemed to decide the matter, and Monsignor went to the infirmary with the Prioress; and Veronica, after bowing to Monsignor, gave him her chair by the bedside.

The eyes of the sick woman lighted up a little, and she said, —

‘Monsignor, it is very good of you to come to see me. I am very ill, I feel it; it is better that I should die. I have given you all a great deal of trouble. I have never known myself; it is so difficult. I envy those who do; their lot is happier than mine.’

'But, my dear child, I would not have you speak of not knowing your own mind; I do not think anyone has ever known better than you. Very few have made the sacrifice that you have made. But they tell me you do not believe in the sacrament as much as they wish you to. I have confidence that your belief is sufficient.’

‘It is not that I do not believe — they never quite understood me, but you will; it is that I am not sure, as I used to feel sure — you can have no idea how sure I once was, and the happiness my belief brought me was more than any other happiness. I believed once so intensely that everything else seemed like nothing.... The whole world was a shadow, and my belief was the one real thing in it. But that belief has passed from me. If I live I may regain it again; maybe I may regain it before I die, even without getting well.’

'My dear child, I see you have been troubled and am sorry for you, but you must not think any more. I feel sure you will feel happier after having received the sacrament. We’re all so anxious on the subject, the Reverend Mother and the whole of the community.’

'Oh, Monsignor, I’m not happy enough, I’m not filled with the love of God, and if some wicked thought should cross my mind as you gave me the Host, I should die of fear. I might die with a dreadful thought in my mind, and next moment find myself face to face with God. Monsignor, I dare not, do not ask me.... The doctor said I was to be kept quiet.’

He did not answer her, and presently he thought it prudent to withdraw, and when the doctor called a little later he inquired from Veronica if she had been talking much, and if anything had happened to disturb her. Veronica told him that Monsignor had asked her if she would receive Holy Communion.

'And did she communicate?'

'No,'

The doctor's face darkened, and he murmured something about his orders being disobeyed, and afterwards in the parlour he told the Prioress that after the great mental strain Evelyn had been subjected to that afternoon he could not answer for her recovery. But the Prioress was not in the least intimidated, and she answered that the sacrament was more important than any medicine, and that it brought greater quiet. The doctor answered that it was not his province to discuss such questions, and he told her he did not think Sister Teresa would outlast the day.

'In that case,' the Prioress said, 'I had better send for Monsignor, as she will have to receive Extreme Unction.'

The doctor shrugged his shoulders, feeling more sure than ever that his patient would not recover, and a message was sent to Veronica.

She drew forward a small table and covered it with a white cloth. She put the crucifix and holy water on the table, and a plate with some cotton wool in it, and then she turned back the bedclothes, leaving the feet bare. She had hardly finished when many footsteps were heard on the stairs and a little procession of nuns preceded the priest, and they all knelt about the bedside. Veronica, who was in charge of the ceremony, handed the priest what he needed swiftly and silently. The Prioress knelt close to Evelyn, and she recited the Confetior while Monsignor took the holy oil from a silver cruet and anointed the eyes, ears and nostrils. He wiped the anointed places with the cotton wool. The feet, long and very white, were then anointed and wiped, and their beauty was remarked, though everyone was in tears. The nuns wept silently, remembering that the dying woman had paid their debts. All jealousies and ingratitudes were regretted, and Evelyn heard the murmur of Latin prayers. As the nuns rose from their knees and were about to leave the cell, Evelyn opened her eyes, and after looking from one to the other, she turned her eyes to Monsignor and said, —

'Monsignor, will you hear my confession and give me communion?'

All withdrew, leaving Evelyn alone with the priest.

'Fearful thoughts about the sacrament have passed through my mind — not now; I am at peace now. I used to put them aside, but they returned almost immediately, and I could not pray, and it came to this, that I dared not sleep, so dreadful were my dreams. It seemed once that I was losing my soul by remaining here.... I think I have said everything.'

Monsignor gave her absolution, and a moment after the chaplain arrived with the sacrament. Monsignor was handed the ciborium, and Veronica lifted Evelyn a little. There was little eagerness in her eye, but she received the Host reverentially, and Veronica laid her back on the pillow. Her eyes closed and it seemed to her that she was very tired, and that her sleep would be very long and dark and peaceful.

She heard the procession pass away, but she did not hear any more.

'Of course we must not wish her to die,' said Mother Hilda, 'but it would have been a terrible disgrace, and we must thank God for having saved us from it.'

The Prioress said, —

She is not dead yet, and if she lives the struggle will begin again.'

LXXXIV

Veronica moved to her side, murmuring her prayers under her breath, she watched her face for some sign of life; but she lay quite still, and her stillness frightened the nun, and when the doctor called next day he seemed surprised to hear she was still alive. And for the next three or four days it was difficult to detect any change in her. But Nature never rests; change there always will be, though the differences from day to day escape our observation.

The summer heat exhausted her and seemed to delay her recovery, and it was not until the end of September that she was able to go into the garden that year. The autumn was a singularly beautiful one. The days were like July days, only shorter and a little cooler; and in the mornings she sat on the terrace, watching the fading garden and the glittering skies. She thought she had never seen skies so beautiful before. There was a strange allurement in the blue; the skies reminded her of death — of some beautiful death, of something far away. The boughs no longer lifted themselves and danced to the light; they hung low as if burdened with the weight of leaves, and all the leaves were moveless in the moveless air.

September passed, and in October she noticed that the grass was tangled and wet — the dew had been heavy that night — and she had to keep to the gravelled path. The last sun-flowers blackened, and the chrysanthemums came out — strange growths of feverish, unnatural beauty. A night's frost had turned the beech tree in the middle of the garden from yellow to red orange, and the same frost stripped the ash of nearly all its fairy leaves.

The garden seemed to struggle against death just as Evelyn had struggled. The rose tree still tried to break to flower, but the outer leaves of the blossoms had been killed by the frost, and the buds could not open. Evelyn noticed that the geraniums she had planted in tubs and placed along the terrace hung lifeless and sapless. All the summer they had been pink and scarlet, and she regretted that no one during her illness had thought to take them into the potting-shed. 'If Sister Mary John had been here this would not have happened,' she said to herself, smiling plaintively.

And it was in this dying season that Evelyn began to regain her health. For the last fortnight she had been very happy. She had enjoyed the exquisite happiness of returning strength, of feeling herself able to walk a little further each day, of being able to do a little more; and her weakness saved her from thinking. A convalescent does not think; she yields herself to the sweet pressure of returning life, and it was not until the end of October, as she stopped in her walk to pity the neglected garden, as she stooped to free a tuft of pinks from some trailing nasturtium, that she suddenly remembered that she would never see the spring return to this garden again. She looked round for a stick to prop up some of the chrysanthemums, and she saw their graveyard

with its nine crosses, and she realised that if she were lying there her difficulty and the convent difficulty would be at an end. And as her strength returned the difficulty would grow more and more acute. Neither the danger she had escaped from nor her long convalescence had helped her to regain her faith. Her position regarding the dogma of transubstantiation was unchanged. When the priest raised the Host she believed that that was the divine flesh, that the wine in the chalice was the divine blood, that a change had come into the elements themselves in the words of consecration; but now, standing in the middle of the garden, face to face with Nature, she could not believe that the Host she had seen that morning was the divine flesh of Him who created all things, she did not believe with that intense conviction with which she — a nun, a Passionist Sister — should believe. It was very likely that many Catholics did not get nearer to a sensible belief in the dogma than she did, but they were not nuns vowed to a perpetual adoration of the Host. It was terribly sad that she no longer believed as she once believed; it was sad because she had sacrificed so much for this belief, and now when every sacrifice had been made she did not believe, or she did not believe enough, and her sacrifice was a vain one. No, not a vain one... even if she had to leave the convent. True that the difficulty lay still unsolved before her, and she almost wished that she had died, for it seemed to her that nothing but death could solve such a difficulty as hers and theirs.

As she watched the passing of the season she noticed that the nuns avoided her, that they looked at her askance, that they seemed frightened of her. She sighed, for the thought passed that there was good reason for their fear of her, for here she was an unbeliever — an unbeliever in a community vowed to perpetual adoration of the Host. She knew that, from the point of view of the nuns, nothing more awful could happen to them. In their hearts they must think of her as some chastisement sent by God. They could hardly think that; God would not chastise them in such a way. His way would be a different way; this was the devil's way. She could not imagine how they thought.

But she knew that the Prioress's illness had been attributed to her. The nuns could not but think that the fear of the scandal which Evelyn's departure would bring upon the convent had brought the Prioress to death's door. No one had told her so, but she guessed that the community was of one mind — or nearly so — on this point. She had no friends in the convent now except Mother Hilda and Veronica, and Veronica had let something slip the other day; and Evelyn pondered as she walked to and fro, seeing last night's rain dripping from the last leaves — it collected at the very end of the leaf and the great drop fell. Leaves were being blown about, there were little pools of water wherever there was a slight hollow in the path, and the nuns were throwing a ball from one to another with little joyous cries. Evelyn kept as much out of their sight as possible, fearing to jar their amusement. She wondered if they had forgotten their obligation to her, and she remembered that had it not been for her singing, their beautiful garden would have been taken away from them a long while ago, and villa residences would

have overlooked the common. She walked round the fish-pond in the little plantation at the end of St Peter's Walk, and, listening to the trickling of the autumn water, she said, —

'No, they have not forgotten their obligation to me; they resent it.'

A few days after this idea received an unexpected confirmation. Sister Veronica told her that Sister Winifred had said that if the Prioress and Mother Hilda would only consent to a relaxation of the rule of the Order, they could make enough money out of a school to pay Evelyn the eight thousand pounds which she had brought to the convent.

'Then they want to get rid of me.'

'No, I don't think they want to get rid of you. I shouldn't put it exactly that way. It is you, Sister, who want to leave, and of course we should not like to keep the money you gave us.'

The garden was full of nuns. Some were walking quickly, for though the sun was shining the air was chill.

Others had begun a game of ball; Evelyn thought she would like to join in it, but she was afraid they would not care to play with her, and it was at that moment that the aged Prioress came up to speak to her.

'I do not know if you are strong enough to give me your arm,' she said.

Oh, yes, dear Mother, I am quite strong now.'

'Your strength has returned, Teresa, but mine will not return. I shall barely see another year. Oh, I know it,' she added, seeing that Evelyn was about to contradict her.

Evelyn did not dare to speak, for she suddenly remembered that the belief of the convent was that she had hastened the Prioress's end. On account of the old woman she had to walk very slowly. The Prioress was now hardly more than a little handful, and her strength was a dying bird's. They had not taken many steps before they had to sit down, and something told Evelyn that the moment had come for her to speak to the Prioress about her departure. But she had only to look at the old woman to see that it was impossible to mention such a subject to her. Life seemed to flutter as fitfully in her as in any of the leaves dancing on the stems. A leaf had just fallen at Evelyn's feet, another was dancing merrily and might hold on a long while, so it was with the Prioress — she might live far into the winter. She had come to speak to her, and Evelyn waited for her to speak, trembling with anticipation.

The Prioress said not a word, and Evelyn heard the childish laughter of the nuns and the wind thrilled through her habit.

At last the silence became too acute, and she said, —

‘Mother, I have escaped from death as by a miracle, but it would have been better, if I had died, for myself and for you. Think, I might be sleeping yonder, under the white crosses.’

‘If you did not die, my dear child, it was because God did not will it. Doubtless He did not think you prepared for death, and He resolved to leave you a little longer. God is very good, and He is merciful to those who have loved Him.

'But, Mother, I have never ceased to love God.’

'We do not judge you, my dear daughter; we all pray for you. We pray for you, and we feel that our prayers will be granted.’

'It is not well for you, Mother, to sit in this cold wind. Had you not better walk a little way?’

'I am rested now.’

And as they walked towards the terrace, Evelyn said, —

'I have caused you pain and suffering. Maybe it is I who am killing you, Mother. My life seems to have been all suffering. I have desired to do right; it seems that I have failed even here. The others cannot understand, but you can, you do understand, Mother.’

'I am older than the others, I am very old, and in old age it is the mind that sees. We are praying for you, my dear child, for we know by instinct when a member of our community is in danger.’

She spoke out of the mystery of age and out of her long convictions, and then Evelyn knew that she could not leave the convent as long as this old woman lived. When she died the closest tie which held her to the convent would be broken, and she resolved to escape as soon as she could after the Prioress’s death. She had considered the various ways of escape that were open to her, for she could not face the will of the convent again; her escape must be clandestine. And the way of escape that seemed most feasible was through the front door when the portress left her keys on the nail.

The journey to London in her habit would be disagreeable and difficult. It would be difficult because she had no money; nuns have no money. She might have to walk all the way, and when

she got to London she did not know where she would go nor how she could get any money. She remembered Owen and she remembered Ulick, but she would go to neither, and she imagined herself knocking at Louise's door. She thought of herself standing in Louise's drawing-room in her habit, but she did not smile.

She looked at the Prioress, and the conviction awakened in her that she would not have to wait long, and then she thought of herself, and she asked herself if she possessed sufficient courage to begin life afresh.

LXXXV

The autumn passed into an early winter, and Evelyn caught a cold which clung to her, and it prevented her from singing at Benediction. It seemed to her that the the nuns were glad that she could not sing, but the Prioress said that she missed her singing, and it seemed to her sad that the Prioress should not hear her; very soon the Prioress would hear no more music, and Evelyn sang in spite of her ailing throat.

One day she found she had no voice left. A specialist came from London to examine her throat; he said that she had been very imprudent, he prescribed, and said that perhaps with a couple of years' rest she might be able to sing again. But Evelyn did not believe him; she knew that her voice had gone from her as her mother's had gone; her voice had left her in the very middle of a piece of music, and in the middle of an opera her mother had lost her voice.

And now that the irreparable had happened the nuns were sorry for her, in a way, though she doubted if any one of them, except perhaps the Prioress, Mother Hilda and Veronica, would give her back her voice if it were in their power to give it.

Her plan had been to leave the convent soon after the Prioress's death. She had intended to sing in concerts and oratorios, and to live as economically as possible, and it would not be difficult for her to live economically after her experiences in the convent. Her expenses would consist principally of a few dresses, her rooms would cost her about fifteen shillings a week, and with one little serving-maid she would be able to limit her expenditure to two hundred pounds a year, and her calculation was that she might earn twelve hundred a year. So she would be putting by every year one thousand pounds and when she had saved seven or eight thousand pounds she looked forward to buying the cottage and the large garden, the home for the six little crippled boys that she had written to Monsignor about. She had looked forward to this as the end of her life; it was to be the inevitable packing up that comes to us all sooner or later, the final arrangement. She had believed that all this would happen, for it seemed so natural, so like what would happen, given the circumstances of her life. It had never seemed quite natural to her that her life should end in this convent amid these very good but very childish nuns. The loss of her voice had destroyed all hope of this little dream of hers; the dream had seemed very real while it lasted, but a simple accident, a month's singing with an ailing throat, had made it as impossible as any dream of fairyland. If she were to leave the convent, and she certainly would have to leave it, the end would be quite different; the only end she could see for herself now was to be a singing mistress, a music teacher. She could see herself living in some distant suburb, coming up to town third class in wet months and cold months, and giving lessons for a few shillings an hour. Her stage career had been forgotten; she had not been long enough on the stage to be remembered. Three or four shillings an hour was the highest remuneration she could

expect. Maybe she could succeed in making three hundred pounds a year; if she did that she would be very lucky, for then she would have a margin which she could apply to some charitable purpose, to some less expensive charity than the home for the little children. Well, she must be content with that.

At that moment the Prioress called her. The old woman had awakened suddenly, and not hearing the sound of her pen had asked her what she was doing. Evelyn excused herself. For some months she had been acting as the Prioress's secretary — they were writing together the history of the convent — but the Prioress's memory was failing; she could not answer Evelyn's questions, and Evelyn had to get up to search for some documents.

As she looked for the documents she suddenly remembered Owen Asher; they would be sure to meet sooner or later if she left the convent. The question was, How would they meet? For the moment she was unable to find any answer to this question, but gradually the thought came that they would meet almost as strangers, and this thought gradually settled into profound conviction. For how otherwise could they meet except as strangers? She had changed beyond his powers of recognition. All that she had been was dead; all that he knew her by was dead. Men do not wish to make love to nuns; a nun could never be more than a shadow. The body would be there, but there would be a look in the eyes that would tell of leagues immeasurable. She could easily imagine the meeting. He would ask from her an account of herself; she would tell him of the convent. He would try to be kind, but when she told him that she had lost her voice, neither would know what to say next.

Ulick would recognise her better, for they had been always going towards the same end, though by different roads, and she wondered what progress he had made in the spiritual life. He stirred her imagination a little, but she was able to overcome it, and she knew that he would be able to forego sensual love more easily even than she would, notwithstanding her five years in the convent, notwithstanding her vows. He would want her to marry him, and she shrank from the thought, remembering that she was the bride of Christ. But she would always be interested in his ideas, and she regretted her voice for his sake; perhaps enough voice would come back for her to sing to him in the evenings. She wondered what music he had written, if he had finished 'Grania.' How far away all these things seemed now!

It was the wish of the old woman who lay dying in her chair that the history they were writing should be finished before she died. Her eyes were strangely dim, and her flesh was grey. She looked like a night light burning low in the socket. But her mind was clear, though the flame flickered on the edge of darkness, and Evelyn often grew afraid that the old nun divined her intention of leaving the convent. The dim eyes seemed to see through her; they seemed to see into the very background of her mind. As death approaches the mind sees; and Evelyn trembled. But the Prioress asked no questions. She seemed to Evelyn to acquiesce in her

departure. She seemed to have no more fear for Evelyn's soul than for her own, and this was a great consolation to Evelyn.

Nevertheless, there were times when Evelyn's conscience nearly overpowered her, and she longed to throw herself at the Prioress's feet and beg her forgiveness, pledging herself to stay in the convent, and she felt that if that pledge were given she would keep it. Her knees dwindled under her, and her lips were about to speak; but at that moment, as if divining her intention, the Prioress asked her to stir the fire, for she was getting cold. And as she made up the fire Evelyn gave thanks that she had not spoken, for such a confession would surely have embittered the Prioress's end, and Evelyn knew that the end was assuaged and made happy by her presence. She knew the Prioress loved her, and she knew that she loved the Prioress with the same kind of passionate love with which she had worshipped her father.

LXXXVI

When the Prioress died Evelyn's life seemed a figment, and life, whether she remained in the convent or left it, seemed to her to be equally unbearable. The anguish was heightened in her by the rites, by the black cloths, by the chants, and by the unconsciousness of Nature. A keen wind was blowing, and the sky brightened at intervals as the procession moved through the gardens. The bare trees were shaken,
and she desired to wave innocently in the air as they did, to mingle with the beautiful, peaceful earth; the earth seemed the only peaceful thing, and she longed to join it and to partake once again of its dark and happy life.

In losing the Prioress she had lost everything, the others had only lost a Prioress, who would be replaced by another Prioress, and a new conviction of her loneliness awoke in her when she knelt by the newly-made grave. She remembered Sister Mary John, whom she would never see again. Even God seemed to have deserted her, yet she had made many sacrifices for Him.

When she announced that she would not vote for the new Prioress the nuns viewed her still more coldly. They asked her if she thought that none among them was worthy to fill the place of the late Prioress. Or did she feel no further interest in the welfare of the convent. Evelyn answered that the choice of the new Prioress would probably decide whether the rule of the order should be widened, whether they should cut themselves off from the Mother House in France, and that she would like to avoid the responsibility of taking sides.

'But,' said Sister Winifred, 'no one has a right to shirk her responsibility; that is why we elected you a choir Sister.'

She could not vote — on that point her resolution did not seem to admit of any change; the nuns continued to press her, and she did not like to remind them that she had freed the convent from debt, in order that it might remain a contemplative order. As she hesitated, Sister Winifred came to her rescue, saying, —

'Sister Teresa has no doubt very good reasons for abstaining from voting.'

Evelyn's defection left little doubt in Sister Winifred's mind that Mother Philippa would be elected, and in that case the new buildings would be finished before a year was out, a school would be in progress, and before ten years the conversion of Wimbledon to Rome would be an accomplished fact. The few nuns who still clung to the ancient tradition of the order could offer no serious opposition to so constant an energy as Sister Winifred's. Mother Philippa was elected Prioress, and at the end of the month the subject of conversation during the morning recreations

was the possibility of obtaining the Bishop's consent to their separating themselves from the Mother House in France and entering upon scholastic activity. Monsignor, who had just returned to England, was sent for, and it was hoped he would use his very great influence with his lordship.

'Where, for instance,' the Prioress said to him, 'could parents get children taught as they could here? But I am very sorry to say that Sister Teresa lost her voice this winter; we miss her voice sadly at Benediction, but for teaching it won't matter in the least, and then she is an excellent pianist, she can even teach composition.' Monsignor sympathised with the sublime idea that a constant stream of petitions was necessary to save this world from the wrath of God, but at the same time it did not seem to him that a school would seriously infringe upon the tradition of the order. He spoke volubly for some minutes, partly in the hopes of distracting Evelyn's attention from the Reverend Mother's remarks concerning her, which had seemed to him injudicious. At the same moment Evelyn was thinking how, just as she had finished her work, it had undone itself, it had just crumbled away, and she saw it scattering like a little heap of dust. True it was that she was leaving the convent, but she did not wish the idea abandoned — the idea that she had striven for; she wished it to be carried on by others; she knew herself to be weak, she knew she must fall out of the ranks, but her belief in the ideal was unimpaired. And she thought of these things as she calculated the height of the garden walls, as she listened to Mother Philippa telling Monsignor the price they would charge for boarders and for non-boarders, and the advantages that such a school would offer to the villa residents. But before she could leave the convent she must finish the Prioress's book. Her promise to the Prioress to finish her history of the convent, its story as it had existed under her headship, had become sacred to Evelyn, and the unfinished manuscript was the last tie that bound her to the convent. She had hoped to finish it in six weeks or a month, but the book was not yet finished; new difficulties arose, and the old difficulties seemed insuperable, and this manuscript which she worked at day after day became like some redoubtable secret enemy. 'If I do not write I shall never get away from here,' she cried to herself in the silent cloisters, and raising her eyes from the paper she thought of herself as of a prisoner scraping her way through an unending wall.

She went about her avocations — a quiet nun, gentle, almost demure; her resolution to escape deep in her heart, and the nuns began to think she had at last become like themselves. Only at recreation did she try to avoid the rule. If it were fine the nuns sat in a circle in the shade of a favourite tree, and gossiped about little external pieties — the lighting of candles and the repainting of the statuettes, and to appear interested in these conversations had always been the greatest of Evelyn's conventual difficulties, and now it seemed more difficult than ever. One day they were babbling of the advantage it would be to them if some of their pupils distinguished themselves in painting or in music when they left the convent. Sister Winifred cast down her eyes and blushed, and Evelyn felt they could talk better without her. She availed herself of this little incident to steal away.

To walk by herself in the sun, in the evening light, thinking of the dead Prioress, or of the nun who had gone away because she could not endure her love, seemed like happiness, and she felt she could be happy in the convent if her friends could be given back to her. When they were with her the convent was a pure aspiration, meagre and a little grey, perhaps, but still pure and true. And while thinking of the grey pieties of the cloister her eyes turned to the sun-setting. The sunset seemed to steal into her heart, and to become a source of secret joy to her. She wondered what was the influence of the sun; it made the woods grow green and the flowers blossom, it drew all things into itself, the rays darted from the horizon to the zenith, and she stood at the highest point of the garden watching the light, breathless and delighted. She saw the beautiful earth quiescent like a nun watching before the sacrament. The plants lifted their leaves to the light. Everything knew it, even the stones in the centre of the earth; she watched the distant woods submerged in the light of the sun; her soul dilated and knew its light; the shell broke which till now had darkened it from her; her flesh and spirit seemed to become one with it; her immortal spirit seemed to ascend into the immortal light; her eyes seemed to see into the depths of the sea, and her ears were soothed by the murmur of the waves.

The great secret was revealed; she understood the mysterious yearning which impels us in turn to reject and to accept life; and she had learnt these things merely by watching the flowers raising their leaves to the light.

She sat down in the grass and watched a sun-flower till it seemed a sentient being whose silent adoration of its distant shepherd in the heavens was turning it into the likeness of the glory it longed to reach. She closed her eyes to imagine it better, and the sun-flower in her thoughts grew and expanded, and went upwards to the brimming love which gave it life; and the imagined ecstasy of the meeting thrilled her heart, and she remembered that yesterday the elevation of the Host had left her unmoved. Why was it that the mere sight of a flower evoked a vanished sweetness which no ritual could awaken in her? And in another moment of revelation she knew that to seek the Real Presence on the altar alone is a denial of the Divine Being elsewhere, and she felt the door would be closed to her until in every mood and in every place she could recognise the sacrament as an eternal act in nature.

She was wakeful that night, but in the darkness there was light, and she felt that it had come to lead her out as it had led her into the convent, for there are not two lights, but one light.

Her book was finished, and she awaited her opportunity — her opportunity was the accident that Sister Agnes should be called away suddenly and leave her keys on the nail; and the little porteress rarely left her door, and when she did her keys were at her girdle. Winter passed into spring and Evelyn still waited, and she sometimes said 'if the opportunity does not occur soon I shall not have the strength,' and she asked herself if she would have the strength to begin life

again. The weeks went by, and one day in April the porteress passed her in the passage, the keys were not at her girdle, and Evelyn walked down the Georgian hall and down the covered way, and taking the keys from the nail she opened the door.

At that moment the pigeons left their roosts and flew towards the fields. The fields were shining in the morning light; thrush and cuckoo were calling, the spring moved among the first primroses, and Evelyn stood watching the spring-tide.

She had only to take a step to regain her life in the world, but she could not take that step. She no longer even seemed to desire it. In the long months she had been kept waiting a change had taken place in her. She felt that something had broken in her, and she closed the door, and having locked it she hung the keys on the nail.

And walking up the covered way, dimly aware that she was walking, she remembered that she would soon come to the end of the covered way, and would meet Sister Agnes returning to her post. And then she remembered that she had left something undone in the sacristy, and she returned there quickly and began to arrange some flowers for the Virgin's altar.

LXXXVII

In the middle of the following year Mademoiselle Heilbron called to see her, and Teresa came into the parlour, and with ready smiles and simple glee she entered into conversation with her old friend.

'But may we not go into the garden?'

'But, of course, certainly.'

A little embarrassed to know what to say to her, Louise talked to her about a new part in a new opera by a new composer.

'I've brought the score with me. Would you like to see it? Shall I leave it?'

Teresa said that once she would have liked to see it, but now such things were far behind her, and with a merry laugh she spoke of herself as a broken spirit. And then, as if speaking out of some vague association of ideas, she spoke of her pupils — of one who really had an aptitude for the piano, and another who could really sing a little. She would like Louise to hear her, and Louise was not certain if she were speaking in bitterness or in jest, or if her present mind was her natural mind.

They walked a little way in silence, and then Louise said, —

'And you are quite happy now that you have put life aside, now that you have decided that there is nothing better for you to do in life than to teach the piano and solfège?'

'Dear Louise, all things are of equal importance; it matters nothing whether we are teaching little children or doing the things that the world thinks glorious. The important thing to do is to live, and we do not begin to know life, taste life, until we put it aside. This sounds like a paradox, but it is a simple little truth. Life is the will of God, and to enter into the will of God we must forget ourselves, we must try to live outside ourselves in the general life.'

'But what is the will of God?'

'What is your own breath, Louise? You cannot explain it, and yet it is yourself. And there are times when the will of God seems as near to us as our own breath.'

'I think I know what you mean, but if I were to live here I should kill myself.'

‘When I was on the stage I often used to think of killing myself. I did not fear death at all, for life seemed so trivial, but now I do not want to die, I should like to live on and on. So long as we live in the will of God it does not seem to matter where we live, whether we live in this world or in heaven.’

They walked round the garden twice, carrying on the conversation as best they could. Louise remarked a nun reading her Office, and Teresa told her who she was. Louise affected an interest in the flowers, and Teresa told Louise she must hear her favourite pupil.

‘I really don’t think you will be disappointed, she has got a very pretty voice, and I have just taught her a song out of one of Handel’s operas.’

‘I remember a song of Handel’s that you used to sing beautifully. Do you ever sing it now?’

'No, I lost my voice last winter; a heavy cold took it all away,' and Teresa laughed just as she had laughed when she spoke of herself as a broken spirit, and Louise left the convent uncertain, thinking that perhaps it was this loss of her voice that had decided her to remain in the convent.

‘So this is the last stage,' she said as she drove back to London. And then Louise thought of her own life. She was now forty-five, she might go on singing for a few years — then she, too, would have to begin her packing up, and she wondered what her end would be.

THE END

AFTERWORD

This ebook of *Evelyn Innes* contains authentic text of George Moore's duology *Evelyn Innes* and *Sister Teresa* under the single title he preferred: *Evelyn Innes*.

The duology appears here for the first time in one volume: according to the Preface, it is "a novel which is meant to be read under one name and within one cover, and which will perhaps be ultimately presented to the public under the single title of *Evelyn Innes*."

The first complete version of the duology was originally published in separate volumes in dissimilar formats on the same day: the third English edition of *Evelyn Innes* and the first English edition of *Sister Teresa (*London: T. Fisher Unwin, 8 July 1901).

The superseded first edition of *Evelyn Innes* (also available on GMi) and the second edition were written years before George Moore started writing *Sister Teresa*. He composed the revised third edition of *Evelyn Innes* only after finishing the first edition of *Sister Teresa*.

The text of this ebook was transcribed from the original printed books and edited by Robert S. Becker, PhD, on behalf of George Moore Interactive LLC. Original spelling is preserved; printing errors are eliminated. Paragraph breaks are changed from indent to single line space.

The chapters of *Sister Teresa* have been renumbered to follow the final Chapter 46 of *Evelyn Innes*; the first chapter of *Sister Teresa* is Chapter 47 in this ebook.

All chapters of *Evelyn Inne*s and *Sister Teresa* are individually available on the GMi website with many other writings and artifacts of the author. Visitors to the website may post comments and questions for the editor and community.