



SHE DID NOT SEEM TO SEE ME, TO SEE ANYTHING. HER FACE WAS STRAINED AND ASHEN UNDER THE PAINT

DO YOU believe in miracles, Sister?" The young countess sat propped up in the great bed. It was an old bed remaining from a pretentious age—on a dais, with heavy curtains drawn back, and the high headpiece surmounted by a gilt coronet. She looked like a very young girl, not twenty, with the fresh luster of youth. Her heavy, dark hair was about her face. The face was slender, the eyes large, the mouth, that feature so rarely excellent in a woman, small and exquisite.

The nursing Sister did not at once reply. She was bending over a cradle. It was an old cradle with black oak rockers, of the period of the great bed. She was young, too; but little older than this girl mother. She wore the dress of the great nursing order to which she belonged, to which she had consecrated the service of her life, in which she had so quickly attained a position of the highest trust, of the highest honor. Her passionate religious devotion to this service of maternity was the wonder of her order, the wonder of those she assisted, the wonder of all.

"Oh, yes," she finally said, "I of all persons!" She stood up now, a splendid youthful figure, her heavy, yellow hair not entirely hidden by the headress. She went on: "That's the wonder of the religion of Jesus. It can suddenly change us—suddenly by a miracle. 'Follow me,' and we go. We don't understand. It's a miracle. We go in a sort of trance, in a sort of dream. One can't explain it."

The young countess moved slightly. She was impressed with the deep sincerity in the words; she found a sort of passion in them. "A miracle can save us," she said. "I was saved by a miracle."

IT WAS night, the midnight before a Christmas morning. The great house sat on the crown of a hill overlooking a sweep of meadow, the dark swift river and the village beyond. The village was lighted, a scattered nest of candles in the dark; one or two of these high up in the tall spire of the ancient church, lights fixed in the sky.

The Sister went on, as though the other had not made a comment: "And it's like a birth. It's complete. It's like

The Other Mary

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Illustrated by Henry Raleigh

getting clear of a soiled garment. You are clean—in a fresh new body; the old foul one's gone."

The voice was low, tense, packed with feeling. "That's precisely the fact, the amazing, wonderful fact. One is a new person, in and out. The old life and the old body that lived it are both gone. It's a new life and a new body to live it. Nicodemus didn't understand it. But I understand it."

She began to move about the room, touching articles here and there in it, as though she tidied the room, put it in order. "And it comes suddenly; it comes without any warning. The Bible stories are right about it; that's the way it came to Saint Paul. And that's the way it came to me. You are going about with the life you are in. You don't care. You've got beyond that. You are swaggering and defiant. You're one with that life. You are lured on in it. You steep yourself in the excess of it, so you won't think, so you won't feel. And you don't want to change. You want to be let alone, to go on; to go on to every extreme of excess, to every depth of degradation. And then suddenly you are enveloped by this miracle."

The room was lighted, but there were heavy shadows in it. The woman moved about, sometimes blending into these shadows, sometimes clearly outlined, illumined, by the light. Tall candles in heavy silver stood about, before mirrors and on a mantel above an open fire, where twisted bronze andirons supported split birchwood, burning with the bark on it. The flame of the fire was a part of the light in the room. It was a huge room, with massive windows, now hidden by the drawn curtains. The

candles and the fire were not enough to vanquish entirely the dark in it. Things were not always to be clearly distinguished in it. The cradle with its white bundle was a vague thing at the foot of the bed.

And the woman, moving about as though impelled by a passion in what she continued to say, was sometimes equally indistinct. The reminiscence that she uttered was vague. It was of things suggested rather than expressed. One did not put such things directly. For such things the circumlocutions of language were in. She understood and followed her words as by the translation of a cipher.

Her life was an example of this mysterious change, this miracle. She had been taken, on the instant, as she said, in her dyed garments and with the paint on her

IT HAD been night, midnight, as now, at the dawn of a Christmas morning. Something had descended on her, and she had been overwhelmed. The sort of thing that suddenly struck Saint Paul down with a light shining around him. The power, the insistence, the compelling authority of it were beyond description. She had gone forward as in a dream, hurrying out, whither she knew not, on a mission that she did not understand, to act and speak as a will beyond her directed.

In the gray morning she had found herself before the door of the great nursing order to which she now belonged—changed, reborn, taken by this miracle from a life of license to a life of service, suddenly, at the stroke of the clock. And the other life and the other body that lived it were gone together. She had stepped out of both, clean, as one steps out of a fouled garment. She had taken then the name by which she was now known in the great nursing order. It seemed, she said, the only name to take. The young countess did not precisely understand. She knew, of course, something of such experiences in life; and such religious seizures were said to occur. They were explained usually as manifestations of hysteria. Emotional persons of no marked intelligence were the actors in them. But this woman standing now on the hearth, by the twisted



androns, in the glow of the fire was no ordinary person. But for her severe costume, she would be a striking beauty—in evening dress, in the rhythm of the dance.

The countess tried to imagine it—a thin chain of diamonds and platinum with a sapphire pendant to replace the cord and the crucifix that hung about the Sister's neck and descended on her bosom. The superb, heavy, straw-colored hair—how would an expert put it up? It escaped, out of fancy, into abandon.

What life had this alluring woman led before the change to the severities of service?

The fancy was displaced by a sound from the cradle. The Sister took up the little bundle and brought it to the bed. The girl received the child in her arms. The faint sound instantly ceased.

The young countess thus with the child was a striking picture, a Madonna by Murillo, the thick, dark hair framing the face, the eyes large, the mouth small and delicate, the slender body and the expression as of a sort of wonder.

The Sister was impressed as though a pictured piety were made manifest in flesh to the eye, as though the Virgin and the Child appeared again on this night in our modern life. It was the extreme purity of the face that impressed her. How could such purity have been preserved in the world she knew? The wonder of it escaped in words. In what sheltered life had this favored creature tranquilly dwelt? What had saved her?

"IT WAS a miracle, Sister," replied the girl. "You were not listening to me. I don't mean the sort of thing that happened to Saint Paul and to you. I mean a strange intervention of events. I did not understand it. I don't now understand it. I mean how it came to happen and who the person was, if it was in fact any living person. I understand the intent of the thing, the intent to save me. And it did save me."

Her voice took more volume, more strength. "But for that miracle, I would not be here tonight." She indicated the child. "He would not be here. None of these things would have happened. I would have been degraded, ruined."

For a moment the wonder in the girl face—the wonder over the new life that she had brought into the world—was replaced by fear, the dread of a memory.

The Sister took the child and put it back into the cradle. She went over to a window and stood a moment, looking out through the parted curtains at the night, the gleam of the river, the lights in the village beyond.

The girl continued to speak: "I suppose the idea of a guardian angel is a sort of religious fairy story. But there must be something behind events to look out for us. We can't look out for ourselves; I mean, when we are young. What has a girl to match experience and cunning when she meets it? She doesn't even know that it is experience and cunning. It's always disguised. It takes a wide knowledge of life to recognize it. I didn't recognize it. I thought it was romance. If it had been a boy, I would have found him out. But it wasn't a boy. It was a man of middle age, a man who knew all about women and precisely what to do, a clever, experienced man of the world, cultivated, polished."

The girl paused, like one in a reflection, endeavoring to visualize the essentials of an event.

"What have we, I mean girls brought up as I was, to guide us with such men? We have no experience of life, and nursery warnings do not include such persons. We have only the heavy-colored conceptions of the fairy story, in which evil persons are conspicuous for some repulsive feature. The wicked woman is always ugly; the man, visibly marked by a vice, the good beautiful. And that's the dangerous, false note in the thing: We shall know the good because they charm and attract us, the wicked because they repel. And one is put into the world equipped like that!" Her voice ended in the exclamation.

The nursing Sister had come away from the window. She sat now by the fire, the lines of her face, of her figure blending with the shadows.

The girl went on: "I met him at a house party in the west of England. It was the country place of a smart young

London woman, not quite included with the best, but on the way and arriving, as the clever and rich finally do.

"I noticed him at tea in the drawing-room. He was looking at me, a cigarette in his fingers, his cup on the arm of the chair. He was not especially good-looking, but he had an air, and he was smart. I mean he was very cleverly turned out, and he looked distinguished. He had that aspect of ease and polish that men who devote their lives to women somehow take on.

"I came on him later in the garden. The guests had wandered out after tea. It was a sunny English evening. I found him suddenly at a turn of a path."



"HE MADE an amusing gesture, putting out his hand. 'You tracked me,' he said, 'by my cloven hoof.'

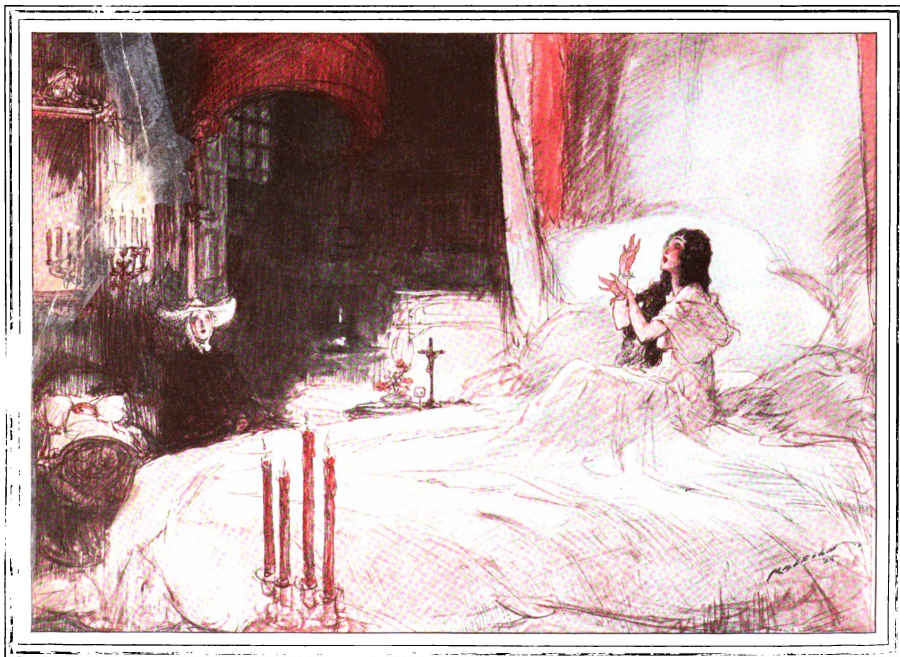
"And he joined me, making amusing small talk on that note. It was clever of him. He knew what I would be told, and he wished to discount the effect of it. He was very wicked; mothers looked up little girls when he passed. Where was the dragon that guarded me? How careless to permit me to come alone into a garden where he might be hidden!"

The young countess paused.

"I put it here with a heavy hand," she said. "He put it with a light, airy touch. I was amused and charmed with him. He was right about what I would be told. The chaperon gave me a vague warning that night when she was summing up the guests. He was not precisely the sort of person one invited to meet a young girl; he had a reputation. But the hostess herself was not quite all that one could wish. These smart young London women did not please a chaperon out of the Victorian era. And that was the very thing that devalued all the advice she gave me. Even I could see that the Victorian Age had passed.

"I saw him again in the morning. He was walking about in the breakfast room with a dish of porridge. Someone made

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FOR A MOMENT THE WONDER IN THE GIRL FACE WAS REPLACED BY FEAR—THE DREAD OF A MEMORY

The Other Mary

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the conventional inquiry usual when the guests appear: "How he slept, was he well? He replied that to be in health was to have a good digestion and a wicked heart; he had both. Then he turned to me. Would I walk with him to the kirk and see what happened? It would be a risk for him, but he would take it. By all rumor he should disappear in a cloud of sulphur when the good curate got at him.

"It was a bright Sunday morning, and we walked across the fields, the hostess and the chaperon ahead. I do not remember precisely how he managed it; he always seemed able to come on me alone. But the hostess was his ally; he helped her, and she returned the service. I discovered later how these things are done. Nothing happens by accident where either party in such an alliance is interested. The intent of the partnership is to eliminate chance. But to the blind young thing it is all coincidence.

"He fascinated me. I had never seen such a man. I had come to England from America because I liked the outdoor English life. My family were all busy with their affairs. There was money. I could do as I liked. A chaperon was got, and I arrived. But I was an infant in the ways of the world. What did I know about the clever indirectness of a man like that!"

"I FOUND my-

self drawn by the lure of him. The very warnings against him served only to stimulate my interest. Why was he dangerous? What would he do? And coming first with the warning, as he did, he disarmed all talk.

"I cannot make you realize how clever he was. He knew all the ins and outs of English social life, bits of interesting gossip. I was never permitted a dull moment with him. And he kept me interested in himself. He belonged on the other fascinating side of life, in contrast to the dull side that I walked with a chaperon from the Age of Victoria. This was the impression he created.

"When the house party broke up I promised to see him in London." Again the voice ceased. There was silence.

Presently it went on: "I met him out—in a shop, at Claridge's, at the Ritz. He had got the suggestions to me in his clever way. And they had several effects. They served to break down conventions, and they gave the affair a spice of adventure. And his ally, the smart London woman, helped. She would have me to tea, and he would drop in. Then she would disappear on some domestic mission."

"AND she helped with suggestion. The man was in love with me. I had done what no other girl in all England could do. She regarded me with wonder. And she would look at me a long time through her half-closed eyelids. Was I not dull? Every other girl she knew had a good time

whenever she could. If such a man were in love with her, she'd have a fling.

"And so the thing went on.

"I don't know precisely how it all came about. I was bored. I had not yet met the man I married—one to love and trust—and so this other lured me. He fascinated me, and he was able to talk me into things; and finally somehow the plan of an adventure came to be considered. Would I have the fling? One look into the other side of life? Why not? Every other girl did. The idea got entangled in my fancy with the mystery of romance. The man kept it going as a delicate, half-serious suggestion.

"And so in the end, as a sort of lark, as a sort of daring adventure, I promised to go to his rooms.

I didn't think very much about it. It was a sort of sporting event, a romantic thing that young girls did in the novels of the day. It was the thrill of the unknown."

A THIN line of flames sprang up in the fire where the bark of a birch log caught. It illumined the figure in the chair beside the hearth, motionless, as though it were a painted picture.

"Finally I did go! It was a night before a Christmas morning, like this night I was alone in the house; the others had gone to the midnight service at Saint Paul's. I remained, on some pretext. I was alone; the servants were out.

"I went out and got a taxicab. "I knew that I would not go if I moved slowly or stopped again. And yet I still drew back from the adventure. I sat huddled in the corner of the taxicab in my fur coat in a sort of futile resistance. Destiny had intervened and now moved me forward; my will in the thing had been superseded by fatality! I was on the way! And strangely, with that realization, I got back courage and the thrill of the adventure."

"IN PICCADILLY CIRCUS the taxicab was held up by traffic. It was midnight. The bells of the city were beginning to ring. The whole of Piccadilly Circus was crowded with people. The taxicab could not go on. I was annoyed at this block. I wanted to hurry, now that I was on the way. I looked impatiently over the crowd of people. And suddenly I saw a woman come out of a group about a theater and hurry away in the crowd.

"My attention was seized and directed to her. She was bareheaded and dressed in an Oriental costume. I took her for an actress in one of the miracle plays running on this night. The woman went swiftly, as though on some urgent mission. I could mark her yellow hair, for a long time to be distinguished in the swarms of people. She did not stop. She did not look about her. She seemed to regard no one. And, as it appeared, no one gave her any

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attention. This seemed strange. Her costume was conspicuous, and she was young.

"I was watching the woman when the taxicab began to move. The police had cleared a way for us. We got through and crossed Piccadilly Circus, turned out and finally came to the address I had given. I had not given the correct address. I got out a little beyond and walked back.

"Then the miracle happened.

"A figure stood in the doorway. It was the woman who had hurried through the crowd of people in Piccadilly Circus. She stood motionless, rigid, like one in a trance, her head lifted and her eyes wide staring before her. She supported her body with her hand put out against the wall. I could not go in—this woman barred the way. And I remained a moment, struck motionless with wonder. I noted every detail of her—her yellow hair; her painted face; a chain around her neck supporting a white antique flask for perfume; her rich costume of Oriental design, reeking with scent.

"She did not seem to see me, to see anything. Her face was strained and ashen under the paint. And she began to speak, to utter a jumble of words, not directed to me or to any one. They were not connected words. It was the gabble of a woman under the influence of a drug. She had kissed someone, wept over him!"

"AND suddenly I had a great revulsion of a feeling. Here was a drunken actress barring the door that I was about to enter. A creature from some low Oriental ballet, babbling about her affair, tawdry painted, soaked with scent.

"I hurried away. I found the taxicab which I had given up, standing by the curb. I got in and returned. The house was still deserted. No one had come back. I slipped in."

The girl's voice hesitated, wavered, descended almost to a whisper: "Christmas morning all London talked of a tragedy. The man had been killed in his rooms, in the night, by a woman of the town with

whom he had had an intrigue. She had gone there a little before midnight. The man had tried to get rid of her. But she would not go. His insistence served only to convince her that he expected someone else to arrive. He tried to force her to go and she killed him. Then she sat down with the weapon in her hand to wait for the other woman to come.

"The night advanced; no one came. And in a seizure of remorse over what she took to be her unjust accusation, she shot herself. But she did not at once die. She lived long enough to tell what had happened. But it was not the woman I saw in the door. There was no mention of that woman in any detail of the tragedy. I alone had seen her."

There was silence.

THE nursing Sister sitting by the fire had arisen. She stood now on the hearth. Her figure seemed to come out in the light of the flame, in the light of the candle on the mantel. Her lifted face was perplexed, like one striving to recall what had passed in the haze of a delirium, to get a clear conception out of the memory of a dream. The young countess, propped up in the great bed among the pillows, leaned forward. She strained out, staring at that other woman in the room. Her fancy for a moment had its will with her. It invested this other woman with the painted face, the Oriental dress of the woman in the doorway, the woman who had come up into the house of Simon the Pharisee to pour the precious ointment on the feet of Jesus of Nazareth, the flask of alabaster fastened with a chain around the neck, hanging down, the unruly yellow hair.

And she uttered the query that possessed her. "It was you—you! Who are you?"

The face of the other cleared of its perplexity. She smiled. The illusion of costume fell away; only the yellow hair remained. "I am Sister Mary Magdalene," she said.

And from the spire of the village church, beyond the sweep of dark river, the bells began to ring.