



FLOREAT LUX

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FLOREAT
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And to the woman were gyven two wynges of a great egle, that she myght flee into the wyldernes, in to her place, where she is nourysshed for a tyme, tymes, and halfe a tyme, from the presence of the serpent.

—Revelation 12:14 (Taverner's 1539 Version)

I hope to paint something that will ruin the appetite of every son of a bitch who ever eats in that room.

—Mark Rothko

I

A WOMAN STANDS with a letter in her hand. She stares ahead with an expression of mild discontent: whatever she has just read did not please her. An exhalation of frustration or annoyance, and her breath mists: it is a cold room.

She puts aside the letter and takes up the envelope.

The stamp is printed without a country of origin, a philatelic peculiarity that identifies it as British. On the lower left is a dark blue ‘Royal Mail’ sticker, declaring that the envelope is to be delivered *par avion*. No return address, like the letter. The stamp has been franked, and she can make out the words *Marylebone, London* forming an arc across the top, but the date below is blurred. Her name and address are written in the same ragged hand as the note—whatever reason the author chose to use old-fashioned nib and ink, it was not to display penmanship. On the back are the remains of a wax seal, bright vermillion, and she wishes now that she had photographed the impression before breaking it.

A beast of some sort, she thinks. Horned.

The paper matches that of the letter, high quality, heavy stock, and the interior is lined with an overlay of gold foil. She wonders if the wax seal and foil lining are just affectations, or whether they were chosen because the combination ensures that no one can access the envelope’s contents without leaving undisguisable evidence of having done so.

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She puts down the envelope and takes up the letter, reading it more slowly this time.

Dear Madam,

Your recent enquiry regarding my client, Mr. Bronaryre, Esq., has been directed to my attention.

I hope you will appreciate that in these uncertain times it is imprudent to pursue delicate matters in any form of written record (so often subpoenaed) or electronic communication (so often compromised), and therefore under the present circumstances I regret that I am unable to offer you any assistance. However, should you happen to find it convenient, I would be entirely willing to discuss the matter with you privately and in person.

It is my habit to attend Evensong of a Wednesday at Temple Church (extra-parochial), located between the City and Saint Clement Danes. I usually take a pew at the back, by William the Marshal.

I have the honour to be, madam, your faithful and obedient servant,

The signature is illegible—presumably deliberately so, given the absence of either letterhead or return address: the author of this note did not intend that she could respond. The first name is short, perhaps *Ross*. The surname is longer and might begin with a *P* or a *D*, but the rest is just scrawl. However, there are two postnominal initials that are clear enough: *QC*.

She looks it up: *Queen's Counsel*—an honorific title given to distinguished barristers in Britain and, in the ceremonious ways of the class-conscious English, includes the privilege of wearing distinctive silk robes while in court. Not that she has any doubt as to the Englishness of the author—*enquiry* with an *e* and *honour* with a *u*, referring to London's financial district as *the City*, the appellative *esquire*, and the elaborately flowery valediction all point to it.

She wonders who William the Marshal might be. The addition of the unnecessary and somewhat fussy *extra-parochial* suggests a punctilious author, a person concerned with the minutiae of ecclesiastical status. Perhaps the lawyer has a secular role in the church that he suggested as a meeting place, and maybe a marshal is a sort of church lay person, like a sexton or a verger, with whom he is on friendly terms.

The idea of going to London is ridiculous, she thinks, doubly so now that her dissertation is complete: even if something new should emerge there would be insufficient time to incorporate it before the submission deadline. Plus the cost; her room is cold because she has turned off the heat to save money, and instead works in the free warmth of the reading room at the public library up in Bryant Park—crossing the Atlantic would subtract a large sum from her carefully conserved scholarship funds. But the letter is intriguing, and if she were not to go she would always wonder what might have come of it.

She opens her laptop and starts searching for the cheapest airfare from New York to London.

II

LONDON IS TEN DEGREES of latitude higher than New York, and consequently winter light fades much faster there, something the woman failed to take into account when setting out for the church. The Temple is London's legal district, a complex congeries of ancient structures accumulated over many centuries, not always easy to navigate, much like the law itself. She discovers that the Inner Temple is a warren of serpentine footpaths and narrow passageways, something that would have been difficult enough to negotiate by day, but which in the dark is an impenetrable maze.

Soon, she is lost.

She checks the time: it is already six P.M. and Evensong would be starting. There is no one to ask for directions. The only sign of life is an occasional yellow-lit window high up in one of the many old buildings crowding in upon themselves, or sometimes the sound of footsteps echoing like hers upon the flagstones, the direction indecipherable in the labyrinth, there and then gone as their unseen source hurries away.

Suddenly, she is enveloped in mist. Her plan had been to match a street sign with the map—a map that she has come to realize is insufficiently detailed and poorly labeled. In this fog it will no longer be possible: she cannot see the street signs. She continues as best she can,

hoping to happen upon something useful, or perhaps to hear the sound of the service, now that Evensong must be underway.

She comes to a small square, black railings and fog-dampened paths separating little patches of greenery: a pocket-sized park. Someone stands nearby, but when she approaches to ask for directions it turns out to be a statue, mute bronze resting upon a stone pedestal. By crouching close and using her phone as a lamp the woman can read the inscription: the statue is of John Stuart Mill, the philosopher. The map that the hotel concierge gave her, essentially a tourist pamphlet, has the various sights denominated by numbers and listed in a key. Among them, she finds the John Stuart Mill statue.

She is at the far side of the Middle Temple, having somehow completely traversed both Inner and Middle Temples, and missing the church along the way. The Thames is just ahead of her, silent and unseen; the sudden fog is explained.

She reorients herself and, with a better sense of scale now, heads back the way she came, but further east, downriver, a route that she calculates cannot fail to find Temple Church. Eventually, she emerges through a narrow cloister into an open space. To her left is the church, the soft murmur of the liturgy audible in the cold night air, pointed Gothic windows glowing warm and inviting. The main portal is located on the side rather than at the end, meaning that latecomers must enter in view of those who managed to make it on time.

The congregation rises to its feet as the woman steps inside, and she briefly has the alarming impression of having been the cause. All except one, an elderly round-faced gentleman with abundant gray curls sitting alone in a pew at the back of the church. Unlike the others, the man faces not the celebrant but her, as if having expected her arrival. He smiles in welcome and signals with three raised fingers, like an aged Boy Scout.

In the middle of the chancel is a choir wearing white surplices over scarlet cassocks, a mixture of men and boys. A few determined organ notes sound and then the choir begins a hymn. She makes her way around the perimeter to the back of the church.

The gray-curl'd man stands as she joins him, and offers a pudgy hand in welcome. He only comes to her shoulder, although she is not wearing heels, but he has compensated for height with girth.

"Thomas Ravenscroft," he whispers as they shake hands. "Delighted to meet you, Miss Lancaster."

The *Ross* was *Thos*, she realizes, an English written contraction of his first name.

"Sabrina Lancaster," she offers in return, although it is obviously unnecessary. "How did you know what I looked like?"

"I am familiar with the congregation. A stranger, especially a young woman alone, is quite unusual here, I can assure you. And so American; my, how differently our cousins hold themselves, and how differently they gaze out upon the world. Who could it be but you?" This declaration leaves him breathless. "Shall we sit?"

They sit.

"I'm afraid that you've missed the prelude," he says. "Charles H. H. Parry, laudably rendered. Both the *Magnificat* and *Nunc Dimittis* will be Stanford, a real treat, but for which we now pay with Bairstow's rather ponderous Psalm 48." He offers her a small printed program, and points to the current line: *Walk about Zion, and go around about her: tell the towers thereof.*

"Where's William?" she asks.

"Who?"

"William the Marshal."

"Ah, Pembroke. He's over there." Ravenscroft nods toward the rear of the church. It is not a vestibule or portal, as might be expected in a traditional church, but instead a strange circular extension, as if having been tacked on as an architectural afterthought. It is empty of people, but what appear to be several half-sunken sarcophagi occupy the floor, their occupants' effigies rendered in high relief upon the lids. "He's on the left, surrounded by his sons," Ravenscroft continues. "William the Marshal is the only man ever to have unhorsed Richard Coeur de Lion. He spared Richard but slew his horse. It gives me great comfort to sit by a man capable of dislodging kings."

The psalm concludes, and they sit for the lesson. Ravenscroft talks no more and shows every appearance of listening attentively, even enjoying it. Sabrina takes the opportunity to inspect the church's interior: smooth stone soaring in a mixture of pointed windows and vaulted arches, the pulpit perched precariously upon a single slender pillar, the wood of the intricately carved reredos darkened near ebony with age, richly ornamented sacerdotal vessels and vestments, the air cool and still and heavy with collective superstition. A calming place, she thinks— notwithstanding the nearby presence of a dead horse slayer—somewhere designed to soothe the spirit into at least a temporary suspension of disbelief.

The service proceeds with a series of sittings and standings, a kneeling at what the program identifies as 'The Collect,' winding through hymns and anthems and the two Stanfords: fine enough, but Sabrina felt a greater profundity in the Bairstow, notwithstanding Ravenscroft's dismissal of it. The congregation remains standing after the final hymn, the minister offers a concluding benediction, and then the choir and clergy proceed in dignified procession down the aisle and out of the church. The organist begins anew and Ravenscroft briefly cocks an ear.

"Gigout," he says, satisfied in successfully identifying the composer, despite having surrendered his program. "An excellent choice for the Voluntary."

"You know your music, Mr. Ravenscroft."

"They say that knowledge is power, Miss Lancaster, but if so I confess that I have found no evidence of it in the ability to distinguish a toccata from a fugue. But here I am talking about power when we have the real thing right by us." He stands. "Shall we pay our respects?"

While the congregants quietly file out the side door, Ravenscroft leads Sabrina to the back of the church, with the effigies.

"This was the original church," he says, in full voice now, no longer constrained to the hushed tones he used during the service. "The circular construction seems unusual to us, accustomed as we are to basilican rectilinearity, but this church was, of course, the London headquarters of the Knights Templar—before their suppression—and Templar churches

were commonly round.” So it is not this part that is the architectural afterthought, Sabrina realizes, it is the rest of the church. “According to the official account, the round design was modeled on the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, in Jerusalem.” Ravenscroft leans closer and lowers his voice. “Actually, it was intended to recall the Dome of the Rock, what they called the *Templum Domini*—that building is technically octagonal rather than circular, although its dome *is* circular, and the seals of Templar Grand Masters depict the *Templum Domini* as entirely circular, dome and walls, notwithstanding the architectural facts. But I choose not to pursue these finer points with our clerical brethren.” He stands up straight and resumes his normal voice. “Are you familiar with the Templars?”

“Not at all.”

“They were a military order that arose during the Crusades, based in Jerusalem, which had been taken in 1099. The *temple* part comes from the Temple of Solomon, on whose site they had their headquarters. Their mission was to protect Christians, especially pilgrims traveling to the Holy Land. It was as an adjunct to this latter obligation that they devised a system whereby the traveler could deposit valuables with local Templars before setting out on his pilgrimage, and then redeem funds against them from the Templars in Jerusalem, and so was born a financial system using letters of credit—the Templars, in addition to being a military order, became bankers. Thus they possessed two of the three paths to power: money and might.

“As the Crusades crumbled the Templars gradually retreated westward, first to Acre, then Cyprus, eventually back into Europe, and the monarchs suddenly found that this once small order pledged to poverty and pilgrims in faraway Jerusalem had transformed into a large, rich, and powerful force in the middle of their own realms. King John discovered this to his disadvantage: it was William the Marshal who negotiated the signing of the Magna Carta—he was a man capable of dislodging kings in more ways than one, you perceive? Come, let me introduce you.”

He takes her to an effigy in the central group.

“This is he,” Ravenscroft says. “These two by him are his sons.”

It has the appearance of a tomb sunk partially into the stone floor, with only the carved lid standing proud. The effigy depicts William the Marshal in full medieval military regalia, a long shield held at the ready to his left, and on the other side a stout fist clenching the hilt of his unsheathed sword, as if ready to continue dethroning in the afterlife if things were not to his satisfaction. His head is wrapped in chain mail, and the face it surrounds is stern and determined, as hard as the stone from which it is carved. William was not a man much given to humor or fancy, Sabrina thinks.

“In unhorsing Richard, William merely taught the young man a lesson,” Ravenscroft says, after having allowed her to contemplate the tomb for a while in silence. “But John’s wings he clipped rather more severely, and in a way which was to reverberate throughout history, an act that we still feel the echoes of today. Strange to say, John held no ill will toward him; in fact, he was grateful to William for having engineered an end to the conflict with the barons. This church even became the state treasury under John, with the Templars taking charge of the royal funds. It was John who appointed William as Earl of Pembroke, and on John’s death he, Pembroke, became regent to the then nine-year-old Henry III—that is, he became the ruler of England. Not bad for a man born with neither land nor fortune. The Archbishop of Canterbury called him the best knight that ever lived, but I would rather call him the most effective.”

Sabrina looks around the room. The walls are bare stone here, the windows narrow, but with the lack of furnishing and low tombs it feels spacious. There are grotesque heads carved into the tracery, leering or screaming—one fellow is having his ear bitten off by what looks to be an enraged ferret. Some of the effigies strike strange poses, lying with their legs oddly crossed, or standing upon animals. The room is part dungeon, part armory, part fortification, part crypt.

“What a strange place this is,” Sabrina says. “How different it feels from the other side.”

“High Church,” Ravenscroft says, cocking his head toward the chancel and reverting to a whisper, “which is to say, Anglican never having quite reconciled itself to the Reformation. They still lament the

liturgical lapse from Latin into the vulgar tongue, and basically never progressed beyond the King James Bible and 1662 Book of Common Prayer. But here in the Round—well, this may be the oldest part of the church, but in a sense it is the most modern: there is no sacerdotal pedantry in this room, just the will to power.”

She follows his gaze back down to William the Marshal, and they contemplate him in renewed silence.

“What do you see?” he asks after a while.

“Determination.”

“Self-satisfaction?”

“No, none.”

“Quite so,” Ravenscroft says. “Like Alexander, or Caesar, or Napoleon: never done and self-satisfied, but always doing and looking forward.”

There is a meaningful throat-clearing from the chancel and looking up they see that the line of people leaving has dwindled to the last talkative stragglers. They walk over and join it. Sabrina opens her bag but Ravenscroft halts her with a hand on her arm.

“Quite unnecessary, I assure you. I am generous enough for two.” He extracts a long coat wallet and pulls from it an ochre-colored banknote: fifty pounds. “Why don’t you read it?”

He hands her the banknote. There is a flamboyant *Bank of England* etched beside a portrait of the reigning monarch, evidently from her younger days.

“Other side.”

She turns it over. The portraits here are of two men—James Watt and Matthew Boulton, as serious and determined as William the Marshal. There is a large steam engine between them: Watt’s invention, Sabrina knows, and she assumes that Matthew Boulton must have been a collaborator. Then she sees what Ravenscroft evidently meant for her to see: a quotation: *I sell here, Sir, what all the world desires to have – POWER.*

Ravenscroft leans in close as he plucks the bill from her hand and says *sotto voce*, “I keep leaving them these little hints, but they never seem to catch on.”

He drops the bill into the basket; mostly it has coins, and the few banknotes are far smaller in denomination.

The minister has not missed this generosity and smiles warmly as he shakes Ravenscroft's hand. Ravenscroft compliments him on the sermon, and then they spend a moment tut-tutting about the weather before Ravenscroft moves on.

It comes to Sabrina's turn, and the cleric inspects her unapologetically as he shakes her hand, but asks no questions. Sabrina has the sense that she is not the first curious stranger to have shown up at his church in Ravenscroft's company, but that he has learned to keep his inquisitiveness in check.

Sabrina and Ravenscroft step out into the courtyard. The fog has expanded from the riverbank, and they are enveloped in mist. It is cold but not unpleasant after being inside, and Sabrina takes a deep breath of sharp briny air.

"What's the third?" she asks.

"Third what?"

"You said there are three paths to power. The two the Templars possessed were money and might. What's the third?"

"Ah, the third is the trickiest: it is men's minds. Difficult, but very effective; worth trying if you can pull it off. Take this edifice, a magnificent building on priceless land, but maintained how? We have just witnessed it, have we not, a line of people putting money into a basket as they file out the door. But purchasing what? Absolution? A place in the afterlife? Or perhaps just peace of mind?"

She realizes why Ravenscroft was paying such attention to the lesson: it was not the content that interested him, it was the technique.

"What happened to the Templars?"

"They were suppressed. Phillip IV of France learned the lesson of Runnymede better than his English contemporaries: he closed the order, burned their leaders at the stake, put recalcitrants to the sword, and of course took possession of their wealth—or at least that part of their wealth that he could lay his hands on, property mainly."

"And the rest?"

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“Gold. Jewels, a common form of portable wealth back then. Silver plate, too. Most of that slipped away.”

“Where?”

“Ah, as the Bard said, thereby hangs a tale.” He rubs his hands. “Come, let us repair to my chambers and fortify ourselves against this climate in the English manner.”

“How’s that?”

“With a good cup of tea.”

III

RAVENSCROFT IS surprisingly fast for a short man of broad girth, scurrying along the mist-shrouded paths with a confidence born of familiarity. He leads Sabrina swiftly through the Inner Temple, a convoluted web of winding alleyways and narrow cobbled lanes that in the nebulous darkness feels to her like a catacomb. The fog makes identification difficult: she sees only passing glimpses of things that briefly emerge and then quickly disappear: a low stone arch that she must duck to negotiate; a boot-scrape projecting from the pavement, threatening to trip passers-by; an iron gate with hinges that squeak as if to raise the dead; a set of steps whose stone is scalloped with centuries of feet having trod upon them. With all the twisting and turning she has soon lost her sense of direction, and this is deliberate, she realizes: he is purposely leading her on this merry scramble to disorient her.

At last, they arrive at an anonymous portal set into a nondescript brick building. The door is painted glossy black, with an elegant fanlight above. There is no polished brass plaque, such as a prosperous barrister might be expected to display, nor even the buzzer with a handwritten label of someone less thriving. There is no identification at all, not even a street number.

Ravenscroft unlocks the door and they step inside. The place smells musty and old. He closes the door behind them and switches on the light,

revealing not a professional premise's entrance lobby or reception area, but instead just a small vestibule, uncarpeted, with a door to the left, a narrow staircase to the right, and between them a little hallway leading to the back. It has an air of abandonment, or at least of little use, and she wonders how a lawyer whose chambers are in such a place can afford to leave £50 banknotes in church collection baskets. They take the stairs up, arriving at a passageway corresponding to the hall below, again with a single door leading off it. Ravenscroft opens the door, finds the light switch, and invites Sabrina into his chambers.

The room is large, or would once have been so, but much of the available space has been reduced by an accumulation of bookcases and cupboards and shelves, all of them seemingly overflowing with paperwork. There is a lone window, but the lawyer's heavy carved desk is by the opposite wall, near the fireplace: perhaps the little natural light that would seep in through the narrow alley was insufficient to justify positioning the desk away from what is apparently the room's sole source of heat.

There is no monitor on the desk, just a blotter, a tarnished silver inkstand, a brass desk lamp with a green glass shade, a letter rack with an opener lying beside it, and on the far side a cluster of items—a stumpy candle attached to a broad base, a tapering rough-cast metal cylinder employed as a paperweight, and a cigar-sized roll from which the covering paper has been torn, revealing a bright red interior, like a fat crayon. She stares at them in momentary puzzlement until realizing that this is where his letter to her must have been sealed.

Part of one wall has been fitted with pigeon holes from which protrude papers in great variety: bound and unbound; folio and quarto and foolscap; some in folders made of stiff cloth-covered board and others in long rolls secured with ribbons of scarlet or black satin.

Not everything is paper: a decapitated brass artillery shell, standing by the door, performs the duty of umbrella stand; a gilt clock sits atop the mantle, its ticking the loudest thing in the room; and on top of a corner cupboard is an owl, large and horned, that some taxidermist contrived to configure with wings spread, as if about to launch upon an unlucky vole.

When all the wall space was taken up Ravenscroft took to using freestanding furniture: the floor is cluttered with chests and cabinets, but even these were inadequate, for loose paperwork occupies almost all the available horizontal surfaces, often in teetering piles threatening to collapse. One of these is on the only spare chair, an old leather-upholstered wingback by the other side of the fire, and Ravenscroft's first action is to hastily remove the documents from it and then with an open palm offer her a seat.

Sabrina accepts, looking around at the paperwork-strewn room in wonderment.

"You must have a great many clients, Mr. Ravenscroft."

"I have only the one client—that same gentleman whom you came to discuss. However, he does keep me busy."

Ravenscroft moves to a side table on which sits a tea set, and a kettle upon a hob. He plugs in the hob and switches it on. The kettle makes a low noise as the water begins to heat, and Ravenscroft looks at it admiringly.

"Isn't electricity wonderful, Miss Lancaster? We take it so much for granted, but when you stop to consider, such an amazing thing."

"I was just thinking that you seem to take very little advantage of electricity, Mr. Ravenscroft." There is no evidence of a computer, or a printer, or a photocopier. There is a telephone on a stand by the desk, a big black Bakelite device with a rotary dial, a type of telephone that Sabrina has only ever seen in old black-and-white movies.

"One doesn't like to become a slave to anything, does one? Even to something as singular as electricity. I find that I get by with what I have. I must say that I sometimes look with pity upon those unfortunate creatures who seem unable to proceed along a footpath without their heads buried in a small screen, and wonder if they are not rather like zombies. However, I must confess to being a slave to one thing."

"What's that, Mr. Ravenscroft?"

"Earl Grey." He opens a tin by the kettle and proffers it for Sabrina's inspection. She leans forward. Inside, there is tea. "Please, take a sniff." Sabrina leans closer and inhales. Besides the sharp tannic smell of the

tea, there is something else: a pungent underlying bittersweetness, something lush and exotic.

“What’s it flavored with?”

“Oil of bergamot, a type of Asian citrus fruit.” He continues talking while spooning some into a teapot. “Legend has it that the mixture was given to Earl Grey by a Chinese Mandarin in gratitude for the earl’s people having rescued his son from drowning.”

“Was he a sea-faring man?”

“No. Charles Grey, who became the second Earl Grey, was a Prime Minister of England. It was under him that slavery was abolished in the British Empire, and he was the author of the Reform Bill of 1832, a document which—representing as it were a completion of the process that was begun with the Magna Carta—is to the British constitution what certain amendments are to the American constitution. Thus it is that tonight, Miss Lancaster, we have had the opportunity to pay our respects to both the start and end points of a six-hundred-year process dedicated to delivering humankind from tyranny.”

He turns back to the table, busying himself with tea preparations, and she wonders what the purpose is behind the history lesson, elliptically delivered with English indirectness. Her eyes return to the desk.

“May I look at the seal?”

“Certainly.”

She takes it from the desk, as hefty as a cudgel, and inspects the underside.

“What is it?”

“Rosicrucian.” The kettle boils, and he continues to talk while filling the pot. “That is, representing the Order of the Rosy Cross, and so I use red wax to continue the tradition, so to speak. Now, we’ll give you a moment to draw.” This last comment is apparently addressed to the teapot.

Ravenscroft places two cups and saucers on the desk, pours the tea through a strainer, and then adds milk and sugar. He stirs briefly before drinking appreciatively. Sabrina stirs and sips in turn, then replaces her cup. “Thank you, but I hope that I didn’t come all this way just for tea.”

“Ah, yes, the time has indeed come to discuss the reason for your visit.” Ravenscroft takes his seat at the desk. He opens a drawer and pulls from it a piece of paper she recognizes as the photocopy of the letter that she had enclosed with her own. “I wonder if you would be kind enough to tell me the circumstances by which you came into possession of the document in question.”

“Well, as I explained, I’m a postgrad at NYU. I’ve been lucky enough to work with Justice Scaglietti—I mean to say, I *was* working with Justice Scaglietti.”

“Yes, a great loss. A fine legal mind, admired on both sides of the Atlantic, one that will be sorely missed. And also no doubt something that on a personal level has profoundly impacted your studies.”

“Not really. I had already finished the bulk of my work with him at the end of last summer. The Supreme Court term runs from October to June, during which he is mostly in D.C., and in any case he would have no time for someone like me when court is in term—the only people with access to him then are the other Justices and his clerks.”

“Nevertheless he made time for you when term was over. A very generous thing to do.”

“He lived alone.”

“But had many friends.”

“Many admirers. He was not a man for friends.”

“And yet for a Supreme Court Justice to essentially give up his free time to help a student—but then I understand that the subject matter was an analysis of his opinions, and perhaps it is not unknown for a man to be willing to expound his opinions, legal or otherwise, should he find a willing ear. Especially if that willing ear were young and female—I believe the late Justice had something of a reputation in these areas.”

It was true, but she had never felt the least hint of it from him, even when he had invited her to stay overnight, alone after the staff went home, just the two of them at Netherly, his great pile on the Hudson. But he had female companions, more than one, notwithstanding the conservative Catholicism: she had seen the evidence of it in one of the bedrooms.

“I think that Justice Scaglietti was under the impression that the dissertation might, in future, expand into a book.”

Ravenscroft smiles with understanding. “Ah, yes, I quite see now.” His eyes fall to the desktop, and he taps the photocopy lying flat upon it. “But you have still not told me how this letter came into your possession. Not the sort of thing he would have shown you himself, surely?”

“No, I came across it after he died.”

“You still have access to his papers?”

“I did. A week after the funeral I received a call from his sister, Marianne Channing. They were twins: Mariano and Marianne. She invited me to lunch at the Palm Court. I thought it would be to ask about her brother, her brother late in life, that is—they were not exactly estranged, but I gathered that, although they were close as children, there had been a falling out at some point—and I assumed that after having lost her brother so suddenly and unexpectedly she now wanted some closure. I dreaded going, but how can a person say no in such circumstances?

“I showed up, wearing my Sunday best. What I found was not a grieving sister but a perfectly composed and dry-eyed woman who, apart from the expected preliminaries, showed not the least interest in her brother’s last months. Instead, she showed a great interest in me.”

“In you?”

“I was surprised that she had even heard of me—the funeral was a private affair, and certainly I had not been invited. She evaded when I first asked, but after I pressed she admitted that she had gotten my name from having quizzed the staff at her brother’s estate. That’s how she put it: *Of course, it was necessary to quiz the Netherly staff, and your name came up.* It made me wonder why it was necessary to quiz the staff in the first place. We ordered, and all through the meal we talked about me. She asked about my studies, how the scholarship funding worked, what my supervisor was like, what progress I had made with the dissertation, when I expected to submit it. For a moment I thought that she might actually ask to read it. But then it finally became clear why we were there. *Riano’s papers are still at Netherly,* she said.”

“Riano?”

“The Justice. In public life, he was always Justice Mariano Scaglietti and was never referred to with a diminutive. But she called him Riano, probably had done since childhood.”

“I see. Please, what happened next?”

“She told me that she had ordered the staff to leave all his papers untouched, and had both the library and the study locked. *They’ll need to be gone through*, she said, *cataloged and whatnot, which will require someone with suitable training*. Then I understood: she wanted me to sort through his papers. *It occurs to me that you are a person with the appropriate training*, she said, *and no doubt you already have familiarity with many of the papers in question, as well as a sense of what my brother kept where, and so forth. Plus, with your dissertation near completion, perhaps you will have time, and my brother’s estate would naturally compensate you—quite handsomely, in fact*. I had not anticipated this and didn’t immediately respond. *Of course, it would require a certain delicacy*, she suggested, *a keen personal understanding of my brother in order to correctly separate from his legal papers those items of a more private nature*. She let that hang there a while, and I realized that what I was being asked to do was not merely catalog the papers, but also to make sure that anything embarrassing or compromising would never come out. I think she had assumed that because I was studying her brother’s opinions that I was therefore an admirer of them, and their author, and so could be relied upon. Oh—”

A shadow suddenly darts across the room to her left.

The lawyer holds up a halting hand. “Please don’t be alarmed.” He removes his cup from its saucer, fills the latter with the remaining milk, and then gently places it on the floor by his feet. “Come, Madame Defarge. Come, come.”

A cat emerges from behind a bookcase, coal-black apart from the eyes, which are a startlingly bright yellow, and which never leave Sabrina, even while it sips from the saucer.

“You will understand that in a building of this age, mice are a given, and a threat to my records. Madame Defarge keeps them at bay.”

The interruption gives Sabrina time to consider how long she has been talking, which is far longer than was necessary to answer

Ravenscroft's question. She realizes that he has quietly lulled her into revealing her position without himself having given anything away, and decides that, appearances aside, this little gray-curlled man is a shrewd lawyer.

Ravenscroft looks up from the cat back to Sabrina.

"And so you accepted?"

"I did."

"How did it proceed?"

"We made arrangements to meet at Netherly, on the following Sunday. I wondered if this was because there would be no staff there on a Sunday. I took the train and walked from the station, something that I was used to. When I got there the main gates had been left open, something that the late Justice—who detested anyone arriving unannounced at his house—would never have done. At the end of the drive was an old black Mercedes that I recognized, and leaning upon it was Marianne Channing, casually smoking and apparently content to gaze over the grounds, presumably taking in what was now hers. I would have expected at least Mr. Channing and a bevy of relatives helping to sort the contents of the house, if not workers and moving vans, but she was alone.

"*I'm keeping this*, she said, patting the fender. *It's all I want*. I asked if she would not keep the house, too. *He left it to the Jesuits*, she said. *The Jesuits...* From the way she said it, I felt that I could now guess the underlying cause of their falling out. We went inside and she unlocked the library and the study, two rooms with which I was already familiar. She wanted all the Justice's paperwork—books, documents, letters, files, everything—to be sorted into four categories: an archive suitable for donation to a university, cataloged; professional papers not appropriate for the archive, also cataloged; personal papers to be retained by the family; and then the rest."

"The rest?"

"I took this as a euphemism for 'to be destroyed.'"

"What about computers and the like?"

"I asked that myself. She said that two of her brother's computers were Supreme Court property, and the Justice Department had already

sent technicians to reclaim them. The third was a personal computer, a laptop, but no one knew how to unlock it and so she had the hard disc destroyed. There was probably little on it: in all the time I was with the Justice I never once saw him use a computer, and he had a reputation for disliking them: his clerks were required to submit in print and use colored pencils for markups, although software designed for the purpose would have been much more convenient. He liked hard copy and loved books, a man at his happiest searching through endless volumes of case law to find just the right precedent; he was a paper kind of guy.”

“As indeed am I,” Ravenscroft says. “Probably he and I are of the last generation that will not consider such devices indispensable. I wonder, did Mrs. Channing happen to mention to which university the archive will be donated?”

“She did: Loyola.”

“Ah, and perhaps there we have a reason why she was so concerned that no materials of an unsuitable nature would be among the donation—one wouldn’t wish to disturb the good Jesuit fathers. And so tell me, where did you find this letter, which Mrs. Channing would no doubt have wished for the burn pile?”

“In Blackstone, oddly enough. Originally I assigned the Justice’s copy of Blackstone to the second category: professional rather than personal, although too common to warrant inclusion in the archive, but then it occurred to me that he might have made annotations, in which case they would be of scholastic interest. I began leafing through them and, sure enough, found many instances of marginalia. The letter was in Volume Four, and the rest I think you know.”

Ravenscroft leans back in a pose of consideration, contemplating not the letter on his desk but the woman sitting opposite him.

“So you were not an admirer of the Justice after all.” It is a statement, not a question.

“Mrs. Channing invited me to make research use of the materials that I was cataloging.”

“Even so, an admirer would have destroyed this letter, research or not.”

His eyes never leave her during the long silence that follows this pronouncement, judging her, and she has the sense of suddenly being at a crux, one of those capricious but supremely important moments whose effects will resonate throughout the rest of one's life.

"No," she admits, "I am not. That is not to say that I did not respect Justice Scaglietti: he had an incisive intellect and a brilliant grasp of jurisprudence. Nor did I personally dislike him; just the opposite—he was excellent company: billowing with good humor when out of the public eye, never quite easygoing but always entertaining, and certainly never trivial. Never boring. Zero small talk, and of course famously acerbic, but I didn't resent his unguarded candor, as so many did—I found it refreshing in an age where every statement is endlessly hedged so as to offend no one. And boundless curiosity, legal and otherwise. These were all qualities to be admired."

"But?"

"But he lacked that one essential quality of a first-rate jurist: he could not bring himself to be at a remove from the matter at hand. He lacked balance. For him, every case was a battle, something to be won or lost rather than rationally and objectively decided. And the closer the matter was to his personal beliefs, the more obdurate he became. One of the weapons he used was a rigorous interpretation of language, a punctiliousness that bordered on the ridiculous. He justified this as strict constructionism. He wrote a dissent in *United States versus Miraclear Corp.*, arguing that the prefixes *cipher-* and *crypto-* are not synonymous. He wrote the minority on *Greene versus Alta County School System* that sought to strike down a lower court ruling because the Latin abbreviation *et al.* could refer not only to the usual gender-neutral *et alia* but also to the gender-specific *et alii* or *et aliae*. And it was his vote that overturned *Compton versus Landon*, in part on the placement of a comma. All of these were major cases—is there such a thing as a minor case that comes before the Supreme Court?—being decided on the basis of tortured semantics. Imagine the wanton recklessness of it: overturning a major precedent on the positioning of a punctuation mark."

Another long silence follows, which the lawyer eventually breaks.

“I think that perhaps when he suddenly died your feelings were not unmixed,” he says. “There was a measure of relief, was there not, because now he would never ask to read your dissertation?”

“I see that the late Justice was not the only man with an incisive mind,” she says. “Yes, I’ve felt guilty about it ever since he died, although it’s obviously irrational.”

“Yes, perfectly irrational. We have absolutely no obligation to the dead, and to believe otherwise is a biological absurdity,” he says. “By contrast, our obligations to those not yet living are quite immeasurable.” He finishes his tea, offers a refill to Sabrina, and then stands to pour a second cup for himself. She takes the opportunity to get to the point.

“And so to Mr. Bronaryre.”

“It’s Bron-a-RIRE,” he says, correcting her pronunciation while pouring the tea. “It’s Welsh, you know. It literally means breast of gold, but in this case the *breast* is metaphorical, signifying a hill—so, *golden hill*. I find these Welsh words so very difficult to pronounce, the only way to remember them is to make up a rhyme. Brynn Mawr rhyming with ‘tin star,’ for example.” He puts down the teapot. “I believe that you went to Brynn Mawr at one time, did you not?”

Sabrina does not respond, since it is clear that he already knows the answer—the comment was just Ravenscroft’s way of conveying that he has done his homework.

“What rhyme would you use for your client’s name?”

“World-a-fire,” he says, resuming his seat. “Has such a nice apocalyptic ring to it, don’t you think?” He stirs his cup thoughtfully before continuing. “And so, Miss Lancaster, perhaps you will tell me exactly what it is that you would like from my client?”

“I should have thought that obvious, Mr. Ravenscroft. What was the nature of Mr. Bronaryre’s relationship with Justice Scaglietti? What were the circumstances that led to its abrupt termination? What was the *greatest possible abomination before the eyes of God and man* that the Justice referred to?”

“Goodness gracious, did he really put it that way?” Ravenscroft picks up the letter and reads through it out loud, not in the tone of someone reviewing a document in intimate conference, but with a

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sonorous declamation that recalls the reading of the lesson at Temple church.

*Mr. Aneurin Bronaryre,
Sir,*

I regret that, upon the deepest reflection following our last meeting, your motives and intentions—once seemingly honorable and laudable—have become all too clear to me.

The corrupt logic that has led to this degradation is beyond me—perhaps it was always there, a small cancer of malignancy, long dormant, but now having metastasized into a hideous tumor of horrendous proportion. Whatever the cause, I perceive now a perversion of a most foul and depraved nature. Your plan, Sir—and what would have made you believe that I would ever countenance such a scheme I cannot imagine—is nothing other than the greatest possible abomination before the eyes of God and man.

You will thereby understand that, from this moment forward, you must number me among you enemies, never to meet again in amity.

Yours not in Christ, as of course I would never have saluted you, nor in Reason, as once to my shame I did, but with the utmost ill will,

“It’s not signed,” Ravenscroft says. “What makes you sure that he was the author?”

“Who but Justice Scaglietti would write so emphatically, so Old Testament? And clearly an author with legal training: the many doublets, for example, like *motives and intentions, honorable and laudable, foul and depraved*—these echo the doublets of classic legal syntax, like *terms and conditions, null and void, cease and desist*.”

“Perhaps it was planted. Left there for you to find?”

“There is the handwriting for a start, which I am familiar enough with to recognize. And also the original, which you have not had the opportunity to see, is written in purple ink.”

“Is that significant?”

“Yes, it’s a well-known quirk of the Justice. He used a particular shade, called *Violette Pensée*, manufactured by the French company J. Herbin. As a boy, Scaglietti was educated for two years in France at a Catholic boarding school. It used to be that a J. Herbin pen-and-ink set was issued to all French school children, and apparently his Jesuit teachers continued the practice.”

“Then a clever forgery, perhaps?”

“Down to the nib? I know that pen, Mr. Ravenscroft, a vintage Montblanc that the Justice used for making fair copy of what he considered to be his most important opinions.”

The lawyer reflects on this for a moment, then nods in acceptance while replacing the letter on his desk.

“Then let us stipulate, for the moment at least, that Justice Scaglietti was indeed the author. Now, please forgive me, Miss Lancaster, but I am obliged to ask you this question: what business is it of yours? I trust you understand that I am speaking as the Devil’s advocate.”

“Without knowing exactly what the letter is about it is hard to say. But the date is a little over a year ago. At the time, oral arguments in *Compton versus Landon* had just concluded, and the court was in recess to consider what was to be the most important and divisive Supreme Court case of his generation. As I’m sure you know, it was decided five-to-four, with Scaglietti writing the opinion for the majority. That opinion is one of several that I analyze in my dissertation, and certainly the most significant. It would be of great value to understand the Justice’s state of mind on the eve of writing it.”

“But I think, madam, that you have made a fundamental error.”

“An error?”

“Certainly. Consider again the circumstances of its discovery.”

“In Blackstone’s *Commentaries*?”

“Not in Blackstone in particular. But in a book, in the Justice’s *own* library.”

She sees where the lawyer is driving. “You mean, the letter was never delivered.”

“Precisely.”

“But presumably it was just a copy. Or a draft.”

“In longhand? And in a favorite pen, reserved, as you said, for special occasions? Would Justice Scaglietti really have done that?”

“Do you have a better explanation, Mr. Ravenscroft?”

“Indeed, I do. Occam’s razor: the best explanation is the simplest: Scaglietti made an error.”

“Are you proposing to assert that the Justice, after writing such a letter, would suddenly have had second thoughts about your client, and decided that it was all just a misunderstanding?”

“A much simpler mistake, Miss Lancaster. He got the date wrong.”

“The date?”

“Wrong year, to be precise. Who of us has not made the same error of a January, when dating a letter or a check or some such, to have accidentally written last year’s date? And this, naturally, explains why it was never sent.”

She realizes how logical this sounds. “But then that would mean it was actually written *this* year.”

“Yes, it would. January the third, presumably.”

“Just a week before he died.”

“Yes, again.”

She feels in his answer that subtle Englishness again, the ability to convey meaning beneath the words with the faintest change of intonation or emphasis, the product of an upbringing in which to be imperturbable is the measure of a man, and only the vulgar demonstrate.

“You are intimating, I think, that the fact of this letter and the fact of the Justice’s death a week later are unlikely to be a coincidence.”

“Some might suggest that; it is of course not for me to say.”

Which, she understands, is an English circumlocution for *Yes, obviously*.

“Then why in Blackstone? Why not just throw it away, or better still burn it?—certain Netherly had enough fireplaces going in January.”

“Perhaps he placed it there temporarily while considering how best to dispose of it, or maybe there is an even simpler explanation: someone suddenly coming into the library, say, and the Justice quickly hiding the thing inside whatever was at hand, which happened to be Blackstone.”

Not possible, Sabrina thinks, no one was allowed into Justice Scaglietti's library uninvited, but then she realizes that that is not quite true. The exception was herself: she was given free rein there—it was the room in which she worked when visiting. And then, feeling the cold prickling of an unwanted realization, she considers again the revised date and reviews her own activity at that time.

New Year's Eve spent alone but not unenjoyably, in bed to stay warm while reading a novel happily unrelated to her studies; the long New Year's Day with the public library closed; gratefully back at work the next day; and then the train up to Netherly the following morning, watching through the window snow falling on the Hudson. The Third.

The large iron gates that guard the entrance to Netherly had been open that day, unusually so, given that Justice Scaglietti was not a man to invite unexpected visitors, but then as she approached she saw why: a big black sedan coming down the drive. It had swung out of the estate and turned left, toward her. She had watched its passage, curious as to who else might be calling on the Justice today, but the windows in the back were too dark, and all she caught was a glimpse of a liveried chauffeur.

She took advantage of the open gates to pass into the estate, glad during a snowstorm to avoid the usual wait by the intercom.

That snow had softened her tread as she walked up the long drive to the mansion. At the house she had removed her boots and put on the ballet slippers she always took in her bag when visiting Netherly, not to be noiseless but to avoid marking the polished wooden parquetry of the floor. She had gone straight to the library, as usual. He had been in there. She cannot say that she recalls him being unduly surprised, nor what books he had at hand at the time, but nevertheless she knows now with an instinctive certainty how the letter came to be in the Blackstone: he was hiding it from her.

Ravenscroft interrupts her thoughts, and she hopes that her expression has given no hint of a sudden revelation. "I note that there is no address on the letter," he says. "I wonder how you came to address your enquiry to my client."

"I looked it up."

“Looked it up where?”

“On the internet.”

“My client has no presence on the internet, Miss Lancaster. He does not hold so-called social media in very high regard.”

“But he is the principal of a Cayman Islands-registered company: Pendle Hill Investments.”

“A company that has no website.”

“But which is required, if engaging in transactions in the United States, to register a Form 13-F with the Securities and Exchange Commission. The New York Public Library makes various databases available to research scholars free of charge. The only one that came back with a hit was the SEC’s, EDGAR. That filing includes the U.S. address: in this case just a post office box number, but that’s enough. I assumed that there would unlikely be two Aneurin Bronaryres in the world.”

The lawyer huffs a little. “The internet. Such a dreadful thing.”

Sabrina cannot help smiling: this is the first of their exchanges in which she has bettered him.

“Please tell me about your client, Mr. Ravenscroft.”

“What would you like to know?”

“Is he English? American? Where does he live? What does he do for a living?”

“As to nationality, Mr. Bronaryre is the holder of several passports, including instances issued by the two countries you mentioned. He owns a number of properties in various countries, and travels between them, and elsewhere, as his interests dictate. As to what he does for a living, well, I suppose I would categorize him as an investor, as of course you are already aware from the 13-F filing, but perhaps scholar-adventurer would be a better characterization.”

“Did he get the letter?”

“You are in possession of the letter, madam—it was never sent, and so never received.”

“The Justice would have written another copy,” she says. “This time with the correct date. Did your client receive such a letter, Mr. Ravenscroft?”

The lawyer does not immediately answer, instead sitting back and considering the question, the fingers of the hands resting on his fat belly forming a little steeple. He remains in the pose, staring down at his shoes and apparently lost in thought. Eventually, Sabrina feels the need to prompt him.

“What was your client’s relationship with the Justice? What was the disagreement about? What is the plan that Scaglietti referred to?”

The lawyer seems momentarily at a loss, as if having forgotten her presence, but he quickly collects himself.

“I am afraid that our meeting must now end,” he says at last. “It has been a very great pleasure to meet you, Miss Lancaster.”

“End? Are you telling me that I’ve traveled all the way across the Atlantic for nothing?”

“Certainly not.”

“But you haven’t answered my questions.”

“Oh, as to your questions, they will be answered—not tonight, but soon enough. My client will do that himself, I imagine.” He stands, still in good humor, evidently believing this to be a perfectly reasonable position, and that polite goodbyes are now in order.

Sabrina remains seated. “Mr. Ravenscroft, that is very far from a satisfactory response.”

He spends a moment in thought, perhaps considering how best to remove her from his chambers without a scene. “Very well,” he says, “then please allow me to offer you a surety of good faith.”

He steps around the desk and moves to a small console by Sabrina. He opens the top drawer and then the one below, apparently without finding what he is looking for. He rummages through a third drawer, first taking from it a cricket ball, as red as a cherry and as shiny, too, which he places on the top where it rolls around precariously while he continues searching. Next to emerge is what appears to be a small rodent, not stuffed into a stiff pose like the owl, but supple, like a scientific specimen. Madame Defarge looks at it with great interest, the first time the cat has taken her feline gaze from Sabrina. When Ravenscroft places it on top of the console Sabrina sees that it has wings, distinctively webbed and scalloped, and wonders if this is English humor, a parody

of a pub name perhaps—Ye Olde Bat & Ball. Last to come out is a wooden box, a few inches square, bearing a smooth satin finish.

He offers it to Sabrina. “The surety.”

She accepts the box and opens it. Inside, wrapped in a soft cloth, is a medallion, struck in silver and tarnished with age. She takes the thing in hand and inspects it more closely. It is not a medallion, she realizes, but a coin, an inordinately large one: about two inches in diameter, and hefty. The obverse depicts a knight mounted, sword drawn and brandished, above a medieval towered city. There is a Latin inscription around the circumference. On the reverse is more Latin, and a date: 1644.

She looks back up at the lawyer, but instead of providing an explanation he asks, “Beneath the *cheval passant*—do you recognize the city?”

“Should I?”

“It has hardly changed these past four hundred years.”

Sabrina looks again at the obverse. The knight is not a knight but a sovereign of some kind: he wears a crown. She studies the depiction of the city beneath his striding horse. There is no evidence of a canal or a gondola, items that would have signified the only city in the Latinized world she can immediately think of that has remained unchanged in four centuries.

“I do not.”

“There are many spires, are there not?”

“Yes.”

“Matthew Arnold once called it *the city of dreaming spires*.”

The line is familiar, and thinking about it she realizes that there is another city not much changed from medieval times, one that is not far away.

“Oxford,” she says.

“Indeed, Oxford. The tower to the left is Magdalen College.” He pronounces it in the Oxonian fashion: *maudlin*. “The spire directly below the horse is Saint Mary’s, with Lincoln College to the right of that. The Bodleian is beneath the stirrup.”

Sabrina looks from the coin to the lawyer, who is beaming with delight. “You know, I myself was at Magdalen when I was up,” he says.

“And I once climbed that very tower, late at night, without permission, and while exceedingly tight. I was almost sent down because of that little foray.”

Sabrina cannot help returning to good humor: the thought of the little lawyer having once been a carousing student fills her with an urge to laugh out loud, and she looks back down at the coin.

“So this is what you might call a monetary surety in the most literal sense?”

“Well, yes, the coin certainly has value, but it is not as something with an objective worth that I entrust it to you. You see, this particular coin, this exact one, holds great sentimental value for my client. He has been after me for many years to find the means of acquiring it, and it just so happens that I was recently able to do so. Now that this coin is in your possession he will surely seek you out, and for as long as you retain it I would say that you have the fellow over a barrel, so to speak. He will have no option but to answer your questions to your full satisfaction, after which you may simply give him the coin. A wonderful arrangement, in which everyone benefits—such a rare thing in jurisprudence; the thought of it quite fills me with joy, like an early spring. I am all aquiver with delight.”

“But, as Mr. Bronaryre’s legal representative, would you wish to put him in such a position?”

“Ah, but I am my client’s counsel, am I not? And it is part of an attorney’s duties and obligations to deliver that counsel without fear or favor, even if one is perfectly well aware that one’s client does not wish to hear it.” He leans down close and drops to a whisper, although there is none but the cat to hear. “What I’m saying is: it will do the fellow good to squirm a little.” He stands back upright and resumes his normal voice. “And now, on the subject of advice, I hope that you will not be offended if I offer some to you.”

“Please go ahead.”

“Firstly, the coin is more than just a surety, it is also a lure. As with any lure, one must exercise patience. Be prepared to wait. Secondly, keep the coin on your person at all times. Even when bathing, you should keep the coin with you.”

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“You think that your client might attempt a burglary?”

“No, although he is perfectly capable of it. The thing is that he might approach at any time, and you should always be prepared.”

“Even while bathing?”

“Even then. My client has no interest in the social norms or the niceties of polite society. If he chooses to make his appearance when you are in the tub and dressed as nature presented you, then I’m afraid that appear he will do. And now a third and final piece of advice: when Mr. Bronaryre finally rises to the bait, you must be very careful.”

“Careful in what way? Are you saying that I should be armed?”

“Oh, goodness me, no. I don’t mean anything to do with physical security. I am talking here at the psychological level. My client is a clever man and can be very persuasive. That doesn’t mean that you should automatically gainsay whatever he may choose to assert; indeed, you need not do anything at all. What I really mean is that he possesses an uncanny sense of other people’s vulnerabilities, and is not above exploiting them to his advantage. In short, he manipulates people.”

“You make your client sound like quite an ogre, Mr. Ravenscroft, but perhaps I’m not as vulnerable as you think.”

“I don’t think you’re vulnerable at all. I wouldn’t have suggested any of this had I thought otherwise.”

Typographical Note

The fleuron used for section demarcation on pages 116, 225, 320, 445, 493 & 511 (& for convenience shown again here, enlarged) is taken from the arabesque border on the first page of the First Edition of Milton's 'Paradise Lost' (1667), printed by Samuel Simmons, whose place of business was listed as 'next door to the Golden Lion in Aldersgate Street.'



Not much is known about Simmons. He was likely a son or relative of Matthew Simmons, who had been an official printer for Cromwell's Government, someone with whom Milton would have dealt in his role of Secretary of Foreign Tongues, and who in 1649 had printed Milton's Eikonoklastes.

According to David Masson's foreword to an 1877 facsimile reproduction of the First Edition, Samuel produced "a very carefully printed book. It may rank, I think, as the best-looking book of Milton's printed in his life-time—superior both in compositor's work and in press-work to any of his pamphlets, and certainly superior to any other volume of his in verse form."



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The Devil is to publish an apologia...



...for which he needs the assistance of a sharp legal mind.

"Brace...displays such eloquence and such a firm control of pacing...artful coup de grace...an intriguing and multilayered supernatural thriller"—Kirkus Reviews

"...a wild, complex novel that blurs the line between the real and the supernatural...a psychedelic trip through literature, history and art"—Blue Ink Reviews

"...a cosmological search...literary and rhetorical...a theatrical celebration of what like minds can accomplish"—Foreword Clarion Reviews

