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THE ABBÉ'S REPENTANCE.

IVY STANBURY had never been in the South before. So everything burst full upon her with all the charm of novelty. As they reached Antibes Station, the sun was setting. A pink glow from his blood-red orb lit up the snowy ridge of the Maritime Alps with fairy splendour. It was a dream of delight to those eager young eyes, fresh from the fog and frost and brooding gloom of London. In front, the deep blue port, the long white mole, the picturesque lighthouse, the arcaded breakwater, the sea just flecked with russet lateen sails, the coasting craft that lay idle by the quays in the harbour. Further on, the mouldering grey town, enclosed in its mediæval walls, and topped by its two tall towers: the square bastions and angles of Vauban's great fort: the laughing coast towards Nice, dotted over with white villages perched high among dark hills: and beyond all, soaring up into the cloudless sky, the phantom peaks of those sun-smitten mountains. No lovelier sight can eye behold round the enchanted Mediterranean: what wonder Ivy Stanbury gazed at it that first night of her sojourn in the South with unfeigned admiration?

"It's beautiful," she broke forth, drawing a deep breath as she spoke, and gazing up at the clear-cut outlines of the Cime de Mercantourn. "More beautiful than anything I could have imagined, almost."

But Aunt Emma was busy looking after the luggage, registered through from London. "*Quatre colis*, all told, and then the rugs and the hold-all; Maria should have fastened those straps more securely. And where's the black bag? And the thing with the etna? And mind you take care of my canary, Ivy."

Ivy stood still and gazed. So like a vision did those dainty pink summits, all pencilled with dark glens, hang mystic in the air. To think about luggage at such a moment as this was, to her, sheer desecration. And how wine-coloured was the dark sea in the evening light: and how antique the grey Greek town: and how delicious the sunset! The snowiest peaks of all stood out now in the very hue of the pinky nacre that lines a shell: the shadows of the gorges that scored their smooth sides showed up in delicate tints of pale green and dark purple. Ivy drew a deep breath again, and clutched the bird-cage silently.

The long drive to the hotel across the olive-clad promontory, between bay and bay, was one continuous joy to her. Here and there, rocky inlets opened out for a moment to right or left, hemmed in by tiny crags, where the blue sea broke in milky foam upon weather-beaten skerries. Coquettish white villas gleamed rosy in the setting sun among tangled gardens of strange shrubs, whose very names Ivy knew not—date-palms, and fan-palms, and eucalyptus, and mimosa, and green Mediterranean pine, and tall flowering agavé. At last, the tired horses broke into a final canter, and drew up before the broad stairs of the hotel on the headland. A vista through the avenue revealed to Ivy's eyes a wide strip of sea, and beyond it again the jagged outline of the Estérel, most exquisitely shaped of earthly mountains, silhouetted in deep blue against the fiery red of a sky just fading from the afterglow into profound darkness.

She could hardly dress for dinner, for looking out of the window. Even in that dim evening light, the view across the bay was too exquisite to be neglected.

However, by dint of frequent admonitions from Aunt Emma, through the partition door, she managed at last to rummage out her little white evening dress—a soft nun's cloth, made full in the bodice—and scrambled through in the nick of time, as the dinner-bell was ringing.

Table d'hôte was fairly full. Most of the guests were ladies. But to Ivy's surprise, and perhaps even dismay, she found herself seated next a tall young man in the long black cassock of a Catholic priest, with a delicate pale face, very austere and clear-cut. This was disconcerting to Ivy, for, in the English way, she had a vague feeling in her mind that priests, after all, were not quite human.

The tall young man, however, turned to her after a minute's pause with a frank and pleasant smile, which seemed all at once to bespeak her sympathy. He had an even row of white teeth, Ivy observed, and thin, thoughtful lips, and a cultivated air, and the mien of a gentleman. Cardinal Manning must surely have looked like that when he was an Anglican curate. So austere was the young man's face, yet so gentle, so engaging.

“Mademoiselle has just arrived to-day?” he said interrogatively, in the pure, sweet French of the Faubourg St. Germain. Ivy could see at a glance he felt she was shy of him, and was trying to reassure her. “What a beautiful sunset we’ve had! What light! What colour!”

His voice rang so soft that Ivy plucked up heart of grace to answer him boldly in her own pretty variation of the Ollendorffian dialect, “Yes, it was splendid, splendid. This is the first time I visit the Mediterranean, and coming from the cold North, its beauty takes my breath away.”

“Mademoiselle is French, then?” the young priest asked, with the courtly flattery that sits so naturally on his countrymen. “No, English? Really! And nevertheless you speak with a charming accent. But all English ladies speak French to-day. Yes, this place is lovely: nothing lovelier on the coast. I went up this evening to the hill that forms the centre of our little promontory——”

“The hill with the lighthouse that we passed on our way?” Ivy asked, proud at heart that she could remember the word *phare* off-hand, without reference to the dictionary.

The Abbé bowed. “Yes, the hill with the lighthouse,” he answered, hardly venturing to correct her by making *phare* masculine. “There is there a sanctuary of Our Lady—Notre-Dame de la Garoupe—and I mounted up to it by the Chemin do la Croix, to make my devotions. And after spending a little half-hour all alone in the oratory, I went out upon the platform, and sat at the foot of the cross, and looked before me upon the view. Oh, mademoiselle, how shall I say? it was divine! it was beautiful! The light from the setting sun touched up those spotless temples of the eternal snow with the rosy radiance of an angel’s wing. It was a prayer in marble. One would think the white and common daylight, streaming through some dim cathedral window, made rich with figures, was falling in crimson palpitations on the clasped hands of some alabaster saint—so glorious was it, so beautiful!”

Ivy smiled at his enthusiasm: it was so like her own—and yet, oh, so different! But she admired the young Abbé, all the same, for not being ashamed of his faith. What English curate would have dared to board a stranger like that—with such a winning confidence that the stranger would share his own point of view of things? And then the touch of poetry that he threw into it all was so delicately mediæval. Ivy looked at him and smiled again. The priest had certainly begun by creating a favourable impression.

All through dinner, her new acquaintance talked to her uninterruptedly. Ivy was quite charmed to see how far her meagre French would carry her. And her neighbour was so polite, so grave, so attentive. He never seemed to notice her mistakes of gender, her little errors of tense or mood or syntax: he caught rapidly at what she meant when she paused for a word: he finished her sentences for her better than she could have done them herself: he never suggested, he never corrected, he never faltered, but he helped her out, as it were, unconsciously, without ever seeming to help her. In a word, he had the manners of a born gentleman, with the polish and the grace of good French society. And then, whatever he said was so interesting and so well put. A tinge of Celtic imagination lighted up all his talk. He was well read in his own literature, and in English and German too. Nothing could have been more unlike Ivy’s preconceived idea of the French Catholic priest—the rotund and rubicund village curé. This man was tall, slim, pathetic, poetical looking, with piercing black eyes, and features of striking and statuesque beauty. But above all, Ivy felt now he was earnest, and human—intensely human.

Once only, when conversation rose loud across the table, the Abbé ventured to ask, with bated breath, in a candid tone of inquiry, “Mademoiselle is Catholic?”

Ivy looked down at her plate as she answered in a timid voice, “No, monsieur, Anglican.” Then she added, half apologetically, with a deprecating smile, “’Tis the religion of my country, you know.” For she feared she shocked him.

“Perfectly,” the Abbé answered, with a sweet smile of resigned regret; and he murmured something half to himself in the Latin tongue, which Ivy didn’t understand. It was a verse from the Vulgate, “Other sheep have I which are not of this fold: them also will I bring in.” For he was a tolerant man, though devout, that Abbé, and Mademoiselle was charming. Had not even the Church itself held that Socrates, Plato, Aristotle, I know not how many more—and then, Mademoiselle, no doubt erred through ignorance of the Faith, and the teaching of her parents!

After dinner they strolled out into the great entrance hall. The Abbé, with a courtly bow, went off, half reluctant, in another direction. On a table close by, the letters that came by the evening post lay displayed in long rows for visitors to claim their own. With true feminine curiosity, Ivy glanced over the names of her fellow guests. One struck her at once—"M. l'Abbé de Kermadec." "That must be our priest, Aunt Emma," she said, looking close at it. And the English barrister with the loud voice, who sat opposite her at table, made answer, somewhat bluffly, "Yes, that's the priest, M. Guy de Kermadec. You can see with half an eye, he's above the common ruck of 'em. Belongs to a very distinguished Breton family, so I'm told. Of late years, you know, there's been a reaction in France in favour of piety. It's the mode to be *dévo*t. The Royalists think religion goes hand in hand with legitimacy. So several noble families send a younger son into the Church now again, as before the Revolution—make a decorative Abbé of him. It's quite the thing, as times go. The eldest son of the Kermadecs is a marquis, I believe—one of their trumpery marquee's—has a château in Morbihan—the second son's in a cavalry regiment, and serves La France; the third's in the Church, and saves the souls of the family. That's the way they do now. Division of labour, don't you see! Number one plays, number two fights, number three prays. Land, army, piety."

"Oh, indeed," Ivy answered, shrinking into her shell at once. She didn't know why, but it jarred upon her somehow to hear the English barrister with the loud bluff voice speak like that about her neighbour. M. Guy de Kermadec was of gentler mould, she felt sure, than the barrister's coarse red hands should handle.

They stayed there some weeks. Aunt Emma's lungs were endowed with a cavity. So Aunt Emma did little but sun herself on the terrace, and chirp to the canary, and look across at the Estérel. But Ivy was strong, her limbs were a tomboy's, and she wandered about by herself to her heart's content over that rocky peninsula. On her first morning at the Cape, indeed, she strolled out alone, following a footpath that led through a green strip of pine-wood, fragrant on either side with lentisk scrub and rosemary. It brought her out upon the sea, near the very end of the promontory, at a spot where white rocks, deeply honeycombed by the ceaseless spray of centuries, lay tossed in wild confusion, stack upon stack, rent and fissured. Low bushes, planed level by the wind, sloped gradually upward. A *douanier's* trail threaded the rugged maze. Ivy turned to the left and followed it on, well pleased, past huge tors and deep gulleys. Here and there, taking advantage of the tilt of the strata, the sea had worn itself great caves and blowholes. A slight breeze was rolling breakers up these miniature gorges. Ivy stood and watched them tumble in, the deep peacock blue of the outer sea changing at once into white foam as they curled over and shattered themselves on the green slimy reefs that blocked their progress.

By-and-by she reached a spot where a clump of tall aloes, with prickly points, grew close to the edge of the rocks in true African luxuriance. Just beyond them, on the brink, a man sat bareheaded, his legs dangling over a steep undermined cliff. The limestone was tilted up there at such an acute angle that the crag overhung the sea by a yard or two, and waves dashed themselves below into a thick rain of spray without wetting the top. Ivy had clambered half out to the edge before she saw who the man was. Then he turned his head at the sound of her footfall, and sprang to his feet hastily.

"Take care, mademoiselle," he said, holding his round hat in his left hand, and stretching out his right to steady her. "Such spots as these are hardly meant for skirts like yours—or mine. One false step, and over you go. I'm a pretty strong swimmer myself—our Breton sea did so much for me; but no swimmer on earth could live against the force of those crushing breakers. They'd catch a man on their crests, and pound him to a jelly on the jagged needles of rock. They'd hurl him on to the crumbling pinnacles, and then drag him back with their undertow, and crush him at last, as in a gigantic mortar, till every trait, every feature was indistinguishable."

"Thank you," Ivy answered, taking his proffered hand as innocently as she would have taken her father's curate's. "It's just beautiful out here, isn't it?" She seated herself on the ledge near the spot where he'd been sitting. "How grandly the waves roll in!" she cried, eyeing them with girlish delight. "Do you come here often, M. l'Abbé?"

The Abbé gazed at her, astonished. How strange are the ways of these English! He was a priest, to be sure, a celibate by profession; but he was young, he was handsome—he knew he was good-looking; and mademoiselle was unmarried! This chance meeting embarrassed him, to say the truth, far more than it did Ivy—though Ivy too was shy, and a little conscious blush that just tinged her soft cheek made her look, the Abbé noted, even prettier than ever. But still, if he was a priest, he was also a gentleman. So, after a moment's demur, he sat down, a little way off—further off, indeed, than the curate would have thought it necessary to sit from her—and answered very gravely, in that soft low voice of his, "Yes, I come here often, very often. It's my favourite seat. On these rocks one seems to lose sight of the world and the work of man's

hand, and to stand face to face with the eternal and the infinite.” He waved his arm, as he spoke, towards the horizon, vaguely.

“I like it for its wildness,” Ivy said simply. “These crags are so beautiful.”

“Yes,” the young priest answered, looking across at them pensively, “I like to think, for my part, that for thousands of years the waves have been dashing against them, day and night, night and day, in a ceaseless rhythm, since the morning of the creation. I like to think that before ever a Phocæan galley steered its virgin trip into the harbour of Antipolis, this honeycombing had begun; that when the Holy Maries of the Sea passed by our Cape on their miraculous voyage to the mouths of the Rhone, they saw this headland, precisely as we see it to-day, on their starboard bow, all weather-eaten and weather-beaten.”

Ivy lounged with her feet dangling over the edge, as the Abbé had done before. The Abbé sat and looked at her in fear and trembling. If mademoiselle were to slip, now. His heart came up in his mouth at the thought. He was a priest, to be sure; but at seven-and-twenty, mark you well, even priests are human. They, too, have hearts. Anatomically they resemble the rest of their kind; it is only the cassock that makes the outer difference.

But Ivy sat talking in her imperfect French, with very little sense of how much trouble she was causing him. She didn't know that the Abbé, too, trembled on the very brink of a precipice. But his was a moral one. By-and-by she rose. The Abbé stretched out his hand, and lent it to her politely. He could do no less; yet the touch of her ungloved fingers thrilled him. What a pity so fair a lamb should stray so far from the true fold! Had Our Lady brought him this chance? Was it his duty to lead her, to guide her, to save her?

“Which is the way to the lighthouse hill?” Ivy asked him carelessly.

The words seemed to his full heart like a sacred omen. For on the lighthouse hill, as on all high places in Provence, stood also a lighthouse of the soul, a sanctuary of Our Lady, that Notre-Dame de la Garoupe whereof he had told her yesterday. And of her own accord she had asked the way now to Our Lady's shrine. He would guide her like a beacon. This was the finger of Providence. Sure, Our Lady herself had put the thought into the heart of her.

“I go that way myself,” he said, rejoicing. “If mademoiselle will allow me, I will show her the path. Every day I go up there to make my devotions.”

As they walked by the seaward trail, and climbed the craggy little hill, the Abbé discoursed very pleasantly about many things. Not religion alone; he was a priest, but no bigot. An enthusiast for the sea, as becomes a Morbihan man, he loved it from every point of view, as swimmer, yachtsman, rower, landscape artist. His talk was of dangers confronted on stormy nights along the Ligurian coast; of voyages to Corsica, to the Channel Islands, to Bilbao; of great swims about Sark; of climbs among the bare summits over yonder by Turbia. And he was wide-minded too; for he spoke with real affection of a certain neighbour of theirs in Morbihan; he was proud of the great writer's pure Breton blood, though he deprecated his opinions—“But he's so kind and good after all, that dear big Renan!” Ivy started with surprise; not so had she heard the noblest living master of French prose discussed and described in their Warwickshire rectory. But every moment she saw yet clearer that anything more unlike her preconceived idea of a Catholic priest than this ardent young Celt could hardly be imagined. Fervent and fervid, he led the conversation like one who spoke with tongues. For herself she said little by the way; her French halted sadly; but she listened with real pleasure to the full flowing stream of the young man's discourse. After all, she knew now, he was a young man at least—not human alone, but vivid and virile as well, in spite of his petticoats.

People forget too often that putting on a *soutane* doesn't necessarily make a strong nature feminine.

At the top of the lighthouse hill Ivy paused, delighted. Worlds opened before her. To right and left, in rival beauty, spread a glorious panorama. She stood and gazed at it entranced. She had plenty of time indeed to drink in to the full those two blue bays, with their contrasted mountain barriers—snowy Alps to the east, purple Estérel to westward—for the Abbé had gone into the rustic chapel to make his devotions. When he came out again, curiosity tempted Ivy for a moment into that bare little whitewashed barn. It was a Provençal fisher shrine of the rudest antique type; its gaudy Madonna, tricked out with paper flowers, stood under a crude blue canopy, set with tinsel-gilt stars; the rough walls

hung thick with ex-voto's of coarse and naive execution. Here, sailors in peril emerged from a watery grave by the visible appearance of Our Lady issuing in palpable wood from a very solid cloud of golden glory; there, a gig going down hill was stopped forcibly from above with hands laid on the reins by Our Lady in person; and yonder, again, a bursting gun did nobody any harm, for had not Our Lady caught the fragments in her own stiff fingers? Ivy gazed with a certain hushed awe at these nascent efforts of art; such a gulf seemed to yawn between that tawdry little oratory and the Abbé's own rich and cultivated nature. Yet he went to pray there!

For the next three weeks Ivy saw much of M. Guy de Kermadec. She taught him lawn-tennis, which he learned, indeed, with ease. At first, to be sure, the English in the hotel rather derided the idea of lawn-tennis in a cassock. But the Abbé was an adept at the *jeu de paume*, which had already educated his hand and eye, and he dropped into the new game so quickly, in spite of the *soutane*, which sadly impeded his running, that even the Cambridge undergraduate with the budding moustache was forced to acknowledge "the Frenchy" a formidable competitor. And then Ivy met him often in his strolls round the coast. He used to sit and sketch among the rocks, perched high on the most inaccessible pinnacles; and Ivy, it must be admitted, though she hardly knew why herself—so innocent is youth, so too dangerously innocent—went oftenest by the paths where she was likeliest to meet him. There she would watch the progress of his sketch, and criticize and admire; and in the end, when she rose to go, native politeness made it impossible for the Abbé to let her walk home unprotected, so he accompanied her back by the coast path to the hotel garden. Ivy hardly noticed that as he reached it he almost invariably lifted his round hat at once and dismissed her, unofficially as it were, to the society of her compatriots. But the Abbé, more used to the ways of the world and of France, knew well how unwise it was of him—a man of the Church—to walk with a young girl alone so often in the country. A priest should be circumspect.

Day after day, slowly, very slowly, the truth began to dawn by degrees upon the Abbé de Kermadec that he was in love with Ivy. At first, he fought the idea tooth and nail, like an evil vision. He belonged to the Church, the Bride of Heaven: what had such as he to do with mere carnal desires and earthly longings? But day by day, as Ivy met him, and talked with him more confidingly, her French growing more fluent by leaps and bounds under that able tutor, Love, whose face as yet she recognized not—nature began to prove too strong for the Abbé's resolution. He found her company sweet. The position was so strange, and to him so incomprehensible. If Ivy had been a French girl, of course he could never have seen so much of her: her mother or her maid would have mounted guard over her night and day. Only with a married woman could he have involved himself so deeply in France: and then, the sinfulness of their intercourse would have been clear from the very outset to both alike of them. But what charmed and attracted him most in Ivy was just her English innocence. She was so gentle, so guileless. This pure creature of God's never seemed to be aware she was doing grievously wrong. The man who had voluntarily resigned all hope or chance of chaste love was now irresistibly led on by the very force of the spell he had renounced for ever.

And yet—how hard it is for us to throw ourselves completely into somebody else's attitude! So French was he, so Catholic, that he couldn't quite understand the full depth of Ivy's innocence. This girl who could walk and talk so freely with a priest—surely she must be aware of what thing she was doing. She must know she was leading him and herself into a dangerous love, a love that could end in none but a guilty conclusion.

So thinking, and praying, and fighting against it, and despising himself, the young Abbé yet persisted half unawares on the path of destruction. His hot Celtic imagination proved too much for his self-control. All night long he lay awake, tossing and turning on his bed, alternately muttering fervent prayers to Our Lady, and building up for himself warm visions of his next meeting with Ivy. In the morning, he would rise up early, and go afoot to the shrine of Notre-Dame de la Garoupe, and cry aloud with fiery zeal for help, that he might be delivered from temptation:—and then he would turn along the coast, towards his accustomed seat, looking out eagerly for the rustle of Ivy's dress among the cistus-bushes. When at last he met her, a great wave passed over him like a blush. He thrilled from head to foot. He grew cold. He trembled inwardly.

Not for nothing had he lived near the monastery of St. Gildas de Rhuy. For such a Heloise as that, what priest would not gladly become a second Abelard?

One morning, he met her by his overhanging ledge. The sea was rough. The waves broke grandly.

Ivy came up to him, with that conscious blush of hers just mantling her fair cheek. She liked him very much. But she was only eighteen. At eighteen, a girl hardly knows when she's really in love. But she vaguely suspects it.

The Abbé held out his hand. Ivy took it with a frank smile. “Bonjour, M. de Kermadec!” she said lightly. She always addressed him so—not as M. l’Abbé, now. Was that intentional, he wondered? He took it to mean that she tried to forget his ecclesiastical position. “La tante Emma” should guard her treasure in an earthen vessel more carefully. Why do these Protestants tempt us priests with their innocent girls? He led her to a seat, and gazed at her like a lover, his heart beating hard, and his knees trembling violently. He *must* speak to her to-day. Though *what* he knew not.

He meant her no harm. He was too passionate, too pure, too earnest for that. But he meant her no good either. He meant nothing, nothing. Before her face he was a bark driven rudderless by the breeze. He only knew he loved her: she *must* be his. His passion hallowed his act. And she too, she loved him.

Leaning one hand on the rock, he talked to her for a while, he hardly knew what. He saw she was tremulous. She looked down and blushed often. That intangible, incomprehensible, invisible something that makes lovers subtly conscious of one another’s mood had told her how he felt towards her. She tingled to the finger-tips. It was sweet to be there—oh, how sweet, yet, how hopeless.

Romance to her: to him, sin, death, infamy.

At last he leaned across to her. She had answered him back once more about some trifle, “Mais, oui, M. de Kermadec.” “Why this ‘monsieur’?” the priest asked boldly, gazing deep into her startled eyes. “Je m’appelle Guy, mademoiselle. Why not Guy then—Ivy?”

At the word her heart gave a bound. He had said it! He had said it! He loved her: oh, how delicious! She could have cried for joy at that implied avowal.

But she drew herself up for all that, like a pure-minded English girl that she was, and answered with a red flush, “Because—it would be wrong, monsieur. You know very well, as things are, I cannot.”

What a flush! what a halo! Madonna and vows were all forgotten now. The Abbé flung himself forward in one wild burst of passion. He gazed in her eyes, and all was lost. His hot Celtic soul poured itself forth in full flood. He loved her: he adored her: she should be his and his only. He had fought against it. But love—love had conquered. “Oh, Ivy,” he cried passionately, “you will not refuse me! You will be mine and mine only. You will love me as I love you!”

Ivy’s heart broke forth too. She looked at him and melted. “Guy,” she answered, first framing the truth to herself in that frank confession, “I love you in return. I have loved you since the very first moment I saw you.”

The Abbé seized her hand, and raised it rapturously to his lips. “My beloved,” he cried, rosy red, “you are mine, you are mine—and I am yours for ever.”

Ivy drew back a little, somewhat abashed and alarmed by his evident ardour. “I wonder if I’m doing wrong?” she cried, with the piteous uncertainty of early youth. “Your vows, you know! your vows! How will you ever get rid of them?”

The Abbé gazed at her astonished. What could this angel mean? She wondered if she was doing wrong! Get rid of his vows! He, a priest, to make love! What naïveté! What innocence!

But he was too hot to repent. “My vows!” he cried, flinging them from him with both hands into the sea. “Ivy, let them go! Let the waves bear them off! What are they to me now? I renounce them! I have done with them!”

Ivy looked at him, breathing deep. Why, he loved her indeed. For she knew how devoted he was, how earnest, how Catholic. “Then you’ll join our Church,” she said simply, “and give up your orders, and marry me!”

If a thunderbolt had fallen at the young priest’s feet, its effect could not have been more crushing, more instantaneous, more extraordinary. In a moment, he had come to himself again, cooled, astonished, horrified. Oh, what had he said? What had he done? What vile sin had he committed? Not against heaven, now, or the saints, for of that and his own soul he thought just then but little: but against that pure young girl whom he loved, that sweet creature of innocence! And how could he ever explain to her? How retract? How excuse himself? Even to attempt an explanation would be sheer treason to her purity. The thought in his mind was too unholy for her to hear. To tell her what he meant would be a crime, a sin, a

bassesse!

He saw it in an instant, how the matter would envisage itself to her un-Catholic mind. She could never understand that to him, a single fall, a temporary backsliding, was but a subject for repentance, confession, absolution, pardon: while to renounce his orders, renounce his Church, contract a marriage that in his eyes would be no marriage at all, but a living lie, was to continue in open sin, to degrade and dishonour her. For her own sake, even, if saints and Madonna were not, Guy de Kermadec could never consent so to taint and to sully her. That pure soul was too dear to him. He had dreamed for a moment, indeed, of foul wrong, in the white heat of passion: all men may be misled for a moment of impulse by the strong demon within them: but to persevere in such wrong, to go on sinning openly, flagrantly, shamelessly—Guy de Kermadec drew back from the bare idea with disdain. As priest and as gentleman alike, he looked down upon it and contemned it.

The reaction was profound. For a minute or two he gazed into Ivy's face like one spellbound. He paused and hesitated. What way out of this maze? How on earth could he undeceive her? Then suddenly, with a loud cry, he sprang to his feet like one shot, and stood up by the edge of the rocks in his long black *soutane*. He held out his hands to raise her. "Mademoiselle," he groaned aloud from his heart, in a very broken tone, "I have done wrong—grievous wrong: I have sinned—against Heaven and against you, and am no more worthy to be called a priest." He raised his voice solemnly. It was the voice of a bruised and wounded creature. "Go back!" he cried once more, waving her away from him as from one polluted. "You can never forgive me. But at least, go back. I should have cut out my tongue rather than have spoken so to you. I am a leper—a wild beast. Ten thousand times over, I crave your pardon."

Ivy gazed at him, thunderstruck. In her innocence, she hardly knew what the man even meant. But she saw her romance had toppled over to its base, and shattered itself to nothing. Slowly she rose, and took his hand across the rocks to steady her. They reached the track in silence. As they gained it, the Abbé raised his hat for the last time, and turned away bitterly. He took the path to the right. Obedient to his gesture, Ivy went to the left. Back to the hotel she went, lingering, with a heart like a stone, locked herself up in her own room, and cried long and silently.

But as for Guy de Kermadec, all on fire with his remorse, he walked fast along the seashore, over the jagged rock path, toward the town of Antibes.

Through the narrow streets of the old city he made his way, like a blind man, to the house of a priest whom he knew. His heart was seething now with regret and shame and horror. What vile thing was this wherewith he, a priest of God, had ventured to affront the pure innocence of a maiden? What unchastity had he forced on the chaste eyes of girlhood? Ivy had struck him dumb by her very freedom from all guile. And it was she, the heretic, for whose soul he had wrestled in prayer with Our Lady, who had brought him back with a bound to the consciousness of sin, and the knowledge of purity, from the very brink of a precipice.

He knocked at the door of his friend's house like a moral leper.

His brother priest received him kindly. Guy de Kermadec was pale, but his manner was wild, like one mad with frenzy. "Mon père," he said straight out, "I have come to confess, *in articulo mortis*. I feel I shall die to-night. I have a warning from Our Lady. I ask you for absolution, a blessing, the holy sacrament, extreme unction. If you refuse them, I die. Give me God at your peril."

The elder priest hesitated. How could he give the host otherwise than to a person fasting? How administer extreme unction save to a dying man? But Guy de Kermadec, in his fiery haste, overbore all scrupulous ecclesiastical objections. He *was* a dying man, he cried: Our Lady's own warning was surely more certain than the guess or conjecture of a mere earthly doctor. The viaticum he demanded, and the viaticum he must have. He was to die that night. He knew it. He was sure of it.

He knelt down and confessed. He would brook no refusal. The country priest, all amazed, sat and listened to him, breathless. Once or twice he drew his sleek hand over his full fat face doubtfully. The strange things this hot Breton said to him were beyond his comprehension. They spoke different languages. How could he, good easy soul, with his cut-and-dried theology, fathom the fiery depths of that volcanic bosom? He nursed his chin in suspense, and marvelled. Other priests had gone astray. Why this wild fever of repentance? Other women had been tempted. Why this passionate

tenderness for the sensibilities of a more English heretic? Other girls had sinned outright. Why this horror at the harm done to her in intention only?

But to Guy de Kermadec himself it was a crime of *lèse-majesté* against a young girl's purity. A crime whose very nature it would be criminal to explain to her. A crime that he could only atone with his life. Apology was impossible. Explanation was treason. Nothing remained for it now but the one resource of silence.

In an orgy of penitence, the young priest confessed, and received absolution: he took the viaticum, trembling: he obtained extreme unction. Then, with a terrible light in his eyes, he went into a stationer's shop, and in tremulous lines wrote a note, which he posted to Ivy.

“Très chère dame,” it said simply, “you will see me no more. This morning, I offered, half unawares, a very great wrong to you. Your own words, and Our Lady's intervention, brought me back to myself. Thank Heaven, it was in time. I might have wronged you more. My last prayers are for your pure soul. Pray for mine, and forgive me.

“Adieu!

“GUY DE KERMADEC.”

After that, he strode out to the Cape once more. It was growing dark by that time, for he was long at Antibes. He walked with fiery eagerness to the edge of the cliff, where he had sat with joy that morning—where he had sat before so often. The brink of the rocks was wet with salt spray, very smooth and slippery. The Abbé stood up, and looked over at the black water. The Church makes suicide a sin, and he would obey the Church. But no canon prevents one from leaning over the edge of a cliff, to admire the dark waves. They rolled in with a thud, and broke in sheets of white spray against the honeycombed base of the rock, invisible beneath him.

“Si dextra tua tibi offenderit,” they said, in their long slow chant—“si dextra tua tibi offenderit.” If thy right hand offend thee, cut it off. And Ivy was dearer to him than his own right hand. Yet not for that, oh, Mary, Star of the Sea, not for that; nor yet for his own salvation;—let him burn, if need were, in nethermost hell, to atone this error—but for that pure maid's sake, and for the cruel wrong he had put upon her. “Oh, Our Lady of the Seven Sorrows,” he cried, wringing his hands in his agony, “who wert a virgin thyself, help and succour this virgin in her own great sorrow. Thou knowest her innocence, her guilelessness, her simplicity, and the harm beyond healing that I wrought her unawares. Oh, blot it out of her pure white soul and bless her. Thou knowest that for her sake alone, and to undo this sin to her, I stand here to-night, on the brink of the precipice. Queen of the Waves, Our Lady of the Look-out, if the sacrifice please thee, take me thus to thine own bosom. Let thy billows rise up and blot out my black sin. Oh, Mary, hear me! *Stella maris, adesto!*”

He stood there for hours, growing colder and stiffer. It was quite dark now, and the sea was rising. Yet still he prayed on, and still the spray dashed upward. At last, as he prayed in the dim night, erect, with bare head, a great wave broke higher than ever over the rocks below him. With a fierce joy, Guy de Kermadec felt it thrill through the thickness of the cliff: then it rose in a head, and burst upon him with a roar like the noise of thunder. He lost his footing, and fell, clutching at the jagged pinnacles for support, into the deep trough below. There, the billows caught him up, and pounded him on the sharp crags. Thank Heaven for that mercy! Our Lady had heard his last prayer. Mary, full of grace, had been pleased to succour him. With a penance of blood, from torn hands and feet, was he expiating his sin against Heaven and against Ivy.

Next morning, the *douanier*, pacing the shore alone, saw a dead body entangled among the sharp rocks by the precipice. Climbing down on hands and knees, he fished it out with difficulty, and ran to fetch a gendarme. The face was beaten to a jelly, past all recognition, and the body was mangled in a hideous fashion. But it wore a rent *soutane*, all in ribbons on the rocks; and the left third finger bore a signet-ring with a coat of arms and the motto, “Foy d'un Kermadec.”

Ivy is still unwed. No eye but hers has ever seen Guy de Kermadec's last letter.

Transcriber's Note

This text has been preserved as in the original, including archaic and inconsistent spelling, punctuation and grammar, except that obvious printer's errors have been silently corrected.

[The end of *The Abbe's Repentance* by Grant Allen]