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About This Edition

This book is a simplified English adaptation created for extensive reading practice.
The text was generated using ChatGPT and prepared for intermediate English learners as part of an educational project.

Target reading level: CEFR A2-B1

This edition aims to support fluency development through accessible vocabulary, expanded narration, and improved readability while preserving the original story structure.

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Charles Maturin, *Melmoth the Wanderer* (Simplified Edition, Adapted and Simplified by ChatGPT)

Part 1

In the autumn of 1816, John Melmoth left Trinity College in Dublin and went into County Wicklow. His uncle, an old rich man, was dying, and John had been told from childhood that this uncle held his future in his hands. John had little money of his own, and his dead father had made him look to this man for help. So he could not refuse the summons. Still, as the carriage moved south through the fading light, he felt no hope, only a heavy fear that seemed to grow with every mile.

He tried more than once to look out at the hills, the fields, and the evening sky. Wicklow was beautiful, but beauty did not help him that day. Every pleasant sight was pushed aside by older memories and darker thoughts. He remembered his uncle's hard face, his sharp voice, and the strange stories that people told about the lonely life at the Lodge. He thought of his own dependence, and of the future that might still be denied him. Each thought fell on him like a separate blow, and by the time the carriage neared the house, his heart felt tired and cold.

He remembered, too, what it had been to visit the old man as a child. He had always been warned, "Do not trouble your uncle. Do not go too near him. Do not ask questions." He had been taught to walk through the room like a thief, careful not to touch the gold-headed cane, the snuff-box, the bell, the books, the papers, or the many useless things that filled the house. Even when he left the room, he had to close the door softly and go down the stairs without a sound. Fear had been made into a kind of lesson, and he had learned it well.

When he grew older, the visits were no better. He came at Christmas and Easter on a poor little horse that made the schoolboys laugh. Then he would sit for hours opposite his uncle, saying nothing, doing nothing, only watching the old man pick small bones from a thin meal and drink weak broth. At night he was sent early to a cold bed so that candle-money might be saved. Hungry and sleepless,

he would wait until the old housekeeper crept up with the remains of her own supper and whispered, “Eat quickly, and do not let your uncle know.” Even now, after years in college, that memory had not left him.

Then another memory rose before him, more painful than the rest. He saw again his father’s face near death, and heard his last weak words. “John, my poor boy, I must leave you. You must look up to your uncle now. He has strange ways, but you must bear them. May God, who is the father of the fatherless, give you favor in your uncle’s eyes.” John had heard those words as a boy, but he felt them again now as a man. When the carriage stopped at the broken gate of the Lodge, he had to wipe his eyes before he stepped down.

He carried only a change of linen in a handkerchief. The gate itself was half ruined, and a barefooted boy from a nearby cabin ran over to help him lift it. Together they dragged it aside, and it grated over the mud and stones with a long unhappy sound. John searched his pocket for a coin for the boy, but found nothing, and so walked on with only a quiet word of thanks. The boy ran away again through the mud, light and cheerful, while John went slowly forward toward the house. Every step showed him more clearly how far the place had fallen into ruin.

There was no proper fence, only broken stone and thorn. The grass was poor, the ground rough, and a few sheep moved over it like pale shadows. No tree, no shrub, no garden softened the dark shape of the building. The house stood alone against the evening sky, hard and bare, with boarded windows and steps where grass had grown between the stones. John stood a moment and looked at it, and in that moment he felt less like a coming heir than like a man entering a prison. Then he walked up and tried to knock.

There was no knocker on the door, so he took a loose stone and beat with it. At once a great dog began to bark and throw itself against its chain. The sound was fierce enough to drive him back, and he left the front door and went by an old passage to the kitchen. There he saw a light through the window. He lifted the latch with doubt, but when he saw the people inside, he knew at least that he would be received. If there was little love in the house, there was certainly curiosity.

Around a strong turf fire sat the old housekeeper, two or three idle followers

from the neighborhood, and an old woman John knew at once. She was the village doctress, a dry, bent, smoky creature who lived partly by herbs, partly by lies, and mostly by fear. Among the poor she spoke of evil eyes, spells, signs, and hidden powers. She could tell a girl where to look for her future husband, or frighten a weak mind into sickness with a dark word and a lifted finger. Even now she sat in the chimney corner with her pipe, half witch, half beggar, and wholly at ease.

The old housekeeper rose and cried out warmly, “Ah, my white-headed boy, you are come at last!” John almost smiled, since his hair was black. The men stood up at once and pushed glasses of whiskey toward him. “Take a drop, your honor,” one said. “It will keep the grief out of your heart.” Another added, “A thousand years to you, sir, and more after that.” John thanked them but refused the drink. Then he looked at the table and was startled. There was more food and drink in that kitchen than he had ever known his uncle to allow under his roof.

“How is my uncle?” he asked. At once different answers flew at him from all sides. “As bad as he can be,” said one. “Much better, thanks be to God,” said another. A tall man bent down as if to whisper, but almost shouted in John’s ear, “They say his honor got a great fright.” Another man, swallowing whiskey, said, “Aye, but he had a cool after it.” Then the old doctress slowly took her pipe from her mouth and turned her face toward them all. The room grew quiet at once.

She touched first her forehead and said, “It is not here.” Then she touched again and said, “Not here either.” At last she spread her thin hand over her breast and said in a low dark voice, “It is all here. It is all about the heart.” She pressed harder as she spoke, and the force of the gesture frightened the others more than the words. Nobody laughed. Nobody even moved. At that very moment a bell sounded through the house.

The company started as if a gun had gone off among them. “The master’s bell!” cried the housekeeper, and hurried away. She added while running, “He used to rap for me. He said pulling a bell wore out the rope.” John followed more slowly, but before he reached the room, several women had rushed in from the house and from outside, ready to cry, pray, and make a noise around the dying man. Their voices rose at once. “He is going! He is going now!” one cried. “Oh,

his honor is leaving us!" screamed another, though her face showed more hunger than grief.

The old man was in bed, sharp, pale, and fierce even in sickness. One woman seized his feet and cried, "Cold as stone! Cold all the way up!" Another wrung her hands beside the bed. The housekeeper tried to settle his nightcap. Old Melmoth pushed her away with sudden strength, half rose on one elbow, and shouted, "What devil brought you all here?" The women jumped back and began to cross themselves. "The devil in his mouth!" one whispered. "Christ save us!" But the old man glared at them and cried, "Aye, and the devil in my eye too, when I look at you."

He pointed at them with a trembling hand and called them a legion. He accused them of waiting for his death only to steal his whiskey and eat his food. He shook a key from under his pillow and cursed the candles burning in the room and below in the kitchen. "Do you think the wake has begun already?" he shouted. The housekeeper tried to calm him, but he turned even on her. "Wasteful old woman," he said, "you would ruin me before I am cold." Then, suddenly changing, he demanded a prayer-book and said someone should read for him.

The housekeeper asked timidly whether a clergyman should be called. "And pay him?" the old man snapped. "No. Read it yourself." She could not. Another woman tried, but she read the wrong service in a loud foolish voice. At that moment John came quietly into the room. Hearing the words, he knelt beside her, took the book gently from her hand, and began to read the proper prayers in a low steady voice. The dying man turned his eyes toward him. "That is John," he said, and for the first time that night his voice softened.

"John, my good boy," he whispered, "read on. I kept you far from me when I lived, and now you are nearest me when I die." John, who had suffered from this man all his life, still felt pity when he heard those words. He went on reading, though the room, the smell of sickness, the heavy breathing, and the low sounds of the women filled him with horror. After a while he rose and said softly, "Sir, you need support. Let me bring you something." The old man caught his hand at once. "Wine," he whispered. "A glass of wine. But not one of them must get it.

They would steal a bottle and ruin me." Then he pushed a key into John's hand and told him the wine was hidden in the inner closet.

John took the key. For one moment he thought his uncle pressed his fingers kindly, but the next whisper destroyed that thought. "Do not drink any of it while you are there, my lad." John almost threw the key down in anger, but checked himself, for rage against a dying miser felt too useless. He promised, took the light, and went into the little room where no one but the old man had entered for many years. The air was close and stale, and the place was filled with useless broken things. Then his eyes were caught by a portrait on the wall.

It showed a man of middle age. The face itself was not strange, but the eyes were terrible. John felt at once that they were the kind of eyes a man may remember forever against his will. He lifted the light and read the name and date on the frame: "Jno. Melmoth, 1646." A cold shock passed through him. He stood looking so long that his uncle's cough called him back. When he returned with the wine, the old man drank, revived a little, and asked at once, "What did you see in that room?" John tried to answer lightly, but the old man fixed him with a dreadful look and whispered, "That picture is no dead man's picture. The original is still alive."

Part 2

John stood still, the candle shaking in his hand. He tried to smile at what he had heard, because the words were too strange to receive in any other way. "Sir," he said, "you are very weak, and fear can change the look of things. A picture is only a picture." The old man fixed him with a terrible stare. "You fool," he whispered, "do you think I fear paint and canvas? I tell you I know that man lives." Then his voice sank lower. "They say I die from want of strength or from want of medicine. No. I die of fright."

He tried to raise himself again, and his thin arm moved toward the closet as if it were pointing not to a room, but to a person standing there in silence. "I have seen him," he said. "I have seen him, and you will see him too." John answered

at once, though his mouth felt dry. “How can that be, sir? The date is 1646.” The old man nodded again and again, with a dreadful kind of certainty. “You saw the date. Good. Remember it. Remember his face. He is alive.” After that he seemed to fall back into a heavy sleep, but his eyes remained open, and they still rested on John with a look that made the room feel smaller and colder.

For some time there was no sound in the house except the weak breath of the dying man and the storm working itself slowly round the walls. John sat near the bed and tried to think calmly. “My uncle,” he said to himself, “was the last man to give himself to foolish fears. He cared for nothing but money, accounts, bargains, and saving half a candle. If such a man dies in terror, then either his mind is entirely broken or there is some cause for what he says.” Yet as soon as he thought this, he fought against it. “No,” he told himself, “it is sickness speaking. I will not become a child because a dying miser has spoken wildly in the dark.”

But reason did not sit firmly with him. He kept looking at the bed, at the old face that now had more fear than anger in it, and at the hands spread on the blanket like claws. At last the silence itself drove him up. Taking the light again, he went once more into the closet. He wished to prove to himself that the thing in the room was only lumber, dust, and a painted likeness. Yet when he faced the portrait again, a sickness ran through him. He could not have said why, but he felt as if the room knew he had returned.

He looked from the picture to the broken old chest beneath it, and then back again to the eyes. They seemed fixed on him with a patience more dreadful than rage. He turned away quickly; then, by some movement of fear or fancy, he thought he saw those eyes shift. At the same instant he heard behind him the horrible sound of a dying throat forcing out one last struggle for breath. He ran back to the bed. His uncle had half risen upright, as if death itself had pulled him up by the neck. The old man sank again, and from that time his end came rapidly.

His last hours were full of a greed that had become madness. He cursed over three halfpence lost weeks before in an account with a servant. Then he caught John by the wrist and said in a hurried whisper, “Get me a clergyman, but not one who will cost much. I am a poor man, doctor, a very poor man.” In the next breath

he spoke as if John were already that clergyman. “Save my soul,” he said, “and speak for me, too, about a cheap coffin. They say I am rich, but they always lied.” Even in that hour, when life was loosening fast, he clung to his poverty as to a final possession.

The women came back, and the room grew darker as the candle-end fell lower. John drew away from the bed and sat in a far corner, tired, shocked, and almost unable to feel clearly. Then the door opened, and a man appeared there. He did not rush in or creep in. He only stood, looked round the room, and turned away with quiet ease, as if he had every right to be there. In that one moment John saw enough to know that the face was the living face of the portrait.

He was on his feet at once, but terror stopped his breath. Then shame came to help him. “What is this?” he thought. “Am I to be frightened because one man looks like another?” He forced himself to believe it was only a likeness made stronger by darkness, grief, and exhaustion. But while he was praising his own good sense, the door opened again, and the same figure appeared, this time beckoning to him with calm, almost familiar command. John moved toward it. Before he could reach the door, his uncle cried out sharply, and the cry ended in a weak desperate complaint. “They are robbing me,” he said. “John, won’t you help me? They are taking my last shirt from me. I shall die a beggar.” With those words, and with his mind still holding its money tighter than its life, the old miser died.

A few days later, after the funeral, the will was opened before proper witnesses. John learned that he was sole heir to a property much larger than he had imagined. The attorney had nearly finished when he paused and said, “There are some lines here in a corner, not part of the will in legal form, but clearly in the dead man’s hand.” He handed the parchment over. John knew that narrow careful writing at once. He read in silence. His uncle commanded him to destroy the portrait marked “J. Melmoth, 1646,” to search the lowest left-hand drawer of the mahogany chest under it, to find a mouldy manuscript tied with black ribbon, and, if possible, to burn that too unread.

The business ended quickly after that. John’s guardians advised him to return to Dublin and finish his studies as soon as was proper. They offered him a place

in their own houses until then. He thanked them but refused. It was not respect for his uncle that kept him in the Lodge. It was curiosity, though the word is too small and too light for the feeling that now held him. He wanted, almost against his own will, to stand closer to the thing that had frightened the dying man, appeared at the deathbed, and now seemed to reach out from the dead hand by means of that strange order written in the margin of a will.

The rest of the day he spent in restless indecision. He walked through the late owner's room, came to the closet door, stopped, turned away, and then returned again. Toward evening he called the old housekeeper and questioned her as quietly as he could. She told him very little at first. "Your uncle, sir, was forever in that inner room these last years," she said. "He would sit there reading, though he never cared for books before. Once thieves broke in, thinking his money was hidden there, but they found only papers and went off. After that he had the window bricked up. And that was strange, sir, very strange, for if a halfpenny was missing he would cry murder through the whole house, but over this he said almost nothing."

She took a sip of punch, leaned closer, and went on. "I saw another strange thing too. More than once he was bending over papers when dinner came in, and he hid them the moment anyone entered. There was talk also of a picture he tried to conceal. I asked questions, as any Christian woman would, but got no clear answer. Biddy Brannigan only filled her pipe, shook her head, and would say nothing plain." John pressed her further. "Was my uncle ever fanciful? Was he given to old fears?" She answered at once, "Never. He hated that kind of talk. He would rather hear bad news of money than tales of spirits and fairy things." Then, after a pause, she added, "And for wronging the poor, sir, no. He was hard, but he would rather starve the world than cheat it."

So Biddy Brannigan was sent for. She entered bent and murmuring, half servant and half queen in her manner. At first she stood by the door and bowed. But when John said, "Biddy, I want the story of my family, and I want it plainly," she seemed to rise into herself. "Plainly, is it?" she said. "Then hear it plainly, young master. The first Melmoth in Ireland came with Cromwell and got these

lands. But his elder brother had travelled abroad so long that his own blood almost forgot him, and maybe they were glad to forget him. There were stories about him, black stories. Folk said he had learned things no Christian should learn."

She smoked a little, watching John all the while, then continued more slowly. "One day that elder brother came back. He was old, he should have been very old, but he had not changed as a man changes. He stayed a short time only. He spoke little, asked nothing, told nothing. The family were not easy near him, though no one could say why. When he went away, he left behind his picture, the same you have seen, and they saw him no more. Then years later a stranger came from England, eager, restless, desperate to find him. He could get no news. Before leaving, he left a manuscript here, whether by carelessness or design no one knew. And in that manuscript, Biddy said, was the account of how he met John Melmoth the Traveller."

John felt his heart beat harder, but said, "And after that?" Biddy lifted one long finger. "After that came the worst of it. The family kept both the portrait and the manuscript. From that time a report spread that the Traveller still lived, and from age to age he was seen again in Ireland. But listen well, master John. He was not seen often, and never for nothing. He came, they said, when one of the family was near death. And even then he showed himself only if the dying person had made that hour darker by evil passions, evil habits, or some secret sin. So when your uncle saw him, people said it was no blessing to the dead, and no comfort to the living."

Night had fully fallen by the time Biddy left him. Her words had not made him believe, but they had made disbelief much harder. At last he took a candle, entered the closet, and stood directly before the portrait. "If you are evil," he said under his breath, "I should destroy you now. If you are only paint, then why do I delay?" Yet he still delayed. Finally he turned from the wall to the mahogany chest, found the lowest left-hand drawer, and pulled it open. It was filled with sermons, old papers, worthless pamphlets, and at the back of them all lay a bundle tied with black ribbon, mouldy and stained by time. He held it for a moment without opening it. Then, because fear itself had now become a stronger force than

obedience, John Melmoth broke the ribbon and began to read.

Part 3

The first pages gave John almost no help. The paper was stained, torn, and dark with age, and the writing ran into blots where the ink had spread or faded. He could make out a few broken lines about a prisoner, an examination, and a fearful secret that must not be spoken. There was also mention of an Englishman, and of two unhappy lovers struck dead by lightning. The fragments were so wild and uncertain that they only increased his curiosity, and after a long hour of effort he laid the manuscript down with more impatience than knowledge.

Sleep did not come easily that night. Whenever he closed his eyes, he saw again the painted face, the living face at the door, and the dead face of his uncle fixed in miserly terror. Toward morning he told himself that old papers might be made meaningful by fear, just as shadows are made into shapes by weak light. Yet he also felt that he was now bound to the manuscript in a way he could not explain. “If I burn it unread,” he thought, “I remain ignorant and troubled. If I read it, I may become more troubled still. But at least I shall not be blind.”

The next day he tried another way. Since the broken pages told him little, he decided to question the people in the house again and gather whatever they knew. The old housekeeper came readily enough, pleased by the importance of being asked. She took snuff, sipped punch, and spoke in a long wandering manner that tried John’s patience. Still, beneath all the useless turns of speech, he found several facts. His uncle had lived much in the inner room during the last two years, had hidden papers there, and had once been so frightened after an attempted robbery that he had the window bricked up.

“But there was more in it than fear of thieves,” she said, lowering her voice. “If your uncle lost a halfpenny, the whole house knew it; but over this he kept almost silent. And I saw him often with papers before him, though he never cared for reading in former days.” John watched her closely and asked, “Did he ever speak of the portrait?” She crossed herself before answering. “Not to me. But there

was one day of great trouble over something he was trying to hide. I believe it was that picture." Then she told him what had happened two evenings before his uncle fell ill.

"He called to me to lock the court door," she said. "Then he snatched the key from my hand, as angry as ever, and I stepped aside. The next thing I heard was a scream, and there he was on the ground. We all ran to lift him. While we were busy, I saw a tall man cross the court and pass out of it. I cried, 'Stop him, stop him!' but nobody listened. The outer gate was locked, and yet he was gone." John was silent a moment, then asked the question that mattered most to him. "Was my uncle a superstitious man?" She answered firmly, "No. Hard, yes. Greedy, yes. But not that."

Her certainty struck him more deeply than all her strange details. If the old man had been weak-minded, fearful by habit, or given to tales of spirits, then the whole matter would have been easier. But even the servants agreed that he hated that kind of talk. "He would starve the world," the old woman said, "but he would not wrong it of a farthing, and he would not fill his own head with foolish fears." That answer darkened John's mind. He had briefly wondered whether some hidden crime might have turned his uncle's dying thoughts to terror, but now even that explanation seemed less certain. So at last he sent for Biddy Brannigan.

She came in with the look of one who had spent half her life bowing to the strong and the other half ruling the weak. At first she muttered blessings that sounded uncomfortably like curses. But when John said, "Biddy, I want the old story of my family, and I want it plainly," she straightened herself and seemed to grow taller. "Plainly, then," she said, "you shall have it. The first Melmoth who settled here got these lands after the wars. But his elder brother had long travelled on the Continent, and there were dark reports about him. He knew strange things, and people were not easy when his name was spoken."

She told him that this elder brother had once returned to the family house, though many had almost forgotten him. He should have been old, very old, but he did not appear changed in the common way of men. "They say he spoke little," Biddy said, "and asked no questions. But those around him were never at ease.

When he went away, he left behind him his picture, the same picture you saw, and no one saw him again." Some years later, she went on, an Englishman had come from England asking after this traveller with wild and painful eagerness. He could learn nothing and at last departed, but he left behind a manuscript telling how he had first met John Melmoth the Traveller.

"And from that time," said Biddy, "the story spread that he still lived. They saw him, they said, from age to age in Ireland. But he was never seen for nothing. He came when one of the family was near death, and even then only when that death was made dark by evil passions or a wicked life." John did not answer. Biddy, seeing his face change, pressed the point more cruelly. "So it was no good sign for the old man, sir, that such a visitor was at his door before the end." Then, after crossing herself, she added in a lower tone, "And no good sign, maybe, for the house either."

When she had gone, John remained alone for a long time. The day was grey, and the wind moved over the ruined place with a low, steady sound that seemed like breathing through clenched teeth. At last he rose, went into the closet, and stood before the portrait. "My uncle ordered that you should be destroyed," he said aloud, as if speaking to the painted man might make him feel less foolish. "And perhaps it is safer so." Yet even then he hesitated, for the face seemed to wait with dreadful patience, not resisting, not yielding, only watching.

He forced himself forward, lifted the picture from the wall, and carried it down to a small fire. For a moment he almost expected some cry, some movement, or some unnatural change in the room. Nothing happened. The canvas blackened, twisted, and fell in upon itself. The features vanished; the terrible eyes broke and shrank in the heat. John stayed there until nothing remained that could be called a face. "So much," he said to himself, though without much comfort, "for one fear at least."

Then he returned to the manuscript. With the portrait gone, he felt more able to face the paper, as if one shadow had been removed from another. He worked through the blotted lines more slowly and with better light. What he first understood was not the beginning of a tale, but the remains of one already far

advanced: a Spanish prisoner, an examination, some strange matter concerning forbidden knowledge, and again the mention of an Englishman seen near the scene of death. John read on with growing impatience until the writing became clearer. Then, all at once, the confused fragments opened into a more distinct account.

He learned that the writer was named Stanton, and that after some terrible experiences in Spain he had come back to England with his mind still fixed on the mysterious being he had met there. Stanton could neither give up the pursuit nor say what he expected from it. He moved restlessly through London, seeking noise and company as men do when they are pursued by one thought and cannot escape it in silence. He went often to the theatres and mixed with crowds, though all the while he was still haunted by the face of the stranger. John bent closer over the page. The old blots were past now. Stanton was in London, and the true narrative was about to begin.

Part 4

About the year 1677, Stanton was in London, but he was not at peace there. His mind was still fixed on the strange Englishman whom he had seen in Spain, and the memory of that face had grown stronger instead of weaker with time. He told himself again and again, “If I can only find that being, I will force the truth from him.” Then, in the next moment, another thought would rise, colder and darker: “And if I do find him, what truth can come from such a source?” So he lived in a state of inward struggle, driven by a curiosity that had long since become something like fate.

It was singular that a man in such a state sought company rather than solitude. Yet this often happens when one thought is eating the heart. The silence of a room gives it too much power, and so the sufferer runs toward crowds, noise, light, and public amusement, not because they cure him, but because they delay his pain for an hour. Stanton therefore went often to the theatres. He mixed with men of fashion, critics, lovers, idlers, and masked women, yet remained as lonely among them as if he had been shut up in a desert.

The theatres of London in that age gave a spectacle almost as strange as any play on the stage. Coaches, chairs, servants, fine ladies, actors, orange-sellers, gentlemen stained with snuff and wine, and women hiding behind masks all filled the place with restless life. Every class seemed to speak loudly, laugh carelessly, and offend openly. Modesty was little seen there, but display was everywhere. Stanton looked on all this with dull and tired eyes, as one who no longer expected either pleasure or surprise from ordinary human folly.

On the night that mattered most, the play was *Alexander*, and the house was crowded. The actors were full of fire, the women glittered in dress and jewels, and the men answered one another in loud voices that rose above the music. Stanton tried to attend to the stage, but his mind wandered. Even the great speeches of love and war seemed to pass before him without force. The truth was that he had not come there for the play at all. He had come because habit drove him into crowds, and because some secret part of him still hoped that chance would do what long search had failed to do.

A violent disturbance suddenly broke the attention of the house. Two actresses had quarrelled behind the scenes, and when they met again before the audience, one drove her passion so far that she wounded the other in earnest. A cry rose. The performance stopped. People stood up everywhere, some in alarm and some in delight, because there are always many who enjoy confusion more than art. Stanton, carried by the general movement, also rose from his seat and looked across the house.

In that instant he saw him. The man stood on the opposite side, not doing anything remarkable, not even seeming eager to leave. Yet the expression of his eyes was enough. Stanton felt at once that no mistake was possible. He had changed less in four years than many men change in four months, and the look of calm, dreadful knowledge in his face was still the same. Stanton’s heart leaped so violently that for a moment the whole theatre turned dark before him.

Then another sensation seized him, stranger still. A soft and solemn music seemed to rise around him, not from the orchestra, not from the stage, and not from any visible corner of the house. It grew sweeter every moment, until it

appeared to fill the whole air. Stanton turned to those nearest him and asked in broken haste, “Do you hear it? From where does it come?” But they looked at him with surprise, and some drew away as if his face disturbed them. He understood then, with a horror deeper than before, that the music was heard by him alone.

The memory of Spain returned on the spot. He remembered the night of storm, the young bride and bridegroom, the sounds that seemed to come from heaven, and the death that had followed them. “Then am I marked too?” he thought. “Is this sweetness only the sign of some evil near me?” His imagination rose to its highest point, yet mixed even then with disappointment. He had pursued this being for years, given him the strength of his mind, and made the search almost a duty. Now that the object stood before him at last, he felt with terror how little he truly understood either what he wanted or what he was about to find.

When the play ended, Stanton went out into the moonlit street and stood alone for a few moments. London seemed suddenly empty after the crowded heat within. Then he saw near him a long shadow cast across the road. At first it appeared gigantic, but when he stepped closer, he perceived that only the shadow was enlarged. The figure itself was of ordinary height. One step more, and he stood face to face with the man whom he had seen in Spain and recognized again that night in the theatre.

The stranger spoke first. “You were seeking me,” he said. Stanton answered, “I was.” The man asked quietly, “Have you questions?” Stanton said, “Many.” “Then ask them,” the other replied. Stanton looked around at the silent street and said, “This is no place.” The stranger smiled in a way that seemed to insult both place and hour. “Poor fool,” he said, “I am not bound by place. Speak, if you wish to ask or learn.” Stanton answered with sudden bitterness, “I have many things to ask, but I hope to learn nothing from you.”

“You deceive yourself,” said the stranger. “You will be undeceived when next we meet.” Stanton caught his arm at once and cried, “When shall that be? Name the hour and the place.” The answer came in a tone so calm that it was worse than anger. “The hour shall be midday. The place shall be the bare walls of a madhouse. There you shall rise from straw and chains to greet me. You shall still

possess the curse of sanity and memory, and my voice shall ring in your ears until then." Stanton felt himself recoil in spite of his own pride. "Must we meet under such horror?" he said. The stranger's eyes burned full upon him as he answered, "I never desert my friends in misfortune. When they sink lowest, then I am sure to visit them."

After this the stranger disappeared into the night so suddenly that Stanton could never afterward tell whether he had walked away or seemed almost to vanish where he stood. From that hour Stanton changed visibly. He had always been thought a man of singular habits, and now his restless speech, his fixed return to the same subject, and his passionate certainty about the stranger gave his enemies their chance. People who envied him, feared him, or merely enjoyed malice began to repeat that his mind was unsound. His nearest relative, a needy and unprincipled man, listened carefully to the spreading report and resolved to profit by it.

One morning this kinsman came to Stanton with another man of grave and unpleasant appearance. They spoke to him in a friendly tone and proposed a short drive out of London for the good of his health. Stanton objected at first and suggested going by water, but they overruled him with easy politeness and led him to a carriage already waiting. He was too absent, too worn by inward struggle, to resist strongly. So he entered with them and drove some miles without paying attention to the road, until at length the carriage stopped before a gloomy house standing round a small paved court.

"Come, cousin," said the relative, "and look at a purchase I have made." Stanton stepped out and followed him through the court and up a narrow stair. "Your choice is dark enough," he said. The other answered with a laugh that Stanton disliked at once. They entered a mean room. "Wait here," said the kinsman to the stranger who had come with them, "while I fetch someone to keep my cousin company." He went out. Stanton, as was his habit, took up the first manuscript that lay near him and began to read.

The pages were filled with wild schemes, foolish plans, and strange drawings, half clever and half mad. He read of London to be rebuilt from the stones of

Stonehenge, of foreign nations to be converted by force, and of delicate paper figures cut by hands that later complained they had been denied even a knife to mend a pen. The mixture of invention and ruin in these writings absorbed him so completely that he did not at first see the truth. But at length he looked up. The other man was gone. Stanton rose, went to the door, and found it locked. Then he turned to the window and saw iron bars across it. In that moment, before any cry left his lips, he knew where he had been brought.

Part 5

Stanton stood at the window for some moments after making that discovery, as if the bars might disappear if he looked long enough at them. The yard below was empty, hard, and silent. There was not even some passing servant or pitying stranger to whom he could call for help. The place seemed built not only to confine the body, but to deny the sufferer every hope of being seen, heard, or remembered. At last his strength failed him, and he sank beside the window in a sickness of horror that he could neither master nor express.

The day passed slowly, and no one came near him. He listened for steps, for voices, for the turning of a key, but heard nothing that gave him any human comfort. Even the light seemed poor and imprisoned, as if the sun itself had entered the place unwillingly. Toward evening he understood that he had been left there to learn the truth of his condition by silence alone. “So this is their mercy,” he thought. “They shut me up, and then wait for the place itself to do the rest.”

Near midnight he woke from a short and broken sleep. He had not truly rested, but rather fallen into that heavy weakness which comes when the body can endure no more. He found himself in complete darkness, and for one dreadful instant he did not know where he was. Then memory returned all at once, and with it such a rush of terror that he sprang up and stumbled to the door like a man pursued. He shook it violently and cried out, first in anger, then in command, and finally in desperate appeal.

His cries were answered at once, but not in any way that could help him.

From many parts of the house other voices rose, sharp, wild, mocking, and discordant. Some repeated his words, some laughed at them, and some sent back sounds that seemed hardly human at all. He understood in that moment that the inmates knew, with the cruel quickness of the disordered mind, that a stranger had been brought among them. Their joy at his misery was like the howl of beasts greeting a fresh victim.

At last he heard heavy steps in the passage, fast and angry. The door opened, and a savage-looking keeper stood there with two others dimly visible behind him. “Let me out,” Stanton cried. “Do you hear me? I am no madman.” The keeper answered with brutal calm, “Then make less noise, and you may pass for one less easily.” Stanton stepped toward him in fury, but before another word could be spoken, the man struck him across the shoulders with a loaded whip, and the pain flung him to the ground.

The keeper stood over him and lifted the whip again. “Now you know where you are,” he said. “And hear me well. If you keep quiet, you may lie there in peace. If you raise the house again, these lads will put irons on you before the sound has died.” The two attendants came forward with fetters in their hands, and their faces showed that they would use them with pleasure. Stanton, cold with rage and fear, saw that resistance would only sink him deeper into the power of brutes, and so he forced himself to submit.

When they had gone, he gathered what strength of mind he could and began to think, not like a free man seeking justice, but like a prisoner studying survival. He resolved that he would be quiet, orderly, and watchful. “If I rage,” he told himself, “they will call it madness. If I plead, they will laugh. I must outlive their mistake, outwait their cruelty, and keep my reason as my last possession.” Yet even as he formed these prudent thoughts, he shuddered to wonder whether such calculations were themselves the first lesson of the place, and whether he had already begun to learn its terrible wisdom.

That same night his resolutions were put to a trial beyond anything he had imagined. In the next cell was a weaver driven mad by religion and politics, a man whose mind had been set on fire by one violent sermon and had never cooled

since. During the day he preached to unseen hearers about election and damnation. At night his words grew darker, and by midnight his cries shook with blasphemy and battle. In the cell opposite was a ruined tailor, half drunk in memory, half mad with royalist songs and old party hatred, and these two wretches began to answer one another through the dark like enemies chained on the edge of hell.

The tailor shouted scraps of songs, insults, and broken jests. The weaver replied with Scripture twisted into threats, visions, and curses. One cried, “The king shall rise again, you crop-eared rogue!” and the other answered with prophetic fury, calling for blood, judgment, and the fall of cities. Their words were absurd, but the hatred in them was real, and that reality gave them power. Stanton lay listening, unable to stop his ears, and felt that the madness of the house was not mere confusion, but the ruin of passions once fierce and human.

Then another voice broke through theirs, and at once all became more terrible. It was the voice of a woman who had lost husband, children, home, and reason in the great fire of London. The cry of “Fire!” never failed to wake her frenzy, and on that night it came as surely as if the flames had risen again before her eyes. She called for light, for air, for her children, and seemed to climb burning stairs in the dark while Stanton heard every struggle in her voice. “I am coming,” she cried. “Take my hand. No, not that one. It is burned. Any hand. Hold to me, and let me burn if only the child may live.”

Her agony changed the whole house. Even the ravers who had filled it with politics, songs, and quarrels fell silent before that cry of nature. Stanton, who had been half distracted by the others, found in this woman’s suffering something still more dreadful because it was so near the truth. He could imagine the red sky, the falling beams, the children slipping from a mother’s grasp into fire below. When at last her voice sank into low muttering and cold shudders, he felt not relief, but exhaustion, as if some real disaster had happened again within hearing of them all.

From that night onward, the place worked steadily upon him. At first he had risen early, forced himself to walk, kept himself clean, and taken the air whenever he was allowed, because hope had ordered him to defend his body and mind. But

as day followed day and no deliverance came, he began to let all these efforts fall away. He stayed in bed for hours, cared less for food and dress, and turned from the sunlight when it touched his cell. Sounds from the outer world that had once comforted him, the wind, the rain, the small cries of birds, lost their power to reach him.

What was worst of all, he began at times to listen to the shrieks of the others with a dark and sullen interest. He was not yet mad, but misery had already taught him to take a terrible sort of company from misery. One dismal night, while he lay half awake on his foul bed, he noticed that the weak light from the hearth had been darkened by something standing before it. He turned his head slowly, at first with no more than dull curiosity. Then he saw, between himself and the fire, the same figure he had seen before in Spain and in London: Melmoth, unchanged, silent, rigid, with those dreadful eyes shining upon him through the gloom.

Part 6

Stanton's whole body grew cold, but he did not cry out. Terror had gone beyond noise. The figure stood between him and the dull fire, and the weak red light drew a sharp line round the stillness of his form. For some moments neither spoke. Then the stranger said, in the same calm tone Stanton remembered from London, "You see that I keep my word. I do not leave my friends when they are in misery. When they sink lowest, that is the hour when I come nearest."

Stanton tried to answer firmly, but his first words were broken by the shaking of his breath. "If you are man," he said, "speak plainly. If you are something worse, then I know not why you should mock me." The stranger replied, "I do speak plainly. You are shut in among the mad. Your body will rot in foul air, your mind will be worn thin by cries, fear, and shame, and after a little while those who sent you here will be believed, because time itself will become witness against you. Is that plain enough?" Stanton covered his face a moment, then forced his hands away and looked up again.

"Why are you here?" he asked. "To insult me?" The answer came without

haste. “No. To offer you freedom.” At those words Stanton started as violently as if chains had fallen from his limbs already. The stranger slowly lifted one hand, and in it Stanton saw a key. Its small hard brightness in the firelight gave him a sharper shock than any speech could have done. “There is the door,” said the stranger. “Outside it are night, air, motion, liberty, and the world of men. Behind you are straw, darkness, noise, mockery, and the slow ruin of the understanding. Choose.”

Stanton fixed his eyes on the key, then on the door, then again on the face of the being who held both temptation and calm together. “And how came that key into your hand?” he said. “What power have you in this place?” The stranger smiled faintly. “Power enough for this hour. Ask rather what use you dare make of it.” Stanton rose from his wretched bed and moved a step forward. “If the door can indeed be opened, open it,” he cried. “If this is another trick of a devilish mind, I am too miserable to bear it.” The stranger did not stir. “It will open,” he said. “But not for nothing.”

Then followed an explanation which Stanton set down at length in the manuscript, though the later reader could hardly make out more than fragments of it. Yet the sense of it was clear enough. The stranger proposed a condition that could not be written or spoken of freely, a condition dreadful not merely because it promised earthly escape, but because it touched the soul, the future, and the relation between human despair and evil aid. It was no common bargain of service or gratitude. It was one of those fearful terms under which deliverance itself becomes a deeper prison.

Stanton listened at first with horror, then with increasing rage. The very greatness of his suffering made the offer for one terrible instant seem possible. He thought of the barred window, the whip, the cries in the night, the slow growth of shame, and the chance that in a few months he might become what the world already called him. He saw too, with dreadful clearness, the door standing near, the key actually present, and the world almost within reach of his foot. Then conscience, pride, terror of the unknown, and hatred of the tempter all rose together in him like one storm.

“Begone,” he cried at last. “Monster, demon, whatever you are, begone. Even this house of horror is fitter than your help. These walls sweat at your presence, and the floor shakes beneath you.” The stranger answered in a tone that seemed less offended than wearied. “You are proud tonight because suffering is still new. Men reject much while they can still imagine endurance. But pain lengthens, hope decays, and the soul learns to bargain.” Stanton seized the iron frame of his bed and said between his teeth, “Then let it decay. Let the place kill me. I will not owe life or liberty to you.”

The stranger watched him fixedly. “Many have said so at first,” he replied. “The human spirit has strange flashes before it goes out. Keep yours while you may.” Then he added, with a kind of cold pity that was more dreadful than insult, “I did not think this prison would keep you long enough to teach you wisdom. Perhaps I was wrong.” Stanton answered only by pointing toward the door. For a moment the stranger remained where he was, tall, still, and dark against the failing fire. Then the light changed, the shadow on the wall broke, and Stanton knew, without being able later to describe how, that he was alone.

He stood for some time in a state between triumph and collapse. He had refused, and the refusal gave him a fierce bitter strength. Yet his misery remained exactly as before. The key was gone. The door was still shut. The cries in the house began again. “What have I gained?” he thought. “Nothing but the right to suffer honestly.” Still, that right was not nothing. Men in extremity cling to very small remains of inward freedom, and sometimes build their whole being upon them. Stanton lay down again, shaking from head to foot, but with a mind, for that night at least, more his own than it had been an hour earlier.

The manuscript then passed rapidly over some interval of time, and much of what followed had been injured by damp and decay. Yet enough remained to show that Stanton was at last released from confinement. Whether friends interfered, whether the trick against him was exposed, or whether his keepers themselves feared to continue so doubtful an imprisonment, the later reader could not determine with certainty. But Stanton came out again into the world, not restored, but changed. He himself admitted that his pursuit of the mysterious stranger had

now become a kind of fixed disease in his mind. He hated it, knew it to be master over him, and still obeyed it.

He followed every rumor with desperate eagerness. He questioned servants, travellers, priests, sailors, actors, and beggars. He bribed those who had nothing to tell and threatened those who knew no more than he did. At times he crossed the sea again and wandered on the Continent. At times he returned to England and wore out whole months in tracing names, dates, and half-forgotten reports. The being whom he had seen three times, and under circumstances so extraordinary that ordinary life seemed weak beside them, he never encountered again while living.

At length one discovery gave his wandering a new direction. He learned that the man was believed to be Irish by birth. On that slight hope he came to Ireland and made inquiries among the Melmoths. But whether from fear, ignorance, or family pride, they told him nothing useful. What they knew, they concealed. What they guessed, they refused to shape into words for a stranger. Stanton therefore left the country unsatisfied, and with that departure the manuscript, so far as John Melmoth could read it, all but failed.

The last pages were in a miserable state. Whole leaves had crumbled at the corners, and lines broke off in the middle like voices stopped by sudden death. John bent over them with feverish patience, but could make out only that Stanton never gave over the pursuit; that he himself called it a species of madness; and that the passion by which he had tried to master the mystery had become the chief torment of his life. After many fruitless journeys and inquiries, the record ceased. It did not say that the Wanderer had died. It only said that Stanton had failed to find him again in his lifetime.

When John at last laid the manuscript down, the room felt quieter than before, but not safer. The tale had given him no clear explanation, no full history, and no relief. It had only shown him that long before his uncle’s death another man had seen the same being, had been tempted by him in deepest misery, and had spent years of life in hopeless search after him. John remained seated with the ruined pages before him, staring at the black ribbon and the mould-stains as if they

themselves might speak further. He had destroyed the portrait, but the story now lived in his mind more strongly than any picture.

Part 7

John remained long over the ruined manuscript after the light had begun to fail. Its story had ended without answer, and that unfinished end disturbed him more than any clear conclusion could have done. Had Stanton died in the search, or gone mad in it, or simply grown old and weary while the being he pursued remained unchanged? The paper did not tell him. It only left him with the dreadful impression of a man once tempted in misery, once delivered from madness, and then consumed through life by the memory of a face and a promise.

He tried to reason himself into calmness. “There is nothing here,” he thought, “but the history of a mind too violently struck by extraordinary events. My uncle read this, became weak enough to believe it, and then fear completed what age had begun.” Yet when he tried to rest in that explanation, the memory of the deathbed rose before him again. He had not imagined the living figure at the door. He had not imagined the old man’s cry or the knowledge with which he spoke. Between what he wished to believe and what he had seen, there was a gap his mind could not cross.

The evening darkened early. A wild rain had begun, and the wind came in heavy bursts against the walls and loose shutters of the ruined house. In the kitchen below, the servants and followers had gathered close round the fire, partly for warmth and partly because terror always seeks company. John went down among them, not from any love of their talk, but because the loneliness of his own room had become oppressive. They were speaking of weather, wrecks, omens, and deaths by sea, as people near a rough coast do when a storm rises. Every few moments one of them would pause and lift his head to listen.

At last, in the middle of some foolish story, John heard a sound that cut through wind and rain with terrible distinctness. “Silence,” he said at once. The room fell quiet. They all listened, but for a moment nothing followed. Then the

sound came again, heavy and far, yet clear enough to leave no doubt. “It is a gun,” cried John. “There is a vessel in distress.” At once the whole house was in motion. The men sprang up eagerly, for danger outside is better than fear indoors, and there is a kind of pride even in running toward another’s peril.

The confusion of their preparations would have been almost laughable at another time. One tore down an old coat that had long served as a window-covering. Another seized a wig from the kitchen-jack where it had hung like a rag. A third fought a cat and her kittens for a pair of boots in which she had chosen to settle. But John waited for none of them. He ran upstairs first to the highest room of the house, where one broken window still gave a view of the coast. Leaning far out into the blackness, he saw for one instant a dim light at sea, then a flash, and after it the report of another gun.

A few minutes later he was on the shore with the others. The distance was short, but the way seemed endless. Wind and spray beat against them with such violence that they could hardly keep their feet among the rocks, and often had to stop and call to one another through the darkness to know they were still together. The sea itself was scarcely visible, except when some burst of pale foam showed where it had broken over black stone. They could tell only that a vessel had struck somewhere beyond, and that the night was making every effort of rescue uncertain and desperate.

For a long time they could do nothing but search the edge of the shore and listen for cries. Once John thought he heard a human voice between the bursts of water, and ran toward the sound until a wave nearly carried him from the rock on which he had placed himself. The men shouted to him to come back, but he scarcely heard them. At last, while trying to descend toward a lower ledge, he slipped, struck hard against the stone, and would have fallen into the sea if a stronger arm had not seized him in that instant. Even then he knew little of what followed. He was conscious only of a terrible struggle in icy water, of being dragged, lifted, and supported, and of a face near his own strained with effort, pain, and dark resolution.

By morning they were found together on the strand, locked in each other’s

hold, cold and senseless, but still alive. John was carried home, bruised and exhausted, and when he was able to rise, the parish priest came to him and told him what had happened. The wrecked vessel had been an English trader driven up the coast by the storm and shattered in the night upon hidden rocks. Crew, passengers, all were believed lost except one Spaniard. “And that man,” said the priest, “while saving his own life, saw you fall and spent his last strength to save yours too. You owe your life to him.” John answered instantly, “Then I must thank him at once.” But as he rose, an old woman beside him whispered with visible fear, “For the dear life, sir, do not tell him your name too quickly. They said ‘Melmoth’ before him the other night, and he was as wild as any soul in Bedlam.”

The warning struck him sharply, yet he mastered himself and went to the stranger’s room. The Spaniard was about thirty, of noble figure and grave but winning manner. The natural dignity of his country seemed in him touched by something deeper and more sorrowful, as if habit had taught him control but suffering had darkened all beneath it. He spoke English well, and when John remarked on it, he answered with a sigh, “I learned it in a painful school.” John changed the subject at once and thanked him warmly for preserving his life. The Spaniard bowed slightly. “Senhor, spare me. If your life was no dearer to you than mine is to me, it is not worth such thanks.”

“Yet you made every effort to save it,” said John. “That was instinct,” answered the Spaniard. “And I am told I also struggled to save yours.” The other gave a strange faint smile. “That too was instinct at the moment, or, if you prefer a gentler word, the influence of a better spirit than mine. I am a stranger in this land, and without your roof I should have fared miserably.” He then spoke briefly of the wreck and of the effort by which he had at last reached shore. While speaking, however, he seemed oppressed by inward pain as much as bodily hurt, and suddenly cried out in Spanish, with a look of anguish, “God! why did the Jonah survive, and the mariners perish?” John, not understanding the words, thought him engaged in some bitter prayer and was about to retire, when the Spaniard detained him.

“Senhor,” he said, breathing quickly, “I understand your name is—” He

paused, shuddered from head to foot, and then, with an effort that seemed almost convulsive, forced out the name, “Melmoth.” John answered quietly, though his own heart had begun to beat hard. “My name is Melmoth.” The Spaniard stared at him. “Had you an ancestor,” he asked, “a very remote one, who was—at a period perhaps beyond family tradition—it is useless.” He covered his face with both hands and groaned aloud. John, half terrified and half inflamed by curiosity, leaned toward him and said, “If you continue, perhaps I may answer. Go on, Senhor.” The Spaniard lowered his hands and spoke with abrupt rapidity. “Had you then a relative who was, about one hundred and forty years ago, said to be in Spain?” John replied after one hard moment, “I believe—yes, I fear—I had.”

“It is enough,” said the Spaniard. “Leave me now. Tomorrow perhaps. Leave me now.” But before John could obey, the stranger’s strength failed. He sank, and John sprang forward to support him. They were alone. John called aloud for water, loosened his vest to give him air, and in doing so his hand touched something hanging near the stranger’s heart. It was a miniature portrait. The Spaniard felt the touch at once with such violence that he grasped it in his own cold hand like a man defending life itself. “What have you done?” he cried. He felt eagerly for the ribbon, found it safe, and then fixed on John a look of fearful, almost composed inquiry. “You know all, then?” “I know nothing,” John answered, faltering in spite of himself.

The Spaniard disengaged himself, staggered to the candles, and held up the miniature directly before John’s eyes. It was the same face. The likeness was coarse and roughly painted, yet so faithful that the hand seemed guided not by skill, but by terror and memory. “Was he,” gasped the Spaniard, “was the original of this your ancestor? Are you his descendant? Are you keeper of that terrible secret which—” The rest was lost in a convulsion that threw him to the floor. John, already weakened by the wreck, the manuscript, and this new shock, could bear no more. He too was carried from the room, and for several days he did not see the stranger again.

Part 8

It was several days before John Melmoth saw the Spaniard again. When they met at last, the stranger's manner was calm, grave, and carefully controlled, as if he had spent those days forcing his mind back into order. He seemed ready to apologize for the violence of their last interview, but when he began, he stopped almost at once, unable to shape either his thoughts or his words. John saw that any direct question about the portrait would only renew his agitation. So, trying to lead him by a gentler way, he asked what business had brought him to Ireland.

The Spaniard was silent for a long time. At last he said, "A few days ago, Senhor, I believed no human power could force that answer from me. I thought my story too terrible to be believed and too strange to be shared. I believed myself alone on earth, beyond sympathy and beyond help. And yet chance has placed me under the roof of the only man from whom I may hope for either." John sat down without speaking. The Spaniard looked at him steadily, then drew the miniature from his neck, stared at it with sudden fury, and cried, "Devil, devil, you choke me!"

With that he threw it to the floor and crushed it under his heel, glass and all. "Now I breathe more freely," he said. The room in which they sat was low, poor, and meanly furnished, and the evening outside was full of wind and storm. The windows shook in the blast, and the sound seemed like some dark messenger beating to be let in. John felt his own heart beating hard in the silence that followed. He half lifted his hand as if to stop the tale before it began, but the Spaniard mistook the movement for eagerness and began.

"I am, as you know, a native of Spain," he said, "but you do not yet know that I come from one of its noblest houses, the house of Monçada. In the first years of my life I knew nothing of this. I remember only that I was treated with the greatest tenderness and kept in the greatest secrecy. I lived in a poor house in the suburbs of Madrid with an old woman, who loved me, I think, partly from affection and partly because she was well paid." He paused a moment, then added more softly, "Even in childhood I felt there was a mystery round me."

"Every week," he continued, "a young gentleman and a beautiful lady came

to see me. They kissed me, called me their beloved child, and brought me gifts finer than anything in the little house where I lived. I loved them at once, not only because they were kind, but because everything in them seemed graceful and noble. My father's cloak fell about him with an easy beauty, and my mother's veil and dress gave her an air that seemed to belong to another world. I would throw my arms about them and say, 'Take me home with you. Why must I stay here?'"

"At those words they always wept," he said. "My mother would turn away, and my father would press money into the old woman's hand. Then he would say, 'Soon, my child, perhaps soon.' But soon never came. Their visits were always short, always late, and always ended in the same sorrowful way. So my earliest days were full of affection, but also of darkness, secrecy, and the feeling that I belonged to something hidden from me." He lowered his head and said, "I think that shadow fell over all my later life."

"Then, one day, everything changed. I was dressed in rich clothes, placed in a splendid carriage, and driven through Madrid in such state that I grew half dizzy with surprise. At last we stopped before a palace whose front seemed to rise into the sky. Servants bowed on every side. I was hurried through room after room so splendid that the light from the gold, the mirrors, and the painted walls made my eyes ache. Then I was brought into a private chamber where an old nobleman sat in still and silent grandeur." The Spaniard crossed himself lightly, as if even now that first sight remained on his mind.

"My father and mother were there," he said, "and both seemed full of awe in the presence of that old man. Their awe increased my own. They led me toward him, and I felt less as if I were being presented to a grandfather than offered up before a judge. He embraced me, but with more duty than warmth, and after that I was taken away by a servant and placed in another apartment, where everything around me spoke of rank, wealth, and power. That evening my father and mother came to me and wept over me while they kissed me. I was still a child, but I could see that their tears were not only tears of love."

"From that hour," he went on, "change followed change so quickly that I scarcely knew where I stood. I was then twelve years old. My earlier life, shut up

in secrecy and narrow rooms, had filled my mind with imagination and expectation. Every opening door had taught me to look for some wonder, and now wonder truly seemed to begin. Yet it was a wonder mixed with fear. I was not allowed to run free through the palace like a happy child. I was watched, guided, corrected, and kept within limits I could not understand."

"I soon learned that the old nobleman was my grandfather. His word ruled the house like law, and even those who loved me most seemed to fear what that law might decide for me. My father, who was young, proud, and full of pleasure by nature, became silent in his presence. My mother's eyes followed me everywhere with anxiety. I began to ask questions. 'Why was I kept away so long? Why do you come to me now? Why do you weep when you kiss me?' But to all such questions I received either silence or words that told me nothing." Then he smiled bitterly and said, "Children see much, even when adults think them blind."

"At last I understood at least this much," he said. "I had not been hidden because I was unloved. I had been hidden because my existence itself was inconvenient to the plans, pride, and devotions of others. I was of the blood of Monçada, yet not securely placed in it. I was both cherished and withheld, both admitted and feared. In one hour I was treated like the son of a grandee, and in the next like a secret that must not be too openly owned." He lifted his eyes to John and said, "From such beginnings, Senhor, no simple life was likely to come."

He leaned back, breathing with some difficulty, but his voice had grown steadier as he spoke. "You must understand these first years," he said, "or you will never understand what followed. I was born into tenderness, secrecy, pride, and fear all at once. I learned early that tears may hide under splendid dress, and that a great house may have darker corners than a prison. If I speak of strange things later, remember that my life was strange from the beginning." Then, after a pause in which the wind struck hard against the shutters, he said, "And now I must tell you what that house intended to make of me."

Part 9

“The thing that house intended to make of me,” said the Spaniard, “was not a soldier, not a courtier, and not the heir of its name in any free and human sense. It intended to make of me a sacrifice.” He spoke the last word quietly, but with such fixed bitterness that John did not interrupt him. “I learned this slowly,” he continued. “No one came to me and said, ‘You are given to the Church.’ In great houses they often do cruel things with soft hands and pious language. They first surround the victim with silence, then with habit, and only at last with necessity.”

“The old Duke, my grandfather, was a man in whom pride and devotion had become one. He loved his house, but he loved the glory of commanding it even more. In his mind there was no contradiction between family greatness and religious severity. He believed, I think, that a noble house should offer one son to the world and another to Heaven, and that both offerings increased its honor. My father, who was then to inherit, had less sternness in his nature, but more weakness. My mother had tenderness enough for ten women, but she was already beginning to place religion above nature, and penance above truth.”

“At first I knew none of this clearly. I only felt that everyone around me was waiting for something to be decided, and that the decision concerned me more than anyone dared say. I saw my father walking restlessly through the long rooms with his hands behind him, stopping suddenly whenever he came near my apartment, as if he wished to enter and then lacked courage. My mother came often, kissed me with tears, and spoke of God, obedience, and blessed resignation in words that meant little to me then, but chilled me even before I understood them. The old Duke said almost nothing. His silence ruled all the rest.”

“Not long after my removal to the palace, he died. His death was like his life, stately, cold, and received by the whole house as an event that imposed order even on grief. I was not allowed to follow his funeral. I saw only the splendid and melancholy procession moving out from the windows, and heard distant sounds of horses, bells, and voices that seemed to belong to another life from mine. I ran from one window to another to see more, but servants restrained me gently and said, ‘You must remain within, Don Alonzo.’ I obeyed, but with a heart full of anger and confusion.”

“Two days later I was told that a carriage waited for me at the gate. I thought I was at last to be taken openly into my father’s home and life. Instead I was driven to a convent, one of those houses outwardly devoted to study, discipline, and holy peace, and inwardly full of calculations, preferences, jealousies, and ambitions no less worldly because they wore a cowl. There I was left as a boarder, and I became an inmate that same day. No violent scene was made of it. There was no farewell worthy of the name. I was only transferred, like a possession placed where others had long before judged it should remain.”

“At first I did not understand the full meaning of the change. I applied myself to my lessons, and because I was eager, quick, and anxious to win affection where I could, my teachers praised me. My parents visited me frequently, and on such days I was almost happy, for they still spoke kindly and showed me the usual signs of tenderness. But even in those visits there was something constrained. My mother watched the fathers and the Superior while she spoke to me, as if she feared to say too much or too little. My father embraced me with warmth, yet often left me suddenly, as if my presence accused him of something he could not bear.”

“One day, while they were departing, I heard an old domestic say in a low voice to another how singular it was that the eldest son of the new Duke de Monçada should be educated in a convent and brought up for a monastic life, while the younger lived in the palace and was already surrounded by masters suited to his rank. That phrase, ‘monastic life,’ entered my soul like cold steel. In one instant it explained many things that had before only troubled me. It explained why indulgence had been shown me where ordinary boys received discipline, why every praise from the Superior had some pious turn, and why all kindness around me seemed to point not toward freedom, but toward surrender.”

“After that I began to listen with a new understanding. The Superior, whom I saw once each week, never failed to bless me and praise my progress, though I knew it to be only moderate. He would lay his hand upon my head and say, ‘My son, Heaven has chosen you early.’ Or he would look upward and murmur, ‘May this lamb never stray from the fold prepared for him.’ The monks themselves,

when they spoke before me, wore an air of such calm and self-command that one might have believed them already above the troubles of earth. Yet I had eyes, and even then I could see small signs that their peace was acted, not felt."

"The whole house was, in truth, in masquerade from the day I entered it. The petty hatreds, the rivalries, the spying, the hunger for notice, the battles over trifles, all that bitter inward life which grows where men are shut up together without liberty and without honest purpose, was carefully hidden whenever I appeared. The boarders too had learned the art. If I joined them in recreation, they spoke as if play were only a necessary weakness of the body. One would sigh and say, 'What a pity these poor exercises interrupt better things.' Another, with his ball still in hand, would glance toward the chapel and whisper, 'How much happier are they who spend every hour in devotion.' I was young, but I was not entirely deceived."

"Still, at that age, suspicion works more painfully than knowledge. I began to feel that a net had been drawn round me, though I could not yet see all its cords. I noticed too that my mother's religion had become more severe whenever she visited. She spoke to me less of my future in the world and more of the beauty of renunciation. 'To serve God wholly,' she said once, 'is better than rank, pleasure, or inheritance.' I answered with the rashness of youth, 'Then why does my brother keep rank and inheritance while I am asked for God?' She burst into tears and could not answer, and my father, who stood by, turned pale and walked to the window without speaking."

"From that day my unrest increased. I watched every look, every blessing, every accidental word. If a monk praised obedience, I thought he was looking at me. If one of the boys mocked the life of the world, I thought he had been taught the lesson for my hearing. If a father spoke of vocation, sacrifice, or the holy peace of the cloister, I felt as if he were trying a garment on my body before asking whether I would wear it. At last I said to myself, 'They are not educating me. They are preparing me.' And though I was still very young, I felt, with the certainty of fear, that what they were preparing me for was not a career, but a grave with the door left open."

Part 10

“From the hour when I understood that phrase, ‘a monastic life,’” said the Spaniard, “the whole face of my world changed. Every indulgence I had received appeared now in its true light. It had not been kindness, but management. They had softened my path only that I might walk more quietly to the place prepared for me. The very sweetness of their manner became hateful to me, because I felt it was not the sweetness of love, but of design. A child does not easily forgive the moment when affection first seems false.”

“I began to observe my parents more narrowly on their visits. My father, who by nature loved pleasure, display, and the free movement of worldly life, seemed torn in two. At one moment he spoke to me with tenderness, asked about my studies, smiled at some answer of mine, and looked almost ready to say, ‘Come away with me, my son.’ At the next, some thought of my mother, the priests, or his own conscience would seize him, and he would become silent, severe, and absent. My mother’s struggle was more terrible, because it was more inward. She loved me, I know she loved me, but religion had begun in her to take the place of truth itself.”

“She would say, ‘Alonzo, obedience is peace.’ And I answered once, ‘Peace for whom, mother?’ She trembled, but replied, ‘For the soul that submits.’ Then I said, ‘And if the soul submits because others have tied its hands before it could choose?’ She pressed me to her bosom and whispered, ‘Do not speak so. Do not let them hear you.’ That whisper told me more than an hour of open confession could have done. It told me that my danger was real, and that even she, who should have defended me first, had already surrendered half her heart to those who meant to bury me alive.”

“After this, every day of convent life grew more hard to bear. I did not at once rebel outwardly. Youth has a strange pride that often suffers in silence while it is still trying to understand the full size of its misery. I rose when they bade me rise. I knelt, answered, studied, walked, and took part in the daily forms of the

house. But all the while there was in me a new inward resistance. When the Superior blessed me and said, ‘My son, Heaven smiles upon your vocation,’ I answered with my lips, but inwardly I said, ‘Heaven has not spoken to me. Men speak, and call it Heaven.’”

“The state of my father and mother soon became more painful to witness. My father rushed by turns from libertinism to austerity. One week he seemed eager for society, horses, gaming, and the world. The next, he fasted, shut himself up, accused himself of sin, and spoke with monks and directors for hours. In the bitterness of these changes he sometimes reproached my mother, then, in the next hour, joined her in the severest acts of devotion. I used to say to myself, ‘There must be something very wrong in a religion which thus puts outward severity in the place of inward amendment.’ Even then I was of an inquiring spirit, though I scarcely knew where inquiry could lead me.”

“A wild thought took hold of me more than once. I had heard of a book called the Bible, which, though they told us it contained the words of Christ, they never put into our hands. I thought, ‘If this book indeed speaks plainly, why are we kept from it? Why must every truth come to us through those who profit by our ignorance?’ But I had no means of obtaining it. The very servants of our house had already assumed the whispering, sanctimonious character that belongs to people who think themselves near some great act of religion. They crossed themselves when the clock struck. They talked, even in my hearing, of the glory that would redound to God and the Church if my father were induced to sacrifice part of his family to its interests.”

“At length the thing long prepared was brought before me less by direct announcement than by pressure from every side. One ecclesiastic spoke of the beauty of an early vocation. Another said, ‘Happy is the youth whom the world never stains.’ The Superior, laying his hand upon my shoulder, said, ‘My son, God has separated you from common paths.’ Then I answered with some warmth, ‘Has God done so, my father, or men?’ He looked at me steadily and replied, ‘God often works through the piety of parents and the wisdom of the Church.’ I said no more, but I felt, with the clearness of anger, that all was now openly turned against me.”

“Still no one dared force the final word from me. They watched, persuaded, managed, and waited. I think they hoped habit would do their work more safely than violence. If I showed sadness, they called it religious seriousness. If I was silent, they called it recollection. If I shrank from their praises of cloistered life, they called it the modest fear of a soul chosen for great things. Thus every movement of my nature was interpreted in favor of their design. There is no tyranny more perfect than that which makes even our resistance appear another proof of consent.”

“At last my health failed under this inward struggle. I had a fever, and in that fever they believed, or affected to believe, that Heaven had marked me in a singular way. I was told afterwards that in my wanderings I had uttered expressions of horror against the convent and against the life to which I was destined. These they quietly interpreted as the last convulsions of nature before grace should conquer it. While I was still weak, and perhaps not yet fully master of myself, the pressure around me grew closer than before. Those who had formerly persuaded now began to exhort; those who had exhorted began to hint at duty, scandal, family piety, and the danger of resisting what God had made evident.”

“The boarders and younger inmates became instruments of this persecution in their own petty manner. Children and youths in a convent soon learn to breathe the air around them. One came and said, with an affected sweetness, ‘Brother Alonzo, how happy you will be when you belong wholly to God.’ Another whispered, ‘The Superior says your vocation is miraculous.’ A third, not knowing how cruel he was, asked, ‘Will you remember me when you are a saint?’ I turned from them all in disgust. Yet even these little stings had their pain, because they showed how completely the whole place was conspiring to shape my future before my eyes.”

“When my fever left me, I was outwardly calmer, but inwardly more resolved than ever not to submit. My silence now took another character. I no longer reasoned with them. I no longer questioned my parents, or exposed my heart to my mother’s tears. I ate little, spoke little, and kept apart whenever I could.

In the refectory I was silent. In the garden I walked alone. I neither thought, nor felt, nor lived as ordinary youth should live. My being seemed to move like an automaton through the forms of existence. Yet under that stupor one thought remained fixed and burning: I would not be made a monk."

"This very state, which was only the numbness of inward suffering, became in the eyes of the community another charge against me. My abstraction, my mechanical movements, my fixed eyes, my noiseless tread, all began to be spoken of as signs of derangement. At first I believe the monks used this language only because idleness in a convent must always busy itself with some victim. Then, by repetition, they half persuaded themselves into belief. They whispered in the refectory, consulted in the garden, shook their heads as I passed, and pointed after me in the cloister. At last a select party, headed by an old monk of weight and reputation, waited on the Superior to represent the dangerous state of my mind."

"They said I was abstracted, that my words were meaningless, that my devotion was wooden and without spirit, and that my exactness in every form of discipline was itself a mockery of the monastic life. The Superior heard them with indifference. He had held secret intelligence with my family, had pledged himself that I should be a monk, and cared little whether I was called melancholy, mad, or inspired, so long as he gained his end. He dismissed them, but only forbade their open interference. When they retired, they pledged themselves to watch me. By watching, Senhor, they meant to harass, torment, and persecute me until their own malice or my own misery had made me what they had first only pretended to suspect."

Part 11

"From that hour," said the Spaniard, "the whole convent was in movement against me. Their conspiracy did not take the form of open accusation at first. It began in whispers, signs, and petty contrivances, the favorite arms of a society that has little action and much malice. Doors were shut suddenly whenever I was heard approaching. Three or four would stand together near the place where I

walked, whisper earnestly while I drew near, then break off aloud into the most trifling subject, as if to let me understand, while pretending to conceal it, that the true subject of their conference had been myself."

"At first I laughed inwardly at all this. I said to myself, 'Poor imprisoned beings, how hard you labour to give drama and movement to your own vacant misery. You must have a victim, an object, a plot, or you cannot endure your life; and since your walls give you none, you make one of me.' There was a kind of contempt in this thought that supported me for a while. But contempt is not a shield against continual irritation. What is ridiculous in single acts becomes intolerable by repetition, and they had the patience of idleness and the resource of ill-will."

"Soon they drew their little toils more closely about me. If I walked alone, some one was sure to place himself in my path with an appearance of kindness that it was almost impossible to reject openly. They would say in their softest voices, 'My dear brother, you are unhappy. You are wasting away with hidden grief. Would to God our fraternal efforts might lighten your heart. But tell us, from what cause springs this melancholy that consumes you?' At such moments I could not answer. I looked at them, I believe, with eyes full of reproach and often of tears, but I had not a word to give them. The state in which they saw me was itself enough to account for the sorrow with which they reproached me."

"This first method failing, they tried another. They attempted to draw me into the internal parties of the convent. You must know, Senhor, that wherever men are shut up together without liberty, there are parties as surely as there are cells. The subject may be as low as the kitchen, the infirmary, or the turning-box at the gate, yet the heat, the bitterness, and the secret combinations are the same as in courts and camps. They began therefore to pour into my ears complaints of partiality, injustice, and abuse. They told me of a sickly brother compelled to attend matins when the physician had declared the effort fatal, and who died under the burden, while a young favorite in perfect health obtained leave to sleep till nine whenever it pleased him."

"Another said, with great apparent seriousness, that the confessional was

shamefully neglected, and before the solemnity of the complaint could touch me, a second added in the same breath that the turning-box at the gate was also shamefully neglected. This horrible mixture of the highest and the lowest, of mysteries professedly sacred and details utterly mean, revolted me more than the abuses themselves. I said within my heart, 'What kind of life is this, where the soul and a piece of convent machinery can become the matter of one complaint, one whisper, and one faction?' Their effort to make me join them in murmurs only deepened my disgust. I neither answered nor took part, and this new failure made them more eager than before."

"The boarders too, who had once played sanctity before me only to influence my supposed vocation, now continued the same miserable comedy with greater confidence. One asked me whether I was indeed intended for the monastic life. I answered, 'You know I am.' He replied, 'We all hope so for ourselves.' 'Yet I heard you once,' said I to Oliva, 'when you thought I was not within hearing, complain bitterly of the length of the homilies spoken on saints' eves.' The boy crossed himself and answered, 'I was then under temptation. Satan is often permitted to buffet those whose vocation is but beginning, because he fears to lose them.'"

"I turned to another and said, 'And you, Balcastro, have yourself told me that you have no taste for music, and to me the music of the choir appears the least likely to create one.' He gave me a look of oily gravity and replied, 'God has touched my heart since then, dear friend of my soul, and you know there is a promise that the ears of the deaf shall be opened.' 'Where are those words?' said I. 'In the Bible,' he answered. 'The Bible? But we are not permitted to read it.' 'True,' he said with a smile of pious triumph, 'but we have the word of our Superior and the brethren for it, and our spiritual guides must take on themselves the whole responsibility of that state whose enjoyments and punishments they keep in their own hands. But tell me, are you willing to take this life on their word, as well as the next, and resign yourself before you have tried either?'"

"Those words, though spoken by a boy, struck me more deeply than all the sermons of the elders. They showed me that the hypocrisy around me had begun

to act even upon the youngest minds, and that falsehood in a convent ripens early because it is breathed from every lip. I answered with warmth, ‘You only speak to tempt me.’ ‘I do not speak to tempt,’ said he, and would have continued, when the bell interrupted us. At once the whole group changed countenance. They drew up their figures, softened their voices, and put on that composed and sanctified air which the sound of a bell produces as mechanically in a convent as the tightening of strings upon a puppet.”

“As we went toward the church they whispered to one another, but in tones carefully pitched to reach my ear. I heard them say, ‘It is vain that he struggles with grace. Never was there a more decided vocation. God never obtained a more glorious victory. Already he has the look of a child of heaven: the monastic gait, the downcast eye, the very motion of his arms imitating the sign of the cross, and the folds of his mantle falling by divine instinct almost into the form of a monk’s habit.’ And all this while my gait was broken by inward agitation, my face flushed and often lifted upward in distress, and my arms employed only in catching and arranging a cloak that had slipped from my shoulder. Their false interpretation of every natural movement made me feel as if my own body had been taken from me.”

“That evening, for the first time, I measured my danger fully and began to think how it might be resisted. I had no vocation for the monastic life; of that I felt certain while the sun was up and the eyes of others were on me. But silence, solitude, and night alter even certainty when the soul is young and besieged on every side by spiritual terror. After vespers, and the evening exercise in my cell, I began to ask myself whether my very repugnance might not be sinful. If all around me called it grace, was I resisting grace? If those I loved best submitted me to this destiny, was it possible they all mistook the will of God?”

“I lay awake for many hours, praying with the utmost earnestness I had then learned. I begged God to enlighten me, not to let me oppose His will if it were truly declared, but to show that will to me plainly and without deceit. I prayed too, that if He had not called me to such a life, He would support me through whatever suffering might be inflicted on me rather than let me profane religion by extorted

vows and a divided heart. To make those prayers more effectual, as I then foolishly thought, I offered them first through the Virgin, then through the patron saint of our family, and then through the saint on whose eve I had been born. Before morning I had at least gained what seemed to me resolution; alas, I knew not then what strength would be required."

"I went to matins without having closed my eyes, but I felt, or imagined that I felt, more composed than before. That day I performed all the exercises of the house with unusual exactness, because I already understood the necessity of dissimulation, the fatal lesson of conventual life. At noon we dined, and soon after I was told that my father's carriage had arrived and that I was permitted to walk for an hour on the banks of the Manzanares. To my surprise, my father himself was in the carriage. The sight of him filled me with sudden joy. He was at least a layman, and I said to myself, as I sprang forward to meet him, 'He may still have a heart.'"

Part 12

My father sat silent for some moments after I had spoken. The carriage rolled on beside the Manzanares, and the sound of the wheels seemed, in that pause, louder than any human voice could have been. At last he said, without looking at me, "Alonzo, you speak with a violence that proves how much you need guidance." I answered, "No, father, it proves only that I have still a heart that is my own." He turned then and fixed on me a look in which anger, shame, and pity were all struggling together. "You do not know," he said, "what has been resolved for your good, for the honor of your family, and for the peace of all who love you."

"Then tell me plainly," I cried. "Do not wrap my life in phrases. If my good means chains, say chains. If my peace means a grave with prayers over it, say that too. I will hear the worst sooner than this soft cruelty." He bit his lip and seemed unable for a moment either to command or persuade me. Then he said, with forced calm, "The will of Heaven, the wishes of your parents, and the judgment of wise men have all pointed to one path." I answered at once, "Then Heaven has been

too often spoken through mouths that profit by my burial."

My father started as if I had struck him. Yet even then he did not break wholly into anger. "Alonzo," he said more gently, "you are young, proud, and miserable, and misery makes every voice sound like an enemy. You mistake kindness for conspiracy." "Because kindness has been used as conspiracy," I answered. "From the first day I entered those walls, every indulgence, every blessing, every pious word has moved me one step nearer a fate I never chose. They praised me to soften me, watched me to shape me, and lied to me till I learned to lie in answer. If that is kindness, father, it is the kindness with which men stroke an animal before they bind it." He covered his eyes with one hand, and I saw that my words had gone home.

For a while he made one more effort to keep the language of authority and religion. He spoke of duty, submission, family honor, and the blessedness of a life given to God. I listened till I could bear it no more. Then I took his hand and said in a lower voice, "Father, look at me. I ask not for wealth, rank, or favor. Give them all to my brother. Leave me without inheritance, without name, without a roof. Let me live by my own labor, or beg my bread in the streets. But do not make me a monk. Do not shut me up among men whom I neither trust nor love, and then call my living burial a sacrifice." He drew back his hand, but tears stood in his eyes, and that sight nearly broke my heart.

The carriage returned in silence. When I stepped down at the convent gate, I looked back once more, hoping for some sign, some motion, some word that might tell me the struggle in him had ended in mercy. He only leaned back in the carriage and raised his hand weakly, as one who dismisses a petitioner whose cause he cannot grant. I entered the convent like a man who feels the door of a prison close upon him more certainly than ever before. Yet, strange as it may sound, I carried away from that interview not despair only, but hope also. A father who had listened in pain might still remember in secret what a father ought to do.

For six days I lived between expectation and torment. Every sound of wheels made my heart leap. Every step in the passage seemed like a message from home. I went through the exercises of the house with outward exactness, but inwardly I

was all disorder. In imagination I saw my father again and again. Sometimes he came to release me with tears and open arms. Sometimes he came stern, yet willing to save me if I would only be humble. In those inward dramas, however, even while I enjoyed them, I always felt that the persons did not speak with the life I wished. I put into their mouths words that in truth I longed to utter myself.

On the sixth day I heard a carriage stop before the convent, and I knew the sound at once. I was in the hall almost before I was summoned. I was taken not to a walk, but to my father's palace, and there I was shown into a room where sat my father, my mother, and the Director. All three were seated, and all were silent as statues. I approached, kissed the hands of my parents, and stood waiting. My father was the first to speak, but every tone of his voice told me he was repeating a lesson painfully learned. "My son," he said, "I have sent for you not to prolong useless struggle, but to announce my resolution. The will of Heaven and of your parents has devoted you to its service. Your resistance can only make us miserable, not change what must be."

I gasped for breath, and my father, mistaking my silence for an attempt to reply, hurried on. "All opposition is fruitless," he said. "Your destiny is decided. You may embitter it, but you cannot alter it. Be reconciled, my child, to the will of Heaven and of those who have authority over you." Then, weary of his own task, he half rose and added, "This reverend person can explain to you better than I the necessity of obedience." At once the Director leaned forward with that soft voice which in him always covered some hard design. "Yes, my son," he said, "since I last saw you, I have urged every consideration that could touch the hearts of your noble parents for your true interests."

"My true interests?" I repeated. "Father, mother, if I have not an advocate in your hearts, no advocate can help me. And if I must plead for my own life, why must I plead through a man who never had a child, never loved one, and never can judge what passes between a parent and a son?" My father flushed and said, "You forget yourself. Respect is due to a minister of the Church." "Respect," I answered, turning toward the Director, "is due to truth, not to hypocrisy dressed in a habit." The Director crossed himself with beautiful composure and said,

“Senhor, let not me be the cause of dissension in a family whose honor I value next to the interests of religion. Let him speak. The remembrance of my crucified Master will support me under insult.” At those words, which mixed Heaven with his own vile theatre of humility, I lost all command.

I seized his habit and cried, “Hypocrite, deceiver, poisoner of natural love!” My father sprang between us. My mother shrieked so wildly that servants rushed in from every side. The room was instantly full of confusion, but through it all the Director continued his part with perfect skill. He seemed to protect my father from me, while in truth he was protecting himself. He called on sacred names, spoke of his willingness to offer every injury as a sacrifice, and even dared to name the saints, the Virgin, and the blood of Christ in one breath with his own abject pretended meekness. The contrast between his words and his inward triumph drove me almost beside myself.

My mother was carried out still screaming. My father, who loved her deeply, and who now saw her terror, my violence, and the ruined peace of his house all together before him, lost in one instant what little self-command he had left. He drew his sword. I looked at him, at the trembling hand that held it, at the priest shrinking behind him and yet ruling him, and I burst into a laugh. It was not a laugh of joy or mockery, but of a mind strained past tears and argument into something colder and more dreadful. My father stopped as if the sound itself had struck the weapon from his hand.

Part 13

My father stopped as if the sound had struck the sword from his hand. I opened my arms wider and bared my breast to him. “Strike,” I said. “Strike here. Let this be the end of monastic power. It began by breaking nature, and it may end by killing a son with a father’s hand. You have already given your first-born like Esau. Give Jacob too, and complete the holy work.” My father, who had been wild a moment before, now fell back from me, not in mercy, but in horror.

He looked at me as if he no longer knew what stood before him. My fever,

my rage, my long inward struggle, and the violence of that scene had changed my face so completely that I seemed, I think, almost convulsed. “Demon,” he muttered. “And who has made me so?” I cried at once. “He has, the man who fed my passions only to use them. He who would call me mad because one movement of nature has broken through his nets. My father, all the order of life has been turned upside down in this house by one corrupt priest. By his means my brother is buried alive. By his means our birth has become a curse to my mother and to you. Since he entered our family, what have we known but division, fear, and misery?”

I pointed to the sword still hanging uncertain in my father’s hand. “Who put that weapon there?” I said. “Was it nature that armed a father against his child, whose crime was only that he pleaded for his brother? Send this man away. Let us stand together, you and I, for one moment without his shadow between us. If I do not humble myself before you then, if I do not speak as a son should speak, cast me off forever.” My father trembled visibly. The Director, who had until then acted humility with admirable skill, now saw that the balance might shift against him and began to tremble too, though only inwardly.

“My father,” I continued, dropping on one knee before him, “look at us both. We stand together before your heart. Judge between us. He can never know what it is to be husband or father. He never held a child in his arms. He never wept over one. He never feared for one. How then shall he judge between a parent and a son? If he speaks to you of duty, ask him first whether he has ever known love.” These words, spoken from the very wound in my heart, moved even the servants, who stood round in fear and confusion, uncertain whether they were witnessing a crime, a prayer, or some kind of judgment.

My father’s sword sank slowly to his side. He looked first at me, then at the Director. My mother was absent now, but the memory of her shrieks still shook the room. At last he said in a broken voice, “Leave us.” I thought he spoke to the attendants, and I rose half hopeful. But the Director, recovering himself with infernal readiness, answered before the servants had even moved. “Alas,” he said softly, “this is another proof. Violence, argument, laughter, tears, submission,

defiance, all in a moment. The unhappy young man's reason is overthrown." My father started and turned to him. "No," I cried, "do not take that word from his lips. Once spoken, it will become my prison forever."

But the poison had already entered. The Director drew himself up with sorrowful dignity and said, "I have long feared it. I feared to wound a father's heart by speaking too soon. Yet now Heaven itself has extorted the truth from circumstances. See his eye, hear his language, mark the fearful rapidity of his transitions. He is mad." "He is mad," repeated my father faintly, as men repeat a thing not because they believe it, but because they dread it. The servants, half frightened and half eager to agree with authority, began at once to echo the cry. "Mad," some whispered. "The young lord is mad," said others aloud.

That word completed what argument could not. I was seized on every side. Their violence roused mine. I struck, struggled, shouted, and resisted with the blind force of a creature driven to despair. They dragged me to my apartment, and there, because resistance always breeds more resistance, I soon became exactly what they wished to show me to be. I tore down hangings, broke whatever came to hand, and when they bound me, I bit at the cords and snapped them in a fury that indeed must have looked like madness. A boy scarcely recovered from fever, already tortured in mind, betrayed by those who should have defended him, may well be pardoned if at that hour he acted less like a reasoner than like a wild beast taken in a net.

I was kept confined for many days. During that confinement I recovered the only powers that usually grow stronger in solitude, inflexible resolution and deep dissimulation. The first taught me that I must never yield. The second taught me that open resistance only strengthened my enemies. I lay still, spoke little, and let them believe what they wished. At times I heard whispers in the passages, and knew that my condition was discussed like that of some dangerous creature. At other times I heard prayers said almost under my door, as if the walls themselves were infected by my presence.

On the twelfth day a servant came to summon me. He bowed and said that if my health permitted it, my father wished to see me. I followed him with the

obedience of a machine, determined to show neither heat nor sorrow. I found my father with the Director at his side, as always. My father hurried through a few words of satisfaction at my recovery and then asked whether I had reflected on our last conversation. “I have reflected,” I answered. “And to good purpose, I trust,” he said. “I hope so,” said I. The Director then joined in with smooth politeness, spoke of indifferent matters, and watched me all the while as a man watches a snare to see whether it will hold.

My calmness deceived them. My father, worn out by conflict, was content with the appearance of peace. My mother wept and called herself happy. The Director smiled inwardly under his mask of holy gentleness. A month then passed in profound but treacherous quiet on all sides. They believed me subdued. I let them believe it. In truth I was only learning the terrible lesson of the cloister, that when force fails, one must pass into secrecy. During that time I observed more clearly than ever how deeply the Director had entered into every part of our family life. The palace itself had become almost a convent. Servants whispered, counted beads, and crossed themselves at every hour. Penance, spiritual direction, confessions, and private rules had taken the place of ordinary affection and ordinary truth.

In the midst of this false peace, one consolation unexpectedly reached me. A letter, conveyed with great secrecy through a domestic connected with the porter, came from my brother Juan. I read it with trembling hands. He wrote that he had not lost a moment in consulting my interests. He had learned that there might be a way to reclaim vows extorted by fraud and terror. He confessed, with a bitterness that pierced me, that he would rather see me rot in a convent than appear publicly as a witness of our mother’s shame, but even with that limitation he now saw a possible road to my freedom. The matter, he said, might be pursued in a civil court. I must prepare a strong memorial. He would provide money, means, and secret delivery. “I commend you,” he wrote, “to the keeping not of the God of monks and directors, but of the God of nature and mercy.”

Those words gave me back life. I destroyed each fragment of his letter as soon as I had read it, some by swallowing, some by tearing and hiding them, for

no trace must remain. Yet what they said could not be destroyed. Hope, after long misery, is not like ordinary joy. It is more violent, more dangerous, and almost more difficult to bear. I walked in the garden and felt as if the sky itself had opened. I heard the doors grate on their hinges and said inwardly, “You shall soon open for me forever.” From that hour I began to prepare. I needed paper, caution, patience, and a face that could deceive men who thought themselves masters of deceit. And all these, in that unhappy place, I resolved to find.

Part 14

“The first thing I did after receiving my brother’s letter,” said the Spaniard, “was to destroy every fragment of it that might betray us. The first piece I swallowed the moment I had read it. The others, which came at intervals and in smaller portions, I tore, hid, or consumed as best I could, taking advantage of those slight indulgences which my attendance on the infirmary allowed me. To live in a convent is to study concealment as other men study language or war. Every favor granted to one’s body must be turned, if possible, into some service rendered to the soul’s secret purpose.”

“From that hour my life had an object again. Hope, which in ordinary circumstances comes like a mild light, entered my prison like fire. I could scarcely contain myself. I walked in the garden and thought the sky looked freer than before. When the doors jarred on their hinges, I said within myself, ‘You shall soon open to me forever.’ Even the sight of those who hated me became less painful, because I now looked on them not as my masters for life, but as obstacles that time and courage might yet overcome. Yet this very hope made me more cautious, because I knew that one careless gesture might destroy all.”

“Lent had now begun, and the whole community was preparing for the great confession. There was in the convent a kind of silent bustle, a hidden movement, more favorable to my purpose than open disorder could have been. Every man shut himself up, prayed longer than usual before the saints, reviewed his conscience, magnified trifles into offences, and tried to gather materials for a

confession that might sound weighty in the ears of the Superior. Men weary of monotony are glad to find guilt if guilt can give importance to their lives. I, who had real matter enough upon my heart, was the only one whose paper did not concern himself."

"Following my brother's advice, I began to ask for paper on the pretence of writing out my confession. The request was natural at first, and easily granted. But when the demand was repeated day after day, sheet after sheet, quire after quire, curiosity awoke. In a convent every repeated action becomes suspicious, because the poverty of events gives value to the smallest irregularity. Some said, 'He is writing the history of his family, and will pour it all into the confessor's ear.' Others said, 'He has long been in a state of alienation; he is accounting to God for it.' Others, with that yawn of malice which often passes for wit among idle men, said, 'He is weary of the monastic life, and is writing an account of his ennui. That indeed may well require much paper.'"

"The truth was very different. Every page I covered was a page of accusation, not against myself, but against them. I set down the constraint under which I had been placed, the arts by which my will had been bent, the persecution I had endured, the falsehood of those who called violence vocation, and the means by which I had been driven to the edge of madness. It was a dangerous work, because I had to write with warmth enough to convince a civil tribunal, yet with caution enough not to bring upon my family dishonor beyond what was necessary for my freedom. My brother's words rang in my ear continually: 'Not a word of our unfortunate mother.'"

"The Superior soon began to watch me in silence. He was too prudent to question me openly while he still lacked proof, but his vigilance became more exact, and that of the discreet brethren, whom he used for every dark purpose, became more restless also. Here, I confess, I made a grave mistake. It was impossible, even in a convent, that the most loaded conscience should require the quantity of paper I consumed. Their suspicions, once awakened, were fed by every fresh request. I knew this, and yet could not draw back, for my memorial had to be full, clear, and strong, or all our efforts would be thrown away."

“Another error I committed was being wholly unprepared when the time of the great confession came close. Hints began to reach me on every side, half jesting and half severe. As we walked in the garden, one would say, ‘Brother, you have made ample preparations for the holy tribunal.’ I answered, ‘I have prepared myself.’ Then another added, ‘We expect much edification from the result.’ I said, ‘I trust you will receive it.’ Others were more direct, and asked whether, among the multitudinous offences that burdened my conscience, I had not reserved something better confessed privately to the Superior, who would guide and console me. I thanked them and said I would consider it, while all the time my thoughts were far from consolation.”

“A few nights before the great confession, I had to entrust the last packet of my memorial to the porter. Hitherto our communications had passed unsuspected. I had received and answered my brother’s letters with a secrecy almost miraculous in such a place. But on this last night, when I put the packet into the porter’s hand, I was struck with a change in his appearance that filled me with alarm. He had once been a strong, healthy man. Now, even in the moonlight, I could see that he was wasted to a shadow, and his hands trembled so much that he could hardly take the papers from me.”

“I said, ‘What is the matter? You look as if sickness had consumed you.’ He answered in a voice broken by fear, ‘Can you ask? I am withered to a spectre by the office I have been bribed to perform. Do you know what I risk? A prison for life, or rather for death, perhaps even a denunciation to the Inquisition. Every line I carry from you or to you seems written against my own soul. I tremble when I meet you. When I sit in my place, I think every footstep in the cloister is coming to summon me before the Superior. In choir, your voice sounds in my ear as if accusing me. When I lie down at night, I see hell opening, and the saints frown on me from their niches.’”

“His terror became so violent that he went on like a man delirious. ‘Do not betray me,’ he cried. ‘Say at least that I was only an agent. Say that you bribed me. Do not let them light those fires for me. I wake from sleep by my own cries. I see Judas on the wall wherever I turn. I have no rest, no appetite, no courage left.

Would to God you had escaped long ago, and that I had never helped you, then perhaps both of us might yet have avoided eternal ruin.' I tried to pacify him, assured him that this was the last packet, and swore that I would never again ask him to carry anything for me. Nothing else could calm him. He went away at last somewhat easier, and I remained more oppressed than before."

"This man was faithful, but he was timid, and what reliance can we place on a being whose right hand serves us while his whole soul trembles to betray us? The danger of my position now appeared multiplied every hour. Still, there was no retreat. The memorial was gone. My confession, if it may be so called, had been prepared, not for the confessor's ear, but for the law. I had only to preserve my composure until the great confession should pass, and then wait the effect of my brother's diligence. Such waiting is harder than labor. Labor consumes the body, but waiting feeds upon the heart."

"The porter died within a few weeks, and I believe his last fidelity was secured only by the delirium of his final illness. During those last days I suffered horribly. His death, under such circumstances, and the unchristian relief I felt when he could no longer be forced to bear witness against me, seemed to me themselves proofs of the unnatural state to which I had been reduced. Yet as soon as he was dead, and my packet already gone some days before, hope returned. Neither voice nor paper, I thought, could now rise to accuse me. My brother, zealous and ingenious, would surely find some other means of continuing our intercourse. I began, for the first time in many weeks, to breathe more freely."

"That false calm lasted only a few days. On the fourth evening after the confession, I was sitting alone in my cell when I heard an unusual bustle through the convent. The bell was rung. The new porter seemed in great agitation. The Superior hurried first to the parlour, then to his own apartment. Some of the elder monks were summoned. The younger whispered in the galleries and shut their doors violently. In a household of ordinary life such movements would mean little, but in a convent, where monotony magnifies every sound into an event, they struck on my heart like blows. I said to myself, 'Something is going on.' Then I added, with a certainty that turned me cold, 'Something is going on against me.'"

“Late in the evening an order came that I should attend the Superior in his apartment. I answered that I was ready. Two minutes later the order was changed, and I was told to remain in my cell and await the Superior there. This sudden alteration filled me with an indefinite fear more horrible than any distinct danger I had yet known. I walked up and down, repeating, ‘My God, protect me. My God, strengthen me.’ Then even while I prayed, I doubted whether the cause in which I was engaged deserved the protection I implored. In the midst of this dreadful uncertainty, the door opened, and the Superior entered with the same four monks who had once before stood round him in that ominous silence. Before I could speak, he dashed some papers upon my table and cried, ‘Is that your writing?’ I cast one terrified glance over them. They were a copy of my memorial.”

Part 15

“That is your writing,” the Superior said again, and his voice was harder now because he had seen my fear. I answered, “It is the copy of my writing, and I ask my right to read the advocate’s reply.” He threw the paper toward me with anger, and I bent over it, though my eyes were shaking too much to read steadily. Yet I saw enough in the first lines to know that hope was still alive. That one glimpse gave me strength at once. The Superior walked up and down my cell while I tried to hold the pages before me like a man holding a light in wind.

Suddenly he struck the table so violently that the papers shook in my hands. “Wretch,” he cried, “when did such papers ever pollute this house? When were we ever insulted by legal advocates inside these walls?” I answered, “I weighed all that against my misery.” He stopped and turned on me. “Misery? Do you call the convent life misery, the only life that offers peace here and salvation hereafter?” Because he spoke in such furious passion while praising peace, his own words destroyed themselves. My courage rose with his anger, and I said, “My father, my repugnance to this life is invincible. If I have broken the decorum of the house, I regret it. But the true violence was done by those who forced me into it.”

He tried another way and asked, in a quieter tone, “To what do you object?

Not to your duties, for you perform them well. Not to your treatment, for it has been indulgent. Not to the community, for all are ready to love you. Then what do you complain of?" I answered, "Of the life itself. That includes all. I am not fit to be a monk." He spoke then of courts on earth and judgment in heaven. "Even if all the courts in the world release you," he said, "your conscience never will. In your last hour it will accuse you of a broken vow." I answered at once, "Its voice will never be so terrible as it was on the day that vow was extorted from me."

He repeated the word "extorted" with horror, and I went on, for by then I had no reason to soften anything. "Yes," I said, "extorted. Your anger, your pleadings, your threats did nothing, until you threw my mother's body before my feet." He answered, "And do you reproach me for zeal in the cause of your salvation?" "I do not wish to reproach you," I said. "I only tell you the truth. You know what I have done, and you know I will not rest while any hope remains. I found means to send my papers from the heart of a convent. Judge from that what my resolution is, and how useless it will be to oppose me further." He was silent then, and I believed I had moved him more than all my past resistance had done.

So I made one last proposal, desperate but plain. "If you wish to spare the house the shame of my appeal," I said, "leave some door unguarded and let me escape. I will trouble you no more." That suggestion touched the deepest point of his rigid nature. He recoiled as if I had invited him into damnation itself. "Would you make me your accomplice?" he cried. "Apostate, do you stretch out your hand not only to save yourself but to drag me down with you?" Then he began once more to walk wildly through the cell, crying again and again, "What will the world say? What will Madrid say? What will become of us?" I answered, "An obscure monk is of little importance beyond these walls. They will forget me. They are not responsible for my salvation."

Those words only drove him higher into rage. At last he stopped before me and said, "I give you five minutes. Renounce this horrible resolution at once." "Five thousand minutes would not change me," I answered. He lifted his hand and said, "Then tremble, lest you should not have life enough left to see the fulfilment of your impious hopes." With that he rushed out of the cell, carrying away the

light. I was left in sudden darkness, and what I felt in those moments is almost beyond description. In the blackness I saw chains, scourges, vaults, and nameless punishments. I heard no friendly voice, and the silence of a house full of men seemed more dreadful than emptiness.

At first fear mastered reason completely. Then, little by little, hope argued in me like a desperate sophist. “They dare not murder me,” I said to myself. “They dare not bury me alive. I have appealed to the court. They must produce me when called.” I repeated these thoughts again and again until they almost calmed me. At that exact moment the door opened, and the Superior re-entered with the same four monks. My eyes were weak from darkness, but I saw at once that they carried a rope and a piece of sackcloth. In one instant all my reasoning broke. I thought the rope was for my throat and the cloth for my body when they had done with me.

I fell on my knees and said, “I am in your power. I am guilty in your eyes. Do what you mean to do, but do not keep me long in pain.” The Superior either did not hear me or would not. “Now you are in the posture that becomes you,” he said. Those words, being less terrible than what I feared, made me prostrate myself to the ground. Fear had made me utterly submissive. Then the monks, fearing perhaps that such humility might soften him, spoke all together in that dreadful unison I had heard before. “Reverend father,” they said, “do not be deceived by this false submission. The time for mercy is past.”

I went from one to another on my knees and begged them like a condemned man begging his executioners. “Brother Clement, Brother Justin, why do you urge him on?” I cried. “What have I done to you? Have I not interceded for you myself when your small faults were noticed?” They answered only, “This wastes time.” Then the Superior said, “I will still give you one final chance. Will you renounce your resolution to recall your vows?” At once all my fear changed back into strength. I rose and stood upright before them. “Never,” I said. “I stand at the bar of God.” “You have renounced God,” he answered. “Then I can only hope,” I said, “that God has not renounced me.”

He gave a sign, and the four monks came on me. I uttered one cry and then

submitted, for I believed that what followed would be my death. But instead of putting the rope round my neck, they bound my arms. Then they stripped off my habit and covered me with the sackcloth. I confess to you that I felt, for one strange instant, almost disappointed. I had prepared myself for death, but not for something slower and perhaps worse. A sudden end may be met with one last act of courage. A long descent into suffering breaks courage piece by piece. Bound like a criminal and dressed in that coarse cloth, I was dragged out of the cell and along the gallery.

They took me down the stairs toward the church, then across the aisle, then through a dark passage I had never noticed before. At the end stood a low door. One look at it told me more than words could have done, and I cried, “You will not immure me there. You will not throw me into a hole to rot in damp and be eaten by vermin. Remember that you are answerable for my life.” At those words they closed round me, waiting for the struggle that would justify greater violence. I gave it to them at last. I cried for help and fought wildly. At once the signal was given. A lay-brother rang the bell, that dreadful bell which orders every monk into his cell whenever something extraordinary and shameful is being done in the house.

The sound of it destroyed my last hope. In that dim passage, with one weak taper burning and the faces around me pale and fixed, I felt as if no living being remained in the world except those who were hurrying me to doom. They dragged me down a few steps below the level of the passage to the door itself. The keys turned with difficulty, and their delay only made my terror worse. I imagined that I was to be the first victim shut into that place forever. When at last the heavy door opened, grating against the stone, they pushed me in. By the small light at the entrance I saw a vaulted room of stone, a block serving as a table, a crucifix, a skull, a loaf, a pitcher of water, and a mat on the floor.

They threw me down there and turned to leave. I no longer struggled, but I begged for one thing with all the force that remained in me. “Leave me a light,” I said. “If not for comfort, then to defend myself from the creatures that must live here. If not for that, then to find the crucifix when I pray.” Even while I spoke, I

saw large crawling things disturbed by the light and moving on the wall. But the monks said nothing. Their whole strength was bent on closing the door again. “Leave me even a little light,” I cried, “if only that I may look at the skull and know where I am.” The door shut. The lock turned. I heard their steps retreat, and then there was nothing but darkness.

Strange as it may seem, I slept. It was not peace, only exhaustion. But when I woke, the horror was greater than before, because I woke into the darkness of day. I had lost not only liberty, but the common mercy of knowing morning from evening. From that hour the only measure of time left to me was the daily step of the monk who brought bread and water. I felt my way to the crucifix again and again, kissed it in the dark, and tried to make prayer my only order of life. I fought also with the reptiles that crawled over the floor and across my mat. I guarded my bread from them, my water from them, and my reason from the silence. Thus began my life in that hole, where every hour seemed at once empty, endless, and full of teeth.

Part 16

In that dungeon, the Spaniard said, his mind did not die at once, because hope would not let it die. He kept telling himself that his papers were safe, that Juan had the best advocate in Madrid, and that even monks would not dare to murder a man whose appearance might at any moment be required by a civil court. Against these thoughts came others far darker. He imagined himself murdered in some secret convent way, buried without noise, and lost before the law could even ask for him. Thus hope and despair took turns at his heart, and neither had mercy on him.

Yet misery, even in such a place, found him work to do. During the brief opening of the door when bread and water were brought, he arranged the crucifix so that he could always find it by touch. When he woke, and did not know whether it was midnight or noon, he reached out for it like a drowning man finding wood in black water. He prayed at random hours, because all hours had become one to

him. “My God is with me in this darkness,” he would whisper. “He has suffered too, and He can pity me.”

He told John that those prayers, offered in silence and obscurity, felt truer than any he had spoken before altar lights, incense, and public ceremony. There, in the choir, he had often felt forced into words that belonged more to habit than to the heart. But in that hole below the church, he had only his misery, and misery cannot easily be theatrical. When he touched the crucifix and kissed it in the dark, he felt at least that he was not deceiving God. The thought gave him some strength, though not peace. Peace was impossible in such a place.

Besides prayer, he had other occupations, lower and more miserable, but no less necessary. The reptiles that crawled from the walls and over the floor gave him a warfare as constant as it was disgusting. He moved his mat again and again, but they followed him. When he placed it against the wall, the cold crawling of their swollen bodies often woke him from sleep, and still more often made him shudder while awake. He struck at them, shouted at them, and used the mat itself like a poor shield. Above all, he guarded his bread and his pitcher from their foul touch with a care that became almost his whole life.

He said with bitter truth that he had more to do in his dungeon than in his cell. There, in former days, solitude had bred thoughts, regrets, and inward poisons. Here, at least, there was a visible enemy, and the body could fight what the mind could not solve. Even his absurd efforts to keep the creatures from his food gave him something like action. It is one of misery’s darkest jokes that a man may be grateful for any task that distracts him, however low. The Spaniard knew that this warfare was ridiculous, yet he clung to it because the alternative was blank darkness and thought.

He found another occupation in counting time. Having lost all morning and evening, he tried to rebuild the day out of minutes and seconds. He sat on the mat and counted to sixty again and again, first fearing that he was rushing faster than the clock, then fearing he had counted too slowly. He would tell himself that an hour must still contain sixty minutes, whether suffered in light or darkness. Sleep often broke this effort, but he began again whenever he woke. In that way he tried

to force order upon a place made to destroy it.

Had that life continued much longer, he believed it would have turned him into some poor human clock, sounding time without sense of it. But on the fourth day, as he reckoned by the visits of the monk, something changed. The man who brought the bread and water hesitated before leaving. He seemed almost unwilling to speak, as if even the delivery of a hopeful message was contrary to his habit and his religion. At length he said that the Superior was moved by the sufferer's condition, that God had touched his heart, and that he was permitted to leave the dungeon. The Spaniard laughed bitterly while repeating these words, for he knew well enough how little either pity or grace had to do with convent discipline.

Yet the words themselves needed no defense. He had scarcely heard them before he was on his feet. He rushed from the dungeon with a cry so full of joy that it startled the monk almost as much as if a dead man had spoken. The passage outside, gloomy and narrow as it was, seemed to him wider than a plain. Air, stone, and even the convent walls looked like liberty after the hole from which he had escaped. He dropped on his knees in the passage and thanked God for light, for movement, and for the simple power of breathing without terror pressing from every side.

But the body, after great extremity, often receives relief like a blow. As he poured out these thanks, his head began to turn. The light itself, long denied him, entered his senses like wine taken by a starving man. He had fed on darkness, and daylight was too much. He fell in the passage and remembered nothing for many hours afterward. When he came to himself again, he was back in his cell.

The cell appeared almost luxurious after the dungeon. Above all, it had daylight. He believed that daylight restored him more than the food and cordials now given to him with unusual care. He lay still and thought over the change. It did not seem to him likely that the Superior's heart had softened of its own will. Much more probable was the explanation suggested by Juan's last message, that some legal step had been taken which made it dangerous to keep him hidden. If the advocate had demanded an interview, or if some higher authority had pressed the matter, the convent might well have thought it prudent to draw him again into

sight.

Toward evening several monks came to his cell and spoke as if nothing extraordinary had occurred. They mentioned trifles, affected to consider his absence no more than an illness, and avoided every direct word that might reveal their fear. He matched their falsehood with his own silence and did not undeceive them. One of them let fall, as if by accident, that his father and mother, overwhelmed by grief at the scandal caused by his appeal, had left Madrid. This news pierced him more deeply than he showed. He asked quietly how long he had been "ill," and when they answered, "Four days," his suspicion strengthened at once.

That answer fitted too well with Juan's earlier calculation. If the advocate had promised to demand access on the fifth day, then his release on the fourth was no miracle of mercy, but a precaution of policy. The monks soon withdrew, yet before the night had grown old another visitor came. It was the Superior, alone. He approached the bed with a calm face, and when the prisoner tried to rise, he desired him to remain still, then sat down beside him with that composed and searching look which in him always meant conflict covered by order.

"You have now found," said the Superior, "that we have it in our power to punish." The Spaniard answered, "I never doubted it." The Superior continued, "Before you provoke that power to an extremity you will not endure, I come to require you to resign this desperate appeal against your vows. It can end only in dishonoring God and disappointing yourself." The Spaniard told John that he then understood the whole purpose of the visit. They had not drawn him from the dungeon to spare him, but to bargain over his fear. They wished to make suffering itself plead on their side.

He answered as plainly as before. He said that what had passed had changed neither his conscience nor his resolution. He said that punishment might terrify, but could not create vocation. He said further that the appeal had now advanced too far to be recalled merely because monks wished it buried. The Superior listened with outward calm, but the calmness was that of a man holding down violence, not of one convinced. So they faced each other again, the one with

spiritual phrases and hidden force, the other with bodily weakness and a will that had grown harder in darkness. And the Spaniard felt, as he lay there in the returning light, that his true imprisonment was not ended, but had only changed its form.

Part 17

The Superior sat beside him for some moments after that last answer, as if still hoping that weakness, gratitude, or fear might yet bend a will which open force had failed to break. At length he said, “And this is your final determination?” The Spaniard answered, “It is. I implore you to spare yourself and me all further importunity. It will be useless.” The Superior then asked, in a lower and more careful tone, “And you will insist tomorrow on your right to an interview with the advocate?” “I shall claim it,” said Monçada. “It will not be necessary, however,” replied the Superior, “to mention to him your late punishment.” Those words revealed more than all his former speech, and the Spaniard at once understood that fear for the convent, not pity for its prisoner, had brought that quiet visit to his bed.

“It may not be necessary,” he answered, “but it may be very expedient.” The Superior started and said, “Would you violate the secrets of the house while you are yet within its walls?” Monçada replied, “Pardon me, my father, but if you are so anxious for concealment, then you must know that power has been abused. It is not your discipline that I would disclose, but its violation.” The Superior remained silent, and the Spaniard continued, “Though I have suffered, it is you who are guilty, if guilt there be.” At that the monk rose at once and left the cell without blessing, threat, or farewell. The quiet of his departure was more ominous than anger.

The next morning Monçada went to matins as usual. The service began and went on in its ordinary form, and for a short time he almost hoped that the matter would pass in silence. But when the community were about to rise from their knees, the Superior struck the desk violently with his hand and commanded them

to remain where they were. Then, in a voice that shook the church, he cried, “The intercession of this whole community with God is implored for a monk who, abandoned by the Spirit of Heaven, is about to commit an act dishonorable to God, disgraceful to the Church, and destructive to his own soul.” At those words all the monks sank down again, shuddering as men shudder who wish to feel terror because terror is expected of them. Monçada was kneeling among them when the Superior called out his name aloud.

“Rise, wretch,” he thundered. “Rise, and pollute not our incense with your unhallowed breath.” The Spaniard rose, trembling, burning with shame, and scarcely able to see for confusion. No one looked directly at him, yet he felt every eye in the church turned inwardly upon him. He had faced dungeon darkness, hunger, and threat with more firmness than he now felt under this public exposure. For bodily pain is often easier to endure than a spectacle made of one’s soul before enemies. He withdrew at once to his cell, where he remained in a state of feverish agitation until a monk came to summon him to the parlour.

The advocate was waiting there, but the interview was spoiled before it began. A monk stood by order of the Superior as witness to all that should pass, and though the lawyer plainly wished him gone, he had no power to dismiss him. Whenever the conversation touched on any important detail, the monk interrupted. If Monçada stated a fact, he contradicted it. If the advocate asked a useful question, he declared that the rules of the parlour did not permit such discussion. More than once he gave the prisoner the lie outright, and did so with the composure of a man who thinks falsehood lawful when used in defense of religious power.

The Spaniard then saw that silence would ruin him. Forced at last into self-defense, he spoke of the punishment lately inflicted on him. The monk could not deny that some severe proceeding had taken place, and Monçada’s wasted face and livid look gave witness stronger than words. From the instant that subject was mentioned, the monk grew cautious and said less. The advocate, on the contrary, became more attentive than before. He wrote down every answer carefully, asked for dates, names, and circumstances, and seemed to attach greater importance to the late outrage than Monçada himself had expected. When the meeting ended,

the prisoner returned to his cell exhausted, yet with one poor comfort at least: the truth had not been completely buried.

For some days those interviews were repeated. During their continuance the convent became outwardly calm again. No one insulted him openly. Food was brought with regularity, and the hours of prayer and common life proceeded without marked humiliation. Monçada understood the reason well enough. As long as the advocate came and went, the house feared to push persecution too far. It wished to appear orderly, charitable, and blameless while eyes from outside were turned toward it. But such restraint sat badly on men who fed on malice as others feed on bread, and the moment those visits ceased, they flung off self-command as eagerly as one tears off a tight garment.

The first public blow fell at the next refectory. The bell rang, and Monçada went to take his place as usual. Before he could sit, the Superior said, “Stay. Place a mat for him in the middle of the hall.” A mat was laid there, not among the brethren, but apart and exposed like the mark of some visible disgrace. He was ordered to sit on it and was given only bread and water. He ate a little and moistened the crust with tears, saying nothing, because he foresaw that speech would be used only to deepen the insult. When grace was about to be spoken, he was commanded to stand outside the door, lest his presence should hinder the blessing they were about to ask.

He retired and waited for vespers with a heart more broken by shame than by hunger. When the time came, he went with the others to the church door and was startled to find it shut against him while the whole community stood assembled. Then the bell ceased, the Superior appeared, the door was opened, and the monks hurried in. Monçada followed instinctively, and the Superior, stretching out his arm to stop him, cried, “You, wretch? You?” There was no answer possible to such rejection. He remained standing at the entrance while the rest went in, and as they came out afterward, they cast on him looks of horror so studied and so cold that he felt himself lower than the pavement on which he stood.

The same scene was renewed the next morning with an added cruelty. Now there were words, not only looks. As they entered and returned, some whispered

reproaches, some muttered threats, and some spoke prayers which were meant to wound rather than save. Monçada knelt at the door and answered nothing. He told John that he tried in those moments to raise his heart sincerely to God, and to believe that silent endurance might be an offering not less real than the loud chant from which he was excluded. But nature had its rights even under devotion. It was misery to hear the choir and not join it, to see the church and not enter it, and to be treated as if one's very nearness profaned what one longed to worship.

During the day the whole sluice of monastic vengeance was opened. At the refectory door a lay-brother, acting under a nod from the Superior, ordered him away before he had crossed the threshold. Hours later, and only when the bell for vespers had already begun, food was sent him so foul and coarse that famine itself would scarcely have touched it willingly. He tried to swallow some part of it but could not. Still, lest negligence of duty should be added to the charges against him, he hurried down when the bell tolled, only to find the church again shut and service already begun within. Thus even devotion, the last refuge of the afflicted, was turned against him and made one more instrument of discipline.

This exclusion continued day after day. He was shut out from matins, from vespers, and from the ordinary communion of the house. The few objects of religion allowed in his cell were removed. His crucifix, rosary, and holy water were taken away, and even his poor furniture was stripped from the room until it had the look of a place not for prayer, but for some infected or condemned being. He complained at last to his father when chance gave him one brief audience, saying, "They starve me, and they deny me not only food, but prayer." The father answered coldly, "Your devotions? In renouncing your vows you have renounced your claim to them." The Spaniard replied, "Though I am not a monk, may I not still be a Christian?" But even that appeal found no mercy in a heart already surrendered to other hands.

More terrible still, a darker persecution began by night. Images of fiends were made to appear before him, and lights, voices, and pretended visions were contrived to shake his exhausted senses. The whole community took part in the imposture by looks of horror, signs of exorcism, and whispers that Satan had been

permitted to visit one peculiarly given up to him. The younger boarders fled from him as if he carried a plague. If they were forced near him, they flung holy water in terror and cried out that the fiend should take his own victim and spare them. At last the Spaniard confessed with shame that he began to feel the terror he inspired. When all around a man act as if he were accursed, even innocence itself starts back from its own shadow.

So the convent labored to do what dungeon, hunger, and shame had not done: not merely to punish him, but to make him believe in the punishment's justice. They wished him to feel himself cut off alike from men, from prayer, and from his own reason. Yet through all this one thought held fast within him. His appeal was still alive, and in a few days, though he did not know the exact hour, its fate would be decided. That hidden hope beat in him, he said, like a troubled clock measuring the approach of sorrow. And on one evening, with his heart unusually heavy and the garden darkening round him, he felt for the first time that some new and more horrible design was ripening under the calm face of convent discipline.

Part 18

"When I found myself thus cut off from prayer, from food fit to eat, from ordinary human speech, and almost from the common signs that one belongs to the race of men," said the Spaniard, "my spirit sank lower than it had sunk even in the dungeon. There is a point at which suffering ceases to excite resistance and begins to produce a dark and heavy shame. I felt not only persecuted, but degraded. The worst of my misery was that the persecution around me had become so complete that it seemed to follow me even beyond the convent walls, and to spread over all Spain like a net."

"In that state I wrote to Juan with less courage than before. I said, in substance, 'My beloved brother, if the whole ecclesiastical power of Spain is everywhere, where shall I flee? Suppose the convent sleeps, and the Inquisition closes one eye, still where am I to go? How shall I live? I have been brought up in luxury and uselessness. The convent has made me unfit for society, and society

will not receive me. If every monastery in Spain were opened tomorrow, for what are its inmates fit? For nothing that would support life honorably, or even hide it safely. I should be only a hunted fugitive, a marked Cain.'"

"The moment I had written those lines, I hated them. They seemed to me the confession not of prudence, but of cowardice. So I tore them into the smallest pieces, burned them one by one by the light of the lamp in my cell, and watched the ashes till they were wholly gone. Then, as if the destruction of that weakness gave me back some force, I went again to the passage where hope sometimes approached me in silence. I walked there long, listening at every sound. In passing through the gallery I encountered a person of the most forbidding aspect I had ever seen within the convent."

"I drew aside at once, for I had made it a rule never to mix with the community beyond what discipline compelled. As he passed, however, he touched my habit and gave me a look so full of meaning that I understood at once this must be the person alluded to in Juan's last communication. He did not stop. He did not speak. He went by with the calm of one accustomed to danger and perhaps to crime. A few moments later, when I descended to the garden, I found a note placed where only a watchful eye would have seen it. It confirmed my suspicion."

"The note was brief and written in haste. Juan said he had procured the money and secured an agent. 'He is an incarnate devil,' he wrote, 'but his resolution and intrepidity are beyond question. Walk in the cloister tomorrow evening. Some one will touch your habit. Grasp his left wrist. If he hesitates, whisper "Juan." He will answer "Alonzo." That is your man. Consult with him. Every step I have taken will be communicated by him.' I read the lines again and again. They seemed to move of themselves, like a spring that had been suddenly released and had now begun to drive the whole machine of my fate."

"I have often thought since," he continued, "how willingly we resign not only action, but conscience, when another stronger will undertakes to think, feel, and decide for us. We say with a secret cowardice, 'Be it so. You have chosen for me,' and we feel relieved, because responsibility appears transferred with effort. It is a miserable illusion. No man can stand surety for another at the bar of God.

Yet I confess, in those hours, I surrendered myself almost with pleasure to the force of Juan's purpose, and even to the agency of the being he had chosen. I was like a clock whose hands are pushed forward by another, and which strikes because it is made to strike."

"On the following evening I walked in the cloister as instructed. I composed my habit, my step, and my countenance as carefully as if I had been going to the altar. Any one who saw me would have imagined that I was immersed in profound recollection, and in one sense it was true, for my whole soul was bent on one object. As I walked, some one touched my garment. I started violently, but to my confusion it was only one of the monks, who asked pardon in a tone of oily civility for the sleeve of his tunic having brushed mine. Two minutes later another touched me. This time I felt at once the difference."

"There was in the grasp a communicative strength, a deliberate and fearless pressure, unlike the timid and sanctimonious contact of a monk. He seized my habit as one who had no need to excuse himself, and who perhaps had lived too long beyond shame to understand apology. I grasped his left wrist with a trembling hand and whispered, 'Juan.' He answered instantly, 'Alonzo,' and passed on in the same moment, leaving me no more than a word and a certainty. Yet that certainty was enough. I knew then that my brother's agent was indeed within those walls, and that my life had been entrusted, as it were, between two extremes equally dreadful to me, Juan's violence and this man's guilt."

"I had time, after that brief signal, to reflect on the strange nature of my position. The man to whom I was now bound for liberty was a being whose crimes made him hateful to humanity, and who seemed to have tried to cover the stains of parricide itself with the cloak of monastic submission. I felt a horror in the thought of dealing with such a creature. Yet that horror was mixed with another and perhaps deeper feeling, the perception that I was now absolutely in the power of all I feared most. The convent hated me. My family had surrendered me. My brother loved me, but loved me with the fierce impatience of a man who always burns faster than others act. And now, between all these, stood this human instrument of escape, dark, resolute, and infamous."

“I was again in the cloister on the following evening, though I cannot say I walked then with so equal a step. I had tried to prepare myself by prayer, but prayer under such circumstances becomes half petition and half calculation. The same man touched my habit and murmured the name of Juan. I answered in passing, ‘I am in your power.’ A hoarse voice replied at once, ‘No, I am in yours.’ ‘Then we understand each other,’ I said. ‘We belong to one another for this business.’ ‘Yes,’ he answered, ‘but we must not speak here. A fortunate occasion offers itself tomorrow. It will be the eve of Pentecost. The whole community keeps vigil. They go two by two every hour to the altar, pass their hour in prayer, and are then relieved by two more. Such is the aversion you have inspired, that they have all refused to accompany you during your hour. You are appointed from two till three. You will therefore be alone, and I will come to you then. We shall be undisturbed and unsuspected.’”

“With those words he left me. I returned to my cell in a state which I can only call mechanical agitation. Fear was there, but it had no time to expand itself into images. Hope was there, but it moved too quickly to become joy. The whole thing seemed to hurry on with a force independent of my will, and perhaps that was why I submitted to it so completely. The next night was indeed the eve of Pentecost. The monks went two by two to keep their hours before the altar. At two o’clock they knocked at my cell. I rose at once, and, without a word from any one, descended to the church alone.”

Part 19

I descended to the church alone and found it almost dark. A few lamps still burned before the altar, but their light was weak and uncertain, and the great body of the church lay in shadow. I went forward and tried to kneel, yet the place itself seemed to reject me. “What am I doing here?” I said inwardly. “Others have just left this altar after real prayer, and others will come after me for the same holy purpose. I am here to abuse the hour of worship and to turn the house of God into the beginning of a flight.” I trembled so much that even my effort to kneel felt like

hypocrisy.

Still I knelt, because I could do nothing else. Yet I did not dare to pray. All around me, the lamps, the images, the very pillars and roof, seemed to stand as silent witnesses against me. At other times, when I had prayed with sincerity, I had almost felt that the lights grew brighter and the sacred forms kinder beneath my gaze. Now all was mute, cold, and severe. “They know,” I thought. “They do not speak, but they know.” I remained thus in a misery more oppressive than speech, ashamed to pray and yet unable to cease from longing toward prayer.

While I was in that state, I heard a step. It was firm, quick, and unlike the slow decorous movement of a monk in the church. “Rise,” said a voice near me. “Rise. We have no time to lose.” I stood up at once. The man beside me was the companion chosen by Juan, and his face, seen by that thin light, was more dreadful than before. “Tomorrow night is fixed for your escape,” he said. I could only whisper, “Tomorrow night? Merciful God!” He answered sharply, “Yes. In desperate designs delay is often more dangerous than haste.”

He then spoke with surprising clearness, as a man speaks who is used to risk and has learned that fear wastes time. He pointed to a low door that I had often seen in the church and never remembered to have seen opened. “Do you know that door?” he asked. “I know it by sight only,” I answered. “Good,” he said. “I have the key of it, and no matter by what means. Once it led to the vaults of the convent. It is not now used, because another passage was opened years ago for reasons that do not concern us. But this old way still reaches the outer wall, and beyond that wall there is a place where a man may descend if he has courage and help.”

He gave his directions rapidly and with an exactness that proved how fully the way had been studied. “After midnight tomorrow,” he said, “come again to the church. If any one is here, withdraw at once and return the moment the place is empty. I will be waiting. We shall open this door, pass through the disused vaults, and reach the old outer wall of the convent. From there we descend by a rope. A carriage will be ready at some distance, and if all goes well, before dawn you will be beyond pursuit.” I asked, “And Juan?” He answered, “He will do what is

required of him. Think now of your own part, and fail in nothing."

Even in that moment of hope I could not help looking at him with inward horror. He saw it, and laughed in a way that made my blood run colder than before. "Do not look so holy," he said. "You need me, and I know it. We are not here to confess to one another, but to get beyond walls and keys." I answered, "I need liberty, not you." "You need both for the present," he replied. Then, after listening for a moment, he added in a lower tone, "Go now. Your hour is nearly done. Remember every word I have said. Forget your beads, your saints, and your fine tremors tomorrow night, unless they can help you turn a lock."

I returned to my cell in a state impossible to describe fully. I had what I had long desired, a real plan, a fixed hour, and a visible path toward freedom. Yet the means of reaching that freedom were so dark, and the hand through which it must come so stained, that my heart recoiled even while my whole being sprang toward hope. I tried to pray, but my thoughts moved between altar and wall, between God and rope, between liberty and crime, with a confusion that made prayer itself seem only another form of inward tumult. By day I went through my duties with a composure that deceived others and half deceived myself. By night every minute lengthened into expectation.

At last the appointed hour came. After midnight I descended again to the church. It was empty. The stillness there was deeper than before, because now every sound in it seemed part of an action, not merely of fear. My companion appeared almost at once. He uttered a few impatient curses under his breath, then hurried toward the low door with a bunch of keys in his hand, and I followed him as a man follows the visible sign of life. The door was lower than I had remembered. We had to descend four steps to reach it, and there he began to try the key, muffling it in the sleeve of his habit so that the metal should make as little sound as possible.

At every attempt the lock resisted. He bent to it, stamped silently, ground his teeth, and then tried again with both hands. I stood beside him in torture, listening for every noise from the church or the passage beyond. "Was that a footstep?" I whispered once. "No, only the echo of this cursed lock," he answered. Then he

hissed, “Fetch a light. Take a lamp from before one of those figures.” The irreverence of the order shocked me even there, but terror overcame scruple, and I obeyed. Holding the lamp near the lock with a hand that shook violently, I heard us both speaking in broken whispers. “Look out into the passage.” “Then I cannot hold the light.” “No matter. Better darkness than detection.” “Any thing for escape,” I answered, and set down the lamp to join my strength to his.

Even united, we could not force the lock. The key grated, resisted, and seemed almost to mock the desperation with which we turned it. Again and again we tried, with fingers stripped by the metal, with our breath drawn in, and our faces wet with toil and fear. At last he sank down on the step, wiped his forehead with his sleeve, and cast on me a look in which sincerity and despair were strangely mixed. The clock struck three. For a moment neither of us spoke. The sound seemed less like the hour than like judgment passing over an effort that had failed at the very point of deliverance.

Then he burst into that frightful smile of his and said, “Do you imagine me such an idiot as to help your escape at the risk of imprisonment, immurement, or the Inquisition, and then stay here quietly to pay for it? No. If you go, I go. We must escape together.” I stared at him, unable at first to take in his meaning. He continued, “Our adventure has joined two opposite beings, but the union is inevitable and inseparable. Your destiny is bound to mine now. The secret each possesses must be watched by the other. We hold one another’s lives in our hands. A moment’s absence might be a moment of treachery. We may hate one another, torment one another, grow weary unto death of one another, but we part never.”

At that picture of the liberty for which I had risked so much, my very soul recoiled. I looked at him as at some fatal condition hidden inside the gift I had desired. He moved away a little, then paused and turned again, perhaps to judge the effect of his words. The lamps in the church were burning low, and he stood in such a position in the aisle that the light fell only on his face and one hand stretched toward me. The rest of his figure was lost in darkness, so that he seemed hardly a man at all, but a head and hand hung in shadow. In a voice deep and hollow as thunder under ground, he repeated, “We part never. I must be near you

forever.” I had no power to answer. A long pause followed. Then, as the hour was over and the monks who were to succeed me came late and yawning into the church, we separated by different ways, and our departure passed unnoticed.

Part 20

I did not sleep after that failure. The image of the low door, the stubborn lock, the late-coming monks, and above all the dreadful words of my companion, “We part never,” moved through my head till thought itself became like fever. Yet even then I did not abandon hope. The very failure that had so nearly destroyed me taught me that success, if it came at all, must come by a fiercer trial. I remained through the following day in a state of outward calm and inward torture, speaking little, avoiding every eye, and waiting for some new sign with the patience of a hunted creature that dares not stir before the net is lifted.

Toward evening I received that sign. It came without writing and almost without speech, for in such a place full sentences are dangerous things. My companion passed me in the gallery, and without stopping muttered, “Tonight again. The lock will yield.” I turned cold at the words, yet answered, “And if it does not?” He threw back a glance full of contempt. “Then we perish more quickly,” he said. That terrible answer, uttered as if life and death were no more than two turns of the same wheel, gave me a confidence as horrible as it was useful. I said to myself, “A man who speaks thus will not turn back.”

When the convent was wrapped in its false peace again, I descended once more to the church. The lamps before the altar were lower than on the former night, and the dark spaces larger. The whole place seemed waiting, not for prayer, but for some work from which prayer had fled. My companion was already there, stooping beside the low door with the impatience of a wild beast held too long. “You are late,” he whispered. “I came the instant I could,” I answered. “Then help me,” he said, “and waste not a breath in trembling.”

This time the key turned. It did not yield easily, but after several harsh efforts a heavy inward movement answered us, and I felt the lock give way like

something that had long resisted the touch of man and hated to submit at last. We paused and listened. No step, no voice, no stirring from the church above reached us. My companion opened the door no wider than was necessary, and a breath of damp, ancient, and imprisoned air met us from below. “Take up the lamp,” he said. “And follow me close. If you lose me, you are dead.”

We went down by broken steps into the old vaults of the convent. The passage was low, narrow, and full of that dead smell which belongs equally to long-closed places and to tombs. The walls were wet, and the stones beneath our feet slipped under the touch like things half melted by time. The lamp, though sheltered carefully, burned with a weak and troubled flame, and every small movement of it altered the faces of the arches round us, so that the place seemed alive with silent changes. “Is this the road to liberty?” I whispered. “It is the road,” he answered. “Whether to liberty or to something else, we shall know too soon.”

We advanced by many turnings, all black, all close, and all alike. More than once I believed we were returning on our own steps, and once I laid my hand on the wall to steady myself and felt it shake under some creature that had made its home in the slime. My companion went before me with astonishing certainty, or at least with astonishing courage. He would stop now and then, hold the lamp high, mutter a curse, and then press on again as if his own violence were a kind of guide. “Have you been here before?” I said once. “No,” he answered. “Then how do you know the way?” He replied, “I know only that there must be one. That is enough for men like us.”

At length we came to a passage narrower than the rest, where the stones had partly fallen and the earth seemed to have shifted inward. “The trap-door must be beyond this,” he said. “Creep after me. There is no room to stand.” He placed the lamp on a jutting stone and went first upon his hands and knees. I followed, feeling the roof almost upon my back and the damp ground soaking through my habit. The place was so tight that breathing itself became labor. More than once I wished to cry out that we must return, but shame and fear kept the words from me. I thought, “If I speak now, he will laugh, and if he laughs, I shall lose even the courage of misery.”

Then the worst happened. A stone shifted under my weight, the earth gave way a little, and in trying to support myself I jammed my shoulders and arms so tightly between the sides that I could neither advance nor draw back. I felt in that instant the most dreadful terror I had yet known. Dungeons, whips, excommunication, all seemed less fearful than to be buried living in that narrow throat of earth, hidden even from those who wished to save me. “I am fast,” I whispered first. Then, as my breath failed, I cried louder, “Help me, for the love of God, I am fast.” My companion, who had gone a little forward, turned and answered, not with pity, but with savage impatience, “Crawl back if you can. If you cannot, then die quietly.”

I tried to crawl backward and at first could not. The pressure on my chest made every breath feel like the drawing of a knife. A horrible story I had once read of men suffocated in narrow caverns came into my mind, and the thought nearly destroyed the last strength I had left. Then, perhaps by that blind force which belongs to despair, perhaps because fear gave my body a power of which it knew nothing, I made one convulsive effort, and the next moment I was free. I came out of the passage I scarcely knew how, dragged myself toward the lamp, and stood up at last breathless, exhausted, and staring round at the black dripping walls and low arches that seemed to bend over me with an eternal frown.

The lamp was dying in my hand. I knew that our lives and our hope of escape now hung on that poor trembling flame, yet for some moments I watched it with the stupid fixed look of one whose mind has been stunned by terror. It burned lower and lower, throwing out pale flashes that only showed us more frightfully to one another. Suddenly one stronger gleam discovered an object near me, and I cried aloud without meaning to do so. “Hush,” said my companion instantly from the darkness. “Be silent. I left you only to search the passages. I have found the way to the trap-door. Is the lamp so nearly gone?” I answered, “You see it.” “Keep it alive a little longer,” he said. “If I cannot?” I asked. “Then we perish,” he replied, adding an oath so dreadful that I thought it might bring the vault down upon our heads.

Strange as it seems, his blasphemy steadied me. There are moments when a

desperate spirit gives courage merely by showing that it fears nothing human or divine for the instant. He went before me again, muttering curses through his teeth, and I followed, watching the lamp as I might have watched the last beatings of a dying heart. Every step seemed to draw the small flame nearer its end. It quivered, recovered itself, then sank lower with a kind of mocking patience. “Faster,” whispered my guide. “I cannot,” I answered. “Then fall, but fall forward,” he said. At the very moment when I thought I could endure no more, the lamp gave one pale flash, like the smile of despair itself, and was extinguished.

The darkness that followed was not like common darkness. It was a thing that struck, pressed, and entered the soul. I stood still, unable even to stretch out a hand, because I felt that if I moved I might lose not only the way, but reason. My guide too was silent for one instant, and I knew by that silence that even his hard courage had felt the blow. Then, through the blackness, another sound came to us, faint at first, yet piercing every faculty the more because it was not of the vault. It was the chant of matins, sung by candle-light in the chapel far above us. That voice from the world of prayer reached us where we stood like beings buried beneath it, and for one moment we seemed to ourselves the very pioneers of darkness, halted on the frontiers of hell.

Part 21

The chant of matins reached us through the earth like a voice from another world. It did not come clearly, but with a softened and distant sweetness that only made our own place seem darker. We stood there without speaking, listening as men might listen from a grave to the prayer of the living above them. For one moment I thought of all the sacred hours from which I had been shut out, all the churches whose doors had been closed against me, and all the prayers I had tried to offer in loneliness and fear. Now the sound of worship, which should have comforted me, only made me feel how deep below human life we had sunk.

Yet even in that moment of horror, hope returned more strongly than before. If the voice of prayer could reach us, then heaven was not utterly sealed above our

heads. If the breeze could come through those narrow chinks, then the upper world was close, visible, and perhaps attainable. My companion, whose courage always took the shape of violence, changed in an instant from despair to action. “Look up,” he whispered. “Do not waste your soul on music. Look up and live.” I obeyed him, and there, above us, I saw the pale line widen and brighten a little more.

It was indeed the light of morning. Thin at first, it seemed only a grey wound in the dark roof above us. Then it broadened, took shape, and sent down a cooler breath. We stood beneath it with locked hands, not in prayer now, but in that speechless hunger with which the wretched gaze at the very form of deliverance. “The trap-door,” said my guide. “We are under it.” I answered nothing, for I dared not, but I felt my whole being drawn upward as if my soul would leave the body and escape before the body could follow.

Our position, however, was still full of danger. The same morning light that showed the way to liberty might also show us to discovery. If even one early servant, gardener, or workman crossed that part of the ground above us, all would be lost. “There is not a breath to spare,” said my companion. “I must go first.” I wanted to resist him, not from courage, but from instinctive dislike and fear. Yet I knew too well that I was still in his power. In youth, guilt often looks like greatness. We bow to a criminal energy because it seems stronger than our own innocence. So I submitted.

He ordered me to stand firm beneath him. “Bend your head lower,” he said. “If you fail me now, you fail yourself.” I placed myself under the opening as well as I could among the broken stones and damp earth. He mounted upon my shoulders with the weight and assurance of a man to whom the body of another is only a tool. I shook beneath him, partly from weakness, partly from dread, but he reached the trap-door and pressed against it with both hands. It resisted for a moment, then yielded. A full burst of daylight poured down on us both.

That light should have been joy, but in the same instant all turned again to terror. My companion let the door fall, dropped heavily to the ground, and almost struck me senseless as he came down. “The workmen are there,” he whispered, but the whisper was fiercer than a cry. “The garden is full of them already. They

have come for repairs, and they will stay the whole day. We are lost if we are seen." Then his self-command broke. He flung himself on the ground in convulsed rage, grinding his teeth and cursing the dying lamp that had failed us a few moments too soon. "Had it burned a little longer," he cried, "we should have crossed the garden, the wall, every thing. And now—"

To me, terrible as the news was, there was in it something less dreadful than to him. I had never possessed his faith in the nearness of success, and so I did not feel the same violent fall from certainty to ruin. Besides, his fury itself frightened me less than the thought of that open garden above, full of workmen whose voices and steps might at any moment sound over our heads. "What shall we do?" I asked. He sprang up instantly and answered, "What men do when one road fails. Find another, or perish seeking it." The brutality of the words gave me the same bitter strength that his blasphemies had given before. We had no choice left that was worth naming.

He then began to examine the place more closely by the growing light that entered through the chinks. We found that the trap-door could not be raised again without certain discovery, for the least sound above it might bring men to the spot. Nor could we remain where we were through the day. The vaults were foul enough at night, but under the thought of whole hours passed in them with discovery hanging over us, they became intolerable. "There must be another outlet," he muttered. "Passages made by men are not made for a single purpose only. Where monks have hidden one thing, they have hidden ten." So saying, he moved on, and I followed him with a submission that was now half necessity and half a dreadful habit.

We wandered again among the old vaults, but no longer in total darkness. The dim and broken daylight that filtered through cracks and forgotten openings only made the place more frightful by showing it. I saw the sweating walls, the masses of slime, the low arches thick with age and damp, and here and there the remains of iron rings or rotten wood that hinted at uses too horrible to be guessed. More than once I thought of all the tales I had heard in childhood of infernal feasts, hidden rites, and pacts made below sacred buildings. It seemed possible that we

were not escaping from one prison, but entering a deeper one that had waited beneath it from ancient times.

My companion went first as before, turning now to the right, now to the left, advancing, pausing, then returning and choosing another course. The pauses were the worst. Motion, however dangerous, still gave the mind something to cling to, but when he stopped and listened, or held his breath over some doubtful opening, I felt the silence crush on me like a weight. At last we came to another passage, lower than the former and still more difficult. “On your hands and knees,” he said. “There is no other way.” I obeyed. Even in that miserable posture my head struck more than once against the rough roof, and every touch of the stone felt like a warning that we had gone beyond all ordinary paths of men.

This passage narrowed more and more as we went. The air within it was so close and thick that breathing became labor. The little light behind us no longer helped at all. I could see scarcely more than the shape of the body before me, and that only when it shifted and blocked what little greyness remained. Once I called to him, but he did not answer. I called again, louder, and then heard only the suffocated sound of his own breath and the muttering of words that might have been curses or prayers. My terror returned with double force. “Have you left me?” I whispered. “No,” came the answer at last, “but I may wish I had.”

Then the passage stopped him as it had nearly stopped me before. I knew it by the sudden stillness, the fierce breathing, and the wild sound of locked hands striking together in helpless anguish. I was behind him so closely that I echoed every movement of despair almost without willing it. He silenced me furiously, then seemed to attempt prayer. But his prayers were so broken, so full of rage, and so like blasphemy, that they chilled me more than his oaths had done. At last he ceased, and for a long while neither of us spoke. We lay there like dying animals, close to the object we pursued, unable either to seize it or retreat from it.

Those moments, which seemed endless, ended almost as suddenly as the former despair had ended. My companion started upright with a cry so sharp that I believed for an instant his reason gone. It was not gone. “Light again,” he exclaimed. “The light of heaven again.” He had kept his eyes turned upward even

in that miserable position, and now he had seen what I at first could not see, a narrow, grey brightness above us. I looked, and there it was. Thinner than before, perhaps, but certain. It widened slowly as the morning strengthened, and a faint breath from above stirred on our faces. We had found, if not liberty, at least another opening into the world of day.

Our joy lasted only long enough to make the next discovery crueler. By painful effort we reached a point from which we could distinguish more clearly what lay above us, and my companion, raising himself first, looked through the opening. He gave back at once, not now with rage only, but with a darker kind of disappointment. “We are not in the garden,” he said. “Or if we are near it, men are before us there too.” He listened again, and this time even I could hear faint sounds from above, the striking of tools, the rough voices of laborers, and the ordinary noises of morning work. Freedom had come within sight twice, and twice it had been taken from our hands.

Part 22

After that second disappointment we had no strength left either for rage or for counsel. We could neither gain the outer air nor return by any safe path to the church, and to remain under those openings till full day would have been certain destruction. So we withdrew once more into the deeper vaults, not from choice, but because misery often has no motion except backward. My companion went first, muttering as before, while I followed with that dull obedience which comes when hope has been stretched too long and at last hangs broken. At length, in a place somewhat wider and less wet than the rest, we threw ourselves down upon the stones like men not lying to rest, but falling where they could fall no farther.

In that state I would gladly have exchanged all my dreams of liberty for twelve hours of profound sleep. My body was bruised, my throat burned, and every joint seemed full of the pains of cramped effort and fear. Yet even that poor refreshment was hardly granted me. My companion slept too, if such sleep it may be called where the body lies senseless and the soul continues its torment aloud.

He talked, groaned, cursed, prayed, and answered himself in broken sounds, as if the whole secret of his life were struggling to escape him through the breaches of sleep.

I heard enough to know that the vision of parricide pursued him without mercy. He repeated words of denial and defiance first, then words of fear, as if some invisible judge stood over him and forced confession from him while sleep deprived him of the power to resist. At one moment he muttered, “I did not strike till he cursed me.” Then, after a pause that made my blood run cold, he cried in a changed voice, “Confess? I will when those are gone.” These words, joined to all I had heard before, brought back to my mind a death-bed story once told in the convent, of a guilty man who saw near him watchers no human eye could perceive.

Such recollections broke the little sleep into which I had sunk. I started up more than once, believing the Superior and the whole community were upon us with lights and cries. Each time I woke more fully, I found only the low vault, the damp stones, and the sleeping criminal near me, heaving and twisting on his bed of rock as if it had been soft down and not jagged stone. His frame seemed made of iron. The hardness beneath him, which had bruised me into exhaustion, appeared unfelt by him. It was not the bed, but what lay within, that denied him peace.

After some time, whether from weariness or the deadly sameness of our place, I too slept again; but my sleep was short and full of terror. I dreamed of torches, of flaming eyes, and of voices crying that I should confess all. A deep tone near me answered, “Confess,” and I woke with a shriek. It was only the sleeping voice of my companion, yet I could bear his presence no longer. In that darkness, amid those muttered avowals of hidden crime, his very sleep felt more dreadful than his waking guidance had done. I rose and stood over him for a moment, shuddering to think that I, who had feared monks and prisons all my life, now felt myself most horribly imprisoned by a sleeping man.

I cannot tell what exact impulse then seized me. It was not reason, for reason would have kept me still. It was not courage, for I was full of fear. It was rather that sudden motion of despair by which the soul flings itself from one terror into

another because it can no longer endure the first. I snatched up what remained of my strength and fled from the place. I ran without perceiving where the passage turned, whether it rose or fell, or whether I was moving toward safety or deeper ruin.

I ran till breath and strength alike failed me. At last, still in that blind haste, I struck violently against something before me. A door burst open under the blow, and I fell on my hands and knees into a small dark chamber. For some moments I could do nothing but gasp and listen. Hearing no pursuit behind me, I raised myself slowly and looked round. What I saw there was so singular that it checked even my personal terror for an instant.

The room was very small, and a heavy curtain, torn by my violent entrance, still hung in broken folds behind me. There was no one within. On a table covered with cloth stood a vessel of strange shape, a knife, and a large book which I opened in trembling curiosity, but could not read, for the letters were unknown to me. In my ignorance and agitation I took it for a book of magic and shut it again with a horror that was almost childish. Fastened to the leg of the table was a cock, whose loud uneasy cries now began to sound through the room with startling force.

The whole place had the look of some secret and unholy preparation. A dim lamp hung from the ceiling, and by that weak light every object seemed half concealed and half accusing. I wrapped myself as far as I could in the rent folds of the curtain and remained hidden there, scarcely daring to breathe. My first thought was that I had escaped the convent only to fall into some lower and more infernal mystery beneath it. Yet even while fear urged me to flight, curiosity and exhaustion held me fast, and before I could resolve on any movement, I heard a step at the entrance.

A man of middle age entered, whose countenance even to my Spanish eye had something singular in it. His dark clustering brows, his prominent features, and above all the bright fixed lustre of his eyes marked him at once as unlike those among whom I had lived. He knelt before the table, kissed the book, read from it in a language I did not understand, tried the edge of the knife, knelt again, and then called aloud for one by a name that was wholly strange to me. Receiving no

answer, he sighed, passed his hand over his eyes, and then pronounced another name in Spanish, “Antonio.”

A young man entered at once and said, “Did you call me, father?” But even while he spoke, he cast a hollow and wandering glance on the table and the things prepared upon it. “I called you, my son,” said the elder man, “and why did you not answer me before?” The youth replied, “I heard only a name that was never mine. When you said ‘Antonio,’ I came.” At these words there passed between them one of those silences that are heavier than speech, because a whole hidden history seems standing within them.

Then the father spoke again, and his voice now shook not with anger, but with inward conflict. He told the young man that the name first spoken had been the name given him at birth, that he had called on him by it from the depths of a father’s heart, and that he now stood before him to claim not only obedience, but faith. Little by little, and with bursts of passion between, he confessed that he was no true Catholic, but one of the hidden race of Israel, living under disguise among hostile idolaters. As I listened from behind the curtain, my own danger for a moment gave way before the terrible interest of what I was hearing. I had escaped one secret world only to break into another.

Part 23

The father continued, now with more force because passion had broken through caution. He seized his son by both arms and cried, “My child, I gave you life, and now that life lies in your hands. You have believed me a Catholic because I raised you so in a land where the true faith would have cost both of us our lives. But I am one of the unhappy race hated in every country, though the very nations that curse us profit by our labor. I am a Jew, and at your birth I called you Manasseh-ben-Solomon. That name has never ceased sounding in my heart, and tonight I have spoken it again, hoping the soul of my son would answer to the voice of his father.”

The young man, astonished and overwhelmed, began to weep. The father,

seeing those tears, pressed his advantage with all the force of terror, religion, and love together. “The God of your fathers waits for you,” he said. “Abraham, Moses, and the prophets look down on this hour. Will you worship the eternal God of heaven and earth, or remain the slave of idolaters who bow before a crucified man and before the image of his mother? Will you follow the pure faith of Israel, or cling to those corruptions which my soul has hated in secret while my lips have submitted to them in public?” The son sobbed, but did not answer.

The father bent lower and lower, till he was almost at the youth’s feet. “Look,” he cried, pointing to the table. “There is the uncorrupted book of Moses. There are the instruments prepared for the rites of expiation. I have lived sparing, watching, denying myself, bearing insult from these idolaters, all for you. And now, at the very moment when I place before you the faith of your fathers and my own life with it, will you reject both? Shall the son save himself by giving up his father to the Inquisition?” The youth clasped his hands and answered through tears, “Father, I would give no man to death. I would not deny even an enemy a drop of water.”

Those words struck the father almost like a sentence. “Reserve your tears for my grave,” he cried. “You are driving me to it. If you refuse me now, you may as well seize me by the throat and drag me before the holy office. The law of Moses, the blood of your fathers, and the years of my hidden suffering all call on you. I ask you not merely as a father, but as one kneeling before death. Choose.” The young man trembled, wrung his hands, and seemed unable either to consent or to resist.

It was at that instant that I, mad with fear, hunger, and desperation, burst from behind the curtain. I had understood little of what was said except the repeated word “Inquisition,” but that word had become to me the whole world. I rushed forward crying, “If he does not betray you to the Inquisition, I will.” The words were scarcely out of my mouth before my strength failed me, and I fell on my knees before them. That mixture of menace and weakness, joined to my dress and ghastly condition, struck the Jew with an astonishment that seemed for a moment to suspend even his terror.

Then all became confusion. I cried again, “Shelter me, or I denounce you.” The Jew, whose presence of mind in danger was almost incredible, turned in one instant from father to contriver. He called aloud for Rebekah to remove the vessels from the table, ordered his son away, snatched up garments from a press, and tore off my convent dress with such violence that I believed he was stripping me for torture. The old woman came, saw me, shrieked, retreated, and returned again at his second call, while the poor cock, as if determined not to be forgotten in the tumult, screamed and struggled at the table-leg.

The Jew, in his hurry, upset the table, broke the vessels, and nearly fell over the wretched bird. Then, terrified that even its cries might betray him, he seized the knife and killed it on the spot. For one absurd and horrible instant he seemed more distressed by the open proof of his Jewish rites than by my presence among them. “My cock, my cock!” he cried. “I am undone.” Then, dropping on his knees beside me, he began in the wildest confusion to deny what I had just seen, confess it again, deny it once more, and implore mercy for himself and his son all in the same breath. “I am no Jew,” he cried. “My son is a Christian. You will not betray me. You will not betray him. I have saved your life.”

Before I could answer, a heavier terror broke over the house. Loud knocking came from the outer door, first with hands, then with stones or staves. Rebekah hurried to the entrance and cried back in a half-biblical fury that men were there, sons of Belial, drunk, violent, and ready to break in the carved work with axes and hammers. The Jew, in the midst of his agitation, found even then spirit enough to dispute her choice of words, and insisted there was no carved work to destroy. Yet while correcting her language, he pushed and dragged me toward the inner part of the house with the strength of a man who knew every sound at the door might be death.

The old woman planted herself against the entrance and answered the knocking with abuse, threats, and boldness enough for three younger defenders. “Use your face, not your back,” the Jew cried to her as he dragged me away. “Try your face once more.” But the knocking grew louder every moment, and I struggled too, for my mind by then had given way wholly under fear and delirium.

I believed myself again in the power of the Inquisition. I seized the Jew by the throat, called him my prisoner, and accused him wildly before that invisible tribunal whose very name had consumed my reason. He knelt, prayed, denied, pleaded, and still never let go his hold on me.

At last he got me up a narrow stair and into a chamber above, where he tried to undress me and lay me on a bed. I thought he was binding me to the rack. When he pulled off my clothes, I cried, “Do not tighten the cords too much.” When he forced me down upon the bed, I screamed, “So this is the torture-room at last. Strain it hard, that I may the sooner forget myself.” My words, I was afterward told, frightened the whole household so much that even the Jew, who feared ruin every moment from my madness, began to pity while he restrained me. But of that pity I knew nothing then.

What followed that first night under his roof remains to me only in broken flashes. I remember his carrying a light before me up and down steps that seemed to me the endless stairs of the Inquisition. I remember his attempting to undress me while I begged him not to bind me too cruelly. I remember being thrown on the bed, crying out against cords, wheels, surgeons, and fire, and then nothing more for many days except a certainty of my own insanity. If I slept, my dreams were more dreadful than waking. If I woke, it was only to fall back into wild visions and worse fears.

When my reason began slowly to return, I found that the Jew had indeed saved my life, though at a price he already seemed to think too dear. He had hidden me, fed me, watched me through delirium, and endured the presence of a dangerous and disordered guest in the very house where one whisper might have destroyed him. Yet his charity was no free act of tenderness. It was mixed with terror every hour. He knew that if I became his accuser, all was lost; and I knew that if he abandoned me, I had nowhere in Spain to turn. Thus, when consciousness returned between us, it did not restore peace. It only showed two unhappy men standing face to face, each preserved by the other, and each fearing the other as the possible author of his ruin.

Part 24

Many days passed before my mind returned clearly enough for Adonijah to speak to me as to a rational being. Even then he did not begin with pity. He began with necessity. Standing beside me one evening, while I was still weak and slow of thought, he said in his dry grave manner, “You have eaten of my bread, Nazarene, and lain under my roof. It is time you tell me what you mean to do, and whither you mean to go.” That question, simple as it was, opened before me a wilderness more dreadful than any dungeon. Until then I had thought only of escape from immediate pain. Now, for the first time, I saw the whole track of life before me laid waste as by fire and sword.

I had nowhere in Spain to stand. The Inquisition had once touched me, and that touch, like death, separated me from all mortal ties. From the hour its hand had fallen on me, I had no father, no mother, no brother, no friend. Those who in common life would have laid their own hands under my feet to smooth the roughness of my way, would, if the holy office required it, have been first to seize the faggot for my burning. I knew this well. And besides that universal terror, I had another loneliness more personal and more bitter. My father and mother had cast me off. Juan, the only being on earth who had loved me and whom I could have loved without misery, had perished through the fatal chain of events that bound me to him.

So I answered Adonijah with little more than silence and despairing looks. What could I say? If I remained in Spain, detection must sooner or later destroy me, unless I buried myself in some secrecy as deep and hopeless as that from which I had just escaped. If, by miracle, I passed beyond Spain, ignorant as I was of languages, customs, trades, and the common means by which men support life, how should I live even one day? Absolute famine stood before me, and, what was still more painful, I felt myself helpless with a shame that ate deeper than hunger. While men persecuted me, I had at least been important enough to be watched. Now I belonged to nobody. I was no longer even worth tormenting.

Adonijah heard all this with much less emotion than I had shown in saying

it. He had the hard composure of age, secrecy, and long inward discipline. My despair neither surprised nor disordered him. He only answered, “The desert is wide, but not wider than the sea through which Israel passed. Eat, and wait.” Those were his remedies for every extremity, food and time. He went out daily to gather intelligence, and each evening returned more composed than when he had gone. I began to perceive that his chief concern was his own safety, not mine. Yet I could not even blame him for that. He had already bought his charity dearly enough in keeping me.

At length, one evening, he returned in an excitement which even his habitual severity could not conceal. “Eat, Nazarene,” he said, almost triumphantly. “Thou hast a better appetite tonight, or shouldst have. Madrid believes thee dead.” I started up so violently that the bowl in my hand fell. He continued with dry satisfaction. The report, he said, had spread everywhere that I had perished in the fall of the burning ruins on the night of the fire. The bodies found after that disaster were so crushed, burned, and defaced that no one could distinguish them. Their remains had been gathered together, masses had been said for them, and it was taken for certain that mine lay among the rest.

He told me further, and with a minuteness that showed how carefully he had listened in the streets, that the cinders of the dead, all together, had scarcely filled a single coffin. That coffin had been borne with solemn rites to the vaults of the Dominican church, and some of the first families in Spain, veiled and in deep mourning, had attended the service in silent grief for those whom they would have shuddered to claim while those same beings yet lived. “Certainly,” said Adonijah, with one of his bitter smiles, “a lump of cinders is less offensive to Christian charity than warm flesh and breathing heresy.” I could not answer him. The thought that my life had been dismissed so easily from the world, and that ashes, perhaps not mine at all, had received the rites due to me, filled me with a strange and hollow feeling, half relief and half desolation.

Then he added what touched me more nearly still. My mother, he said, had been among the mourners. She had come veiled so closely and attended so poorly that no one would have known the Duchess di Monçada but for the whisper that

penance had ordered her appearance there. That image of her, bowed and hidden, standing beside a coffin which the city believed held her son, pierced me with a sorrow new even to my sorrows. Yet Adonijah, whose mind moved always first toward safety, pressed another part of the news more strongly. The holy office itself, he said, was glad to accept the story of my death. It wished me dead, and in Madrid what the Inquisition wishes to be believed is rarely denied belief. “So,” he concluded, “their falsehood gives thee life. Thy death-certificate is thy best defense.”

In the joy of this discovery, his temper became almost communicative. As I swallowed the plain food he set before me, for my stomach still turned from richer fare, he informed me that there was to be a great procession that very evening, one of the most solemn and magnificent ever seen in Madrid. The holy office itself was to appear in all its pomp. Standards of Saint Dominic and of the cross were to be borne before it. Every ecclesiastical order in the city would attend in its proper habit and insignia, and a strong military guard would invest the whole, while the populace of Madrid followed in crowds. They were to proceed to the principal church, there to humble themselves for the recent calamity of the fire and implore the saints to show more active favor if such a danger should ever return.

As he spoke, I felt a movement in my mind at once strange and irresistible. I wished, I hardly knew why, to see that procession. Perhaps it was because I had so lately been cast out from among Catholics as a polluted and desperate being, and the sight of all that outward grandeur touched some deep and wounded feeling of old loyalty and old fear within me. Perhaps it was mere morbid curiosity. Perhaps it was the instinct that draws the sufferer to look once more upon the power that has crushed him. Whatever the cause, it took such hold of me that, when evening darkened and Adonijah left the house, I climbed slowly to the highest room I could reach and waited there, my heart beating at every bell that began to toll through the city.

I had but one window, and even that I dared not use openly. So I hid behind the blind and withdrew it by little degrees. The house looked on an open space

through which the procession must pass, and long before the first standard appeared, that whole space was crowded beyond belief. The mass below rolled and darkened like the sea under the first breath of a distant storm. Yet for a long time it gave way nowhere. Then, little by little, I saw a motion run through it, not confusion but submission, as if some invisible power were pressing upon it from afar. At once the multitude opened. A broad moving path formed between two dense banks of human bodies, and through that path, far away at first and then nearer every moment, I saw the stream of the procession begin to advance.

It was impossible, even to one who had suffered from the Church, to behold such a sight without emotion. The crucifixes, banners, and torches, which had been reserved for the falling light, seemed to float like crests of fire above the heads of men. The habits of the ecclesiastics, the strong red glare of the lights struggling with the last remains of twilight, and the solemn fixed pace of those who marched, gave to the whole a magnificence that almost overpowered thought. It looked like something more than mortal ceremony. The very tread of that advancing body seemed to say that the cross outweighed sceptres, and that kings themselves were but dust in the road before it. As I watched, all my old habit of reverence returned, and I felt, in spite of all, that I exulted still to belong by birth and faith to the Catholic world.

But even while that feeling rose in me, another and darker movement began below. At first it was no more than a slight disorder in one part of the crowd, a whisper, a turning of heads, an uneasy stir. I could not understand it. All faces had seemed so fixed in attention and awe. Then, drawing the blind a little farther, I saw among the officials who clustered near the standard of Saint Dominic a figure I knew too well. It was my companion of the vaults, the parricide. One faint hiss was heard. Then another. Then a low growl, half smothered and yet spreading. Hands were clenched, stones lifted, and voices began to murmur that a man with blood of his father on his hands was no fit bearer of the banner of the cross. I felt, before a single blow had fallen, that the whole magnificence of the procession was already trembling over an abyss.

Part 25

The murmur below spread with frightening speed. A hiss became a growl, and the growl became words. Men pointed toward the standard of Saint Dominic and cried that no parricide should bear the banner of the Church. Women crossed themselves and fell back. Others pushed forward only to look more clearly at the face of the accused man. In another instant stones were lifted, curses burst out openly, and the whole solemn order of the procession began to shake under the pressure of one terrible recognition.

My companion, who had stood with outward composure while the first signs of danger gathered, now seemed rather to exult than to fear. He raised his head, grasped the banner-staff more firmly, and looked round with that savage expression which in him always seemed nearest joy. “Yes,” he cried aloud, “I am he. I killed my father.” These words, spoken not in shame but in fierce defiance, threw the multitude into a frenzy. Those nearest him rushed forward. Those behind, unable to see and eager to strike, pressed on with blind violence. The guards tried to hold their ground, but in such a crowd order breaks in a moment and seldom returns.

Then all was uproar. The standards swayed, torches were thrown down, and the procession, which a minute before had moved with such awful magnificence, broke into fragments of shouting, struggling, terrified human beings. Some fled, some attacked, and some knelt in the very midst of danger, calling on saints and the Virgin as if heaven must interfere at once. I could no longer distinguish one part of the scene from another. The red lights, the moving habits, the flash of arms, and the cries from every side seemed to whirl together in one vast disorder. It was no longer a religious ceremony, but a judgment day of passion and panic.

In the midst of this tumult, another danger began. A torch, flung down in struggle or rage, caught some light material that had been raised for festal decoration, and in a moment flame ran where no one had thought of flame before. The crowd, already wild, became mad with fear. People who had been crying out for punishment now screamed only for escape. The press of bodies, which had

first been an instrument of attack, became a trap of death. I heard cries of “Fire!” and then cries for children, for saints, for mothers, for water, for mercy, all mingled together till the very sound seemed to burn.

What followed I knew only in broken flashes. I remember feeling the house shake under the movement below. I remember seeing red light strike upward and waver across the walls like blood thrown on stone. Then smoke began to enter by the openings, and with it a heat that made breathing pain. I tried to draw back from the window, but some part of the building gave way, or I myself fell, I cannot tell which. The next clear thing in my memory is that all around me seemed one fierce and fiery light, and that I was sinking through terror, noise, and suffocation into a darkness deeper than any I had known in the vaults.

When sense returned for one dreadful instant, I felt Juan near me. His arms were round me, and his voice, though broken by haste and fear, was urging me on with a tenderness I shall remember beyond death. We were again in darkness, but now it was the darkness of the garden, of open air, and of night. My companion was with us too. He had recovered from the tumult as men of his kind recover, not by softness, but by instant return to purpose. He led us once more to the wall, and all that had failed before now succeeded with desperate speed. The trap-door, the passage, the ropes, the ascent, all seemed to pass in one convulsive act.

We crossed the garden hardly feeling the ground under our feet. I was weak with famine, terror, and the shock of what I had seen, and more than once I thought lights were flashing from the convent windows and bells sounding in my ears. “They are only in your own head,” said my companion harshly. “Come on, if you can.” Then my strength failed altogether. I sank, and should have remained there, I believe, but that he dragged me to the foot of the wall and twisted my cold fingers into the rope-ladder. That touch restored in me some instinct of life, and almost before I knew what I did, I was climbing.

At the summit I found Juan below with a dark lantern. I dropped down less like a man descending than like one falling into the arms of mercy itself. “Alonzo, dear Alonzo,” he whispered, holding me close. I could answer only, “Juan, dear Juan.” He urged haste, telling me the carriage was but a few steps away and that

he too had waited without food or sleep through the last horrible day. Even in that moment, half dead as I was, I saw his face by the shifting light and thought I had never looked on any thing so noble, so proud, and yet so full of tenderness. I tried to point toward my companion, but could not speak. Juan understood enough to support me and hurry me on.

The carriage stood in a waste place near at hand, scarcely visible except for that poor dim lantern. I sprang into it in a kind of blind joy. “He is safe,” cried Juan, following me. At that very instant a voice answered from the darkness, “But are you?” Juan staggered back from the step of the carriage and fell. I leaped out, and fell too, not on the earth, but on his body. My hands and breast were wet at once. It was his blood. He had been stabbed, and before my mind could even shape the meaning of the blow, I knew by the stillness that followed that he was dead.

There are moments that contain more suffering than years. One wild cry broke from me, and then all was flame, blood, noise, and emptiness together. I have no ordered memory of the next months. I know only from what I learned afterward that I remained for nearly four months in a state between life and madness. Religious malice, when it once fixes on a victim, does not easily release him. Men of common cruelty would have left me to sink or recover as nature pleased. Those who had governed my life were more patient. If the fire seemed out, they watched for embers. If the heart still beat, they sought how it might be made to suffer again.

At last I awoke one day, not slowly as from ordinary sleep, but as if some inner tide had at length reached the shore of reason. I found myself on a bed little better than that of my cell, in a room larger than the cell but bare of every religious sign. There was no crucifix, no picture, no holy water, only a coarse table with a lamp and vessel upon it. The door was strong and ironed, and no window appeared. For some moments memory did not trouble me. I only looked round with the jealous wonder of one who fears that even sight may be taken from him again if he moves too quickly. Then the whole past rushed back, and I uttered a cry so sharp and full of agony that it seemed to drain the strength from my body at once.

The door opened immediately, and a man entered in a dress I had never seen

before. He made me understand by signs that I must be absolutely silent. The very refusal of voice gave his command a horrible power, as if speech itself were forbidden in the place where I lay. He withdrew, returned later with bread, water, and a little food, and then whispered, not spoke, that because my past condition had made it impossible to instruct me sooner, he must now warn me that my voice must never be raised above the key in which he addressed me. Cries, exclamations, and even a cough too loud might be taken for signals and punished with the utmost severity. To my repeated questions, “Where am I? What place is this?” he answered only that his duty was to give orders, not explanations.

I fell asleep again, and my sleep was broken by terrible dreams in which Juan appeared to me, now as himself and now like some wounded hero from the books of my school-days, calling on me to fly while I could neither move nor wake. Then, starting up in horror, I saw a pale light close to my eyes, held by a paler hand. The hand withdrew it for a moment, then brought it near again, and with the light came the face of my companion. The memory of our last meeting returned like a blade driven into an old wound. “Are we free, then?” I whispered. “Hush,” he answered. “One of us is free.” When I asked at once how Juan fared, he told me with that monstrous mockery which was his natural speech that my brother lay sumptuously indeed, under marble pillars, banners, and plumes, but insensible to all such honors. Then, seeing I still hoped against reason, he added calmly that none of his victims had ever required a second blow.

Part 26

“You are in the prison of the Inquisition.” Those words ended all doubt. Yet, strange as it may seem, once the truth was spoken, I felt less confusion than before. Great extremities often give the mind the exact temper they demand. A man may tremble at the storm while it is still only heard far off, and yet stand firm when it breaks over his head. So it was with me. I said to myself, “I am in the Inquisition. Then let me meet the Inquisition as a man can.”

Even then I tried to reason against terror. My offence, dreadful as it might be

in convent eyes, was not properly one for that tribunal. I had resisted the monastic life, I had appealed against my vows, I had attempted escape, but I had not spoken heresy, denied the Church, or uttered one doubtful word on any article of faith. The charges of sorcery and possession, so wickedly raised in the convent, had already fallen to the ground under episcopal inquiry. “I have nothing to fear here,” I told myself again and again. “At worst, I am only a rebellious monk brought into a more terrible prison than belongs to my case.” It was poor reasoning, but it supported me for the moment.

On the seventh day after my recovery, I was brought to examination. I must pass lightly over much that followed, because an oath was imposed on all who came within those walls, and I will never knowingly break it. But this at least I may say: the first examination ended more favorably than I had dared to hope. My aversion to the cloister was blamed, my contumacy reproved, my temper represented as dangerous to myself and scandalous to religion, but no darker charge was yet distinctly pressed. I returned to my cell almost composed. “You see,” I said to myself, “they have no hold on me here beyond what belonged already to the convent.”

That calm did not last. A few days after the examination, one of the officials came to me with unusual gravity and said, “The holy office has reason to watch over your soul more narrowly than before.” I asked what new guilt had been discovered in me. He answered, “The extraordinary visitations which have attended you, both in the convent and now here, are not unknown. If the evil spirit seeks you even within these walls, it is because you have somehow put yourself within his power.” Then, crossing himself, he added, “If the figure should appear again, observe him closely and report every word. Trust nothing but the mercy of the holy office.” He spoke as if warning me, yet every syllable carried menace.

When he was gone, I thought long on his words. “So,” I said, “they are playing terror against terror. They would frighten me with the devil, and then make me accuse myself before them in trying to avoid him.” I resolved to watch every thing, to believe nothing lightly, and above all to betray no inward movement while any eye might be upon me. But it is easy to form prudent

resolutions in solitude while danger is absent. When the danger stands before us, prudence often sinks under the first shock of fear. I had not long to wait for that trial.

On the second night after my examination, my visitor entered my cell again. My first impulse was to call aloud for the officers of the prison. The next moment I restrained myself. “If this is their agent,” I thought, “they will use my cry against me. If he is not their agent, my cry may still destroy me.” So I remained silent and listened. He seated himself without ceremony and began to speak with the same ease and singular power that had marked his former appearances. His language was darker, bolder, and more dangerous than before, and more than once I felt the words rising to my lips, “Help! officials! guards!” Yet always some stronger dread kept them back.

He seemed to know that I was thus divided between one terror and another, and he used that division mercilessly. “You fear them,” he said, glancing toward the door, “and you fear me. Well you may. But at least I do not hide my power under forms and mumbling prayers.” I answered, “If you come to tempt me again, your labor is vain.” He smiled and replied, “So said others before you. Pain is patient, and despair learns.” Then he renewed, under forms still more dreadful, the proposal he had once made in the madhouse, a proposal touching deliverance indeed, but touching it by a road over which no Christian soul could pass without shuddering.

I drew farther from him and said, “You mock me. Even if I believed you able to do what you promise, I would rather rot here than owe freedom to you.” “Rather rot here?” he repeated, looking round the cell. “You speak bravely in the first freshness of prison. Wait till silence and stone have eaten further into you.” “Leave me,” I cried. “Leave me to my judges, my chains, or my death, but leave me.” He answered, “You prefer their mercies because they strike more slowly. Men always do. The axe terrifies less than the touch that reaches the soul.” After that he spoke long, half in mockery, half in earnest, and when he departed I was left more shaken than I can tell.

From that night his visits continued for a time, and each time I was more

strongly tempted to denounce him, and more strongly withheld. “If I speak,” I thought, “they will say I invited him. If I am silent, they may say the same. Between both, I am ruined.” At last an event occurred that for a moment seemed to settle every thing. I was brought again before certain persons of the tribunal, and there, in dark and solemn language, I heard myself accused not merely of monastic disobedience, but of having been from my birth marked out as the prey of infernal influence. They spoke of my illegitimate birth, of guilt resting on my origin, of fiends hovering round my cradle, and of the evil spirit now coming to claim his own within the very prison of the holy office.

Those words were terrible enough in themselves, but they derived tenfold force from the place, the voices, and the fixed conviction with which they were uttered. I cried out once, and only once, with the whole strength of outraged nature. Then I was borne back to my cell, where shame, horror, and self-reproach seized me all together. “Idiot,” I said to myself, “beast, driveller, could you ever believe that such a being moved through these prisons unseen and uncontrolled unless he moved by their permission?” The conclusion came on me with irresistible force. My mysterious visitor was their agent. His appearances, his temptations, his blasphemies, his promises of escape, all were part of one infernal contrivance to betray me into self-accusation. I had not been tempted by a demon from without, but by the art of men who knew how to use the likeness of one.

This explanation, hopeless as it was, at least had probability. It relieved my mind of the preternatural terror and gave me a human enemy to hate. The visits then ceased altogether, and their cessation confirmed me the more. “You see,” I said, “the mask has been withdrawn because its purpose is served.” I now expected only the worst. Day followed day in the silence of that prison, and I waited for sentence as a man waits for a falling wall whose first crack he has already heard. Then, when both hope and calculation had almost died within me, an event took place that confounded them equally.

It was the great fire that broke out in the prison of the Inquisition toward the close of the last century. The night of it is stamped on my memory forever. At the first alarm that the flames were spreading dangerously, we prisoners were

removed from our cells and brought into one of the courts under guard. I must in justice say that, on that occasion, much humanity was shown us. There was haste, confusion, fear, and the dreadful uncertainty of a fire shut in among high walls, but there was not needless cruelty. Even the officers seemed more occupied in averting general destruction than in maintaining terror over miserable beings who could scarcely escape if they would.

Yet terror was there enough without their aid. We saw lights running to and fro above us, heard beams crack, doors burst, and voices shouting orders through smoke and darkness. Some prisoners prayed aloud. Some were too stunned even for prayer. For my own part, I stood looking upward as if the whole sky had sunk down upon the prison in fire. Then, amid the confusion, I became aware of a face near me that I knew too well. Whether he came as prisoner, official agent, or something that belonged to neither name, I cannot now tell. But I knew that the same being who had visited my cell was once more beside me, and that the catastrophe of the fire, terrible as it was to all, had for me some deeper and more personal meaning.

He leaned toward me in the tumult and said, “Now, if ever, is the hour.” I drew back and answered, “Back, tempter. I have learned you at last.” He smiled with that calm and dreadful superiority which had so often maddened me. “Have you?” he said. “Then keep your wisdom and burn with it.” At that instant a cry arose that part of the building had fallen, the crowd swayed, smoke rolled over us in a thicker volume, and every thing became confusion again. Whether this was the beginning of my preservation or of a new descent into horrors, I could not know. I only felt that the prison itself had become unstable beneath our feet, and that in the midst of flames, guards, and terror, some fearful turn in my destiny was once more at hand.

Part 27

At that instant, while we stood gathered in the court under guard and flame, my eyes were drawn upward by a sight so strange that even terror itself gave way

before it. The steeple of the Dominican church, rising close beside the prison, was visible as clearly as if noon had fallen on it. The night was black, but the fire below cast such a violent light upward that the spire shone like a thing of metal heated in a furnace. I could even see the hands of the clock. Their quiet progress over the dial, calm and regular above the confusion, made the whole scene below seem wilder still.

Yet it was not the clock alone that fixed my sight. On one of the high points of the spire stood a human figure, motionless and perfectly distinct in the burning light. There was no possibility of mistake. It was the same being who had entered my cell, mocked me with offers of escape, and turned all my terrors into sport. He stood there with a tranquillity so complete that the flames, the cries, and the danger below seemed only a spectacle prepared for his amusement. The sight drove all prudence from me at once.

I pointed upward and cried aloud to the guards, “There! Look there! It is he!” I called again and again, naming the place and stretching out my arm till it ached with the effort. But no one had leisure to raise an eye. At the very moment when I uttered that cry, the great archway of the court opposite us gave way with a crash that seemed to tear the night in two. It fell almost at our feet, and with it came such a burst of flame that for one instant all faces vanished in a sheet of fire.

A single shriek rose from every mouth together. Prisoners, guards, officials, and servants shrank into one terrified mass. Then the fall of the stone, while it broke the arch, choked part of the fire and threw up a cloud so dense that in the next moment we saw nothing at all. The intolerable light became sudden darkness. Dust, smoke, and steam from the extinguished flames rushed over us, and through that black confusion came the cries of men crushed under the ruins, writhing where they had fallen and calling on God, saints, or mothers with equal hopelessness. The transition from blinding light to this thick blindness completed the disorder.

In that confusion a space opened before me. How it opened I do not know. Perhaps those nearest me had thrown themselves down. Perhaps the guards themselves were stunned or half suffocated. I only know that in one instant I saw

a narrow way lying free among the ruins, and in the same instant my thought became motion. No one marked me. No one followed. Before they could know who was absent, or before any inquiry could be made in the smoke and tumult, I had passed through the broken space and gained the outer streets of Madrid.

To one who has escaped present and extreme peril, all other danger seems at first diminished. The man who has just leaped from a burning house asks not whose field receives him. So it was with me. Madrid was in truth only a larger prison of the same power from which I fled, yet for that first hour I felt only a delirious and shapeless sense of safety. Had I reflected at all, I must have known that my dress and my bare feet would betray me at once. But reflection had no place in me then. I ran, because I had escaped, and because the body runs before the mind can understand what it flees from.

The city favored me by its very terror. The streets were almost deserted. Every inhabitant who was not already in bed, or too sick to leave it, was in some church or chapel praying against the fire. Those who remained within doors had barred themselves in, and listened in fear to the bells and distant cries. Thus I found lane after lane empty before me. I ran on, passing walls and corners without knowing them, guided only by the instinct that drives a hunted thing forward while breath remains.

At first I heard only my own steps and the confused noise of the burning prison behind me. Then even those sounds grew dim, and all that remained was the labor of my breath and the beating of my heart. I knew nothing of the quarter through which I moved. The dark passages, the shut doors, the blind corners, all were alike to me. I had become little more than a creature using its last strength in flight. Several times I struck against walls or posts and rebounded from them without pausing, as if the very stones were part of the power from which I fled.

But there is an end to every bodily effort. At last my breath failed me so completely that I could no longer distinguish whether I moved through open street or some covered passage. My limbs shook under me, and a cold faintness came over my sight. Still I pressed on a little farther, because there remained in me that blind fear which continues after all hope of escape is gone. Then, while moving

in such darkness and exhaustion that I no longer knew where I was, I was stopped suddenly by a door before me.

The force of my fall burst it open. I was thrown forward on my hands and knees into a low dark room. For some moments I remained where I had fallen, unable either to rise or to think. Then, hearing no cry of pursuit behind me, I lifted myself slowly and looked round. What I saw there checked even my own terror for an instant, because it was unlike any thing I had expected from the streets of Madrid at that hour. The room was small, strange, and full of objects which seemed prepared for some secret rite.

A table stood there covered with cloth. On it were a vessel of singular construction, a knife, and a large book in characters unknown to me. Fastened to the leg of the table was a cock, whose impatient cries sounded through the room with dreadful force in the silence. A lamp hung from the roof and gave just light enough to make every object look half hidden and wholly suspicious. I wrapped myself at once in the folds of a heavy curtain which my fall had torn, and remained concealed there, scarcely daring to breathe.

I had escaped the fire, the prison, and the officers of the holy office, only to break by accident into some chamber of mystery below the common life of the city. Yet fatigue, fear, and curiosity now held me more strongly than prudence. I stayed hidden where I was, listening with every faculty sharpened by desperation. Before many moments had passed, a step approached the room. The door opened, and a man entered whose face, even at the first glance, told me that my flight from one terror had not led me into ordinary human safety.

Part 28

In the next instant the archway opposite gave way and fell almost at our feet. The mass of stone dashed down with such force that flame leaped from it like water from a rock, and for one terrible moment prisoners, guards, and officials shrank together in one crowd of common terror. Then the very ruin that had threatened to burn us alive smothered part of the fire beneath it, and there rose so

thick a cloud of dust, smoke, and broken lime that no man could distinguish the face of the person nearest him. The cries of those crushed under the fallen stones filled the court. In that darkness and confusion there opened before me a space by which one man might pass if he had the courage and the desperation to trust himself to chance.

The thought and the movement were one. No one saw me. No one followed me. Before my absence could be discovered, and long before inquiry could be made in such confusion after a single prisoner, I had struggled through the broken place and found myself in the streets of Madrid. To one who has just escaped present and extreme peril, all other peril appears small for a little while. I knew in truth that Madrid itself was but a wider prison to me, but still, in knowing that I was no longer in the hands of the officials, I felt a wild and shapeless joy, like a man who has been thrown from a wreck upon any shore whatever.

Had I reflected for one moment, I must have understood how easily I might be discovered. My dress and my bare feet would have marked me at once. Yet the night favored me. The streets were almost wholly deserted, for every inhabitant who was not already in bed was in some church praying against the fire, or listening from behind barred doors to the bells and the far-off cries. So I ran through lane after lane, not knowing where I went, but only that I must still go on. Fear drove me forward long after strength had begun to leave me.

At last my breath failed. I could run no more, and even the effort to keep my feet became pain. Still I staggered on, without perceiving that I had entered a dark passage, until a door stopped me. I fell against it so violently that it burst open, and I was thrown forward on my hands and knees into a low room. When I raised myself and looked round, what I saw there was so singular that it suspended even my personal anxiety for an instant. The place appeared fitted, not for ordinary life, but for some secret rite of fear.

There was a table covered with cloth. On it stood a vessel of strange shape, a knife, and a book whose letters I could not read, and in my ignorance I took it at first for a book of magic. A cock was fastened to the leg of the table, and its uneasy cries sounded dreadful in the silence. A dim lamp hung from the ceiling

and threw just light enough to make every object more suspicious. Behind me there hung a large curtain, torn by my violent entrance, and in its folds I found concealment enough to hide me if need should come. I wrapped myself in it and waited.

I had not long to wait. A man entered, middle-aged, with dark heavy brows, a proud nose, and eyes whose brightness had something unnatural in it even to me. He knelt before the table, kissed the book, read from it in an unknown tongue, tried the edge of the knife, and then called aloud by a name I had never heard before. Receiving no answer, he sighed, and then called again in Spanish, "Antonio." A young man entered at once and said, "Did you call me, father?" But while he spoke, he cast a dark and uncertain glance toward the things on the table, as one already fearing what they meant.

The father began to question him, then slowly confessed that the name first uttered had been his true one, the name given him at birth before he had been brought up outwardly as a Christian. Step by step, with tears, passion, and bitter eloquence, he declared himself one of the hidden Jews of Spain. He told the youth that he had lived under disguise only to save both their lives, and that he now implored his son to return to the faith of his fathers. The son, astonished and overcome, burst into tears. The father, seeing those tears, pressed him more strongly, kneeling at last before him and urging him by religion, blood, and filial duty to choose between embracing Judaism and betraying his own father to the Inquisition.

I understood little of this argument, but I understood that last word. Despair made me reckless. Bursting from my concealment, I cried, "If he does not betray you to the Inquisition, I will." My strength failed at once after the threat, and I fell at the father's feet. That sudden apparition, joined to my dress and my wretched condition, struck the Jew with a horror almost beyond speech. Yet fear gave him marvelous presence of mind. In one instant he was removing the vessels, sending away the son, calling the old woman of the house, stripping off my inquisitorial dress, and clothing me in such garments as he could seize at hand.

The confusion that followed was at once dreadful and absurd. The old

woman came, saw a third person, shrieked, and ran back, while the master, in his hurry, overthrew the table and almost fell over the poor bird fastened to it. The cock, not to be forgotten in the tumult, uttered the most intolerable cries. Terrified that those cries would betray him, the Jew snatched up the knife and killed it on the spot. Then, half mad with fear, he denied and confessed his Judaism in the same breath, implored me not to denounce him, and insisted that he had saved my life and must not now lose his own by an act of hospitality. For some time neither of us was master enough of himself to understand the other clearly, but fear makes interpreters of strange men very quickly.

At length the matter stood plain between us. I needed concealment, and he needed silence. In less than an hour I found myself seated before food such as I had not seen for many months, while my involuntary host watched me, and I watched him in turn with the eyes of a famished wolf. Yet even there I could not trust or rest. I was but a fugitive from the Inquisition, and he was a hidden Jew who had tried that very night to bring his son over to the law of Moses. Each had the power to ruin the other. If I had feared the convent before, I had now entered another secret world, not less dark because it was different.

That night, if indeed I slept, my sleep was full of dreadful visions. I remember being led up a narrow stair by the Jew with a lamp, and asking him whether he was lighting me down into the dungeons of the Inquisition. I remember his trying to undress me while I begged him not to bind me too tightly. I remember being thrown on a bed and crying out to let the torture be sharp, if I must suffer, that I might the sooner forget myself. After that all is broken and confused for many days. I know only that I was wholly unfit either to think or to judge, and that the house which had sheltered me paid dearly for its dangerous charity.

It was long before my mind recovered enough for the Jew to feel that my preservation had become somewhat costly. When he saw at last that I could answer him like a rational being, he asked with dry composure what I meant to do and where I meant to go. That simple question opened before me a desert more terrible than any dungeon. The Inquisition, like death, cuts a man off from all common ties with a single touch. From the hour it has grasped him, he has no

father, mother, brother, or friend. The dearest hands that would once have supported him in ordinary life would now be the first to cast wood upon the fire if the holy office required it.

Besides this general misery, I had a particular one of my own. I was rejected by father and mother, and I had become, as I believed, the cause of my brother's death. In all Spain I had no roof, no meal, no trade, no safe name, and not even enough knowledge of the world to gain bread honestly if I escaped beyond the reach of my enemies. While men think it worth their labor to torment us, there remains to us at least some painful kind of dignity. But I had ceased even to be a victim of consequence. I was cast out from all places at once, and the hopeless greatness of that waste before me broke me more completely than chains had done. The Jew listened, not disturbed in the least, and when I had done, he answered only, "Eat, and wait."

Part 29

"Eat, and wait," said Adonijah, and there was something so hard and settled in his voice that I obeyed almost without thought. He went daily out for news, while I remained hidden in the upper part of his house, moving little, speaking less, and listening to every step on the stair as if it might bring ruin. Those days were among the strangest of my life. I was no longer in chains, yet I was not free. I was not pursued openly, yet every sound in the street seemed to say that pursuit had only changed its shape. Thus I lived between fear and emptiness, with no duty left to me but to keep myself alive and unseen.

Adonijah returned one evening in a state of unusual excitement. His eyes, commonly severe and fixed, had a kind of dark triumph in them, and even before he spoke I knew that he had learned something great. "Eat, Nazarene," he said, almost sharply from impatience. "You may well eat tonight. Madrid believes you dead." I rose so suddenly that the stool on which I sat fell backward. "Dead?" I repeated. "Yes," he answered. "Dead in the fall of the burning ruins, and safer by that report than by any prayer your priests ever said for you."

He then told me, with a minuteness that showed how carefully he had listened in the streets, that the bodies found after the fire had been so crushed and blackened that no man could know one from another. Their remains had been gathered together and treated as a single mournful burden. A mass had been sung for them, and it was believed that mine lay among them. “Their ashes,” said Adonijah, “filled but one coffin, and that coffin has gone down with solemn prayers into the vaults of the Dominicans.” He smiled bitterly as he spoke. “A little dust gives less offence to Christian charity than warm flesh and breathing fear.”

The news struck me in two opposite ways at once. It gave me safety, and it gave me a pain for which I was not prepared. To know that the city believed me dead was indeed a defense beyond price. Yet to hear that I had been so lightly dismissed from the world, and that prayers had been said over ashes perhaps not mine at all, filled me with a sorrow as strange as it was deep. It was like hearing my own life closed by other hands while I still stood listening outside the door. I asked at once whether any of my family had appeared at the service. Adonijah answered that my mother had been there, though hidden under a veil so long and thick that none would have known the Duchess di Monçada, but for a whisper that penance had commanded her presence.

At that image my heart failed me for a moment. I saw her in my mind, veiled, bowed, and silent, standing beside a coffin that Madrid believed held her son. I remembered her tears, her weakness, her terrible surrender to those who governed her conscience, and I felt that in mourning me as dead she had perhaps loved me more truly than when she consented to bury me alive. But Adonijah, who never rested long on sentiment when safety was in question, pressed another part of the matter more strongly. The holy office itself, he said, was glad to accept the story of my death. “They wish you dead,” he told me. “And in Madrid, what the Inquisition wishes to be believed is rarely denied belief.”

That assurance gave me a colder but steadier comfort. I felt, for the first time since my flight, that life had some opening before it, however narrow and obscure. My false death stood between me and pursuit like a wall built by chance and

accepted by power. Adonijah, in the freedom of his joy, became more communicative than usual. As I swallowed my poor meal of bread and water, for my stomach still turned from every richer thing, he informed me that there was to be a great procession that evening, one of the most solemn and magnificent Madrid had seen for many years. The holy office itself was to appear in all its pomp, with the banner of Saint Dominic, the cross, the orders of the Church, and a strong military guard.

"They go," said Adonijah, "to humble themselves for the late fire and to implore the saints to guard them better if flames should rise again." The bitterness with which he spoke of that holy pageant would have offended me at another time. But by then I had suffered too much from sacred words used as shields for cruelty to answer him with any warmth. Instead, a strange wish seized me, sudden, deep, and almost irresistible. I wished to see that procession. I hardly knew why. Perhaps it was because all my life I had feared, obeyed, and suffered under that power, and now wished once more to look on it from concealment, as one might look on the face of a ruler after being struck and cast out by him.

Perhaps, too, there was something in me that still loved what had wounded me. Faith, habit, childhood, reverence, and pain are not easily parted. To hear of the crosses, banners, lights, and solemn march of the Church touched a place in my heart deeper than anger. I felt that if I heard the bells and remained crouched below like a criminal in hiding, I should be consumed by the desire I resisted. So when evening darkened and Adonijah left the house, I climbed slowly to the highest room I could reach. There was but one window, and even that could not safely be used except from behind the blind.

I waited there with a beating heart until the first bells began to toll through the city. They answered one another from steeple to steeple till all Madrid seemed in vibration. The sound filled the evening with that mixture of sorrow and greatness which belongs to bells alone. Hiding myself behind the blind, and drawing it aside only a little at a time, I saw that the open space before the house was already crowded beyond belief. The multitude below rolled and blackened like the sea under the first stir of a coming storm. Still, for some time, it did not

give way, though I could not imagine how any procession could pass through so dense a mass.

At length I perceived a movement run through it, slight at first, then wider, then irresistible. It was as if some power not yet seen had touched the whole body of the crowd from afar. The mass rocked, divided, and opened into two firm lines, leaving between them a broad path along which the procession might move. Then, far away at first, I saw the first signs of it approach, the cross, the banner, and the lights lifted above the heads of men. The torches looked like moving stars in the growing dark. The stream advanced between those human banks with a majesty that made all other movement seem vulgar and confused beside it.

As it came nearer, the whole spectacle burst upon me in its full force. The habits of the ecclesiastics, the glare of the torches struggling with the last pale remains of twilight, and the solemn fixed pace of the procession gave it something more than worldly magnificence. It seemed to move as if the earth itself must make way before it. The black crucifix lifted in the rear, the banner of Saint Dominic, the guards, the priests, the ordered tread, all together formed a sight so imposing that I felt, in spite of memory and suffering, a proud thrill at my heart. “I am still a Catholic,” I whispered to myself. “I still belong to this world of faith and splendor, though it has cast me out.”

But even while that thought rose in me, another movement began below. At first it was no more than a faint stir among part of the crowd, a whisper, a turning of faces, a murmur not yet separate from the general sound. I drew the blind farther and looked more closely. Then, by the torch-light, among a cluster of officials near the standard of Saint Dominic, I saw a face I knew too well. It was my companion, the parricide. The first low hiss had already begun to spread through the crowd, and with it came the first dim feeling that the magnificence before me was not moving toward prayer alone, but toward blood.

Part 30

The whisper spread fast, because hatred and superstition carry news more

quickly than reason. What had begun with a few fierce voices soon moved through the whole crowd. Men clenched their hands. Some bent down for stones. Others looked upward, crossed themselves, and asked aloud why the saints had withdrawn protection from the Inquisition if a parricide might march openly among its officials and touch the banner of the cross. The procession still moved, but no one could now mistake the sound rising around it for devotion.

The foremost priests faltered, though they tried to hide their fear. That slight pause seemed to act like a signal. An officer of the guard rode near and warned the chief Inquisitor that danger was close at hand, but the answer came cold and proud. “Move on,” he said. “The servants of Christ have nothing to fear.” The procession attempted to advance, yet the multitude had now become a wall rather than a crowd, and every step forward only made the pressure stronger. A few stones were thrown, and then, in the same instant, many of those who had cast them dropped on their knees as the raised crucifixes passed before them.

That momentary kneeling made the scene more dreadful, not less. Men worshipped and prepared for murder in the same breath. The officers again begged permission to disperse the crowd, or at least to remove the doomed man to some neighboring church or back to the walls of the Inquisition. The unhappy wretch himself, seeing the fury close round him, joined in those entreaties with cries that were sharp even above the roar of the people. But the Inquisitor, though already pale, would give way in nothing. Pointing to the crucifixes, he said, “These are my arms,” and ordered them still to move on.

They could not move on. The pressure had become too violent, and all order was gone. The soldiers tried to form and charge, but they were entangled among the multitude, who clung to their horses’ legs and hurled stones into their ranks. The first shower broke them into confusion. Then the true purpose of the crowd stood out plainly. Through all that moving mass there was one fixed motion, one savage current driving straight toward the place where their victim stood trembling behind priests, guards, and holy emblems that no longer protected him.

The chief Inquisitor saw his error too late. He now shouted for the military to advance by any means, but command had come after obedience was already

impossible. Besides confusion, there was something like unwillingness among the soldiers themselves. They charged weakly, then reeled back. At once a hundred priests closed round the parricide with a desperate courage that, for the moment, almost redeemed the pride and folly of their leaders. Torn habits, uplifted crucifixes, pale faces, and cries to heaven pressed together in one ring round the doomed man. Yet the multitude came on with a calmness more dreadful than frenzy, because it showed a settled and final will.

They began to remove the priests one by one, and even then, in the midst of fury, they did it with a strange rough respect. They asked pardon while they tore them away. They did not yet strike the ecclesiastics if they could avoid it. This self-command made the whole vengeance darker, because it proved that the crowd was thinking only of one object and would not waste its force on anything else. The ring grew thinner, broke, and vanished. Then, amid a cry like that of wild beasts closing on prey, the victim was seized and dragged forth, still clutching in both hands the fragments of robes to which he had clung in vain.

For one terrible instant there was silence. The crowd had him, and looked at him with thirsty eyes. Then the work of blood began. They dashed him to the earth, tore him up again, flung him from hand to hand, and beat him with stones till he was no longer shaped like a man. He still struggled, still howled, and still begged wildly for life and mercy. But that very cry, which might have softened a single heart, only excited the multitude the more, because there are moments when crowds love the sound of fear as drunken men love wine.

The military, strongly reinforced, now came galloping on, and the ecclesiastics followed behind them, torn, stained, and full of late but real horror at what they had helped to make possible. Yet this interference only hastened the end. There was now less time for the crowd to complete its cruelty, and therefore it completed it with greater fury. I cannot relate every circumstance, nor would I if I could. I saw enough to know how quickly a human body may be reduced to something that no longer belongs even to pity. When at last they flung the mangled thing against the very door of the house where I stood, there still came from it a cry for life.

With his tongue hanging from the torn mouth, one eye out, every limb broken, and the whole body blackened with earth and blood, he still cried, “Life, life, mercy!” till a stone, perhaps thrown in pity, struck him down. Then the crowd trampled him into a shapeless mass under a thousand feet. When the cavalry at last forced their way through, there was nothing left that could be rescued, hidden, or even named. An officer demanded where the victim was, and someone answered with dreadful truth, “Beneath your horse’s feet.” The troop rode on through blood and mud, and the crowd gave way at last, grim, silent, and satisfied.

While I watched this horrible execution, I felt in myself something I had once thought impossible. At first I shuddered. Then I screamed. But by degrees the terror below seized on me like a disease. I echoed the cries of the multitude. I screamed for life and mercy with the very voice of the man who was dying before me. I tried to leave the window, yet every cry seemed to fasten me to it more strongly. It was as if horror had nailed both my body and my sight to that place until the work below was finished.

In that state I lost even the sense of my own danger. Had anyone looked up and seen me there, my false death, my concealment, and all my future hope would have vanished in one instant. But I no longer thought of this. I mimicked every shout and every shriek with a kind of savage mechanical instinct. The scene before me had swallowed my separate being. I was no longer the witness of the cruelty, but one of its victims in soul, if not in body. Terror has that power. It can draw the spectator into the suffering till he feels the blows he only sees.

At last my strength gave way entirely. Still clutching the bars of the window, and still uttering those dreadful cries, I sank down insensible. When sense returned, I found myself stretched on the floor, with Adonijah bending over me, not with tenderness, but with a grave alarm which even he could not wholly hide. He had remained apart from the tumult in the streets, yet the tumult had reached his own house through me. “Are you mad again?” he said sternly. “Will you ruin us both by crying out the secrets of your soul to all Madrid?” I could not answer him at first, for my throat still labored with the ghost of the cries I had uttered.

He forced me at last to rise, gave me water, and shut the blind with his own

hand. Then he stood listening long to the noise below, now less fierce, but still terrible in its after-sounds of running feet, orders, curses, and distant lamentation. “This city,” he said at last, “can pray, persecute, and murder all in one night, and still wake tomorrow to call itself holy.” I looked at him, and for the first time felt less horror of the Jew than of the Christian crowd I had just seen. Yet even then I could not trust him. Between us there remained fear, dependence, and the knowledge that each held the other’s ruin ready in his hand. And so, after that night of blood, while Madrid rang with bells and pious thanksgiving, I crouched once more under the roof of Adonijah, shaken in body, sick at heart, and feeling that every refuge on earth had become a hiding-place rather than a home.

Part 31

The next evening Adonijah returned with a face more anxious than any I had yet seen on him. He shut the door carefully, dismissed Rebekah, placed candles on the table, and walked up and down the narrow room for some time before he spoke. At last he stopped and asked whether, on the night of that horrible execution, I had shown myself at the window so plainly that any eye from below might have marked me. I confessed at once that I had stood there, and that cries had escaped me in spite of myself. At this he wrung his hands, and a sweat of real terror broke out on his brow.

When he had somewhat recovered himself, he told me that a strange story had run through Madrid all day. It was said everywhere that the spectre of a prisoner who had perished in the fall of the Inquisition had appeared in the air near his house, and that this spectre had hovered above the dying wretch, summoning him to judgment with a voice heard through the tumult. He spoke of the tale with contempt, calling it absurd and impossible, yet in the same breath he admitted that such absurdities were the very food of Spanish superstition. “What fools believe,” he said, “the holy office examines. What the holy office examines, it often finds cause to punish.” I saw then that the danger I had brought upon him by one hour of delirious horror might be greater than any danger I had escaped.

He added that, for this reason, he was about to trust me with a secret on which not only my safety, but perhaps his whole peace for the short remainder of his life depended. If I would obey him exactly, he said, I might remain hidden even in the center of Madrid until means could be found to send me to some Protestant country beyond the reach of Spanish power. I bent toward him in speechless eagerness. Every faculty in me seemed gathered into hearing. He cleared his throat more than once, looked suspiciously toward the door, and had just begun to speak, when a knock sounded there so unlike any common knocking that my blood stopped.

It was single, solemn, and peremptory. Then followed words that froze me where I sat, a demand to open the house in the name of the most holy Inquisition. At that name Adonijah dropped on his knees, blew out the candles, slipped a large rosary on his arm with incredible swiftness, and called on the patriarchs and saints all together in a confusion that would have seemed comic, had not terror made it dreadful. The knock came again, louder than before. I stood motionless. He sprang up, tore aside one of the boards of the floor, and pointed me down with a gesture in which fear had become instinct.

I obeyed without a word. A few steps brought me into complete darkness, where I stood trembling on the last stair while the officers entered above and walked over the very board that concealed me. From that moment every word they spoke reached me with a distinctness I shall never forget. One asked why the door had not been opened sooner. Adonijah answered in a voice choked but submissive that his old servant was deaf, his son asleep, and he himself engaged in devotions. Another remarked dryly that he seemed able to perform those devotions in the dark. Adonijah replied, with a readiness born of long danger, that when the eye of God was on him, he was never in darkness.

The officer then changed his tone and spoke at length, slowly and sternly, of the vigilance the holy office was bound to exercise over men of Jewish descent who had become Christians. He reminded Adonijah that the black blood of Granada still flowed in the veins of his family, that not four centuries had passed since his ancestors had trampled on the cross, and that an old man might still not

be an old Christian. Adonijah protested with extravagant humility that the strictest scrutiny would be to him a favor and an honor. His very zeal in cursing the creed of his fathers made me tremble for his sincerity in any creed at all. But the officers were not there to debate sincerity. They had come for a search.

They declared that the story of a spectre seen near his house had suggested to the wisdom of the holy office that a living prisoner of the Inquisition might be concealed within it. At those words I felt the boards above me shake under Adonijah's feet. In a voice broken by fear, he implored them to search every apartment, to raze the house to the ground, and even to bury him under its ruins if anything were found within it that a faithful son of the Church should not harbor. The chief officer accepted the offer with terrible calmness. He said the house should indeed be searched, but first Adonijah must fully understand the penalty of ever having hidden a prisoner of the holy office. Then, pausing between each clause as if measuring out blows, he declared that the lightest part of that penalty would be the destruction of his dwelling.

He went on with greater severity still. Adonijah, he said, would be carried to prison as a relapsed Jew. His son would be shut in a convent, to remove him from the infection of his father's presence. Every stone of the house, every garment on his person, and every coin in his purse would be confiscated. At the last of these threats the poor old man lost all command of himself. He fell, as I judged from the sound, upon the floor, crying on Abraham and the prophets. I thought all was over. Even if his fear had not betrayed him, I felt that no Christian convert could utter such words safely before inquisitors. Without waiting to hear more, I shrank farther into the darkness and began to feel my way along a passage into which the stair appeared to descend.

I moved blindly, expecting every step to lead either to a wall or to a precipice, yet the floor remained even under my feet and the walls were matted, as if the place had been made not for sudden concealment only, but for secrecy long prepared. The darkness was complete, but it was at least a darkness farther from the officers above. I went on until a faint light appeared before me. At the sight of that little gleam my whole blood seemed to turn. I hastened toward it with a speed

one hundred times greater than that with which I had groped through the dark, and soon discovered that it shone through the broad crevices of a door, warped and loosened by underground damp. Kneeling there, half from exhaustion and half from irresistible curiosity, I looked in.

The apartment beyond was large, hung with dark baize, and matted round the lower part against the damp. In the center stood a table covered with black cloth and lighted by an iron lamp of antique and singular form. Round it, in upright cases, were several skeletons, and near them lay parchments, instruments, and papers in confused heaps, as if the room had served at once for study, memory, and death. Even in my extremity the sight chilled me. It seemed that in fleeing one secret terror I had entered another, quieter perhaps, but still more ancient and inward. Yet before I had time either to retreat or to examine further, I heard once more the sounds of movement above, and then, after what seemed an age, silence.

At length the board over the stair was raised again, and Adonijah himself came down with a light in his hand. He looked not only spent with fear, but changed, as if in those few moments he had passed through years of inward suffering. Yet when he found me safe, a kind of solemn satisfaction came over him. “Be at peace,” he said. “Our brother Solomon is in no peril, nor shall his goods yet be taken for a spoil. Thy flight cannot now be traced, and thy existence on the face of the earth may still remain unknown, if thou wilt hearken to me and heed my words.” I could not answer, but my whole look implored him to continue.

He fixed his eyes on me and said slowly, “Last night thou didst use words that still make mine ears tingle, though they have not listened to such sounds for four times the measure of thy years. Thou saidst that a power beset thee, tempting thee to renounce the Most High, and that, though the fires were kindled round thee, thou wouldst still trample on the offer.” I cried out that it was true, and that by God’s help it would remain true. He regarded me for some time in silence, as if trying whether this was only a burst of fear and passion, or the proof of some deeper firmness. Then, after a long pause, he said, “Then thou shalt know the secret that has been a burden to the soul of Adonijah from youth till now.”

Part 32

“Then thou shalt know it,” said Adonijah, and after those words his whole manner changed. Till then he had been fearful, cautious, and broken by immediate danger. Now he seemed to grow larger in my sight, as men sometimes do when some ruling thought within them rises at last above common fear. “This secret,” he said, “has lain on my soul like a stone from youth to age. I have carried it through labor, exile, imprisonment, widowhood, and the long solitude that eats into old age more cruelly than hunger into youth. Thou art here at the hour appointed for its discharge, and whether thou wilt or no, thou shalt hear it.”

He then told me that when he was still a boy, a rumor had reached even the hidden circles of the Jews in Spain of a being who wandered through the earth, offering deliverance in the hour of utmost misery to Jew, Christian, and even the followers of Mohammed alike. This deliverance, he said, was always offered under a condition which he would not yet name, and which his own lips hardly dared approach even in secrecy. “I heard that tale,” he went on, “as the thirsty drink running water. My spirit was perverse, my imagination hot, and I longed not merely to hear of such a being, but to see him, speak with him, and try him.” Then, striking his breast, he added, “For this presumption I have been rebuked as thou seest.”

He pointed round the room as he spoke. The strange apartment into which I had looked through the warped door was now fully open to me. The baize that lined the walls swallowed much of the sound, so that every word spoken there seemed to fall and die at once. The lamp on the table burned with a deep steady light, as if it had forgotten all common nights and belonged only to that vault. Near it lay rolls of writing, parchments, pens, and dark instruments whose use I could not guess, while the upright cases held those dreadful tenants of bone whose silence made the whole place more eloquent than speech.

Adonijah followed my glance. “Thou tremblest at these,” he said, “but they are kinder than the living. Those two,” and he laid his hand with strange tenderness on the nearest cases, “were once my wife and my child. Of them thou

shalt not hear now. That grief is mine, and mine alone, till I carry it where all griefs end. But yonder two," and he pointed to the other skeletons opposite, "thou must both hear and record, for their story is linked with thine by a chain neither thou nor I can break." I confess that at those words a horror came over me deeper than any I had yet known under his roof.

He then related how, after returning to Spain in his early manhood, he had shut himself up in that very vault, lighted by that very lamp, and vowed that neither lamp nor seat nor chamber should be abandoned until the record was finished and sealed. He had begun to write in characters unknown to the Christians round him, and for a time had hoped to carry out that purpose in secrecy. But, as he said with one of his bitter smiles, "the sons of Dominick are keen of scent and swift in pursuit." They had traced him, seized him, and taken his papers, though they were unable to read them. Their ignorance, sheltered by pride and secrecy, had at last forced them to restore the writings, and in that event he believed he had seen the direct hand of the God of Israel.

"Then," he said, "I vowed another vow. None but one who could read those characters should ever transcribe them. And I prayed that some Nazarene, escaped from their hands, pursued by the same enemy, and tempted by the same power, might be sent to me at last. I prayed that he might stand where others had stood, suffer where they had suffered, and trample on the snare where they had trampled. Thou art that man." When he said this, he fixed his eyes on me so strongly that I could neither speak nor turn away. I felt less as if I were hearing a proposal than as if I were being claimed for some purpose settled long before my birth.

My eye had by then fallen on the manuscripts spread upon the table. Looking at them listlessly, I discovered that they were not written in Hebrew, but in Spanish words formed with Greek characters, a method as safe from ordinary Christian eyes as if the pages had been inscribed by Egyptian priests. At that sight my heart sank lower still. It was plain that Adonijah did not mean merely to reveal a secret. He meant to use me. He meant to make me the hand by which those fearful records should pass from hidden writing into common speech. "No," I cried, shrinking back, "my own burden is enough. Must I carry the burden of others too?"

He broke out at once into a kind of stern ecstasy. “What dost thou tremble at, child of dust?” he exclaimed. “If thou hast been tempted, so have they. If thou hast resisted, so have they. If they are at rest, so shalt thou be. There is not a pang of body or soul thou hast suffered, or canst suffer, that they have not known before thee. And wilt thou refuse thy hand to those who are beyond refusal and beyond fear?” Then, bending nearer, he spoke in a lower voice, but with greater force. “Boy, thy hand shakes over pages it is unworthy to touch, yet still I must employ thee, for I need thee. Miserable necessity, that binds together minds so unlike, and makes one man the instrument of another when both would gladly part.”

As he spoke, I turned over the pages more fully, but my hand shook so violently that I could scarcely hold them. “Does thy hand tremble still?” he cried. “Then hear those who can no longer move their own.” In a transport that was almost madness, he snatched one of the skeletons from its place, set it before me, and, supporting it with one hand, pointed with the other, as white and bony as that of the dead itself, to the manuscript on the table. “Tell him thy story thyself,” he said to the skeleton. “Perhaps he will believe thee. Perhaps he will write when the dead command him, though the living cannot.”

I took the pen because resistance had become useless, but I could not trace a line. A strange feeling overcame me, as if in touching those papers I were placing my own hand into some current already running toward destruction. Adonijah, still excited, pressed me on with words, images, and gestures that seemed half inspired and half diseased. He spoke of a chain invisible but indissoluble, binding together those who had seen, suffered, and refused. He spoke of mute arms of bone pleading more strongly than living flesh. He said that the dead around me were not speechless, but only waited for a hand willing enough, or miserable enough, to lend them a voice.

At last his transport subsided a little. Seeing that I remained incapable either of writing or of listening in calmness, he set the skeleton back and stood before me breathing hard like a man exhausted by his own fervor. “It shall not be all at once,” he said more quietly. “You shall hear first, and write afterward. The mind, like the eye, must be brought from darkness to a dreadful light by degrees.” Then,

laying one hand on the manuscript and the other on the back of my chair, he added, “What thou art now about to hear is no legend for old women, no monkish terror, and no Jew’s dream. It is the true history of those who were tempted at extremity, as thou wert tempted, and who stood where thou standest now.”

I cannot tell you, Senhor, with what reluctance I yielded. It was not merely fear of the story itself. It was the feeling that in hearing and recording it I became more deeply entangled in a destiny from which all my former sufferings had perhaps been only the approach. Yet there are moments when the soul, weary of choosing, resigns itself to necessity as the body resigns itself to sleep. So I sat, the pen still idle in my hand, while Adonijah drew the lamp nearer, spread out one of the manuscripts, and prepared to open before me another abyss. And when at last he began, I felt, before I understood a word, that I had ceased to be only the hearer of my own misery, and had become the unwilling keeper of the misery of the dead.

Part 33

Adonijah drew the lamp nearer, spread out the manuscript, and, after gazing for a moment on the dead forms round us as if asking their leave to speak, began in a voice lower and more solemn than any I had yet heard from him. He said that what I was now to hear concerned a child of Spain, a merchant of that country, and an island in the Indian seas, where nature had seemed for a while to hide one human soul from all the corruption, cruelty, and falsehood of the world. “Write nothing yet,” he said. “Hear first. There are stories which the heart must receive before the hand can bear to trace them.” I obeyed, and he began to unfold the tale.

There was, he said, a Spanish merchant who had gone prosperously through the first years of life, and then, finding his affairs darken at home, had accepted a partnership with a relative already settled in the East Indies. He went thither with his wife and son, leaving behind him in Spain an infant daughter with a nurse, intending to send for her as soon as fortune should justify the charge. Fortune did more than justify it. After two years of successful labor, his losses were repaired, his hopes enlarged, and he sent orders that the child should be brought to him. The

nurse and infant embarked at once, and, as often happens where men make plans with confidence, the sea received those plans and answered them with ruin.

The vessel was wrecked on or near a small isle at the mouth of a river. Crew, passengers, and all were believed to have perished. But rumor afterward declared that the nurse and child alone had reached the island alive. The woman, already worn by terror, fatigue, and want, did not survive long after landing. The child remained. She grew there like some strange flower planted by accident where no human hand had thought to set it. She fed on fruits, drank the clear element from stream and hollow stone, slept among flowers, and retained, like faint music remembered from a far-off room, a few Christian words which the nurse had taught her and which she repeated without understanding fully to the birds and waters round her.

Thus the infant became a child, and the child grew toward womanhood, while all the world that formed and softened ordinary life was absent from her. No law taught her, no voice restrained her, no custom bent her, no fear darkened her. She knew the trees, the shade, the flowers, the fruits that prolonged her delightful life, the bright streams that reflected her own face back to her, the peacocks who spread their plumage as she passed, and the bird that perched familiarly on her shoulder and learned to answer her voice. These were her companions and her teachers. Pain she had scarcely known, death she had never understood, and fear had not yet entered her imagination, because fear, in most minds, is first learned from the face and cry of another.

The natives of neighboring islets sometimes approached her dwelling. At first they came with caution, then with wonder, and at last with worship. Their gestures were humble, their offerings of flowers welcome, and their visits peaceful. She saw them without alarm and only wondered how beings so dark, so unlike the bright life around her, could grow among the lovely blossoms they laid before her feet. To them, on the other hand, she seemed no earthly creature. Her pale hair, her white skin, her light rapid motion, her strange dress of flowers, shells, and peacock feathers, and the bird that sat upon her shoulder as if in service, made her appear some island goddess rather than a mortal maiden. Their awe increased

every time they saw her.

One day a company of young Indians landed near the isle, among them two lovers whose marriage was to be blessed by some omen from nature. They came singing, crowned with flowers, and bearing gifts such as their simple worship permitted. Then she appeared before them in all the fantastic beauty of her solitary life, her long pale auburn hair falling to her feet, flowers and bright feathers woven through it, shells of rich sea-colors on her brow, and her white arms and feet entirely bare. The young lovers sank before her in reverence. She spoke to them in a language they could not understand, and their belief that she was divine became complete. At that moment her bird flew from her shoulder, darted toward the withered rosebud in the girl's wreath, and laid it at the maiden's feet. The omen was received with transport. The young pair returned to their own island no longer in separate boats, and those who went with them sang of the white goddess and the isle made sacred by her presence.

But the sole and beautiful inmate of that isle soon forgot the worshippers who had disturbed her only for a little while. She returned to her wandering life among the woods, the rocks, the flowers, and the streams, as a creature wholly at ease in a world that had never frowned on her. If storms came, they came with the regularity of seasons. If the sea rose, it rose only to sink again into brightness. The changes of nature, terrible perhaps to instructed minds, had for hers only the character of power, not of menace. She had never seen an enemy, and so had no rule by which to interpret danger. The whole creation still seemed to her one family of beautiful and beneficent things.

Yet her life, though free from misery, was not wholly without a strange inward want. She had learned to look at her own image in the water, and perhaps to ask it questions which no water can answer. She had no name for loneliness, but she had begun to feel something like it. When birds ceased their songs at evening, and the great ocean murmured round the island in eternal sameness, she would repeat to herself the few sacred words the nurse had taught her, not as prayer exactly, but as sounds that seemed to belong to tenderness and protection. Thus innocence waited, though it knew not what it waited for. It stood like a clear

spring in a lonely place, still, pure, and shining, till a darker foot should first trouble it.

That hour came at last. A vessel in distress was driven toward the island, and from it there landed one who was unlike all the simple worshippers she had yet seen. He was a stranger, a wanderer, a man whose face bore at once power, knowledge, fatigue, and something more fearful than all three together. He spoke to her, and unlike the Indians, he understood and could partly answer the fragments of language she still retained. From that first meeting her solitary existence took another color. The world, of which she had known only flowers, birds, water, and light, began to speak to her through him in images of cities, nations, passions, crimes, religions, and griefs beyond her former thought. He did not merely appear before her. He interpreted the human universe to her, and by interpreting, changed her.

Adonijah paused here a moment, and I could see that even he, stern and dark as his spirit was, felt the singular pathos of such a beginning. Then he resumed, saying that the unhappy being whose innocence was thus first touched by knowledge was afterwards called Immalee. Under that name she listened to the stranger day after day. He showed her the distant world not by leading her into it, but by making it pass before her sight and imagination in living pictures. By his account, its magnificence and its horrors were always joined, so that wonder and terror entered her together. She who had never feared before now began to shudder, and she who had never desired before now began also to desire. Thus her education in humanity began with enchantment and with poison mixed in the same cup.

He taught her not only facts, but feelings. The loneliness she had once borne without pain became in his presence the preparation for attachment. The simplicity of her mind, which had made all nature one clear image, now made all his words sink into her with a force no divided or guarded spirit could have known. She listened, questioned, trembled, believed, and wept by turns. The world that thinks and suffers, the world of cities, temples, blood, triumph, cruelty, worship, and love, rose before her out of the sea and sky as if called up by his voice alone.

And because he was the first human being who had truly entered her mind, all those terrible revelations wound themselves inextricably round his image.

When Adonijah had brought the tale thus far, he laid his hand on the manuscript, looked fixedly at me, and said, “Now you begin to see why I told you this was no common story. Innocence itself, left alone in a paradise, could not remain beyond the reach of that being. He found her where nature had hidden her best. He spoke, and the whole world entered after him.” I had not yet taken up the pen, but I felt by then that I was already far deeper in the story than if I had written every word. The lamp burned steadily between us, the dead looked on in silence from their cases, and I knew that the next part of the narrative would lead me farther into that island world where beauty, solitude, and temptation had first met face to face.

Part 34

At first the stranger did not hurry to fill the silence. He looked round the island, then back at Immalee, as if measuring at once the beauty of the place and the strange innocence of the being who lived there alone. She, on her side, stood before him without fear, but not without wonder. She had seen dark islanders prostrate themselves at her feet, and had heard their cries and songs, but this man neither worshipped nor fled. He looked at her as one who knew more than she, and yet found in that knowledge no peace. It was this, perhaps, more than his features or his voice, that first fixed her attention on him.

She spoke to him in the broken words that remained with her from the nurse of her infancy. He understood enough to answer, though not always with ease, and the joy that shone over her face at being understood was like the sudden opening of flowers after rain. “You know the world of voices,” she said eagerly. “You know the world where all can answer. Tell me, is it beautiful?” He replied, “Beautiful and miserable.” She paused at once over that second word. “Miserable?” she repeated. “What is that?” He looked at her long before answering, as if he regretted already the necessity of being the first to bring such knowledge to her

ear.

She soon forgot the gravity of his look in the pleasure of having at last a human companion. Observing by signs that he was weary and hungry, she beckoned him to follow her through the shade of the grove. “Come,” she said, “the tamarind and the fig are shedding their fruit, and the stream is cool under the mango. I will bring you water in the shell, and you shall eat what the island gives me.” As they went, she poured out all the history of her life with the frankness of one to whom concealment was impossible. “I am the child of the palm-tree,” she said, pointing to an old trunk fallen and half decayed. “I first woke under its shade, but my poor father has been dead long, long since.”

She went on with that wild and innocent way of measuring life which belonged to her lonely education. “I am very old,” she said gravely. “I have seen many roses die on their stalks, and though new ones came, I did not love them so much as the first. Besides, every thing is grown smaller now. The fruit used to be out of my reach till it fell, and now I can touch it before it drops. The water too is taller than it was. Once I drank it on my hands and knees, and now I can lift it in the shell. And I am older than the moon, for I have seen it waste away till it was dimmer than the light of a fire-fly.” The stranger listened with an expression in which compassion struggled for a moment with something darker and more mocking.

He accepted the fruit at last, though at first he had seemed hardly conscious either of hunger or thirst. While she gathered figs and laid them before him on leaves, she watched him with the most lively curiosity. “Tell me,” she said, “how is it that I understand you? The loxia speaks to me, and the peacock cries to me, but I do not know their thoughts as I know yours. When you speak, I seem to hear something I knew before I was born.” He asked, with a faint smile, “Before you were born?” “Yes,” she answered with perfect seriousness. “A spirit once came from the world of voices and whispered sounds to me long before I could gather fruit or drink from the stream. I never forgot them. They come back now when you speak.”

The stranger leaned for a moment against the trunk of a tree and looked at

her almost tenderly. That look did not last. He seemed to reject it as men reject a softness that accuses them. Soon the half-ironical, half-dark expression returned to his features, and with it his desire, not merely to speak to her, but to shape her thoughts. He drew from his dress a small telescope, such as she had never seen before, and directed it toward the coast of India, which lay not very far distant across the sea. “Look,” he said. She took it eagerly, though at first she held it the wrong way and cried out in sorrow, “Gone! gone! The beautiful world lived only a moment.”

He directed it rightly, and then her delight became almost painful to witness. She saw cities, buildings, moving crowds, and the works of men, all bright and small in the clear distance. “Alive!” she cried. “Alive and more beautiful than ever. All living, thinking things. Their very walk thinks. No mute fishes, and senseless trees, but wonderful rocks that men have shaped with thought. Oh, what a world must that be where nothing is natural, and every thing is beautiful! Thought must have done all this. Thought should be a god.” Then, checking herself with the quick modesty that was natural to her, she added, “Perhaps I am wrong. Things often grow greater as I come near them. Perhaps your beautiful world grows higher as one approaches.”

“Hold, Immalee,” said the stranger, taking the glass gently from her hands. “To enjoy what you see, you must also understand it.” She seated herself at once at his feet on the grass, as if instruction itself had become a kind of delight. “Yes,” she said, with anxious submission, “let me think.” He was silent a moment, then asked abruptly, “Immalee, have you any religion?” The word was wholly new to her. Yet, seeing his brow grow pale and drops stand on it, she sprang away, returned with a broad banyan leaf, wiped his forehead with childish solicitude, and then repeated with profound eagerness, “Religion? What is that? Is it a new thought?”

He answered more gravely than he had yet spoken. “It is the knowledge of a Being greater than all worlds and all creatures, because He made them and will judge them. It is the sense of One whom we do not see, yet in whose presence we stand always. It is to believe in a power every where unseen, always acting, though

never moving, hearing all things, though never heard." She interrupted him with a gesture almost of pain. "Stop," she said. "Too many thoughts will kill me. I have seen the shower that came to refresh the rose beat it down to the earth." Then, after a little silence, she added with deep recollection, "The voice of dreams told me something like that before. Often I have thought I loved the things round me too much, and that I should love things beyond me, flowers that never fade, and a sun that never sets. I wished to spring upward like a bird after that thought, but there was no one to show me the path."

Those words seemed to move him more than he wished to confess. Still he went on, and in going on, he began also to wound. "It is not enough," he said, "to think of such a Being. Men in the world express these thoughts by outward acts. They call this worship." A strange smile touched his lip as he spoke the word. "And in all the world they differ about it. Yet in one thing they agree well enough. They make religion a torment. Some use it to torture themselves, and some to torture others." Immalee looked at him in simple amazement. "In the world that thinks?" she said. "Impossible. If He is One, how can difference please Him?"

"And have you then no worship?" he asked. She answered without hesitation, "I smile when the sun rises in beauty, and I weep when the evening star comes. I love the flowers when they open, and I am sorry when they die. When the winds are kind, I am glad. When the storm beats, I hide and wait till all is gentle again. Is not that worship?" He looked at her keenly. "It is innocence," he said, "but the world has something harder than innocence. It has knowledge, fear, command, law, punishment, and prayer learned under suffering." She reflected on this longer than on any thing he had yet said. At last she replied, "Then the world is very great, and very sad."

From that hour their conversations became frequent and long. He came to the island again and again, and she received him always with the same delight, yet with growing inward agitation. He was to her not merely a companion, but the gate through which an unknown universe entered. Under his words the sea no longer marked the edge of existence. Beyond it there rose for her nations, temples, kings, slaves, mothers, lovers, crimes, griefs, and forms of worship as various as

the flowers of her island, but stained with pain. She listened, trembled, questioned, and believed. And because every thing new came to her through him, the world itself began to gather round his image, till wonder, dependence, pity, fear, and the first secret motions of love were all woven together in her heart before she knew one feeling from another.

Part 35

On one of those later visits, when Immalee had already learned to wait for him with a restlessness she herself could not name, the stranger resumed the subject of religion with more intention than before. He took up the telescope again and told her that if she wished to know how men thought of God, she must not look first at their words, because men often deceived one another there, but at their worship, because in their dealings with heaven they were often more sincere than in their dealings with one another. “If the god they imagine is terrible,” he said, “their worship will speak terror. If cruel, cruelty will appear in the faces and acts of the worshippers. Look, then, and judge.” She obeyed him at once, eager, submissive, and already formed by habit to receive knowledge through his hand.

The first sight he showed her was the coast of India, where temples of very different faiths rose within view of one another. She cared little at first for the buildings themselves. “The rocks are more beautiful,” she said, “for they have sea-weeds, mosses, and palms, and the wind can touch them. These houses stand stiff and dead.” But he insisted that the meaning lay not in the stones, but in the thoughts those stones sheltered. Then, under his guidance, she looked again, and this time he made her see not only roofs and walls, but the life moving round them. The world of men, which had once seemed to her only a splendid distant picture, now began to break into separate scenes of suffering, devotion, fear, and pride.

He pointed first to the dark pagoda of Juggernaut and the long sandy space before it. There she saw not triumph or festivity, but a plain white with bones and crowded with living forms scarcely less ghastly. Pilgrims, burnt by the sun and worn to shadows, crawled toward the temple in hope of holiness or relief. Some

died before reaching its shade. Some dragged themselves on over the bodies of the dead. The living and the dead seemed almost mingled together on that burning sand. Immalee, who till then had looked with delight on every human multitude he had shown her, uttered a cry and let the glass fall for a moment from her eye. “Do they go willingly there?” she asked. “They do,” he answered. “And the god they seek is honored by their pain.”

She looked again, and the sight seemed even worse because it was no longer wholly strange. The pilgrims were not pursued by enemies or overtaken by storm. They were sufferers by choice, and that choice was made in worship. “Then worship can wound,” she said slowly. “It can,” he answered. “Men sometimes think they please heaven best when they hurt themselves most.” The thought entered her with visible difficulty. She had smiled to the sun, wept to the evening star, loved the flower that opened, and pitied the flower that died. To her, adoration had been only another form of joy. Now she was seeing devotion clothed in dust, blood, hunger, and despair.

He next directed her sight toward a Turkish mosque distinguished by its crescent, and afterward toward another temple belonging to the ancient worship of the country. In each place the forms differed, yet in each there was something that troubled her. Here were prostrate figures repeating words by habit and fear. There were gestures exact and solemn, but faces without peace. There were priests whose gravity looked less like love than office. There were worshippers who seemed to bow not because the heart overflowed, but because law, custom, or terror had bent them down. “Why do they not worship as the birds sing?” she asked. “Why do they not smile, if they are glad?” The stranger answered, “Because they are not glad. Or if they are, their gladness is not simple. They carry guilt, memory, and fear into the presence of the Being they adore.”

This thought opened in her mind a whole world of new pain. “Then to think is indeed to suffer,” she said. “The flower dies patiently because it does not remember. The bird loses its young one and still eats, because it cannot look too far before or behind. But man remembers and fears. He loves what is absent, and trembles for what is to come.” The stranger regarded her with a look in which

triumph and something almost like regret were mixed. “You are learning,” he said. “Yes,” she answered, but tears came into her eyes as she spoke. “And every thought I learn is heavier than the last.”

Yet even these tears had for her something sweet in them. She told him so with the frankness that never left her. “When I first began to weep,” she said, “I was afraid of it. I thought the flowers bled through my eyes. But now I know tears are not always sorrow. Sometimes they are only a fuller kind of feeling. They make the heart more tender.” He replied with bitter quiet, “In the world you are about to know, tears are often the beginning of sorrow, not its end.” She heard the warning but did not understand its whole weight. How could she? Suffering to her was still chiefly an image. It had not yet become habit, memory, and destiny.

Still he went on teaching her, and always in such a way that wonder and grief entered together. He described cities where thousands lived side by side yet did not know one another, houses rich with gold and silk but full of misery, mothers weeping over children, lovers divided by pride or law, and men kneeling in temples with hatred in their hearts. To a mind like Immalee’s, which received each picture with undivided force, these descriptions were not stories but visions. She trembled, then questioned him eagerly, then trembled again. At times she could bear no more and begged him to stop. At times she implored him to continue, because every pain he revealed seemed to bind her more strongly to the being who interpreted it.

Once, after a long pause of reflection painful to see in one who had so lately lived only by instinct and delight, she said, “Then the world of thought is a world of pain, but why do you call me to it? Why did you not let me remain among the flowers? If men suffer so much, why do they not return to the trees and the sea?” He answered, “Because once awakened, thought never sleeps again. Because even sorrow enlarges the being that feels it. Because innocence without knowledge is beautiful, but it is not human life.” She laid her hand upon her heart and said, “Then I am changing. I do not know myself. I was once as happy as the birds. Now, if you are absent, I am not happy even when the birds sing.”

At those words he turned away for a moment. She, interpreting every

movement by her own sincerity, feared she had displeased him. She drew nearer with one of her roses in her hand and said timidly, “Have I spoken ill? Take this from me, then, and be kind again. When I bend over the fountain, I say to my friend in the water, ‘Let us breathe one flower together,’ but the image always steals mine away before I can taste it. Will you take this rose? We may share its sweetness better than I can share it with a shadow.” He answered, “I will,” and took from the cluster she held out not the freshest bloom, but a withered one. He hid it at once in his breast, and that choice, though she did not understand it, had in it more truth than the offering of the flower itself.

Soon after this he prepared to depart. The sea had grown darker, and the little canoe by which he came was now but a dim shape among the rocks. “Will you go alone over that black water?” she asked anxiously. “I shall go,” he answered. “And will you come again?” He looked at her fixedly and said, “We shall meet again, and meet in the world of suffering.” She repeated those words with gratitude, because she still took from his lips whatever he gave them, whether comfort or wound. “Thank you,” she said. “Then I shall wait for that world, since you will be in it.” He made no answer but the same dark promise. Twice he turned as he went, and twice some last stir of humanity seemed to pause about him; but each time he hardened himself again and moved on through the surf.

For seven mornings and seven evenings after that, Immalee paced the sands of her lonely isle and looked over the sea without seeing him. Yet she repeated continually to herself the promise that they should meet in the world of suffering, and she repeated it as if it were full of hope. During that interval she tried, in her own strange innocent way, to prepare herself for entrance into such a world. Watching a flower fade, she said, “It dies without pain, and the flowers near it are not sad. But if he died, could I live beside him and still smile?” Watching a bird over its dead young, she began to understand that to think and to love were perhaps the same as to suffer. Thus, before the stranger returned, the first lessons he had taught her had already begun to work inwardly, and paradise itself was no longer simple to the heart that had once been at ease there.

Part 36

For seven mornings and seven evenings Immalee walked on the sands of her lonely island and looked over the sea without seeing him. She still repeated to herself his promise that they should meet in the world of suffering, and she repeated it as if it were full of comfort. Since he had spoken it, she had tried, in her own strange innocent way, to prepare herself for entrance into such a world. She believed that if she could understand a little of pain before he returned, she would be more worthy to hear him speak of it again. So she began to study sorrow where she could find its faintest image among flowers and birds.

In the shade she watched a flower wither day by day. “The blood that ran so red in it yesterday is dark today,” she said to herself, “and tomorrow it will be black and dry. Yet it feels no pain. It dies quietly, and the flowers near it are not sad, or their colors would not still be so bright. But is it thus in the world that thinks? If I saw him fade as this flower fades, could I stay fresh beside him? No. When this flower bends and falls, I would be the dew that covered it, and if he suffered, I should suffer too.” These thoughts did not make her miserable yet, but they made her serious, and seriousness was new to her.

She then tried to learn from the creatures that lived around her. One day a young bird had fallen dead from its hanging nest, and Immalee, looking into the opening, saw the old birds still there with food in their beaks, while the little one lay still before them. At this sight she burst into tears. “You cannot weep,” she said, “and that is why you can still eat while your own little one lies dead. But if he died, could I drink the milk of the cocoa-tree again? Could I gather fruit, and still taste it? I begin to know what he meant. To think, then, is to suffer, and a world of thought must be a world of pain. Yet these tears are sweet. They make the heart ache, but they also make it fuller.”

On the eighth evening he returned. She did not hear him first, but felt a shadow fall across the place where she sat, and turning suddenly, saw him standing there. She sprang up with a cry of delight that had in it something almost like reproach. “You are come again,” she said. “I knew you would. I have been

learning the world that suffers while you were away." He looked at her with surprise and asked, "And what have you learned?" "That flowers die without grieving for one another," she answered, "and birds lose their young and still live. But I think men are not like them. I think to love is already to suffer."

He smiled, but there was little joy in that smile. "You have learned quickly," he said. "Too quickly, perhaps." She came nearer and looked earnestly into his face. "And I have learned something else," she added. "I can bear your being absent no longer as I once bore the setting of the sun. Before I knew you, all changes returned to joy. Now some changes leave pain behind them." He turned away for a moment, and when he spoke again, his voice was colder. "Then you are indeed ready to hear more of that world." "Show it to me," she said instantly. "If it is beautiful, let me rejoice in it. If it is sad, let me still know it, because you came from it."

They walked together to a point of the island from which the distant coast of India could be seen. The sea was calm, and the evening light so clear that ships moving far away looked like living things cut sharply against the gold of the west. He gave her the telescope once more, and now her hand took it with less childish wonder and more eager purpose. "I will not say now that thought should be a god," she said, smiling faintly, "until I have seen what thought has done." He directed the glass toward the sea-path where vessels passed to and from the East, and bade her look not only at the shore, but at the ships themselves, and ask where they came from and why they went.

She saw them approach one after another, some heavy with goods and some hastening away as if eager to carry their gain elsewhere. She clapped her hands at first, delighted with the motion of them and the white swelling of their sails. "How beautiful!" she cried. "They come like birds over the water. They must bring gifts, songs, and gladness to every shore they touch." "Look again," he said. "They bring gold, silver, and the souls of men. They come to seize the rich things of warm countries, and deny the poor people of those same lands even the food that keeps them alive. They come loaded with greed, lust, disease, and pride, and when they go back, they carry with them wealth in their holds and corruption in their

hearts."

Immalee lowered the glass in astonishment. "But if they do such things, why do they come smiling over the sea?" she asked. "Because evil often travels splendidly," he answered. "Because sails can be white though the purpose that fills them is black. Because men learn very early to cover avarice with enterprise, and cruelty with civilization." She looked again, this time in silence, and what had first seemed beautiful now seemed doubtful and even threatening. "Then the sea carries sorrow too," she said. "Every where," he replied. "The world is full of men who cross earth and ocean only to enlarge the field of human misery."

She still wished to understand, and, like all sincere minds, once awakened, she preferred painful truth to pleasing vagueness. "Tell me, then," she said, "what sort of world sends them forth." He answered after a pause, and his answer was given with that mingling of truth, bitterness, and dark mockery which always marked his speech when he spoke of mankind. "It is a world," he said, "where the chief art of the inhabitants is to increase their own suffering and the suffering of others to the utmost possible degree. Considering how few thousands of years they have practiced this art, they are already excellent masters in it. Nature gave them weak bodies and evil passions, and they spend their lives improving both gifts. They labor to make the body more diseased, the mind more restless, desire more burning, and disappointment more certain."

Immalee shuddered, but still listened. "How can they do that?" she asked. "In many ways," he answered. "First, they refuse the simple food that would nourish them without pain. They kill living creatures to feed on their flesh, and they force from abused plants drinks that do not quench thirst, but inflame the blood, darken the reason, sharpen the passions, and shorten the life they pretend to enjoy. You, who live on fruits and clear water, would think this madness, and you would be right. But in that world men are proud of every habit that makes them less gentle, less clear in thought, and more capable of tormenting one another." As he spoke, Immalee turned her eyes involuntarily toward her peacocks, and he saw the movement and smiled with a cruelty almost playful.

"There are some," he continued, "whose taste is less refined still. They are

content, when need or fury drives them, to feed on the flesh of their fellow-creatures. Since human life is generally miserable, one might say this is at least a quick way of lessening the sum of human wretchedness." "Do not say so," cried Immalee, putting her hands over her ears. "You are making the world too fearful for me to bear." He answered, "I have not yet begun." She looked at him with tears, but they were not tears of mere terror now. "Yet I must hear," she said. "When you are absent, I think only of you. When you are with me, I think of all you tell me. If those thoughts are painful, still they are yours, and I cannot refuse them."

He was silent at that, and for the first time there seemed in him something like inward conflict. The island lay round them in evening beauty, the birds were settling into quiet, and the sea burned with that soft last light which makes even solitude seem blessed. Beside all this peace sat the being who was teaching her to associate humanity with corruption, worship with terror, and thought with suffering. Yet she, who should perhaps have feared him most, only leaned nearer, because pain itself had become dear when it came to her through him. At length he pointed again toward the sea and said, "Then look once more, Immalee. Those ships are only the first lesson. The world that suffers is wider, darker, and more crowded than all your island dreams can yet imagine."

Part 37

"Look once more," he said, and directed the glass toward another part of that distant shore. There she saw not a temple now, but a wide field covered with moving lines, bright points of steel, mounted figures, smoke, and confused rapid motion. At first she did not understand it. "Are they dancing?" she asked. "No," he answered. "They are at war." She repeated the word slowly, for she had heard it before from him, but had not yet fixed its meaning in her mind. "Then these are the beings you told me of, who are hired to destroy those whom under other circumstances they might have wished to help."

He seemed almost pleased that she remembered. "Yes," he said, "and see

how admirably they perform the work. They have no quarrel of their own with one another. They never knew one another before this hour. Yet now they rush together with iron, powder, fire, and sharpened steel, as if each had been born only to tear the heart from the breast of the other." She trembled and still looked on. "But for what?" she asked. "For many things, and for nothing," he replied. "For a few inches of barren ground, for the mastery of a strip of sea, for the vanity of kings, for the pride of ministers, for pay, for bread, for the love of noise and motion, for the dread of home, for hatred learned by command, and very often because men are weary, restless, and glad to perish showily rather than live obscurely."

Immalee lowered the glass and thought a while. "Then the kings must be very cruel," she said at last, "if they send so many to die for things so small." "Cruel?" he answered. "Some are cruel, some weak, some vain, and some merely afraid to appear less violent than their neighbors. But cruelty is not the whole matter. Men are capable of making misery look noble to those who endure it, and splendid to those who command it. They dress murder in bright colors, put music before it, wave banners over it, and call it glory. Then the poor, the hungry, the disappointed, and the proud all run to it as if they were invited to a feast." She looked again with tears in her eyes. "Then the world that thinks knows how to deceive itself."

"Perfectly," he said. "That is one of its chief accomplishments." He pointed once more through the glass. "And yet, in the midst of all this madness, there are sometimes moments that almost redeem the race. A vessel may blow up in battle, and the very men who a minute before were tearing one another with fire and iron may leap into the sea to save those same enemies from drowning. Pride, courage, or some sudden awakening of nature may thus break through custom and command for an instant." Immalee clasped her hands at once. "Oh, that is beautiful," she cried. "That is glorious. I could bear all the rest to see only that." Her face shone with such pure delight that he frowned more darkly than before.

"And what do the kings do," she asked after a pause, "while this is happening? Do they come near the wounded? Do they bind the bleeding? Do they speak to the dying?" He laughed, but there was no joy in it. "The kings?" he said.

“Some sit far away and wait for news. Some pray publicly and intrigue privately. Some tremble for their crowns while others are losing their limbs. Some ride over the field after the slaughter and look at the dead as if they were counting fallen leaves. Their pity, if they have any, comes safely after the danger.” “Then they are not fathers to the people?” asked Immalee. “No more,” he answered, “than the storm is father to the wreck it makes.”

She was silent for some time after this, and during that silence the evening seemed to grow more solemn round them. The sea darkened, the bright colors left the clouds, and the first star appeared above the palms. But her mind was too full now to return easily to its former peace. “If men can do these things,” she said at last, “then every thought they gain seems only to give them a new way to hurt one another.” “Very often,” he replied, “that is exactly what thought does among them. Their inventions destroy, their laws oppress, their wealth corrupts, their religion terrifies, and their pleasures leave them emptier than before. They refine pain as if it were an art. They make the body sick with excess, the imagination feverish with desire, and the heart miserable with comparison, memory, pride, jealousy, and fear.”

“You spoke to me of this before,” she said softly, “when you told me they force from plants drinks that darken the reason and inflame the blood.” “And I might speak of it for years,” he said, “without saying all. They refuse the fruits that would sustain them without cruelty, kill living creatures to feast on their flesh, and then force from crushed grain and fruit liquors that disturb the mind and stir the worst passions till men love rage better than peace and excitement better than happiness. They poison themselves slowly and call it society. They lose the clear use of the senses and call it joy. They inflame the blood till the heart becomes at once weaker and wilder, and then wonder that life is miserable.” Immalee shuddered. “Then even what they take for gladness is another way of suffering.”

“Exactly,” he said, and his eyes fixed on her with a strange intensity, as if he wished every word to go down into her very soul. “And when they are tired of these common ways of torment, they invent finer ones. They teach the young to desire what they can never keep, the old to regret what cannot return, the poor to

envy, the rich to fear, the proud to be restless, and the humble to feel their humiliation more deeply every year. They give names to all these disorders, decorate them, excuse them, preach against them, and practice them still them, and practice them still. Thus whole lives are spent in teaching misery how to wear a graceful face." "Do all live so?" she asked. "All in one way or another," he answered. "Even the happiest carry a hidden wound."

She leaned against the trunk of a tree and covered her eyes for a moment. "When I first saw your world through the glass," she said, "I thought it all beauty because all moved and answered. Then I thought it greatness because men had built and sailed and spoken together. Now every thing I learn makes it darker. Yet I cannot wish not to know it. Is that evil too?" "No," he said more gently than before. "That is the beginning of being human." She looked up at once. "Then to be human is to lose paradise." "Yes," he answered, "and not only to lose it, but to know it is lost." These words fell between them with such force that even he seemed troubled by them after speaking.

To change the current of her thoughts, or perhaps to drive it deeper, he asked suddenly, "And what think you now of worship?" She considered before answering. "I think," she said slowly, "that the Being you spoke of must be very great, if He can bear so much confusion from those who seek Him. I think too that men are very unhappy, if they bring fear, blood, and lies into His presence. I do not understand their ceremonies, but I understand now why they kneel with faces that are not glad. They do not worship as the birds sing or the flowers open. They worship as those who remember wrong, expect punishment, and ask for safety." He replied, "You have learned much." "And yet I know nothing," she said. "Before you came, I was only happy. Now I am not happy, but I begin to understand."

The confession moved him in spite of himself. A struggle, brief but visible, crossed his face. He knew that every lesson he gave her made return impossible, and yet he could not cease from teaching, because he was teaching not only the world, but himself, through the wonder and pain of her innocent mind. "Immalee," he said at length, "there is something still darker than war, than cruelty, than false

worship, than all I have shown you." She looked at him with quiet terror. "What can be darker than making pain into religion and murder into glory?" "Love among men," he answered, "when it is touched by the world. Not love in its beginning perhaps, but after law, pride, family, religion, fear, and self have laid hold of it. Then what should save becomes one more instrument of suffering."

She grew very pale, though she did not fully understand him. "I do not know that thought yet," she said. "You know its first shadow," he replied. "You have felt absence. You have waited. You have looked over the sea and found the whole island changed because one being was not on it. That is enough for the beginning." She made no answer, but tears rose again and stood in her eyes. They were not tears of shame, because shame had not yet been taught her, but tears of a heart that had begun to discover itself through another. Seeing them, he rose abruptly as if flight were safer than further speech.

"Must you go?" she asked at once. "I must," he said. "And will you return?" He was silent so long that she thought he had not heard her. At last he answered, "Yes. And before long you shall see more than through the glass. You shall enter that world whose suffering I have shown you from afar." She repeated the words faintly, not with the earlier joy that had answered every promise, but with a deeper feeling. The island was no longer enough for her now, and yet the world beyond it had already filled her with dread. Still she trusted the hand that had wounded her. That trust, which should perhaps have been fear, was the surest sign of how wholly her solitude, imagination, and awakening heart had given her over to his influence.

Part 38

Time passed, and with it the outward shape of Immalee's life changed more quickly than her heart. By one of those strange turns which seem like chance to men and like destiny to the sufferer, she was at last removed from her island and restored to her father's house in Spain. There she received the name of *Isidora*, was taught the forms of Christian life, and was surrounded not by trees, sea, birds,

and open sky, but by a mother austere in religion, a brother proud and impatient, and a whole household full of rule, ceremony, and watchfulness. The paradise she had lost was not replaced by love. It was replaced by order, caution, and cold instruction.

Yet the deepest change in her was not made by Spain, but by memory. She had brought back with her from the island something that no mother, priest, or custom could take away. Her heart had once opened wholly to one voice, and it could not learn afterward to open in the same way to any other. The lessons of religion, the language of duty, the grave manner of those about her, and even the new name they gave her, all rested upon her like garments laid over some inward being that still remained itself beneath them. She obeyed much, learned much, and spoke little, but within she was still Immalee.

Her mother, Donna Clara di Aliaga, was a woman who joined Spanish formality to severe religious habit. She loved propriety almost as much as salvation, and thought a household ill-governed if it moved either too warmly or too freely. Her brother, Don Fernan, had that mixture of dull pride and quick temper which sometimes grows in men who feel their rank less secure than they wish it to appear. Both looked on Isidora's beauty less as a mystery of nature than as something to be directed, guarded, and used honorably. They could not understand why she often seemed absent while present, or why she received the world as if she had once belonged to another.

One evening, while walking in public with her family among others of rank and wealth in Madrid, she passed through a group already occupied in speaking of a singular stranger who had appeared among them. Her beauty drew every eye as she moved, for even under Spanish dress and discipline there remained in her something of the island, a lightness, purity, and truth of expression not learned from courts or convents. The whispers that had followed the stranger turned for a moment into broken praises of her. But she had scarcely passed when the man himself was seen slowly returning, known by all, yet seeming to know none. The company turned, and in turning, they brought him face to face with her.

His look, among all the faces before him, selected only one. She saw him too,

knew him in that instant, and uttered a cry so wild that all who heard it stood astonished. Then she fell senseless to the ground. The whole company rushed round her. Some sought water, some air, some explanation, and some only the pleasure of confusion. In that tumult the stranger might well have escaped every eye, yet just as they raised Isidora to place her in the carriage, a voice near her uttered softly but distinctly the old name, “Immalee.”

Even in faintness that name reached her like a hand laid suddenly on her heart. She half turned, opened her eyes with anguish, and tried to look toward the place from which the voice had come. But those around her understood nothing, and took her movement only for another sign of weakness. They hurried her into the carriage and drove away. The stranger remained where he stood, following its course with his eyes till darkness thickened round him. Those who still lingered to observe him afterward said that once he lifted his hand to his face as though to wipe away a tear. If that was true, the tear did not promise peace to the being for whom it fell.

The next day Isidora was to leave Madrid for a villa belonging to the family at some distance from the city. The whole party set out with the grave delay proper to their habits. The great square carriage moved heavily, its six black horses creeping rather than advancing, while servants rode beside it and every thing about the progress announced wealth without animation, dignity without pleasure. Within sat Donna Clara and her daughter. The mother preserved her usual cold composure. The daughter seemed equally quiet, but her quiet was not of the same kind. Donna Clara was calm because her world never went deep. Isidora was calm because every thing deep in her had been suddenly stirred beyond immediate speech.

The country through which they moved had beauty enough, but to Isidora it gave none of that free delight which the island once had given. Nature itself now came to her through memory, and memory came always with a face in it. She looked from the carriage at trees, sky, and evening light, yet every thing was altered because he had returned to the world around her. She had lived under one kind of pain on the island, the pain of absence. She had then been carried into

another life, where duty, religion, family, and shame all stood round her. Now these two worlds had met. The being who had first opened thought and sorrow in her stood somewhere upon the same earth again.

At the villa the household settled into that old Spanish regularity which seems made less for comfort than for order. Donna Clara directed every movement, every meal, every hour of devotion. Fernan watched his sister with the selfish vigilance of one who thought himself her protector because he hoped one day to profit by the distinction of her marriage. Priests came and went. Servants whispered. The evenings lengthened. And through all this Isidora moved with a quiet obedience that deceived them because it was so far from the inward truth. She performed what was expected, but her whole soul was bent toward one possibility, the possibility that he would seek her again.

He did. One evening, after the household had gathered within and the windows stood open on the garden, a strange agitation spread through the house before any one knew its cause. Isidora, standing near the casement, saw among the flowers and shadows beyond it the face she had never ceased to remember. The sight struck her with a terror not separate from delight. Her cry brought every one round her at once. Her mother advanced with essences and questions, her brother with anger and suspicion, the attendants with a hundred foolish suggestions, and the priest with the ready insight of one who smelled a secret and wished to hold it alone. But though pale as death and hardly able to stand, Isidora guarded the truth even then. She neither pointed toward the window nor let her eye rest openly upon it.

When flowers were brought to revive her, their scent only carried her back more strongly to the island. “There are no roses like those that grew round me when he first saw me,” she exclaimed before she could restrain herself. “He?” said Donna Clara instantly. “Who, daughter?” cried Fernan in the same breath. The priest, quicker in self-command, cut through their questions by declaring that she raved and must be left quiet. Under cover of that prudent judgment he sent mother and brother away, not to spare her, but to keep for himself the whole future knowledge of whatever hidden cause had thus disturbed her. Isidora gained her

room, but peace did not go with her.

From that hour the old life of mere memory ended. He began to appear at her casement by night as he had once appeared to her on the island, but now every meeting brought with it new torment. There had been no shame in solitude, because solitude had no witness. Here every whisper of affection stood under the eyes of family, religion, and social law. Yet the very pressure of those surrounding powers made her cling more desperately to the one being who had first awakened all her deepest feelings. When he spoke, she heard again not only his present voice, but the sea, the stars, the leaves, and the whole vanished world in which her soul had first known itself.

Their meetings, therefore, renewed what absence had never destroyed. He found her no longer merely the child of nature, but a woman divided between memory and duty, passion and religion, freedom and fear. This division made her dearer to him and more miserable in herself. She did not love him for grace of manner or for flattering words, for he had little of either. She loved him because he was the first, because all the world of thought had entered with him into her being, because nature, suffering, remembrance, and hope were all gathered round his image. And he, who should perhaps have fled from so pure and fatal an affection, returned to it again and again as if it both wounded and sustained him.

So the life at the villa, outwardly so formal and guarded, became inwardly full of concealment, agitation, and nightly expectation. Donna Clara saw enough to fear and not enough to understand. Fernan suspected much and knew nothing. Fra Jose, with his soft eyes and worldly appetites, watched every movement that might promise him knowledge and influence. And in the midst of them all stood Isidora, trying to obey, trying to pray, trying to hide, and failing in all because the heart that had once learned love on a solitary island could no longer return to safe ignorance. What had been simple in Immalee had now become dangerous in Isidora, and the world into which she had been brought was already proving itself, as he had foretold, a world not only of thought, but of suffering.

Part 39

During that month of nightly meetings beneath her casement, Isidora passed, almost without knowing it, through all those changes of feeling by which love becomes at once more tender and more fearful. At first she had only wished to speak and to hear. She had the whole wonder of her changed existence to tell him, and that innocent desire, so common to first affection, of showing every thought, every memory, and every feeling to the one being whose judgment has suddenly become more important than our own. She spoke of the island, of Spain, of her mother's severe goodness, of her brother's impatience, of the prayers she had learned, and of the strange divided life she now led between remembrance and duty. In those first interviews she was all confidence, trembling indeed, but still more eager than afraid.

Afterward another mood came. When the first delight of hearing and being heard had a little subsided, she began to feel with pain that she understood less of him than he understood of her. She had laid open the whole simple history of her heart, while he remained always, even in tenderness, surrounded by something dark and unrevealed. Her own truth made reserve in another feel like mystery, and mystery, where there is love, soon becomes suffering. She began therefore to listen with less joy and more solicitude. If he was silent, she feared she had displeased him. If he smiled, she watched the smile as if it might hide more than it expressed.

Yet the meetings continued, and with continuance came that deeper stage of passion in which the mind no longer seeks only to display itself, but to surrender itself. Isidora no longer thought chiefly of what she had to say. She thought rather of how she might please, calm, or comfort him. She watched his face when he spoke of the world, and when some dark and troubled expression crossed it, her own heart answered as if the pain had been hers. The island child, who had once loved him with wonder, now loved him with womanly anxiety. And because this feeling was joined to concealment, danger, and nightly expectation, it took hold of her with a strength all the greater because it had so few outward liberties.

Still her innocence, though shaken, was not yet lost. She had given her heart,

but she had not learned to separate love from truth, or tenderness from honor. There were moments when, even in the very sweetness of hearing him, a pang shot through her at the thought of what these secret interviews would become if they continued unchanged. She could not bear that the relation dearest to her soul should remain hidden like a shame. The teachings of Spain, though they had not made her worldly, had made her understand that a woman's affection must be protected by something more than feeling. Thus the very purity of her love began to demand from him an open, solemn, and lawful acknowledgment of their bond.

One night, therefore, when he had been speaking in that mingled tone of tenderness and dark mockery which so often disturbed while it attracted her, she gathered courage at last to say what had long trembled on her lips. "If you love me," she said, her voice failing even while she tried to steady it, "seek me no more thus secretly. My mother is good, though she is austere. My brother is kind, though he is passionate. My father—I have never seen him, and know not what to say; but if he is truly my father, he will not hate one whom I—" She stopped, covered her face for an instant, and then continued more firmly, "Meet them in their presence, and I shall no longer feel pain and shame mingled with the delight of seeing you. Ask from them what you have already asked from my heart, and let the Church bless what I can no longer bear to think of as hidden."

He answered first with raillery, as if he wished to turn aside the force of her appeal by treating it as only another pretty movement of feminine hesitation. "Perhaps!" he repeated when she had faltered over that word. "You have learned already the European perhaps, the art of darkening the very meaning you most wish to show." But she, instead of being drawn into confusion by the tone, spoke more openly than before. "No," she said, "I am truth when I speak to you. I am still Immalee with you, though to all others here I am Isidora. When I first loved you, I had only one heart to consult. Now there are others round me, and some who do not feel as I do. But if you love me, you can bend to them as I have tried to bend. You can love their home, their faith, and their hopes, as I would learn to share all yours."

Then, with the earnestness of one whose whole soul was gathered into that

one point, she added, “Even with you I could not be happy unless you adored the cross to which your hand first turned my wandering sight, and the religion which, however unwillingly, you once confessed to be beautiful and beneficent.” At those words a strange expression passed over his face, half convulsed and half derisive. “Did I confess that?” he said. “It must indeed have been unwillingly.” Then, mastering himself at once, he bent nearer and spoke with a softness that deceived her because she wished to believe. He told her he was a convert to whatever she loved, to her new religion, her beauty, her Spanish name, and all that she desired. He said he would wait on her mother, her brother, and all their stately and difficult kindred, and ask in due form what she had already given in freedom.

But while he spoke thus, there was in his voice something that chilled her through all its sweetness. Innocent and devoted as she was, she could not help trembling before this fearful being, whose words at one moment seemed all surrender and at the next all command. “Will you then be mine?” he asked suddenly. “Or what am I to understand from your tears and your doubts?” She answered with trembling sincerity, “Consult my parents. Wed me by the rites and in the face of the Church, and I will be yours forever.” At that word he started as if some inward chord had been struck with violence. “Forever?” he repeated. “Well spoken, my bride. You will then be mine forever?”

“Yes, yes,” she answered, though his manner already began to alarm her. “I have said so. But go now, I implore you. The sun will soon rise. I feel the coolness of the morning air and the smell of the orange-blossoms growing stronger. The servants may be stirring. Begone.” “I go,” he said, “but one word first. To me the sun, your servants, and all things in heaven above or earth beneath are of equal indifference. You are mine.” “Yes,” she said again, now weeping, “but you must solicit my family.” He replied in a tone whose irony she only half understood, “Doubtless. Solicitation is congenial to all my habits.” Then, after a pause, he added, “And what more?”

She hesitated, and the hesitation came not from artifice, but from pain. “I hesitate,” she said at last, “because those with whom you speak will not speak to God as I do. They will speak to you of wealth and dowry. They will ask what

region it is where your possessions lie, of which you have so often told me. And if they ask me, what shall I answer?" At these words he approached as near as possible to the casement and uttered a certain word in a tone so low that at first she scarcely believed she had heard it. Hoping she had mistaken him, she repeated her request. He answered again, now more distinctly. The reply was one word only, but it fell on her ear like a blow from ice and thunder together.

She looked at him in terror, unable for a moment either to believe or understand fully. "No," she whispered, as if denial might still change the fact. "You do not mean that." He repeated the same dreadful monosyllable with a force that left no room for doubt. Then the whole fabric of timid trust, patient concealment, and innocent hope under which she had so long suffered seemed to shake at once within her. She uttered a shriek and closed the casement violently. But the closed casement could only shut out his form, not his image, nor the horror of the answer that still seemed to reverberate through her heart long after the night itself had sunk into silence.

Left alone in her chamber, she sank to her knees, not even knowing whether she prayed or only wept. She now understood for the first time that love itself might become more fearful than loneliness. The being to whom she had given every deep affection of her soul stood before her suddenly stripped of the one support by which her conscience had hoped to join him with honor, faith, and home. Yet even then she could not cease to love him. That was the sharpest part of all. She recoiled, but she did not detach herself. The world he had promised her was proving itself indeed a world of suffering, and the first great suffering it gave her was this: that the heart, once given, cannot at once be recalled by terror, reason, religion, or shame.

Part 40

The night at last came on which had been fixed for their union. Isidora had retired early to her chamber, and from the first falling of evening she sat at the casement watching the garden below. One might have thought that at such an hour

a soul like hers would have been torn by a thousand different feelings. Yet it was not so. When a strong mind, long weakened by restraint, is driven at last to one violent effort for freedom, it has no leisure left to measure all that may be lost or gained. She sat pale and resolute, thinking less of all that would follow than of the one step by which she must pass beyond the power that held her.

For many hours she felt nothing but the awful nearness of his coming and of the event that was to follow. She trusted, with that complete and dangerous trust which had grown in her from the beginning, that by whatever means he was able to visit her through guarded walls and a vigilant house, by those same means he would be able to lead her out. It was near one in the morning when Melmoth appeared in the garden. He spoke no word at first, but threw up a rope-ladder toward the balcony and in short low whispers directed her how to fasten it and descend. Her hands trembled, yet obeyed him exactly, and in a few moments she was on the earth beside him.

They hurried through the garden at once. Even in that extremity Isidora could not help feeling surprise at the strange ease with which they passed through the well-secured gate and left the villa behind them. But they were soon beyond all familiar ground, and then surprise gave place to fear. The open country, through which she had scarcely ever wandered, seemed to her far wilder than the lonely paths of her island had once seemed, because there she had known no enemy. Now every sound appeared threatening. In the faint echoes of her own light steps she imagined pursuit, and in every movement of the air she heard a kind of warning.

The night itself deepened her terror. It was not like the soft summer nights she had known in her earlier life, but dark, broken, and disturbed. A blast, sometimes cold and sometimes heavy with sultry heat, moved through the trees in fits, and from time to time a pale wandering light crossed the sky like a troubled sign rather than lightning. To Isidora, whose whole nature still answered with painful quickness to every change in earth and air, this seemed a fatal omen. More than once she paused, turned toward Melmoth with doubtful and frightened eyes, and felt that her courage was sinking even while she tried to command it.

He hurried her on with a speed that soon exhausted both her breath and her

strength. At last she cried, gasping, “Stay. Where are you bearing me? What place is this to which we go?” He answered only, “To your marriage.” His voice was low and almost broken, whether from emotion or from the speed with which they moved she could not tell. A few moments later she could walk no farther, and leaned heavily on his arm, her whole frame trembling with weariness. “Let me pause,” she said, almost in fear, “in the name of God.” He gave no direct answer, but he stopped and supported her, and for an instant there was in his manner something that looked almost like tenderness.

In that pause she tried to examine the place around her. She could distinguish very little, yet what she saw increased rather than lessened her alarm. They seemed to be moving on a narrow path beside a rough shallow stream, whose waters fought over stones with a hoarse and broken sound. On the other side stood a few stunted trees, twisted by weather and tossing their thin branches in the troubled wind. Every thing appeared dreary, strange, and unlike a bridal path. “This is a fearful night,” she said softly, and then more audibly, hoping perhaps that some answer might soothe her. But Melmoth was silent, and as her fatigue and agitation overcame her, she wept.

“Do you already repent?” he asked at length, laying a strange weight on the last word. “No, love, no,” she answered, wiping away her tears, “I can never repent what I have done for you. But this darkness, this speed, this loneliness, this silence, have in them something almost terrible. I feel as if I were passing through a place not meant for human feet. No father walks beside me, no mother follows, no brother supports me, no friend blesses me. Where is the priest who is to unite us? Where is the church beneath whose roof I am to become your wife?” At these words he spoke of a ruined monastery near, and of a holy hermit dwelling beside it who would bless them in his little oratory.

But the account did not comfort her. He said the monastery had long since fallen into ruin after dark reports of forbidden books, magic, and inquiry by the Inquisition. He said too, with that bitter levity which always returned in moments of deepest seriousness, that crucifixes and grave-stones still remained there, though now the place sheltered banditti instead of monks, and the old trade of

gold for souls had only changed into the newer trade of souls for gold. At these words Isidora drew her arm away with a shudder. Then, suddenly gathering all her strength, she sprang upon a crag above the path and clung to an ash-tree that had rooted itself among the stones. “Hold,” she cried. “Come no nearer, speak no further, till you tell me plainly when and where I am to be made your wedded wife. I have borne doubt, terror, persecution, and secrecy; but I will bear no more without honor.”

Melmoth, startled by this burst of resolution, humbled himself even to kneel before her where she stood. He swore, by all she held sacred, that his intentions were as pure as her own soul, that the hermitage was but a hundred paces away, and that no being but herself could ever have been the bride of Melmoth. Then, when he saw she still hesitated, his tone altered, and he reminded her with terrible force that she was wholly in his power, far from all human aid, in a night so dark that neither cry nor struggle could bring her help. Yet, he said, he would not abuse that power. He offered only his hand to lead her to a consecrated place and unite her to him according to the rites of her own faith. Looking round at the dark stream, the trees, the lonely path, and the waste of night, she felt every object confirm his words, and at last she shuddered and yielded.

They went on again, but now her uneasiness returned in another form. “You speak of religion,” she said in a low pleading voice, “as if it were the custom of a country, a matter of habit, a fashion among men. What faith do you hold? What church do you enter? What holy rites do you perform?” He answered with an effort at levity that he respected all faiths much alike. Yet even while he said it, something like involuntary horror seemed to struggle across his face. Still more anxiously she pressed him. “Do you indeed believe in holy things?” Then, after a pause that made her blood grow cold, he answered that he believed in God, like those who believe and tremble.

She did not fully understand the fearful depth of those words, for her scriptural knowledge was slight and her religious education formal. Yet she continued, asking whether he believed all that her Church declared necessary to salvation. His answer came in a tone of stern and reluctant confession. He said he

knew it all, believed it all, and that no martyr of the Christian Church had ever borne a more dreadful witness to its truth than he one day would bear. He spoke of a testimony in flames, not for moments, but forever, and of a destiny that joined hers to his in that terrible grandeur. Before he had finished, Isidora's strength failed utterly. She fainted where she stood, still hanging by one cold hand upon his arm, and fell to the earth like a helpless burden of fear and weariness.

At the sight, he showed more feeling than she had perhaps ever seen in him. He loosened the folds of her dress, sprinkled water from the stream on her face, and supported her till breath returned. But his tenderness, such as it was, lasted only till consciousness came back to her. The moment she could move, he urged her onward again, assuring her that the place before them was near. She struggled on through the darkness, too weak now even for resistance. At last the ruined building rose before them more distinctly, and they climbed toward it through broken stones and roots. He led her to a small burial-ground before the ruin, told her the hermitage was close by, and left her for a moment among the graves while he went to call the holy man who was to unite them. There, wrapped in her veil and seated on a grave, she waited alone in shuddering silence, saw once a dim human figure moving as if to warn her away, and then, when he returned, was hurried forward into a ruined chapel where the darkness itself seemed to have become part of the ceremony prepared for her.

Part 41

Inside the chapel, darkness seemed not merely to fill the place, but to govern it. Isidora, exhausted in body and broken in spirit, could neither examine what was before her nor frame a prayer steady enough to support her. She felt only that the air was close, that the stones beneath her feet were cold, and that every object about her belonged more to ruin than to worship. When Melmoth left her for a moment, she had not strength even to call him back. She sat on the stone bench as one who has been brought to the edge of fate and can only wait to be pushed over.

By degrees a weak moonlight broke once more through the broken window. It showed the ruined shafts, the dark ivy hanging round them, the fragment of an altar, and the empty vessel once meant to hold holy water. It also showed her again the figure of the old servant who had followed her in faithful anxiety and who now appeared silently beyond the pillared opening, looking on her first with deep attention and then with pity. He raised his arm once more as if to warn her away. Then the figure passed, and a low mourning cry seemed to die with it in the night. Before she could gather thought enough to understand what she had seen, Melmoth was beside her again.

He spoke in a whisper and said the holy man was ready. The words gave her no comfort. A faint rustling followed, and she felt rather than saw that a third person had approached. The hour, the place, and her own long terror had so weakened all clear sense in her that she scarcely knew whether she stood, knelt, or only leaned to keep from falling. She heard words spoken, but they reached her rather like sounds in a dream than like language understood by the waking mind. When she tried to answer, she hardly knew what she said.

The ceremony itself passed over her like a troubled vision. She felt Melmoth's hand take hers. She heard a voice, low, hurried, and almost indistinct, uttering the forms required by the Church. Once she thought she heard herself named. Once she believed she caught the response of her own lips. Then all again became confused. Her whole soul seemed fixed not on the words that were said, but on the fearful certainty that they were irrevocable.

At length there was silence. Melmoth drew her arm within his, and in that movement she first understood that whatever had just been done was done forever. She had become his wife in darkness, solitude, and terror, with no mother near her, no blessing from home, no witness she knew, and no joy except the desperate joy of having escaped from one fate by rushing into another. She trembled so violently that he was forced to support almost her whole weight. Yet he did not speak with triumph. A strange and gloomy stillness had fallen on him too. It was as if even his dark spirit felt the solemnity of the bond it had sought.

They left the chapel almost immediately. The night was now deeper and

quieter, and the silence after that shadowy marriage seemed more dreadful than the sounds that had gone before it. Isidora looked once behind her toward the ruin, as if some instinct made her wish to know whether she had indeed crossed the threshold of lawful union or only of some fearful deception. But she saw nothing except the broken outline of the old building against the sky. Melmoth hurried her onward, and before long she had lost all sense of direction again. The world had become only darkness, fatigue, and the arm on which she leaned.

By the time she regained the shelter to which he had secretly conveyed her, dawn was not far off. He spoke little. She asked no questions, because she had no courage left for uncertainty and no power left for reproach. All that remained in her was a heart too full for rest and a body too exhausted for resistance. Thus the first hours of her married life were passed not in confidence or tenderness, but in that mute oppression under which the soul, having ventured all, has not yet strength to look at what it has gained or lost.

The next day at the villa moved at first with its usual grave regularity. Donna Clara, to whom writing a letter was as great and serious a labor as governing a province, spent almost the whole day composing an answer to her husband. Fra Jose sat near her, dictating phrases, correcting devout expressions, and suffering from the scratches and erasures of her pen with less patience than he preached. Between them they shaped a long account of Isidora's religion, her modesty, her docility, and the happy progress she had made from heathen ignorance toward proper Catholic obedience. But even in this praise there was poison, for Donna Clara could never write long of her daughter without also writing of what she chose to call her strange fancies.

So she told Don Francisco that Isidora was dutiful and pure, yet subject at times to singular thoughts which must surely proceed from some disorder of the mind. She recalled with alarm the questions her daughter had asked about prayer, pity, and pleasure, and repeated those innocent but inconvenient words which a rigid and vacant understanding always takes for signs of madness. Fra Jose encouraged her in all this, now supplying a Latin word, now a sermon-phrase, now some convenient pious turn by which simplicity might be made to look like

danger. Thus while the daughter lay hidden in the first misery of her unlawful happiness, the mother sat sewing false reasons upon true events and calling the whole work prudence.

Evening came, and with it a letter from Don Francisco which disturbed both priest and mother far more deeply than Donna Clara's had disturbed him. Its contents, among other things, told of a strange apparition in the form of his daughter, beseeching him to hasten if he would save her. The very hour at which he wrote of the apparition seemed to agree too closely with the hour then passing in the house. Donna Clara and Fra Jose read the letter again and again till every line darkened more upon them. Even their habits, their beads, their little comforts, and their practiced religious forms failed before this sharper fear. They listened at every movement of the air as if warning had already entered the house.

At last, while they still sat over the letter, the clock struck three. The coincidence with the hour named by Don Francisco chilled them both. Donna Clara turned pale and whispered that she had heard a sound. Fra Jose tried to recover his authority by speaking of drafts and open casements, but he himself was already uneasy. Then the tapers flickered violently, and the hanging tapestry near the door stirred as if some sudden current had entered from an unseen quarter. The priest rose, half from reason and half from fear, and went into the passage.

There another sight stopped him at once. The door of Isidora's room stood open, and a light still burned there. He entered quickly, looked toward the bed, and saw at once that it had not been slept in. The casement opening to the garden was wide, and the air came in strongly through it. At this discovery he could not help uttering a cry. Donna Clara, who had followed him as far as she could, heard that cry, tried to reach the chamber, and fell in the passage before she came to it.

When at last she was raised and brought back to her chair, she neither fainted nor wept. Terror had dried both tears and words within her. She tried only, with white lips and a hand that had almost lost its power, to point toward her daughter's room. Fra Jose, looking from the open casement to the helpless mother, let fall unconsciously the same dreadful words that Don Francisco's apparition had used. "It is too late," he said. And in that moment, while one woman sat paralyzed with

horror and one priest stood confounded between superstition and fear, the marriage of Isidora and Melmoth first became a visible calamity in the house she had abandoned.

Part 42

Yet before that night had wholly spent itself, the shape of the calamity changed in a manner that bewildered them even more. Donna Clara, recovering little by little from the first shock, would not be satisfied till every chamber, passage, and corner of the house had been examined. Servants ran with lights, doors were tried, and the garden itself was searched in fear and confusion. No trace of Isidora appeared. Then, when their terror had almost fixed itself into certainty, one of the women, passing again by her apartment, uttered a cry that brought them all back at once.

Isidora was there. She lay on her bed in profound sleep, dressed as if she had only just thrown herself down upon it, pale indeed, but breathing softly and with an expression of utter exhaustion rather than distress. The casement was now closed. No sound had been heard of her return, no footstep, no opening of a door, no voice in the passage. The attendants crossed themselves, and even Fra Jose, who had hitherto labored to keep his courage by words, stood for a moment silent before a spectacle that seemed to leave ordinary explanation far behind.

Donna Clara approached first, because maternal fear, though weak in resistance, is sometimes bold in examination. She called her daughter by name more than once, but Isidora neither moved nor answered. She took her hand; it was cold, yet not deathlike. She bent to listen at her lips; the breath came and went steadily, as in the deepest natural repose. “See,” said the bewildered mother, half hoping and half shuddering, “how profoundly she sleeps, though we speak over her, and though it is almost day.” Fra Jose, whose first impulse in every confusion was to escape into a formula, answered that sleep might still be only the natural effect of very natural causes.

He spoke with more confidence than he felt. The truth was that he desired

above all things to put an end for the moment to a crisis which threatened both his composure and his influence. So, exchanging his cowl for a night-cap with the solemnity of a man entering on the labors of the mind, he declared that Isidora had doubtless passed a most fatiguing night, as indeed had they all, though from very different reasons, and that all such causes equally disposed the frame to profound repose. Then, finding his theory easier than his nerves, he demanded wine, and after wine something more solid, alleging that his tongue clave to the roof of his mouth from fasts, watchings, and the labors of exhortation. Donna Clara, clinging to any direction that had the air of authority, obeyed him instantly.

Thus the dreadful business of the night, which should perhaps have driven stronger spirits to action, melted in that house into a consultation of terror, appetite, and superstition. Fra Jose drank, reasoned, and at last, overcome by the subject more deeply than he confessed, sank into such meditation as his habits permitted, and broke it only by lamenting that both bottles were empty. Donna Clara sat by, still watching her daughter with eyes full of fear, yet hardly daring either to touch her again or to let others touch her. The attendants, relieved from immediate duty, whispered in corners that the saints had returned the young lady, while the older women declared that no saintly visitation ever left so profound and heavy a slumber behind it.

Morning brought no real comfort, but it brought one of those accidents by which weak minds often mistake delay for deliverance. A letter arrived from Don Francisco announcing that urgent business had called him to another part of Spain and that the marriage with Montilla must therefore be deferred for some months. The words fell on Donna Clara's heart like reprieve on that of a prisoner. So long as the public marriage was postponed, there remained time to conceal whatever had happened in the night. Fra Jose, recovering both his wit and his authority with daylight, assured her that if Isidora's short disappearance were not known, then no evil had in truth taken place, and if known only to a few servants, might still by proper management be made of no account.

This counsel gave Donna Clara a kind of courage, but it was the courage of concealment, not of truth. She learned with great relief that amid the multitude of

domestics scarcely any one appeared conscious of her daughter's absence, and that one old servant, whose fidelity might perhaps have been dangerous, was himself missing from the house without attracting notice. The establishment, like many rich and formal households, was too crowded to observe a single disappearance closely when confusion had once subsided. Fra Jose, perceiving how much this discovery raised her spirits, recommended certain methods for securing silence among servants, methods which he praised as infallible, having, as he boasted, seen them operate even in establishments far greater than that of Donna Clara. When she asked what establishment could surpass theirs, he answered, with his usual mixture of irreverence and professional pride, that he meant the household of the Pope.

After settling thus the policy of the house, he advised her to wake Isidora, who, he said, deserved to sleep till doomsday if ever mortal had earned such a privilege. But when they approached the bed once more, they found it no easy matter to rouse her. She did at last open her eyes, yet with such heaviness and confusion that it seemed less like waking than like a soul recalled unwillingly from some farther depth. She answered little, looked round on them with wandering gaze, and then closed her eyes again as if even sight were too painful an effort. Donna Clara, who at every moment hovered between maternal pity and religious alarm, asked whether her daughter knew her. Isidora murmured something faintly, but whether it was recognition, supplication, or only a broken sound of weariness, none could tell.

They let her lie again, partly from fear of exciting her, and partly because no one really wished at that moment to hear the truth. There are occasions when families dread explanation more than mystery, because mystery still leaves room for concealment, while the truth fixes guilt, shame, and suffering in forms too clear to be denied. Thus the house moved through that morning with unusual softness, every step hushed, every voice lowered, every order given as if around a dying person, though in fact what lay under that roof was something more embarrassing to them all than death. Even Donna Clara's habitual fretting over kitchen, servants, clocks, and devotion sank for a few hours under the weight of

one thought.

Isidora herself, when at last she woke more fully, found her mind in a state more miserable than any bodily pain. She remembered enough to know that the decisive step had been taken and that no return to her former condition was possible. Yet her memory came brokenly, and with it such inward exhaustion that she could neither repent with force nor rejoice with freedom. She knew herself to be Melmoth's wife, and that knowledge lay upon her not like a blessing received, but like a seal impressed in darkness. What had passed in the ruined chapel, the hurried ceremony, the night, the terror, the vows, his strange language, and the sudden return to her chamber, all floated before her rather like fragments of a fever than like the calm beginning of lawful married life.

Still, even in this confusion, one thing remained unshaken in her: she loved him. That certainty, instead of consoling, now only deepened every other pain. Had she loved less, shame and horror might more easily have detached her. Had she doubted her heart, religion and fear might have governed it. But love, once given with the whole force of her nature, endured beneath every shock, and because it endured, it compelled her to bear in silence what a less devoted spirit might have proclaimed in despair. Thus, while Donna Clara and Fra Jose busied themselves in concealment and delay, the true crisis lay hidden where they could least understand it, in the heart of the young wife who had passed through terror, secrecy, and darkness into a bond that neither home nor Church had openly acknowledged, yet which her own soul already felt to be indissoluble.

Part 43

The morning after that dreadful night brought no explanation, only a change of form in the misery of the house. Donna Clara, who had expected to wake her daughter from that profound and mysterious sleep with tears, reproaches, and anxious embraces, was struck dumb at the first sight of her. Isidora entered the room of herself before she could be summoned, with her countenance as serene, her step as equal, and her whole manner as composed as if no terror had passed

under that roof, and no mother had sat through the night in despair. The contrast was so complete that both Donna Clara and Fra Jose stood looking at her as if they had suddenly found themselves in the presence of something less intelligible than guilt.

Then amazement gave place to questions, and questions to a kind of storm. Donna Clara asked where she had been, why she had left her room, by what means she had returned, and with whom she had passed those awful hours. Fra Jose, more eager because more suspicious, joined his voice to hers, and between them they exhausted almost every form by which curiosity can disguise itself as authority. But the effort was useless from the first. Isidora heard them all, neither with insolence nor with submission, but with that pale fixed patience which is sometimes more impenetrable than defiance. She answered nothing, and neither that day nor many that followed could entreaty, fear, spiritual admonition, or maternal accusation extort from her one word of explanation.

Her silence itself had now become a life. Before that night she had been simple, sorrowful, and secret. After it she was secret with a purpose, and silence seemed no longer natural innocence, but a guard set over the whole inward truth of her being. Donna Clara thought this obstinacy, Fra Jose thought it dangerous resolution, and both, in their different ways, believed they had power to break it at last. Yet each effort only failed more plainly than the last. They could force tears from her, they could drive her to her chamber, they could watch, admonish, and terrify, but they could not make her betray what had become dearer to her than safety, repose, or life itself.

Meanwhile, the nightly visits were renewed. To Isidora these interviews had now an anguish deeper than the former one, because love no longer stood alone in them. Love had been joined to duty, fear, religion, shame, and that inward knowledge of irrevocable bond which gave all tenderness a darker and more solemn color. On one of those nights, while expecting Melmoth, she had been singing as usual her vesper hymn to the Virgin and accompanying it on the lute. He entered through the casement, and with that ghastly half-levity which often covered his most serious feelings, asked whether it was not late for such a hymn

after midnight. “Her ear is open at all times, I have been told,” said Isidora. “Then add a stanza in favor of me,” he answered, vaulting into the room as before.

She tried to smile, but the attempt died on her lips. “Alas,” she said, letting the lute fall, “you do not believe, love, in what the Holy Church requires.” “I believe when I listen to you,” he answered. “And only then?” she asked. He evaded the question by desiring her to sing again. She obeyed, and watched him while she sang. He seemed moved, and motioned that she should repeat the hymn. Then, unable to bear this doubtful tenderness any longer, she said with mournful earnestness, “Is not this less like devotion than like some song called for by an audience? He who hears a hymn should love his wife the better because she loves her God.”

He answered with one of those brief and ambiguous turns which always wounded while they fascinated. But she, anxious now not for herself alone, pressed him more directly than she had ever dared before. “Do you ever visit the church?” she asked. He was silent. “Do you ever receive the holy sacrament?” Still he did not answer. “Have you ever, at my earnest solicitation, enabled me to announce to my anxious family the tie that unites us?” There was again only silence. Then, gathering all her courage, and with tears that came more from shame than weakness, she added what till then she had scarcely dared even to shape in thought. “And now—what am I to say? A wife without a husband, and soon perhaps—a mother without a father for her child, or one whom a fearful oath has bound her never to declare!”

Those words struck him more visibly than any she had yet spoken. The change in him was sudden and terrible. He caught her extended arms, fixed on her an eager and fearful look, and asked in a voice that seemed wrung from some inward convulsion, “And is it so?” She shrank from him, and her silence answered more clearly than confession. Then for a moment all the dark reserve, irony, and fierce self-command of his nature seemed broken through by something more human and more dreadful. He appeared to say inwardly, rather than aloud, that the being yet unborn was his, the first-born of affection and of nature, one who might bear his form when he himself was driven beyond all human ties, and who

might be taught to pray for a father even when those prayers must fall hopeless and burning where no prayer could save.

From that time his tenderness toward her visibly increased. Whatever the source of that wild fondness was, whether some remnant of humanity, some darker design connected with the child, or only the selfish desire of one miserable being to leave behind him another linked to his own doom, the change itself was plain. He became gentler in manner, more patient of her tears, and more inclined to speak of the future with something like anxious interest. Isidora, soothed by this alteration, endured with more silent firmness the burden of her condition, though that burden grew every day heavier in body and in heart. She still hoped, with that patient hope which often lives long after reason is weary, that he would at last reward her faith by an open and honorable declaration.

It was in the midst of this fearful and secret state that the next great blow fell. One night, while he was with her, Melmoth suddenly said, with visible reluctance, "Your father is returning. He will be here in a few days, perhaps in a few hours." Isidora heard the words as if they had been a sentence. "My father!" she cried. "I have never seen my father. Oh, how shall I meet him now? And is my mother ignorant of this? Would she not have warned me?" Melmoth answered that she was ignorant for the moment, but would not long remain so. When Isidora, in the confusion of her fear, asked by what means he could know what those in the house themselves did not yet know, he paused, and then said with slow sternness that the truth of the intelligence was of more importance to her than the means by which he had obtained it.

He then told her more, and every word deepened the horror of her situation. Her intended bridegroom, Montilla, was coming with her father. Montilla's own father was dead, the arrangements for the public marriage were completed, and her brother had gone to meet the returning parent and the future son-in-law. "There will be a feast prepared in the house for your nuptials," he said, and there was in his voice something between menace and mockery as he added, "You may hear of a strange guest appearing at your festival. I will be there." Isidora stood for a moment as if turned to stone. "A festival!" she repeated. "A bridal festival! And I

already wedded to you, and about to become a mother!”

At that very instant the trampling of many horsemen was heard approaching the villa. The noise of servants hurrying to admit and receive them ran through the house. Melmoth, with a gesture that seemed to her rather a menace than a farewell, vanished at once from the casement, and within an hour Isidora was kneeling before the father she had never seen till then. She suffered herself to be embraced by her mother, saluted by Montilla, and half-coldly received by her brother, whose temper could not hide its dissatisfaction even in such a moment. Around her every thing moved with the grave formality proper to Spanish life. Within her every thing shook like a world already broken.

Yet even then a brief and treacherous calm followed. Aliaga kissed the cold hand of his wife, the servants displayed their grave joy at the return of their master, Fra Jose assumed new importance, and Montilla, cold, decorous, and satisfied, accepted all things as they occurred. Isidora, who had expected instant exposure and overwhelming ruin, found instead a short interval in which danger seemed suspended, though not removed. She heard with outward composure the daily mention of her approaching marriage, endured the grave congratulations of father and mother, the self-satisfied attentions of Montilla, and the sullen hints of her brother that she might have formed a nobler alliance. All this passed over her like a dream. The reality of her existence had gone inward. She said to herself only, “Were I at the altar with Montilla, Melmoth would rend me from him.” And in that wild conviction, half terror and half dependence, she found the only support left to a heart already standing on the edge of another and darker catastrophe.

Part 44

Aliaga’s heart expanded with the belief that his plans were at last drawing toward their happy completion, and with his heart his purse opened also. He resolved to give a splendid fête in honor of his daughter’s approaching marriage, and the whole house soon felt the effect of that determination. Rooms long kept severe and half dark were suddenly hung with richer draperies, plate was

displayed, flowers were brought in profusion, lights prepared, musicians spoken to, and servants hurried from task to task under the grave importance which great households assume when they think themselves on the edge of public happiness. To all but Isidora, the villa seemed passing out of silence into festivity. To her, every preparation had the sound of a sentence being read.

There is no pain like that which comes not by one blow, but by the daily arrangement of all things around us toward an event which the soul abhors. It was not only the mention of Montilla, nor even the certainty of the day fixed for the marriage, that tortured her. It was the slow visible growth of the bridal world around her, the measured joy of her father, the grave satisfaction of Donna Clara, the self-complacent quiet of Montilla, and the officious bustle of servants who smiled when they crossed her path as if they carried parts of her happiness in their hands. She sat among them pale, silent, and obedient, but inly she felt like a victim watching the altar rise stone by stone before her eyes.

Montilla himself added something cold and insupportable to all this. He was not violent, vain, or passionately importunate. There would have been less oppression perhaps in a more human lover. But he received every thing as already secure, and advanced toward his bride not with love, but with that calm propriety which treats a woman, a dowry, and an alliance as parts of one satisfactory arrangement. He spoke to Isidora with decorous attentions, accepted her silence as reserve, her paleness as modesty, and her shrinking as only feminine timidity before a new condition. Thus his very composure made him more intolerable, because it denied even the possibility that he might suspect the abyss over which he walked so tranquilly.

Isidora bore all this while sustaining herself by one wild inward conviction. She still believed that at the last hour Melmoth would tear her from the hands of all who claimed her. That image, which once had filled her with terror, had now become the only refuge left to her imagination. She did not ask by what power, in what form, or at what cost he would appear. She only said to herself, “If my hand were already in that of Montilla at the altar, Melmoth would rend me from him.” There are states in which the soul, pressed beyond all natural hope, leans even on

terror as if terror itself were a kind of deliverance.

Yet such support was too dreadful and too uncertain to suffice always. At length, when the preparations had reached a point at which every servant in the house spoke of the fête as near, and every hour seemed to move with intolerable haste toward the marriage, she sought another interview with Melmoth, not now to speak of love only, but of extremity. He came as before to the casement, and at the first sight of him she felt, not that calm which affection might have promised, but rather the breaking forth of all the anguish she had been forcing inwardly to silence. “You know all,” she said. “You know what they prepare. You know that I am urged, watched, praised, dressed, instructed, and led every hour nearer to that altar. Tell me now what remains for me.”

Melmoth himself seemed confounded. Appalled he could not be, but there was in him that night a visible agitation, deep though sternly mastered. He turned away, then back again, and demanded, “Is this then your resolution, Isidora? Have you indeed resolution to—to” He stopped, and she, with an accent whose calmness was more fearful than passion, answered, “To die.” He looked at her long, and the union in that slight and tender form of beauty, fragility, and a courage fixed on death moved even him in a way unknown before. “Can you then,” he said at last, averting his face as if ashamed of its own softness, “can you die for him you will not live for?”

“I have said I would die sooner than be the bride of Montilla,” answered Isidora. “Of death I know nothing, nor indeed do I know much of life. But I know this, that I would rather perish than be the perjured wife of the man I cannot love.” Melmoth, with that fatal skill which could still torture while seeming only to inquire, asked, “And why can you not love him?” At that question her whole heart, long overborne by fear and silence, broke from her in words. “Because I can love but one,” she said. “You were the first human being I ever saw who could teach me language and feeling. Your image is before me waking and sleeping, present and absent. I have seen fairer forms, perhaps, and heard softer voices, but the first image is written where none can efface it till the heart itself is dust.”

She went on with a force that astonished even herself, because in such

moments the soul speaks more rapidly than the mind can judge. “I loved you not for beauty, nor for gentle manners, nor for soft words such as women are told to love. I loved you because you were my first, the first link between the human world and my heart, the being who woke that strange instrument within me whose strings will answer no touch as they answered yours. I loved you because your voice was mingled from the first with the murmur of the sea and the music of the stars. Memory and hope, nature and passion, all cling round your image. I have loved once, and forever.” Then, trembling at her own avowal, and yet ennobled by the purity of the feeling she had confessed, she added, “The feelings I have trusted you with may be abused, but they can never be alienated.”

“And these are your real feelings?” said Melmoth after a long pause, his whole frame moved by deep and uneasy thoughts. “Real?” repeated Isidora, a faint glow passing over her pale cheek. “Can I utter any thing but what is real? Can I so soon forget my own existence?” He looked up again as she spoke, and something like resolve gathered visibly in him. “If such is your resolution,” he said slowly, “if such be indeed your feeling, then look to the alternative that awaits you: union with the man you cannot love, or the wasting, wearing, almost annihilating persecution of your family.” “Oh, let me not think,” she cried, wringing her white hands. “Tell me, tell me what may be done to escape them.”

“In truth,” answered Melmoth, knitting his brow with an expression in which irony and feeling were once more so strangely mingled that no eye could separate them, “I know not what resource you have unless you wed me.” “Wed you!” cried Isidora, retreating from the window and clasping her hands over her forehead. The words brought near in one instant the very object her heart desired and her whole soul feared to touch. He repeated, with calm and dreadful emphasis, “All things are possible to those who love.” She shook from head to foot. “But how is that possible?” she whispered. Then, after a moment in which her whole being seemed suspended between terror and surrender, she looked up again at him with that earnest and fatal trust which had governed her from the beginning, and knew, before he had fully answered, that she already stood nearer to the last step than either conscience or prudence could any longer bear.

Part 45

Aliaga's heart had indeed expanded with the near completion of his plans, and with his heart his purse opened also. He resolved that his daughter's marriage should not pass like a private contract, but should be celebrated with that grave magnificence which in Spain often takes the place of joy. Orders were therefore given for a splendid fête. Servants moved through the house with increased importance, lights and plate were prepared, musicians were spoken to, and every thing that wealth could command in a stately household was put slowly, carefully, and proudly in readiness. To all eyes but Isidora's, the villa seemed advancing toward honor, alliance, and domestic triumph.

To her, each new preparation only made the inward misery more certain. It is possible to endure one sharp blow better than a hundred small and public signs of approaching ruin. The setting out of jewels, the trial of lights, the mention of guests, the measured congratulations of her parents, and the cool attentions of Montilla all became so many parts of one long persecution. Yet she bore them with an outward composure that deceived almost every one. Her silence, her paleness, her absent look, were interpreted by the house according to its own wishes. Donna Clara called them modesty. Montilla took them for maidenly reserve. Aliaga, who was better pleased with results than curious about feelings, accepted them with paternal satisfaction.

Another and darker reason aided this outward peace. The retirement of the family, the habitual want of true observation in Donna Clara, and the dress of the day, especially those ample and enveloping folds beneath which fashion itself concealed so much, all combined to preserve Isidora's secret for a time. So likely, indeed, did concealment appear to continue, that those about her grew confident just when confidence was most dangerous. Still, the nearer the crisis approached, the more that confidence changed, in the small circle entrusted with the truth, into watchfulness and fear. The important nurse, proud of the trust reposed in her, the confidential maid, the discreet attendant whose skill was to be called in at the last

necessity, all moved about her with that mysterious diligence which belongs to guilt, secrecy, and bodily pain united.

Melmoth, too, though his exterior still remained plain, reserved, and almost severe, supplied her with money for all that trembling service. In another state of mind, the contrast between his mysterious power, his private appearance, and the ease with which money seemed always at his command, might have surprised Isidora deeply. But such questions had now no place in her. Her whole soul had narrowed itself to one dark and beating point, the hour. She measured every day by its approach, and every night by the fear lest it might come before she had strength to meet it. Thus the life of the house moved in two currents at once, one public and festive, the other hidden and mortal.

In the midst of these arrangements there were still, from time to time, interviews between her and Melmoth; but even these had changed their character. They no longer brought her the painful happiness of divided tenderness and fear. Every meeting now was darkened by necessity. He spoke less of love than formerly, and more of danger, decision, and the future. She on her side had become at once more dependent and more oppressed. Love still remained, deep, faithful, and incapable of retreat; but love was no longer alone in her heart. Shame, bodily suffering, religious terror, and the foreknowledge of approaching exposure had all entered there and sat beside it.

Yet the strange and wild persuasion still upheld her, that Melmoth would not and could not abandon her. She felt, with a conviction that had in it more of destiny than of reason, that if the whole house, the whole city, and the whole Church rose against her at once, he would still be there, whether for salvation or for ruin. This image had once filled her with almost supernatural fear. It now became her last support. She said to herself again and again, “If I were already standing before the altar, if my hand were locked in that of Montilla, Melmoth would rend me from him.” Such thoughts gave no comfort, but they gave strength enough to endure the dreadful calm of the days.

At length an interruption came, not from open discovery, but from that kind of domestic summons which in ordinary life would have had nothing formidable

in it. One morning, after a night passed in restless expectation and bodily uneasiness, she heard an unusual stir in the house. Steps went quickly through passages usually so quiet. Voices, though still lowered by Spanish habit, were more numerous and more hurried than was common beneath that roof. Yet the nature of the intelligence moving all this agitation did not at once occur to her. Donna Clara's mind could turn with perfect sincerity from the most solemn spiritual question to the feeding of capons, the preparation of broth, the scandal of a servant's ribbon, or the state of an ecclesiastical dispute, and Isidora had long been used to these abrupt transitions.

She thought therefore, when a woman entered and said with formal respect, "Madonna Isidora, your lady-mother desires your presence in the tapestried chamber, having received intelligence by a certain express which she deems fitting that you should know," that it might concern some point of conscience, some fresh scruple of Donna Clara's, or some domestic alarm dressed up in solemn language. Even then she was not wholly without apprehension; the strange bustle of the house had prepared her for something unusual. Still she did not suspect how nearly the words spoken in that chamber would touch her secret life. She rose, adjusted her dress with mechanical care, and passed through the galleries with a step outwardly calm, though inwardly every movement of her heart seemed to ask what new shape of suffering was now at hand.

As she went, she heard still more distinctly the signs of excitement round her. A page crossed hurriedly with a message. Two servants, usually grave to immobility, whispered together and ceased at once when they saw her. From below there came the confused sound of persons entering and departing, of doors opened and shut, and of orders given more quickly than the indolent dignity of the house commonly allowed. All this, which at another time she might have observed only with languid curiosity, now struck upon her like preparation for judgment. Yet she controlled herself, because concealment had become with her not an art, but an instinct.

Donna Clara sat in the tapestried chamber with Fra Jose near her, and the very look of both told that the message brought by the express was no trifling one.

The mother's features had that anxious rigidity which with her always preceded either tears or anger. The priest wore an air of composed importance, but his eyes were brighter than usual, as if he already scented in the business some secret out of which power might be drawn. When Isidora entered, both turned toward her with a gravity so fixed that she felt before a word was spoken that some darker movement of the story had begun. And as she stood there, between the tapestry, the mother, the priest, and the silent weight of coming knowledge, she felt that the treacherous calm in which she had been living was over, and that whatever came next would press not merely on her fear, but on the whole fragile structure of concealment by which she still existed.

Part 46

Donna Clara, as she uttered those formal words, sat enthroned in a monstrous high-backed chair, so stiff, so motionless, and so wooden in attitude that she seemed less seated in it than grown out of it. Before her lay a large manuscript letter already spread open with all the solemn preparation that usually accompanied any important act of her pen or judgment. At her right hand sat a spectacled duenna on a cushion almost as large as a throne, ready to read where Donna Clara preferred to govern. Fra Jose was near enough to direct, correct, and enjoy the scene, though not so near as to seem to share the responsibility of whatever embarrassment might follow. Isidora curtsied, sat on one of the piled cushions before them, and waited.

The duenna then began, with many pauses and difficulties, to read the letter that had lately arrived from Don Francisco. He wrote from a seaport of Spain, where he had landed on his return, and from which he was now setting out to rejoin his family. The opening of the letter was exactly such as might have been expected from a man in whom paternal feeling and mercantile habit had long been uneasily united. He declared that he rejoiced not so much in having recovered a daughter, as in seeing heaven regain a soul and a subject from the very jaws of heathen error. He desired Donna Clara to understand that on this point his

satisfaction was perfect, and that he trusted the child once lost to Spain and the Church had now been restored to both.

He proceeded then, in a tone of grave satisfaction more chilling than tenderness, to commend the religious progress of Isidora as described by Donna Clara in her former letters. He expressed less pleasure at possessing a daughter than at seeing that daughter made fit for a Catholic household and, above all, for the marriage proposed with Montilla. He observed too, with that dry good sense which often passes in practical men for wisdom, that time lost in mere transports of affection must now be made up by prudence and arrangement. He had business yet to finish on the road, but all his designs turned steadily homeward, and among them the chief place was now openly given to the settlement of his daughter.

These first parts of the letter, though they gave no joy to Isidora, at least contained nothing wholly new or startling. She heard them with outward calm, her eyes resting on the floor and her hands folded motionless in her lap. But the letter, like many letters written by men who think first of concerns and only afterward of feelings, took a darker turn. Don Francisco related that in his journey he had fallen among strangers from whose chance discourse he had gathered matter of fearful and mysterious import regarding his daughter. He did not state the whole by letter, but declared that some communication had reached him, indirectly yet with terrible force, which made haste no longer merely a desire, but a necessity.

He then told of an event stranger still. After parting from these companions and passing the evening alone in grave thought, he had sat in his chamber reading out of an old volume of legends and reputed appearances of the dead. Wearied at length, yet unwilling to go to rest, he had taken out Donna Clara's former descriptions of their recovered daughter and read them again, dwelling with a father's mind on her blue eyes, her slight figure, and those soft ringlets which art itself could not wholly subdue. While so occupied, sleep had stolen on him in his chair, and in that state between waking and dreaming he believed that the very creature thus described was before him, kneeling, embracing him, and imploring his blessing as a Christian father.

At this part of the letter Donna Clara raised her eyes triumphantly toward Fra Jose, as if the apparition itself had come to confirm the excellence of her own description. But the triumph lasted only for a moment. The next lines changed admiration into terror. Don Francisco wrote that, while he bowed in this vision to bless the form before him, he felt a deadly coldness in the kiss with which she touched him, and heard words of such despairing import that even after waking they clung to him like a sentence not to be forgotten. The apparition, or dream, or whatever it was, had adjured him to hasten if he would save his daughter. It had given the warning not in accents of joy, but of extremity, and had vanished only after leaving him convinced that some immediate danger hung over her.

The duenna, whose voice had grown more and more uncertain as she advanced, now faltered so much that Donna Clara herself snatched the letter and tried to continue it. But her own agitation soon overcame both sight and utterance, and Fra Jose was forced to take the paper from her hand. He read on, though even he could not entirely command his tone. Don Francisco declared further that the hour of this visitation had been so exactly marked in his memory that he charged Donna Clara to compare it with all that had occurred in the house on that night, and to tell him, on peril of all that was dear to them both, whether any strange sound, sight, or movement had then taken place near their daughter.

At these words every one in the room looked involuntarily toward Isidora. She did not move, but the stillness with which she endured that united gaze was itself more alarming than any cry could have been. Donna Clara, pale and fluttering between fear and wounded authority, let the letter sink upon her lap. Fra Jose turned from the paper to Isidora with a scrutiny in which professional jealousy, suspicion, and real uneasiness were all mingled. The duenna crossed herself repeatedly. No one for some moments could frame a question, because all felt that the very terms of the letter had brought into the room something darker than domestic anxiety, a fear at once paternal, supernatural, and shamefully near to truth.

It was Fra Jose who first broke the silence. Assuming the air of one whose office required him to unite calmness with penetration, he asked whether Isidora

knew any cause that might explain such an extraordinary dream. She answered nothing. Donna Clara then, with less method but more distress, demanded whether her daughter had seen, heard, or spoken to any one on the night in question. Still there was no answer. Isidora neither denied nor confessed. She sat with the same fixed paleness and the same downcast eyes, looking not like a guilty woman preparing falsehood, but rather like one whose whole soul had suddenly withdrawn beyond the reach of questions.

The effect of this silence on her mother was almost more violent than the contents of the letter had been. Donna Clara, who could always endure sorrow better than uncertainty, began to utter broken exclamations against mysterious influences, wicked servants, evil eyes, and the danger of leaving a daughter too much to solitude. Fra Jose rebuked her for this disorder, yet plainly encouraged it by every pause and glance that could deepen her dependence on his guidance. He suggested that the warning of Don Francisco, however extraordinary in form, might still have some natural ground. But while speaking of nature, he looked steadily at Isidora, as if all that was least natural in the matter had already fixed itself in his own mind.

At last he advised that no more should be said for the moment, and that the letter itself must be kept with the utmost secrecy till Aliaga should arrive or write again. Donna Clara assented instantly, partly from fear of scandal, and partly because secrecy seemed to her already half a remedy. Isidora was then dismissed, not with tenderness, but with that ominous gravity which falls on households where truth is feared and silence watched. She rose, curtsied as before, and withdrew with a step outwardly unchanged. Yet as she passed from the tapestried chamber, she felt that the house around her had altered, and that from this hour every eye, every whisper, every movement near her would be colored by a suspicion not yet spoken aloud, but already alive in the hearts of those who had heard her father’s letter read.

Part 47

After leaving the tapestried chamber, Isidora understood that her life within the house had entered on a new stage of danger. Before, she had been watched because she was beautiful, silent, and destined for an important marriage. Now she was watched because fear had been let loose round her under the name of warning. Donna Clara no longer regarded her merely as a daughter to be governed and well bestowed in marriage, but as a being about whom some dark and shameful mystery might already be gathering. Fra Jose, who had before suspected a secret only in order to use it, now pursued that secret with a patience sharpened by real alarm. Every movement of Isidora's day was thus surrounded more closely than before.

Yet this increased vigilance did not take the form of violence at once. It was more Spanish, more domestic, and therefore in some ways more oppressive. Her mother questioned her with measured solemnity on little things, asked where she had sat, whether she had slept, whether she had heard any voice in the garden, whether the scent of the orange-blossoms had affected her, and whether she had observed any strange light or dream. Fra Jose, when he could speak to her alone, used a different method. He hinted darkly that the powers of evil loved to approach the young, the beautiful, and the spiritually unstable; and then, under color of warning, tried to draw from her one unguarded word by which he might begin to master the whole truth. She answered neither mother nor priest, except with such outward submission as concealed refusal beneath respect.

Thus the days passed in a kind of still warfare. Donna Clara watched at one side with anxious dulness, and Fra Jose at the other with restless penetration. Servants became grave, important, and whispering. Some pitied, some feared, and some enjoyed the trouble, because every great house contains dependents to whom the pain of their superiors is a form of excitement. Montilla still came and went with the same decorous serenity, and Aliaga, thinking himself already safe in the completion of his designs, continued to arrange details of alliance, settlement, and festivity with that heavy satisfaction which prosperous men often mistake for domestic happiness. The whole house seemed moving steadily toward celebration, while under its roof silence, suspicion, and inward misery were

ripening more quickly than any of them knew.

Meanwhile, the hidden crisis approached in another and more terrible form. Isidora's confidential attendants, those few women whom secrecy had brought near her person, began to tell her, with hints that grew every day less timid, that concealment could not much longer continue. At first they spoke only in looks, broken whispers, and timid gestures of alarm. Then they became more explicit, for necessity is always bolder than fidelity. One assured her that some immediate step must soon be taken. Another implored her not to delay till her condition should proclaim itself in a way that no art could disguise. A third, more worldly and less compassionate than the rest, reminded her that great houses are not saved by tears, but by prompt contrivance. Their language was often coarse, but the truth beneath it was too plain to be mistaken.

These warnings, which should perhaps have driven her to action, often had the contrary effect. There are moments when the soul, pressed from without by too many alarms at once, becomes numb instead of active. Isidora no longer wept as she had once done. Her tears had been spent in earlier conflicts. Now she sat for long intervals in a pale and exhausted silence, listening to the plans of others as if they concerned some woman not wholly herself. Yet beneath that outward stupor there remained one constant feeling. She still clung with desperate and unshaken love to Melmoth, and believed that whatever extremity approached, it could not approach without bringing him near her too. This belief, though it gave no peace, gave her just enough inward life to endure.

Melmoth himself was not absent during this time. He still appeared, though more rarely and under conditions of greater danger. His manner had changed again. The dark raillery with which he had once wounded while he fascinated her was now less frequent. In its place there was an anxious and silent tenderness, more terrible perhaps because it seemed wrung from depths in him that had long forgotten softness. He would sit or stand near her for some moments without speaking, looking on her with such fixed attention that she felt at once comforted and oppressed by it. Once or twice she implored him to explain that troubled expression, but he turned away and answered only by some brief word bidding

her be firm and wait.

At last there came an evening on which his agitation could no longer be concealed. He looked on her often, seemed about to speak and checked himself, then at length told her that the dreaded hour was nearer than even her attendants imagined. “Your father,” he said reluctantly, “is returning. He may be here in a few hours. Montilla comes with him, and the arrangements are finished.” Isidora heard him at first almost without understanding. Then the whole meaning struck her at once. “My father,” she cried, “and I to meet him thus! My bridegroom to come and claim me! My mother ignorant still, and yet not ignorant enough to trust me! What remains for me now but death?” He answered, after one of those pauses in which his features always darkened to something almost unearthly, that if she could not live through such a meeting, she must at least have strength to endure it for a little while longer.

The return of Aliaga and Montilla followed almost immediately, and with it the house fell again under the weight of formalities, visits, arrangements, and endless preparations. What had been fear became now pressure. Isidora was expected every where, instructed every hour, and praised or observed at every step. Her brother returned with increased irritability, half offended by the coldness of her reception, half eager to make his own consequence felt in the approaching alliance. Donna Clara resumed, with the courage of one who hides terror under business, her long speeches on obedience, silence, thrift, and matrimonial duty. Fra Jose, hovering between household and conscience, made himself indispensable to all. And in the midst of these converging forces sat Isidora, already another man’s wife, and soon to become the mother of his child.

The very feast prepared in honor of her public marriage became, by a dreadful contrast, the hour of her real extremity. Lights were arranged, guests expected, and all the forms of Spanish stateliness drew together toward one night of display. Yet under these ornaments the reality was decay and terror. The women who attended her had become almost frantic with secrecy. They moved round her with bandages, essences, linen, whispered counsels, and frightened devotions, as if they served at once a bride, a sick person, and a criminal. Her own bodily

suffering, hitherto borne in a kind of proud silence, now began to overcome even that heroic endurance which had so long resisted fear, shame, and domestic tyranny. She felt that the hour was at hand indeed.

When evening deepened and the sounds of festivity were beginning in the outer rooms, the conflict within her became too strong for concealment. She had not the strength to dress, smile, receive, and perish slowly under the eyes of those who believed her destined for Montilla. Nature itself now refused to serve the long conspiracy of silence. She sank down more than once while her attendants still tried, by all the miserable arts of delay, to hold back the inevitable disclosure. But pain, which had spared the house long enough for its own pride and prudence, would spare it no longer. The bridal music, the voices below, the lights in the chambers, and the secret agony within her room were at last brought face to face.

Then the catastrophe, so long suspended, broke over the whole family at once. Cries were heard where they should least have been heard on such a night. Servants ran in terror. Donna Clara forgot dignity, Aliaga forgot arrangement, Montilla forgot decorum, and Fra Jose forgot every thing except the first movements of priestly alarm. The hidden truth, which had so long lived shut up in one heart and guarded by a few trembling women, now stood visible before them all. And when in that dreadful instant every eye turned with horror from the daughter, the bride, and the mother, to the unseen author of her ruin, the first words that burst from Aliaga in his stupefaction were not of pity for her, but of hatred for him. “The wife of the sorcerer,” he cried, “and their accursed offspring, be delivered to the holy tribunal.” In that one cry, paternal feeling, family pride, superstition, and terror all united; and Isidora, who had passed through love, secrecy, marriage, and suffering, found herself at last openly cast over from the hands of her family into those of the Inquisition.

Part 48

The officers of the Inquisition came within a few hours, armed with all the cold authority of a tribunal that needed no haste because it believed itself certain.

Their arrival put an end, at least on the side of religion, to the wild disorder of the family. Aliaga, who had spoken in stupor rather than in full consciousness when he first gave up his daughter, now repeated the order with more form and less humanity. Donna Clara, divided between pity for her child and horror at the thought that she had become grandmother to what she almost believed a demon's offspring, wrung her hands, wept, crossed herself, and then submitted. Fra Jose, though he trembled, recovered enough of priestly habit to baptize the infant at once, not from love, but from fear of what might happen if the child of such a union died unblessed.

That baptism itself had in it something at once miserable and terrible. No sponsor could be found. The lowest servant in the house refused with horror to stand godparent to the child of Melmoth. Fra Jose therefore performed the rite with shaking hands, glancing more than once toward the door as if he expected at every moment some fearful interruption from the father whose name was never spoken without terror. But no interruption came. The little creature received the water, the name, and the sign of the cross in utter destitution, while the mother, lying pale and exhausted, heard every word and loved her infant only the more because the whole house shrank from it. In that moment all her former attachments seemed to contract themselves into one point, the child.

The officers entered the chamber not like men dealing with a sick woman, but like men securing a witness, a hostage, and perhaps an instrument. Their chief spoke of Melmoth with severe and learned confidence. He declared that if any thing human still remained in such a being, it must be fastened not by chains of iron, but by the cords of natural affection. "He has a wife and child," he said. "If there be any mortal root left in him, we shall wind round it and draw him to us by that." These words, spoken over the bed of a woman scarcely recovered from childbirth, fell on Isidora's heart like icy water. Yet even then she clasped the infant closer and said inwardly, "Whatever they do to me, they shall not separate us."

She was mistaken. Violence, when it comes under legal form, is often more complete than sudden cruelty. Before many hours had passed, she was removed

from her father's house and conveyed to the prison appointed for her. The journey itself she scarcely remembered. Pain, weakness, milk-fever, shame, and fear had all combined to make the outward world uncertain to her. When full recollection returned after some interval, she found herself on a pallet of straw in a narrow cell, with a crucifix and a death's-head the only furniture besides the bed, and a poor struggling light falling through a high grated opening that seemed rather to show the misery of the place than to relieve it.

At first she looked round in silence, like one who has waked in a world not wholly believed in yet. Then her eyes fell on the infant lying beside her, and at that sight all other horrors vanished for a moment. She snatched the child to her breast and burst into tears of joy. "Mine," she sobbed, "mine, and only mine. It has no father with it, for he is far away, and I am alone in this prison. But while you are left to me, I am not alone." The child, unconscious of all around it, sought its miserable nourishment and lay quiet. That quietness, which to another mother might have been natural, seemed to Isidora almost a miracle of consolation.

She was left for many days in strict solitude. No mother, no priest, no attendant came near her except those whose office it was to bring the coarsest food, examine the lock, and watch that no communication passed between prisoner and world. Even these kept a distance. It had been resolved, for reasons at once political and religious, that she should be suffered to sink inwardly before she was questioned. They wished fear, bodily weakness, and the silent burden of disgrace to do their work first. Thus she lay in that cell with her infant, seeing no face but that of the child, hearing no voice but her own and the faint sounds that came by chance through distant passages.

The first effect of this solitude was not submission, but a fierce tenderness. Deprived of every human support except the infant, she turned to it with all the force of a heart that had once given itself wholly and now found only one object on which to rest. She spoke to it as if it could answer. She told it of the island, of the stars, of the sea, of the first hour when she had heard its father's voice, of the ruined chapel, of the house she had left, and of the strange path by which she had come to be lying there on straw in a prison. The child slept or cried or fed, knowing

nothing, yet its very helplessness bound her to life more strongly than argument, religion, or hope had done.

Then other thoughts came. As bodily strength returned a little, memory returned more completely also, and with memory the whole weight of her condition. She was Melmoth's wife, but no law on earth now seemed ready to acknowledge that bond except the conscience of her own heart. She was a mother, and her child lay in a prison because it had drawn life from her. She was under the power of a tribunal which sought less to save than to use her. She knew enough by this time to understand why they left her solitary. They wished her love for the child to ripen into terror. They wished to make that little being at once her comfort and her vulnerability. This thought chilled her deepest joy without destroying it.

Still, her courage was not yet broken. She had suffered too much already to be overthrown at once by stone walls and silence. She began to pray more steadily than before, not now with the imaginative fervor of Immalee, nor with the troubled and divided supplications of Isidora at the casement, but with the short, grave, repeated prayers of one who has no language left for ornament. She prayed for forgiveness where she had sinned, for light where she had been blind, for strength to endure whatever might be laid on her, and above all that her child might not become a curse either to itself or to its absent father. Then, after these prayers, she would sit long looking at the infant, and ask herself whether she prayed for it as a Christian, or loved it merely as a mother. At last she understood that she did both.

Days passed in this manner till the cell itself became familiar in all its wretched details. She knew the hours by the fall of the light through the grate, the distant sounds of keys, and the steps that brought food. She learned how the shadow of the bars moved along the wall, how the child's breathing altered in sleep, and how much of heaven could be seen if she lifted her eyes from the pallet to the opening above. Misery, if it cannot be escaped, trains the senses to take account of the smallest things. Thus, without peace, she acquired a kind of order in suffering. But beneath that order lay one fixed and terrible expectation. She knew they would not leave her there forever. They were waiting, and she too was waiting, though with a far different heart, for the hour when the prison would

cease to be merely a place of confinement and become the place of interrogation, temptation, and judgment.

Part 49

The silence of that prison was at last broken, not by judges, but by a visitor from her former life. On the night before her first examination, of which she had received no warning, the door of her cell opened softly, and a figure entered whom she recognized at once even through the dreary obscurity. It was Fra Jose. For some moments they looked at one another in mutual horror. Then Isidora knelt in silence to receive his blessing, and he gave it with a solemnity that was this time more human than official. Afterward the poor monk, whose appetites had always been earthly enough, but whose heart was not evil, tried in vain to hide his emotion beneath his cowl, and at last began to weep bitterly.

Isidora did not answer him at first. Her silence was not stubbornness, nor that proud apathy which sometimes follows despair. It was rather the silence of one whose grief had gone too far inward for immediate speech. Fra Jose at length seated himself at the foot of her pallet, keeping some distance still, whether from reverence, fear, or shame she could not tell. “Daughter,” he said, striving hard to recover his voice, “it is by indulgence of the holy office that I am permitted to visit you.” “I thank them,” she answered, and at those words her tears, which had long seemed dried up by suffering, flowed fast and with strange relief. Then he told her that her examination would take place on the morrow, and urged her to prepare herself with all humility and truth.

The information seemed less terrible to her than it would once have done. “My examination?” she repeated, with surprise rather than terror. “And on what am I to be examined?” “On your union,” said the monk, shuddering visibly, “your inconceivable union with a being devoted and accursed. Daughter, are you indeed the wife of that being whose very name makes the flesh creep?” “I am,” she answered simply. The directness of the answer struck him more than any outcry could have done. He crossed himself repeatedly, then asked, in a lower voice, by

what witness, and by what daring hand, such a marriage could have been made. “There were no witnesses,” said Isidora. “We were wedded in darkness. I heard words, I think, but saw no form. I only know that a hand placed mine in Melmoth’s, and its touch was as cold as that of the dead.”

Fra Jose bowed his head upon his arm and sat some time without speaking. The whole matter, which till then had seemed to him partly scandal, partly superstition, and partly domestic ruin, now assumed for his mind a depth of horror more difficult to bear. Yet even in that horror he retained some compassion. He asked her if Melmoth had ever spoken to her of religion, of repentance, of any hope beyond the present life. She answered with painful sincerity. “He spoke of God with knowledge and fear, but not with trust. He knew more than others, yet believed less happily than the simplest child. He moved always as one under some dreadful sentence, and whatever he said of worship, sin, or judgment, made me feel that he spoke not from conjecture, but from inward certainty.” Fra Jose listened, trembling more and more, and then entreated her, if any human means could still reach such a being, to use them for the salvation of his soul.

At this she fixed on him eyes in which grief, love, and strange inward light were blended. “Father,” she said, “if he had been one whom ordinary words could move, I should not be where I am. Yet do not think I have ceased to pray for him. I pray for him still, though I know not whether prayer can reach where he stands.” Those words pierced even the monk, accustomed as he was to pious phrases uttered with little suffering behind them. He remained some time in broken exhortation, now urging confession, now recommending submission to the tribunal, now bursting out into lamentations on the fearful net in which she had been caught. At last, hearing steps approach in the passage, he rose, blessed both mother and child again, and departed in greater sorrow perhaps than he had ever felt for any living being.

The next day she was led to her first examination. The place, the officials, the grave forms, the measured questions, and the consciousness of being judged by men who neither loved nor pitied, might once have overwhelmed her; but suffering had already done much of the work of terror for them. She answered

with simplicity, docility, and a submission that came not from servility, but from inward exhaustion. They questioned her on Melmoth, on their meetings, on the marriage, on his language, habits, and opinions, and above all on any secret connected with his mysterious existence. To much she could answer only imperfectly, for much she had never understood. To some questions she answered with painful truth. To others she remained silent, not from design, but because the truth itself lay beyond her knowledge.

During these examinations they hinted once at the torture. The word produced no visible fear in her. On the contrary, she smiled with something of that free, nature-born dignity which had belonged to Immalee of the island. An official whispered one of the inquisitors, who looked fixedly at her face and then made a sign. The torture was not again mentioned. Whether they judged her too weak in body, too simple in spirit, or too likely to become useless if openly broken, she could not tell. But from that hour the form of their cruelty changed. The second and third examinations followed at intervals, and with each the treatment grew externally milder. Her youth, beauty, profound simplicity, and the sight of the infant always in her arms, whom she bent over to hush even while straining to hear and answer their questions, wrought strongly even on hearts little used to pity.

This apparent indulgence had in it no mercy. A subtler and colder intelligence had perceived where her true vulnerability lay. “She has defied the rack,” one whispered, as she sat there pale and submissive, yet immovable in all that touched Melmoth’s secret. “Try her on that rack,” answered another, glancing toward the child. The counsel was adopted. At the next formal session her sentence was read. She was condemned, as a suspected heretic, to perpetual confinement in the prison of the Inquisition. Even this fell upon her without visible agitation. But when the reader proceeded, and declared that her child was to be taken from her and reared in a convent, she uttered one cry so dreadful, so instinct with all the agony of motherhood, that it seemed more terrible than any sound extorted by bodily torment could have been.

She fell senseless to the floor, and when she was revived, no awe of place, no fear of judges, no remembrance of her own danger could restrain her. She

poured forth such wild and piercing supplications that her very prayers sounded like commands. She scarcely seemed to hear the first part of her sentence. Eternal solitude, imprisonment, darkness, and living death, all were nothing while the child remained. But the child! On that point alone her whole soul broke forth. She wept, implored, argued, promised, knelt, rose again, and knelt once more, beseeching only that they would not separate her from the infant. The judges heard her in fortified silence. When at length she found all over, she rose from the posture of humiliation and frenzy into something almost like dignity, and asked, in a calm and altered voice, that the child might be left with her till the following day, lest too sudden a deprivation of the nourishment it drew from her should cost it life.

This request was granted, perhaps from policy, perhaps from that miserable economy of cruelty which prefers to inflict a wound in full consciousness rather than in blind and instant violence. She was remanded to her cell, and there the hours that followed passed in a state beyond ordinary grief. She neither raved nor wept long. There are times when sorrow, having gone to its utmost point, becomes still and almost clear. She held the infant continually in her arms, fed it, watched it, kissed it, and looked at it for long intervals without tears, as if striving by one night of undivided attention to gather into memory the whole image of its helpless life. The official who brought her food came and went without a word, and she gave him none. All her speech, all her thought, all her existence for those hours were with the child alone.

It was about midnight when the door of the cell was unlocked and two persons in official dress appeared there. The hour, the silence, and the sight of those figures told her at once what they had come for. She did not scream. She had gone beyond screaming. Rising with a solemn quietness more heart-rending than any violence, she drew the infant closer to her breast and looked from one to the other with such an expression as neither had perhaps ever seen on a human face before. For one instant even they hesitated. Then duty, habit, or hardness resumed its place. One advanced and made a sign that the child must be yielded. Isidora neither yielded it nor resisted yet. She only pressed one long kiss upon its

forehead, looked once upward as if to ask some strength not human, and then waited, while the whole prison, the whole world, and the whole future seemed to contract themselves into that one dreadful minute before the arms of the mother and the arms of the officials should finally meet over the living burden she could not keep.

Part 50

For one instant even the officials hesitated. There are moments when habit itself is arrested by nature, and those men, trained to severity, could not at once advance against a mother who stood before them in such a silence. But the pause lasted only a moment. One made the accustomed sign, another stepped forward, and the torch behind them threw a broad red light on the arch of the cell and on the pale fixed face of the prisoner. Then, as if the sight of that light had hardened rather than shaken her, Isidora altered in a way more terrible than outcry or struggle could have been. Her whole countenance became dry, rigid, and unnatural. “Take it,” she said in a voice so hoarse and dead that it seemed not a human voice, but something forced from stone.

The men looked round the little cell, hardly understanding at first what she meant. They saw the straw pallet, the crucifix, the skull, the poor vessel of water, the dim lamp, and the miserable woman herself standing motionless before them. There was no other place in which so helpless a being could be hidden. Yet still, obeying rather the form of their duty than the sense of the moment, they searched by torchlight the scanty corners of the room. Isidora watched them without moving. Then suddenly a laugh broke from her, a laugh so wild and unnatural that even those officers, accustomed as they were to every sound that pain or frenzy can extort, drew back from it. “What fools you are,” she cried. “Where would you search for a child but in its mother’s bosom? Here—here it is—take it!”

With that she drew from her breast the little body she had pressed there till then, and placed it in their hands. “It is yours now,” she shrieked. “Take it from me. Take it, since you would have it.” Her strength, strained so long beyond nature,

seemed upheld for that one dreadful act, and only for that. The men who received the infant did so with a confusion that broke for an instant even the cold exactness of their office. The child was dead. Round its throat there was a dark mark, black and narrow, which some afterward declared to be the stamp of an infernal birth, and others, more humanly but not more gently, called the sign of maternal despair. Whatever name they gave it, the little creature had been spared at once the convent, the prison, and the slow life of shame they had prepared for it.

The officials withdrew with their burden, not now as men executing a mere order, but as men carrying with them a new and darker matter for report. The door was locked again, and Isidora was left alone. She neither fainted nor wept after that moment. The springs of tears had long been overtasked, and the violence of what she had done seemed to have dried up every other movement of the heart. She sat down on the pallet, looked once toward the place where the child had lain, and then remained for a long time with her hands fallen on her knees and her eyes fixed on vacancy. To any who might have seen her then, she would have appeared less like a criminal after action than like a woman already half dead before sentence.

It was determined, however, that she should within four-and-twenty hours appear once more before the holy office and answer for the death of her infant. This decision was hardly formed before another and mightier judgment had begun its work. No torture was applied, because none was needed. The wound within her was of that kind which men scarcely name in histories and never record in registers, yet which kills more surely than steel or fire. She had done with hope, with fear, with resistance, and almost with life. From that hour the strength of her body sank visibly under the load borne so long by her spirit. The prison, the tribunal, and the future all receded from her, not because they grew lighter, but because death was drawing nearer than any of them.

The inquisitors themselves, cold and subtle as they were, soon perceived that little more was to be gained from her by bodily or mental pressure. They had tried her on the side where nature clings most strongly, and nature itself had answered them by one desperate act that defeated their design. The child, which they had

hoped to use as a chain by which they might draw Melmoth within their power, was gone. The mother, whom they had hoped to break into disclosure, was now falling rapidly beyond the reach of ordinary fear. To persist longer with common methods would be to waste cruelty where cruelty no longer promised profit. They therefore suffered her to die comparatively unmolested, and, whether from policy or a late movement of pity, granted at last her request that Fra Jose might be permitted to visit her once more.

It was midnight when he came, though midnight and morning were almost the same in that place, where the weak counterfeit of daylight was changed only for a dimmer and more tremulous lamp. Isidora lay upon the pallet, no longer clasping any living thing to her breast, and the blank where the child had been gave to all the poverty around her a more dreadful bareness. Fra Jose entered slowly and seated himself beside her. If his presence could lend no dignity to the scene, it softened it at least by humanity. He was no hero, no saint, and no deep thinker; but he was still a man, and there are hours in which mere humanity seems almost a sacrament.

Isidora knew him at once, and though greatly changed herself, made an effort to rise in order to receive his blessing. He bade her remain as she was and gave it with more feeling than he had perhaps ever before thrown into that office. For some moments neither spoke. The monk, who had seen her first as the beautiful and puzzling daughter of Donna Clara, afterward as the silent girl suspected and watched in the villa, and now saw her lying before him broken alike in body and fate, drew his cowl partly over his face in vain. His sobs were audible even through the effort he made to restrain them. At length Isidora said faintly, “Father, you are come too late for comfort, but not too late for kindness.”

He attempted some words of pious encouragement, spoke of penitence, mercy, and the Church’s last offices, then suddenly stopped as if he himself felt how poor such formulas sounded beside the visible ruin before him. “Daughter,” he said at last, “I am permitted to remain with you for a little time. Use it as your conscience bids you. If there is any thing that still burdens your soul, unburden it now.” She answered with more calmness than he had expected. “My soul has but

one burden now," she said. "Not sin only, though that is heavy enough, but sorrow. I have loved, suffered, sinned, and lost, all in one path. Tell me whether there is any mercy for such as I." The monk bowed his head and for some time could frame no answer that did not seem either too stern or too weak.

At length he spoke again more simply than before. He reminded her that while life remained, repentance was not rejected. He asked whether she still held as true the union that had bound her to Melmoth, and whether she adhered to that being even now. At the name, a change passed visibly over her wasted face. "I am his wife," she said. "Nothing can make me other while I breathe." Fra Jose shuddered, yet did not interrupt her. She went on, not with excitement now, but with the grave clearness of one who feels the last veil thinning between herself and judgment. "If I have been deceived, I was deceived through love. If I have sinned, I sinned not from levity, but from giving my whole heart where I should have feared. If I have done wrong to my parents, to my faith, and to my child, may God read in all this not excuse, but the truth."

Fra Jose, hearing such words from lips already so near death, felt that ordinary reproof would be both useless and cruel. He therefore questioned her rather than exhorted. He asked whether Melmoth had ever disclosed to her any full account of himself, any hope, any doctrine, any explanation of that fearful existence which hung round him like a sentence. She answered that he had spoken of God, judgment, and truth, but always as one condemned knows them, not as the faithful hope in them. "He believed," she said, "more terribly than others. He knew, but he did not trust. He moved as one already under doom, and all his tenderness had in it the misery of a being who could not save either himself or what he loved." These words affected the monk more deeply than perhaps any learned discussion could have done.

He then ventured to ask of her parents, but she stopped him with a motion of the hand. "Do not tell me more than this," she whispered. "Are they alive?" He could not answer at once. At last he said, with painful reluctance, that grief and shame had fallen heavily on that house, and that if his answer could have given her comfort it would not have been withheld. She understood him. The little

remaining color left her lips, and for some moments she lay silent, breathing with difficulty. Then she said, “I have brought death to all I touched. To my mother through sorrow, to my father through dishonor, to my child through despair, and perhaps to him too, if he can suffer more.” Fra Jose began to deny this in the language of religion, but she shook her head faintly, as if truth had already become too plain for such consolations.

While he yet sat with her, a bell was heard sounding in a distant part of the prison. The monk started and rose involuntarily. “That bell,” he said, “may summon me away. Or it may announce that the hour of your final questioning is at hand.” Isidora looked up at him with an expression in which fear had almost disappeared beneath something more solemn. “Then stay one moment more,” she said. “Only one. Tell me this, father, not as priest to penitent only, but as man to dying woman. Do you think I am lost forever?” The poor monk, pressed thus between his conscience, his office, and his pity, stood speechless for a time. At last he answered in heavy and troubled accents, “Daughter, I have given you what comfort I could. Press for no more. Perhaps you are in a state on which I dare neither judge nor pronounce. May God be merciful to you, and may those who still claim power over you learn mercy also.” Then, seeing her lips move as if for another question, and feeling his own heart no longer equal to the scene, he bent, blessed her once more, and remained beside the pallet while the dim lamp burned lower and her failing breath grew each moment fainter in the darkness of that place.

Part 51

Fra Jose remained beside the pallet while the dim lamp burned lower and Isidora’s breath grew more and more uncertain. He tried once or twice to resume the language of prayer, but the words seemed to break upon his lips. The scene before him was too strong for mere form. He could not look at that wasted face, once so bright amid flowers and moonlight, without feeling that all the dry distinctions by which men judge guilt from safety were poor indeed beside the

ruin of one heart that had loved, trusted, suffered, and now lay perishing under the weight of all three. At length he could do nothing but sit near her in silence, holding the crucifix where her dim eyes might still rest on it if they sought any earthly sign of consolation.

She did seek it once. Raising herself a little with a last effort, she pressed her lips upon the image, then sank back and said in a voice scarcely louder than a breath, “I have no child now, no father, no mother, no home, and perhaps no hope but God. If He rejects me too, then there is indeed nothing left.” Fra Jose, startled into speech by the simplicity and greatness of that desolation, answered more from the heart than from the schools. “He does not reject the broken,” he said. “Daughter, if you have erred, you have also suffered. Cast yourself wholly on His mercy.” She looked at him fixedly, as if weighing whether mercy could indeed descend where life had become so dark, and then closed her eyes again with a faint movement of assent rather than peace.

After a little while she spoke once more, but now her words wandered between prayer and memory. She murmured of the island, of the sea, of flowers falling at evening, and of that first hour when a human voice had broken her solitude. Then the broken recollections changed, and she named her child, though the child was no longer there. At last another name came, low at first and then again with deeper feeling. “Melmoth,” she whispered, not in terror now, but in that mournful tenderness with which the heart often returns at death to the earliest and deepest image graven on it. Fra Jose heard and shuddered, yet did not interrupt her. It seemed to him then less the utterance of earthly passion than the clinging of a spirit to the very chain that had wounded it most deeply.

Toward morning her mind became clearer for a little space, as lights sometimes burn up once before they go out. She looked round the cell as if seeing it distinctly for the first time, then raised her eyes to the narrow grate above. The faintest hint of dawn was gathering there, not enough to illumine the place, but enough to separate darkness from death. “It is morning,” she said. “I shall not see another.” Fra Jose bent nearer and implored her to think only of eternity. “I do,” she answered. “But to me eternity is full of those I have lost. My child is gone

before me. My brother died in blood. My mother and father—I do not know how they bear my shame. And he—" She stopped, and after a long pause added, "if there is mercy anywhere, let some drop of it fall on him too."

The monk could not answer immediately. That prayer for Melmoth, breathed from lips already failing, pierced him with a feeling too profound for ready speech. At last he said, "Pray then, and leave all else to God." She obeyed, if obedience can be said of one whose prayer was rather the last natural movement of the soul than any deliberate act. Her lips moved for some time without sound. Once or twice her hands clasped themselves faintly. Then, as if the effort even of inward words had become too great, she lay perfectly still, her eyes half open and fixed on the crucifix beside her. Fra Jose, leaning forward, thought at first that she had already passed beyond hearing. But presently she spoke again, and with surprising clearness. "Father," she said, "if they ask more of me, tell them nothing. I can answer no more. Tell them only that I died loving God, and loving him too. If that is a sin, I cannot mend it now."

These were almost her last connected words. The strength that had risen for a moment sank at once afterward, and the change became visible even to the least observant eye. Her features sharpened, her breath came at longer intervals, and the hand that had once clasped the crucifix so fervently now lay open and powerless on the straw. Fra Jose, unable any longer to govern either his sorrow or his fear, called softly for assistance. No one answered at first. The prison seemed to preserve its dreadful silence even at that hour. When at last steps were heard in the passage, they came slowly, as if the living themselves already moved with awe near the dead. An official entered, paused at the threshold, and remained there without advancing, because the sight before him was enough to tell him that the tribunal had been anticipated by a higher sentence.

Before any question could be asked, Isidora made one last motion. Her eyes opened fully, rested for an instant on the crucifix, then turned, with that mysterious instinct which often survives reason itself, toward the emptiness beside her where the child had once lain. A faint smile, too light and melancholy to be called earthly joy, passed over her face. Her lips parted as if to shape one name more, but no

sound followed. The breath that came next was so slight that Fra Jose bent close to feel it. Then came another, fainter still. Then no more. The monk remained bent for several moments, unable either to rise or to speak. At last he made the sign of the cross over her, and said in a voice broken by tears, “She is gone.”

The official crossed himself also, though more from habit than grief, and withdrew to report what had happened. Fra Jose stayed where he was. Whatever faults, weaknesses, and worldliness had stained his life, they were all silent then. He knelt by that pallet not as director, inquisitor’s agent, or domestic priest, but as one human being left beside another after the struggle of passion, shame, motherhood, and despair had been ended only by death. The poor cell, with its straw, its skull, its ironed door, and its pale growing light from above, seemed now less a prison than a tomb already closed in all but stone. And as the dawn strengthened by degrees through the grate, it showed on the dead face not horror, nor rebellion, nor the mark of bodily anguish, but only the deep and final weariness of one who had been too tender for the world into which she had been brought.

Monçada told this part of the tale with greater difficulty than any that had gone before. More than once his voice failed him altogether, and once he covered his face with both hands and remained silent so long that young Melmoth did not dare to interrupt him. At last he said, in a tone subdued by remembrance rather than exhaustion, that with Isidora’s death the manuscript of Adonijah’s fearful story seemed to close, not because sorrow had ended, but because a life had ended in which innocence, love, religion, suffering, and fatal temptation had all been gathered more terribly than in any other. He added that when Adonijah had reached that point in the narrative, even he, stern as he was, had paused over the page and sat long without speech, while the lamp burned between them and the dead still stood upright in their cases around the room.

“Such,” said Monçada at last, “was the fate of her whom the world once worshipped as a creature too pure for common life. She was found in flowers, taught through sorrow, loved by one accursed, torn from her family, robbed of her child, and left to die between the cross and despair. Yet if ever there was a being

whose errors might plead their own excuse in their very innocence, it was she. I had heard the whole, and thought no human misery could exceed it. But, Senhor, I was then to learn what remains when such a tale is ended, and the living who have listened to it must return again to their own dreadful place among the living."

Part 52

After this portion of his narrative, Monçada seemed unable for some time to proceed. The image of Isidora's death had shaken him more deeply than any former passage of his own strange history, perhaps because in that history suffering had so often hardened itself into action, while here it had ended in mere patience and extinction. Young Melmoth, who had listened with an attention strained almost into pain, did not venture to press him. They separated for that night in silence. Each carried away from the interview not only the sorrow of the tale just ended, but a darker expectation, as if some consequence of it, not yet told, still hung suspended over both their lives.

Many days passed before the recital was resumed. During those days young Melmoth often looked toward the door with a half-superstitious impatience, not merely for his guest, but for something more. The dangerous curiosity which had first drawn him to the tale had by this time grown into a state far more serious and inward. He felt that if the narrative were left unfinished, it would still continue in his mind of itself, shaping for itself horrible conclusions out of fear, darkness, and conjecture. There was in him also, though he scarcely confessed it even to his own thoughts, a wild and involuntary hope that the original of the portrait he had destroyed might yet appear and complete in his own person the fearful history of which he had so long been the shadow.

At length Monçada signified that he was prepared to continue. A night was fixed for the purpose, and on that night they met in the same apartment where so much had already been spoken and heard. It was a dreary and tempestuous night. The rain, which had fallen heavily all day, seemed now to have yielded to the wind, but yielded only as an army withdraws to gather strength for a stronger

assault. The blasts came in sudden furious gusts against the house, then ceased at once, leaving a silence even more ominous than noise, as if the darkness itself paused to listen before again rushing on with louder violence. The two men drew their chairs close to the fire, not for warmth only, but with that instinct by which human beings seek some central and companionable light when the outward world has become threatening and obscure.

They looked at each other more than once before either spoke. Each wished to encourage the other, and each perhaps felt the more need of courage because he knew so well how little of it he possessed. The tale they had already traversed together had not exhausted horror, but rather sharpened the sense by which horror was received. Young Melmoth's face, once merely eager and intelligent, had taken during these days something of that strained and listening expression which long intercourse with terrible things often imprints on the countenance. Monçada too, though older in suffering, seemed oppressed by a burden heavier than the remaining narrative alone could explain. At last he collected enough voice and resolution to begin.

Yet he had not gone far before he suddenly paused. The change in his hearer had struck him. Young Melmoth, instead of listening with his former fixed and painful attention, had turned his head slightly toward the door, and sat as one who hears or imagines some sound beyond the range of the voice before him. "What is it?" asked Monçada at length, unable to proceed while his auditor thus seemed divided between the tale and something else. "I thought," answered Melmoth slowly, "I thought I heard a noise, as of a person walking in the passage." Monçada instantly raised his hand. "Hush, then," he said. "Listen. I would not willingly be overheard."

They both sat motionless and held even their breath. For a few moments there was nothing but the sinking of the fire and the long troubled murmur of the wind round the angles of the house. Then the sound returned more distinctly. It was not the shifting of boards under the force of the weather, nor the accidental trembling of some loose fastening. It was a step, measured, heavy, and deliberate, approaching the door, pausing there, and then retiring again as if the being who

trod thus wished not merely to come, but to make those within conscious of his nearness before he entered. Young Melmoth half rose from his chair. “We are watched,” he said in a low voice, though whether in anger or terror he scarcely knew himself.

At that moment the door opened. The figure that appeared there was one which neither could mistake, though each knew it by a different road of fear. Monçada recognized in it the mysterious visitant of the prison of the Inquisition, the tempter of his darkest extremity, the being whose words had pursued him through suffering, flight, and recollection. Young Melmoth recognized in it at once the original of the portrait, the figure that had stood by his dying uncle’s bed, and the secret center toward which all the stories, manuscripts, warnings, and apparitions of his family seemed now visibly to converge. It was the same being who had haunted the past, and who stood at that instant bodily before them in the present.

He remained for some time near the door without looking at either of them. There was something in that pause more dreadful than immediate advance would have been. It seemed as if he allowed them leisure to know him fully, and to feel to the utmost that the unknown was unknown no longer. Then he began to move forward. His step was slow, perfectly distinct, and so unlike the hurried or uncertain tread of ordinary men that every sound of it appeared to fall separately on their hearts. He advanced till he reached the center of the room and stood there again motionless. The firelight, broken by gusts that shook the imperfect casements, fell unevenly upon him; now leaving him half in shade, now revealing more plainly the form that had long moved darkly through all their fears.

The horror with which the two spectators regarded him was equal, but its expression differed in each. Monçada crossed himself repeatedly, and his lips moved as if he would have uttered prayers in rapid succession had not terror broken their order. Young Melmoth remained nailed to his chair, his eyes fixed so intensely upon the figure before him that they seemed almost sightless from excess of vision. He felt no power either to speak or to avert his gaze. The being who stood there was indeed Melmoth the Wanderer, the same in form and stature

as in that ancient portrait whose date had marked another century, and yet wearing none of the visible burden of years by which living men confess the tyranny of time.

There was no decay in him, and yet there was no health such as belongs to common life. His natural force seemed not abated; the frame was still upright, collected, and entire; the features still retained that firm and severe character which belongs rather to habitual command than to suffering. But the eyes had changed. That fearful and almost supernatural light, which had once seemed to burn in them like a beacon kindled from infernal fire to lure or warn the desperate, was now no longer visible in the same dreadful splendor. Instead of that fiery lustre, there was in them something more appalling still to those who looked upon him closely, the dim fixed aspect of the dead. It was not blindness, nor was it the ordinary dulness of fatigue or grief. It was rather as if the life of the eye had withdrawn inward, leaving behind only the last terrible witness that a soul might still remain where its light seemed already extinguished.

Slowly, and without haste or hesitation, he approached the table where they sat. The fire gave one strong upward flash at that moment, and both saw more clearly the face bending over them. It was a living face, but not with the full and mutual relation of living men to one another. It seemed rather the face of one who had long conversed with thoughts, places, and destinies beyond the ordinary range of human intercourse, and who now regarded human fear not with triumph, but with that profound knowledge which leaves surprise impossible. He stood before them without speaking. The silence that followed his advance became itself a kind of presence in the room, enlarging it, darkening it, and making the storm without appear far away compared with the deeper storm that had thus entered and taken its place between them.

Neither Monçada nor young Melmoth dared at first address him. They were like men who have heard of thunder all their lives, and suddenly find it standing before them in human form. Yet each knew, with a certainty that made speech only more difficult, that the silence could not last forever. The being before them had not come by chance, nor for any idle display of power. He had entered at the

very point where the tale of Isidora's death had ended and where the living were to take up again their own share of that fearful history. Thus they sat, one half rising and sinking back again, the other still clutching unconsciously at the beads he had drawn from his breast, while Melmoth the Wanderer remained before them like a figure returned not merely from another place, but from another order of existence, to demand that what had been told of the dead should now be continued in the presence of the living.

Part 53

As the Wanderer advanced still nearer, till his figure almost touched the table, Monçada and young Melmoth started up together in irrepressible horror. They stood as men stand who know that defence is hopeless, and yet feel nature arm itself in spite of reason. He looked on them without haste, then waved one hand with a motion that seemed to express defiance without hostility. When at last he spoke, the sound of his voice was unlike any common human utterance, not loud, not hurried, but deep, distinct, and prolonged, rolling on their ears like thunder heard far off among mountains. It was the voice of one who had long spoken only to extremity, and who never addressed guilt or suffering except to darken both.

"Mortals," he said, "you are here to speak of my destiny, and of the events which it has drawn into its circle. That destiny, I think, is now accomplished, and with it the events that have so miserably stimulated your curiosity draw also toward their close. I am here to tell you of both. I, of whom you speak, am here before you. Who can tell so well of Melmoth the Wanderer as himself, now that he is about to resign that existence which has so long been terror and wonder to the world?" Then fixing his dim dead eyes first on one and then on the other, he added, "Melmoth, you behold your ancestor. Monçada, you see an acquaintance of later date."

A grim smile passed over his features as he spoke those words of recognition. Then, observing the agony of both, he said with sudden bitterness, "Fear nothing. What have you to fear? You, Senhor, are armed with your beads, and you,

Melmoth, are fortified by that desperate inquisitiveness which would interrogate hell itself, if hell could answer you with novelty. You have both pursued me through story, conjecture, and terror. Be satisfied now. The object of your search is before you, and he does not seek to injure you. Have I not learned, by long and burning experience, that mankind need no aid from me to tremble, to suffer, and to perish?"

He seated himself, or rather sank into a chair near them, with an appearance of power still unbroken, though some heavier change than weariness seemed already upon him. "It has been reported of me," he resumed after a pause, "that I obtained from the enemy of souls a life prolonged beyond the lot of mortality, a power to pass over space without delay, to brave tempests, to enter dungeons, and to appear in places where bolts and walls might well have been trusted against other men. It has also been said that this power was granted to me that I might tempt those in their utmost extremity, and offer them deliverance on condition of exchanging destinies with me. If this be true, what does it prove? Only a truth uttered once by lips I may not name, and confirmed by every human heart since the world began."

Then, leaning forward, he spoke more slowly, as if each word had to be drawn through pain. "No one has ever exchanged destinies with Melmoth the Wanderer. I have traversed the world seeking such an one, and no man, to gain the world, would lose his own soul. Not Stanton in the madness to which his fear had brought him. Not you, Monçada, when the prisons of the Inquisition had made life itself a torment. Not Walberg, when his children were dying of want before his eyes. Not another—" Here his voice stopped. His whole countenance changed, and for one moment the bitterness of long years seemed to give way to an anguish more human and more recent. The two hearers, who had listened hitherto in terror, now felt something like pity begin to struggle with it.

He sat for some time without speaking, and the silence of that room became more oppressive than the storm without. At length he raised his head again and said, "Your ancestor has come home. His wanderings are over." Then, with the same stern and desolate calm, he went on. "What has been told or believed of me

is now of little moment. The secret of my destiny rests with myself. If all that fear has invented and credulity received concerning me be true, to what does it amount? That if my crimes have exceeded those of mortality, so will my punishment. I have been on earth a terror, but not an evil, except to those who, of their own will, would have purchased rescue by consenting to become what I am. None could partake my destiny but by consent, and none have consented. I alone must sustain the burden."

His features, which had seemed fixed into something almost sepulchral, now kindled for one instant into fierce life. "If I have put forth my hand and eaten of the forbidden fruit, am I not driven from the presence of God and from every paradise? Do I not wander among blasted worlds of barrenness and curse? Men have imagined that I sought always to drag others into my doom. Fools. Had one accepted, he would only have proved what the rest of mankind had disproved, that there exists a man who values earth above eternity. But I have found none. They feared death, chains, famine, madness, torture, infamy, and despair; yet all these they chose rather than my condition. Learn then, if you can, from the failure of all my temptations, what that condition is."

As he spoke thus, the wild energy that had once made his voice so fearful sank again, and left behind a weariness deeper than bodily exhaustion. "There was a time," he said, "when the powers committed to me, if powers they were, appeared to place me above mankind. I could traverse seas and deserts, enter prisons, appear beside the bed of the dying, and stand before the wretched in their last extremity as if space, storm, and stone were nothing. Yet what was all this? A wider range only for despair. What is distance to one who carries his hell with him? What are tempests to one on whose soul a worse tempest is fixed? What are bolts and walls to a being who can never shut himself out from himself?" At these words even young Melmoth, in the midst of terror, felt that all he had once imagined terrible in the Wanderer's existence was now shown to be only its least dreadful part.

The Wanderer then grew silent once more, and remained with his head resting on his hand, as if thought itself had become too great a burden for speech.

The fire fell low. Neither Monçada nor Melmoth dared interrupt him. At last he looked up, and the ghastly derisive smile that had more than once crossed his face returned faintly. “Let me, if possible, obtain an hour of repose,” he said. “Yes, repose—sleep. My existence, it seems, is still human enough for that.” There was in these words something so horrible from the lips that uttered them, and so piteous also, that neither of his hearers could answer. He rose slowly, as one to whom motion itself had become a difficulty, yet whose will still kept power over the failing frame.

“Men,” he said, turning once more toward them, “retire now, and leave me. I must be alone for the few last hours of my mortal existence—if indeed they are to be the last. In this apartment I first drew breath, and in this I must perhaps resign it. Would—would I had never been born.” The shudder with which he uttered those last words struck both more strongly than any thing that had yet passed. Then, suddenly raising his voice till it filled the room with its old authority, he added, “Remember this. Whatever sounds you may hear in the awful night that approaches, do not come near this apartment at the peril of your lives. Let no desperate curiosity draw you here. For the same stake I risked more than life—and lost it. Be warned. Retire.”

They obeyed him. They left the room, and for the remainder of that day neither thought of food, rest, or any common need of life. Their minds were held in one burning tension which preyed on them like disease. At night they each attempted to lie down, but no sleep came. It would indeed have been impossible. Soon after midnight sounds began to issue from the Wanderer’s chamber. At first they were low and uncertain, not enough perhaps to alarm, but enough to hold the hearer waking. Then they changed into others so strange and so dreadful that young Melmoth, who had dismissed the servants to distant offices lest any common ear should hear them, found his own inquietude insupportable, rose from his bed, and began to walk in the passage that led to that room of horror.

Part 54

As young Melmoth paced the passage in restless misery, he thought at first that the figure moving at the farther end of it was some creature of his own disturbed sight. The lamp he carried shook in his hand, and the light it cast trembled so wildly on the walls that every shadow seemed alive. But the figure came nearer, and he saw that it was Monçada. Neither asked the other why he was there. No question was needed. Their terror had taken the same road. They joined each other at once, and for some time walked up and down together without speaking, listening to those sounds that came from the Wanderer's chamber and changed every moment in character, yet never in horror.

At first the noises had been low and uncertain, like the troubled movements of one struggling with sickness, memory, or dreams too deep for utterance. But these soon gave place to sounds that no language could clearly name. One instant they seemed like prayers wrung from extremity, hurried, broken, and gasped rather than spoken. The next, they rose into tones so fierce, so wild, and so full of inward revolt, that the listeners shrank from them as if they had heard not supplication, but blasphemy. Sometimes both seemed mingled. There were cries in which despair and defiance, fear and resistance, sounded together like hostile voices fighting in one breast.

The two men looked at one another more than once as if each hoped the other might suggest some interpretation less dreadful than his own. None came. The warning of the Wanderer still held them back from bursting into the room, yet every new sound strained obedience closer to breaking. Young Melmoth said inwardly, "If this is the end of his fearful existence, shall we stand here and hear him perish alone?" Monçada, whose past sufferings had taught him both terror and caution, thought rather, "What if those cries are not extorted by suffering merely, but by some presence or summons which no living man may behold and survive?" Thus pity and fear struggled in both, while neither had strength enough to make the struggle end in action.

At times the sounds sank so low that they almost persuaded themselves all was again still. Then some sudden outbreak, more violent than before, would drive the blood from their faces. There were moments when the whole chamber seemed

shaken by what issued from it, and moments again when the cry was no louder than a voice speaking close to the floor. The variety of the horror was one of its most dreadful parts. Had the sounds been only groans, or only shrieks, the mind might have formed some miserable image to rest upon. But here every form of human anguish seemed passing before them in succession, and none remained long enough to be fully known.

Towards morning the sounds ceased as suddenly as if some hand had cut them off in the midst. The silence that followed was more terrible than all that had gone before. Both stopped short at the same instant and stood listening. The wind had fallen too, and the whole house seemed waiting. There was no movement in the chamber, no footstep, no fall, no broken breath, not even that faint restless stir which belongs to a room lately inhabited by violent suffering. “This cannot be borne,” whispered young Melmoth at last. Monçada answered only by grasping his arm, and together they went to the door.

They opened it slowly, scarcely knowing whether they wished or feared to see what was within. The room was empty. Not merely empty of life, but empty as if no living being had lately been there. The chair in which they had left him stood near the table. The fire was sunk low. The air, though heavy, had none of the close and mortal oppression they had expected. They looked behind the curtains, round the hearth, and into every corner of the apartment with that hurried minuteness which men use when terror has made them at once eager and incredulous. There was nothing. No body, no garment, no trace of the being whose presence had so long darkened all connected with that house and family.

Then, after some moments of fruitless amazement, they perceived a small door opposite to that by which they had entered. It communicated with a back staircase, and stood open. At the sight, both felt the same instant conviction, that whatever had become of the Wanderer, the last visible direction of his steps must lie there. They approached the opening and discovered on the boards beyond it traces of footsteps marked very plainly in damp sand or clay. The impression of the feet was not confused, not broken, not such as might have been made by one moving with the uncertainty of a dying man. They were the footsteps of one who

had walked out steadily and alone.

Without speaking, they followed them down the narrow stair. The marks continued from step to step, each distinct in the faint morning light that had begun to gather in the passages. At the bottom they led to a door opening upon the garden. That door also stood open. Beyond it the little path of gravel was darkened here and there by the same damp traces, and these, being recent and plain, drew them on with a kind of irresistible authority. The path ended in a broken fence, beyond which stretched a rough heath rising toward the rock that overlooked the sea. Through this heath, wet with the rain of the preceding day and night, the footmarks were again visible.

They followed them upward together. The dawn was by then spreading faintly through a sky still troubled with broken cloud, and the sea beneath the cliff had that cold and almost metallic look which belongs to it after storm. The fishermen, whose poor dwellings lay along the shore below, were already astir, as men must be who live by the uncertain moods of wind and water. When questioned, they declared that the night had indeed been one of fearful disturbance, and that sounds had reached them from the direction of the Lodge such as none of them could describe. It was singular that, men of exaggeration and superstition as they commonly were, they now used no wild language. Terror had perhaps gone beyond the range of ornament, and left only blunt sincerity behind it.

Still the footsteps went on, leading over the heath toward the very edge of the cliff. The earth there was softer, and the marks appeared even more distinct, as if the being who made them had walked more slowly while nearing the summit. Young Melmoth felt his heart beat so violently that each new impression on the wet ground seemed struck not on the soil, but on his own blood. Monçada, though less shaken outwardly, crossed himself again and again, and muttered prayers which he scarcely knew in order. Thus they climbed till at last they reached the highest point to which the traces led.

There the marks ended. They ended not in confusion, not in turning back, not in doubling upon themselves, but absolutely and sharply at the very brink of the precipice. Before them lay only rock dropping sheer to the sea. Beneath, the waves

still rolled heavily after the storm, whitening among dark stones and hollows with a sound more sullen than loud. There was no ledge by which any man could have descended, no path to right or left, and no further impression upon the wet ground. Both stood and stared first at the rock, then at the sea below, then again at the last footstep on the edge, as if by force of looking they might draw some explanation out of the stone itself.

It was young Melmoth who first saw the object lying a little aside from the very last print. He stooped and took it up. It was a handkerchief, old-fashioned in make, stained by wet, and marked in one corner with the initials of the Wanderer's name. The sight of that slight and miserable remnant affected them more strongly than any greater sign might perhaps have done. It was the first thing of his they had ever held that seemed wholly human and wholly forsaken. Young Melmoth looked at it long without speaking. Monçada turned away and gazed upon the sea, as if he expected the waves themselves to restore or accuse what they had taken.

For some time neither could frame a thought that would satisfy the mind. Had he thrown himself down the precipice? Had he been taken thence by some power less visible than the sea? Had the long and dreadful term of his wandering closed there, and if so, by what summons, judgment, or hand? The cliff gave no answer, the sea no witness, and the morning itself no comfort. The last footsteps remained, and the handkerchief remained, and beyond these all was mystery. At length young Melmoth, still holding that poor relic, said in a voice scarcely audible, "He is gone." Monçada answered, "Yes. But whether to rest, or to more wandering, God alone knows."

They descended slowly from the cliff, carrying with them nothing but that handkerchief and the certainty that the Wanderer's visible course on earth had there come to its end, or at least passed beyond the reach of mortal pursuit. The sea continued to break below them with its heavy and indifferent murmur. The fishermen returned to their boats and nets. The pale morning widened into day. Common life resumed its place on all sides. Yet for the two men who went back from that precipice, common life could never again be wholly common. They had traced one fearful history to its last earthly sign, and found that even there the end

preserved the same character as the whole, half disclosed, half hidden, leaving behind it just enough certainty to bind the mind forever to what it could never fully know.

Part 55

Melmoth and Monçada stood some time longer on the summit of the rock, looking first at the last footmarks on the wet ground, then at the handkerchief, and then down toward the waste and engulfing sea beneath. Neither attempted to offer an explanation that might lessen the horror of the scene. Each felt that whatever had become of the Wanderer, the visible history of his earthly course had there come to its final sign. The morning widened round them, the fishermen resumed their labor, and the common sounds of life began again below. But for those two men, standing by the last trace of that fearful being, common life itself had become forever mixed with darker thoughts.

Young Melmoth still held the handkerchief in his hand, as if reluctant to part with the slightest remnant of one whose existence had so long hovered between certainty and dread. He looked at it, then at Monçada, and neither could say more than what each already knew in silence. The Wanderer had vanished, but his disappearance, like his life, refused to become wholly clear even at the last. No eye had seen him descend, no voice had answered from the sea, and no farther mark remained upon the earth. Mystery had closed over him as naturally as light had once closed over the world from which he seemed always half divided.

At length they descended slowly from the precipice. Their steps were heavy, not from bodily fatigue only, but from the burden of all they had heard, seen, and guessed. Behind them the sea still broke against the rocks with that deep and indifferent murmur which seems to say that nature receives alike the innocent, the guilty, the loved, and the forsaken. Before them lay the house to which they must return, but neither could feel it home-like now. Every chamber of it, every passage, and every remembered sound had been changed forever by the presence and departure of the being whose history had thus ended before them.

They exchanged, as they reached the lower ground, one look of silent and unutterable horror, and returned slowly home. Nothing remained to be sought, nothing more to be told by human witness, and nothing was left in their hands but that slight and miserable relic which the blast had spared upon the cliff. So ended the tale of Melmoth the Wanderer, not with peace, nor with explanation, but with the last trace of a being too fearful for common life, and too unhappy even for terror itself to triumph in. And if any lesson remains from all that was suffered, witnessed, or refused, it is only that no extremity of earthly misery has yet taught man to barter eternity for the world.