

TERROR

OF

LIGHT

Charles Williams

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CHARACTERS

MARY
MARY MAGDALEN
JOHN
THOMAS
PETER
SAUL OF TARSUS
SIMON THE MAGUS
LUNA
THE APPARITION

TERROR OF LIGHT

The scene is laid in the orchard of John's house in Jerusalem

PETER. It seems a very long time.

THOMAS. It is only ten days.

JOHN. Ten! Is it as much as that?

THOMAS. You are as careless of time, John, as Peter is careful of it. To-day is the feast of Pentecost and of the first-fruits. It is exactly ten days since Jesus ... disappeared.

PETER. We must wait. I am not impatient.

THOMAS. My dear Peter!

PETER [*with a definite impatience*]. Well, I will not be. We cannot hurry on whatever it is that is to happen. But I do not see his meaning in all this ... waiting and watching.

THOMAS. I do not see his meaning in anything at all, and the longer we wait the less I see his meaning. I am quite sure that our lord was incredibly important, and I haven't the least idea what we ought to do about it. But that at present seems incredibly unimportant.

PETER. We ought to be at work somehow.

THOMAS. Ought we?

JOHN. The waiting and the watching are enough. Everything

is changing every moment. I feel as if I had just died or were just about to die—

MARY MAGDALEN. Do not die, John, unless you must.

JOHN [*putting out his hand to her*]. This orchard now—it used to be a place with trees in. Now ...

PETER [*staring at him*]. Well, what is it now? [*He looks round.*] It is still a place with trees in.

JOHN. Yes, but one looks ... up through every tree, as well as at it, if you understand me.

PETER. I do not understand you in the least.

THOMAS [*rolling over to look at JOHN*]. John, are you becoming what the literary people call a Nature-mystic?

JOHN. Certainly not. I am not in the least the same thing as a tree, but.... Well, there used to be an inside and an outside, and one was either inside or outside, and now one is both at once, if you...

[*He stops*]

THOMAS. ... understand me. No, John. That sort of thing is your job; it isn't mine. Do you understand, Mary?

MARY MAGDALEN. Very well. Not so much about trees.

PETER [*turning back*]. Well, we must wait still. I will not be

impatient. Please God, whatever is to happen will be soon.

THOMAS. There was that business of the election. Would this be a good time to go on with it? All the rest of the Companions are in the house, or about somewhere.

PETER. I should like to have asked our lady first. But why not?

[He turns and looks at MARY. As he does so, she speaks

MARY. Peter, there is something I have meant to ask you. What has happened to Judas? Do you think *[They all look at her and away.]* I have not remarked his absence? I have not said anything because you have all been too much on edge till now ... and no wonder. But now that you have had time to pause, and my lord has soothed you, tell me. Has he been arrested or has he run away? Or is he dead?

JOHN. He is dead, madonna.

MARY. I was afraid of that.

PETER. He could not be anything else. It is a mere chance that I am not dead too—no; it was not chance, it was because he did not speak to me. If he had spoken a word I should have destroyed myself. It split my heart in the garden—only to hear him, there with all the moonlight on the swords, and Judas panting as if he were breathless, and Jesus asking him as one might ask anyone who seemed to want something. But afterwards he only looked at me, so I

am not dead yet.

MARY. You are all of you very much alive.

MARY MAGDALEN. Yes, but, mother, you do not know what it was like to have him look at us.

THOMAS. It was perfectly appalling—it was like being put completely into one's own identity at that moment; perpetually settled in exactly *that* intention, *that* valuation. Pure heaven or pure hell. Fortunately he generally hooded his eyes.

JOHN. Thomas, which was it when you saw him—after you had refused to believe us about the resurrection?

THOMAS. That was almost pure laughter. [*He rises.*] You know—and he knew—that I have done many silly things but that was not one of them. In the state you all were then, I wouldn't have taken your word for anything. As it turned out, you were quite right to be in that state, but I was quite right not to believe you. And you know I was.

JOHN. Yes.

MARY MAGDALEN. He was terrible, mother, terrible. He never looked at you like that.

MARY. No?

MARY MAGDALEN Mother!

JOHN [simultaneously] Madonna!

MARY. Wait, children, till you are older in this—state of things, faith or whatever you call it. I felt all this when he was a baby; it is afterwards, it is afterwards.... O you have only begun. Tell me of Judas.

PETER. He is dead and lying under a heap of stones—that is all. Outcast.

JOHN. Say, of some other fold.

[MARY *crosses herself*]

PETER. But there was something I was about to ask you, lady. Since it is so, since he is lost, and since your son chose twelve, it seemed to us that perhaps there should be twelve. We cannot be the bodyguards of his person; we were useless when it came to the point, and now his person is gone; well, and one of the twelve is gone. But do you think it would be wise to make a substitute for Judas of one of our friends, to complete the twelve points?

MARY. It is not for me to order the Church; that is for you and the rest. We are not like you, we have a quite different function. Mothers and victims are not priests and orators. Decide as you choose; whatever my lord proposes to you is best.

PETER. We are agreed, are we not? John?

JOHN. Yes. It is terrible to exclude Judas, but we can only agree to his choice. He is pent in God; he has gone down the wholly negative way, where there is nothing but God. Let us make the substitution.

PETER. Thomas?

THOMAS. I don't think it matters very much, but yes if you like, and the others of the company.

PETER. We will cast the lots now then. Thomas, will you find the others and tell them? Let us go inside.

[The APOSTLES go in

MARY MAGDALEN. What are you sewing, mother?

MARY. A scarf for you.

MARY MAGDALEN. Me?

MARY. Yes. You have taken to wearing very dull colours, and I cannot think why. You must know, as well as I do, that they do not suit you. I am sure John knows it, but I dare say he has a great regard for your independence of thought or your soul or something noble. That is very proper of him, but in me it would not be so proper and quite unnecessary.

MARY MAGDALEN. But, mother—

MARY. Well, darling?

MARY MAGDALEN. I mean ... you see I *did* wear bright colours once, and I *did* look rather well in them....

MARY. I am sure you looked quite beautiful.

MARY MAGDALEN. Yes, but then ... O you know what happened!

MARY. It was all most unfortunate—natural, but unfortunate. That does not seem to me any reason for making yourself so depressing a sight to the Apostolic College or to any single member of it. If you love yourself because my lord loves you, you should know better. But it is never any use arguing with you girls.

MARY MAGDALEN. Yes, but, mother—I do not understand it at all—but my lord was killed, somehow, because of my fault. It would not be quite decent to wear bright colours after his death. [*She moves agitatedly.*] As it is, I am afraid ...

MARY. Why?

MARY MAGDALEN. Well ...

MARY. It is John?

MARY MAGDALEN. Yes.

MARY. Do you want to marry him?

MARY MAGDALEN. I do *not* want to marry him. I do not

want to touch him. I don't know what is happening.¹

MARY. No. I told you that you were very young in this new life. I have had thirty-three years of it [*breaking out*]—blessed for ever and ever and ever be He who made it. I am held here. I am held ... He has an errand for me still, and He will show it to me.² [*She recovers.*] But you are dead and hidden in God; you may as well wear respectable clothes there, especially if I ask you to.

MARY MAGDALEN. O if you—

MARY. It is dear of you to wear those things because of what you did, and it will be dear of you to wear others because of what he and I have done. So either way all is well. There!

[*She holds up the scarf*]

MARY MAGDALEN. It is lovely. How good you are to me!

SAUL *enters*

SAUL. Good morning.

MARY. Good morning.

SAUL. You will forgive this intrusion, madame. I came to find if the Lord John Bar Zebedee was still in Jerusalem.

MARY. Why, yes. He is in the house at present, sir, but our people shall find him for you. Shall we have the honour to

name you to him?

SAUL. I am called Saul and I am from Tarsus.

[MARY MAGDALEN *gives a little scream and her hands fly to her cheeks. He glances at her and away*

It will be kind of you, madame.

[*He looks back at MARY MAGDALEN, half-recognizing her*

Have I had the privilege...?

MARY MAGDALEN. No!... yes ... yes.

SAUL. I am abashed.... I know I have met you, but my memory for names—

MARY. Women's names especially, I think. Child, you had better tell this gentleman the occasion.

MARY MAGDALEN [*half-aside*]. Must I?

MARY. It would perhaps be better. The Nature of God is to have everything clear.

MARY MAGDALEN. O!... Well, it was in Jerusalem, a year ago.

SAUL. I was certainly here a year ago.

MARY MAGDALEN. You had just come out from an official

dinner with the High Priest. It was rather late, and there was a Roman officer ...

SAUL. You were the girl with him! [*He steps back.*] You!

MARY MAGDALEN. Yes. Will you forgive me? I am afraid I behaved rather badly.

SAUL. You were detestable. You made fun of me, and you ...

[He cannot find words]

MARY MAGDALEN. I practically offered myself to you—yes. It seemed very amusing then. Publius thought it funny. Now I do not think it seems so amusing. Will you forgive me?

SAUL. But you were that sort of woman; you were that man's mistress; you—you are horrible.

MARY MAGDALEN. I know. I was.

SAUL. You—a Jewess and the mistress of a Gentile; a filthy little piece of fornication.

MARY MAGDALEN. I know.

SAUL. But what are you doing here? You are not ... John hasn't ... you ... you ... tell me!

MARY. Sir, you are talking about a great many irrelevant things. There is only one question—this young woman

behaved most improperly towards you; do you forgive her? That is all. If (you will excuse me)—if we go into everyone's life history, we shall lose the main point.

SAUL. But ...

JOHN *returns*

JOHN. Saul! My dear man, how unexpected!

SAUL. John!

JOHN. How do you come here?

SAUL. I was delayed at Antioch by my old trouble, and I very nearly turned back when I found I had missed the feast. But I was anxious to see you ...

JOHN. That was delightful of you. You will stay here, of course ...

SAUL. That is kind of *you*. But you have guests already—no, that is not the reason, though it is part of it.—John, are you still in with these—what shall I call them? Nazarenes?

JOHN. Yes.

SAUL. *Now?* Now, when he has been hanged?

JOHN. Yes, but such a lot more. You have no idea how much *has* happened.³

SAUL. I hear that the Council took action at last. John—you have not been outlawed, have you?

JOHN. No: the Council has not outlawed us, not yet. And on our side we have been told that he was the fulfilling of the Law.

SAUL. John, I beg you, I beg you! O this is dreadful! How can you talk so blasphemously of the things of God? Does the Law mean nothing to you now—the Law that you and I have tried to keep all our lives, the Law God gave us as a holy trust? Here is this world, with unbelief and vulgarity swelling up all round us; doesn't it mean anything to you—John, you must forgive me; I have no right to talk to you like this—but doesn't it mean anything to you that we are Jews, and Pharisees, and have some sort of honour? You who taught me more about it than I could ever have found out for myself! No; that is nonsense; what does that matter? John, he has called us to be his chosen—

JOHN. Yes.

SAUL. What?

JOHN. Yes. That is the difficulty. You see he is the Law.

SAUL. What do you mean?

JOHN. I do not know quite. But if you can imagine that you were dead, day by day, night by night, living just the same, breathing, eating, but *dead*.

SAUL. And I suppose this woman is dead too!

JOHN [*staring*]. What woman?

SAUL. This—harlot. [*Pointing to her*]

JOHN. Mary? Yes, certainly. At least, she is alive now; more alive than I am—you can see that—but ...⁴

SAUL. I cannot see it. Is she living in your house?

JOHN. Yes, of course. Let me present you.

SAUL. Present *me*—to her.

JOHN. Yes, you will like her. She is quite adorable. So is everyone, I know, but one sees it clearer sometimes than at others. Come. [*He takes SAUL by the arm.*] Mary?

MARY [The Virgin]. I think, John, I should not trouble—Mary and I are just going in. Come, child. Help me up; my bones are burning: something is going to happen. Sir— [*she makes a small curtsy to SAUL. He bows*]. If I may say so, I should take care of yourself.

SAUL. Myself! It is John I am thinking of, Madame. If you have any influence with him ...

MARY. O, I? I should be no good. My son and he knew each other too well.

SAUL [*struck by a suspicion*]. Your son?

MARY. My son. I should recommend you to be careful of my son; though if, as I think, he is implacably determined to have you, all that will not help. John will tell you what it is like—knowing him. Come, Mary. Sir.

[She bends her head. SAUL bows mechanically. The women go in

SAUL. Who is that woman?

JOHN. The mother of Jesus.

SAUL. A harlot, and the heretic's mother. And you asked me to stop here. John—I would not have insulted you in that way.

JOHN. Do not worry. I should have told you before we sent for your luggage—at least I should have told you about our lady. Mary's business is, I think, her own. And I beg you not to go on saying 'harlot'. It is inaccurate.

SAUL. She has repented, has she?

JOHN. She has—but that is not quite what I meant. Well—you will not stop here?

SAUL. If she has repented I am sorry. I would not have spoken so. Though even then I do not see why she should be living in your house. But if she has not, I prefer to call things by their right names.

JOHN. You might as well call yourself a prig and me a

blustering nincompoop. Neither of them is much better than a harlot; an intellectual sin is as bad as a physical. But even if you were right, there would be no sense in monotonously reiterating a name. You need a new vocabulary.

SAUL. I need nothing of the sort. The old names are good enough for me—the Law, sin, repentance, pardon.

JOHN. I know, I know. But you hear them and you feel them, and yet they don't kill you! You don't die into them. Nowadays I don't know if I am dead or alive.

SAUL. Emotional nonsense! You can obey the Law.

JOHN. I can *not* obey the Law. Can you?

SAUL. I can try.

JOHN. And if you saw the Law moving and walking and talking in front of you ...

SAUL. John, this is very near blasphemy. You will be saying next that the High and Holy One himself may have been ...

JOHN. Well, and at that—

[They are both shocked into silence]

SAUL. You don't mean that?

JOHN [*recovering*]. No; I don't. Only all these words one has used, they *were* walking about in front of me. You talk of sin and the Law—Saul, have you ever felt an absolute, complete, and utter fool?

SAUL. No.

JOHN. M'm. You will. And I don't envy you, or at least perhaps I do. You will be doing exactly what you ought to be doing: you will be full of the most proper emotions, and acting in the most proper way—keeping the Law or repenting of *not* keeping the Law or ...

SAUL. John—

JOHN. ... making other people keep the Law, which is quite likely if I know you!—And click! There you will suddenly be, staring at yourself—a blind stupendous imbecile. And will you know it! O I should have been so angry once. Sit on his left hand in the Kingdom, indeed! Idiot! Double-sized idiot! 'Burn the place down with heavenly fire!' Saul, I writhe even while I laugh. I said that. I walked about this incredible world saying things like that. But to resent it now would be to be as offensive in heaven as I was on earth. No resentment, even of myself!

SAUL. I know that all our righteousnesses in God's sight are like filthy rags.

JOHN. We all know that. They *are*, that is the whole point,

they *are*. Saul, when you said that—forgive me, but when you said that, *did* you detect the slightest note of propriety in your voice? You do think you ought to feel like that, don't you?

SAUL. Of course I do.

JOHN. There you are! O not to know what one ought to do, not to feel one has done it—or hasn't done it, not to be anything but a line of light in which things can be seen! But Peter feels more like you, so I suppose it is all right. There must be something in it. But I don't get it myself.

SAUL. John, this is quite useless. We are distressing each other and doing no good. It may be your Greek philosophers that have changed you; and you may think me pompous or a prig. I am sorry; I do not mean to be a prig ...

JOHN. Only as much a prig as I was a blustering nincompoop!

SAUL. I do not think you *that* or I should not be appealing to you now. I say again—you and I should have some honour and a little loyalty: Jesus may or may not have been a good man in himself. I was not here during the trial and I won't pretend to decide. But even if you think the Council acted hastily—or I will go further, I will say even if you think they let themselves be influenced by a kind of mob hysteria and acted as they should not—still, I beg you to consider that the High Priest himself is not Judah and the grand tradition of the Law. The covenant of

Abraham is our pledge—nothing less. Jesus may have been the best of men; he may not have meant to set himself against the God of our fathers; but at best he must have been rash, at worst—leave it. We are called by our God to stand by him—we the true Israel, the faithful remnant, the sons of those who came out of Egypt. John, you are a master, you can be so great an energy; do forget all this irrelevance. Did Jesus ever say anything that is not said better in the prophets? Did he teach anything that is not in Isaiah and Ezekiel and Micah? Forget him; forget all this riff-raff: help me, help us, help our God!⁵

JOHN. If I could we would talk. I cannot. I am dead and alive at once. Have you ever been in love?

SAUL. No.

JOHN. If you had, you would understand better. You might as well ask a man in love to forget that the girl lived, as me to—

SAUL. It is that woman who has done it. You are in love with her, and you call that Jesus.

JOHN. Nonsense [*staring suddenly*]. At least—

[MARY MAGDALEN *comes out of the house*

MARY MAGDALEN. John!

JOHN. Mary?

MARY MAGDALEN. I was sent to tell you that there is another visitor for you. He will not tell his name except to you.

JOHN. What is he like?

MARY MAGDALEN. A tall man, very beautifully dressed. He has a thrilling voice and fine eyes—and a stately way of walking. I think he must be one of the teachers one hears of sometimes. There is a woman with him. I cannot see her face under the veil but I think she is beautiful too. He is very anxious to speak to you.

JOHN. He had better come out here. I suppose the house is rather full of the brethren?

MARY MAGDALEN. It is rather. Most of them are on the roof, but even so—

JOHN. Let someone tell him to come here. And thank you.⁶

[They look at each other gravely. She goes in

SAUL. The 'new religion' must find your house useful.

JOHN. I hope they do a little. There is nowhere else in Jerusalem they can very well meet.

SIMON MAGUS *enters with* LUNA

SIMON. The Lord John Bar Zebedee?

JOHN. Yes.

SIMON. I am Simon, called the Magus. You have heard of me perhaps?

JOHN. No. But I am glad to see you.

SAUL. Simon the Magus? The disciple of Dositheus?

SIMON. No such thing. Dositheus was a trifler, a bungler, an ignoramus. He only occupied his place till it was time for me to take it—a precursor, nothing more. Do not let us talk of him. I have come here to ask you about this new gnosis of yours.

JOHN. What gnosis?

SIMON. This secret wisdom. I hear you have, or rather your Master had, great magical powers. It has been going about the town that he revived himself after death. He deigned to leave his body to be crucified, did he not?

JOHN. He deigned to be crucified. I do not think you can say 'left his body'.

SIMON. You are not yourself of the High Grades, of the Perfected, that is clear; or you would not talk so.

JOHN. I am certainly not one of the Perfected, if only that I neglect my manners. May I—the Lord Simon the Magus; the Lord Saul of Tarsus.

[*He looks over at LUNA*]

SIMON. This woman is the Moon of the divine science; her true name is not spoken except in the Rituals, but if you must speak to her, or speak of the Aeons and the Emanations which are conceived in her, you may very well call her Luna. She is nothing in herself but nothing can come into being without her, except the undisturbed Godhead and I who am that which is stable everywhere. That is why I am called the Standing One.

JOHN. I see. And you had some business with me, perhaps?

SIMON. I have only that business which goes on always and everywhere—the coming of men and women into the Perfection. If you are interested in that ...

JOHN. Both Saul and I are interested in that.

SIMON. Then we may talk. Frankly I do not see what you can have to tell me, except perhaps in one particular. I do not wish to speak lightly of your master, but I understand he never performed any specially striking miracles. I mean—nothing but healing the sick, and arousing and abating storms and raising the dead, and so on, but that after his own death he chose to reinvigorate his body—and I have heard he removed *in* his body to some one of the heavenly spheres. Now this is very remarkable—both *how* he did it and *why* he did it. If you had any information about that, I should be glad to exchange with you any poor instruction that I chance to possess.

SAUL [*only half-aside to JOHN*]. Do you observe? It is like the insect-worshippers in the prophet Ezekiel. He absolutely *smells* of blasphemy.

JOHN. He will hear you—

SIMON. I should hear him—if I chose—if he were in his own room and only whispered the word into a mirror. But he isn't of any interest to me. You are.

JOHN. Well, but, my lord Simon, I do not see what I can do. If you have heard so much, you may have heard that we are waiting for—for whatever our Lord promised should happen. We cannot tell you—not even Peter can tell you—*why* he did things. He was himself the law of himself; that is where he was different from us.

SIMON. Were you one of his intimates?

JOHN. He had none.

SIMON. No; that is right, for all such as we are. We can have none. Yet he was betrayed, they tell me, by one of his company, a certain Judas Iscariot. It is what surprises me. Did he not know? I should know, and I should blast the traitor.⁷

SAUL. Obviously, John, your master was a quite inferior sorcerer. I do not think you will be able to tell the Lord Simon the Magus very much. Nor do I think I will wait to hear the argument. If this is the sort of associate you like I congratulate you on finding him. I had not supposed that

John Bar Zebedee could sink to the foulness and folly of a rhetorical necromancer from the East.

THOMAS [*coming out*]. John! John!

JOHN. Hallo!

THOMAS. Our mother sent me to fetch you—so did Peter. The twelve are together except for you; Matthias is with them—and the wind is blowing back into itself at the last corner ...

JOHN. What wind?

THOMAS. A wind is blowing out of the air—it is gentle but it is increasing; it loses itself suddenly; the house cannot be separated into it. It is the Holy Ghost that is coming.

[*He goes* ⁸

SAUL. I shall not wait. I will see you again before I leave Jerusalem.

SIMON. I shall wait.

JOHN [*to SAUL*]. Yes, do. [*To SIMON.*] I will be back when I can.

[*He runs into the house. SAUL goes*

SIMON. They are working their Rites very unceremonially. [*He goes towards the house.*] No; I will not go in; I might

spoil their magic, and I want to understand more of it first. The Holy Ghost? Luna!⁹

LUNA. Lord.

SIMON. I will entrance you here.

LUNA. Lord, must you?

SIMON. Why, are you afraid?

LUNA. I would so much rather we were at home: couldn't we go home first?

SIMON. No, we have no time. I must know what is happening. I can bring the gods down to earth, but I cannot carry earth into the heavens. I cannot yet go up and down the ladder of all things in this body. If this Holy Ghost can help me to do that ... Come; we will not waste time. You are quite safe here; you are the vessel of the knowledge and the instrument of compulsion, the rod of magic over the spiritual world. Come; remember yourself.¹⁰

LUNA. Lord, I am afraid.

SIMON. There is nothing anywhere for you to fear except the uncreated and me. And the uncreated does not know of you, and I am your lord and your lover. Come.

[She stands in the centre. He begins to hypnotize her

LUNA *[suddenly]*. Simon. Simon!

SIMON. Hush! I am not Simon; there is no Simon here. There is only the Standing Pillar, the union of the worlds. I am the magical Adam; you are Eve in magic, the rod of the magic, the shape of the rod and of the woman, the union of the line and the life; you are the union of the seal of King Solomon; you are the vessel of the clear light. Look into the vessel; see what is happening in the light.¹¹

LUNA [*her voice dying away*]. Simon! Simon!

SIMON. Priestess of the terrible art, reflect and see.

LUNA [*her voice changing*]. They are in a crowd in the house; they are hurrying to the roof; they are on the roof, they are on the stairs—within and without; the air they breathe is about them and the flashes within the air.

SIMON. Who are *they*? Where are you seeing them?

LUNA. In the house. They are the companions of the Spirit, voices of the light, dead and living in the light, all the Nazarenes. They are standing up—Simon the Magus, you are not the Standing Pillar.¹²

SIMON. What! What do you mean?

LUNA. You are not the Pillar of the world. Each of them is a pillar, and the wind blows round and round them. There are millions of pillars, in the air within the air. You are not any pillar of them all.

SIMON. I am the lord of your trances; that is enough. I am the

god to you. Examine their magic; tell me all.

LUNA. Every pillar is opening into fire: there are flames playing in the wind, and tongues singing. The pillars are crowned with flame, and there is a light beyond and below them.

SIMON. Be still; reflect and see.

LUNA. The light is within the air and breaking out of the air. The edge of the light, where it mingles with the air, is a company of twisting flames. The flames sit upon their heads. The edge of the light is in the air, and the edge of the air is in the earth; the edge of the earth is in the air, and the edge of the air is in the light. Their bodies are compacted of what is beyond the light: their voices are flame in the mingling of the light and the air. They are speaking.

SIMON. How is the body one with the light?

LUNA. I have gone into the edge of the light. I am going down into it, among the shapes and images. It passes me upwards; the invisible waves of it shake me. I am going down.

SIMON. Speak to the shapes. My magic is stronger than theirs; command them to speak to me in you.

LUNA. I am at the bottom. There is no light visible here. I am walking on the floor of the ocean; there are bodies and heaps of bodies. I can see something moving not far off. It

is the shape of a man lying down; now he is standing up.
He is coming.

SIMON. Who is it you can see?

LUNA. Those who cannot live in this world, the drowned by
the new death. They are creeping and crawling here.
Simon, Simon, I am dying too.

SIMON. Do not die. Return.

LUNA. I cannot rise; someone else is rising. Simon, save
yourself. He is coming up instead of me. Simon, save me!
Do not leave me here at the bottom of the terror beyond
light. Simon, do not leave me alone! Save me, save me!

SIMON. I am the master of the heights and of the depths.
Return.¹³

LUNA. He has gone past me; he is ascending. I cannot stand
upright here. I shall be one of the dead creeping things.¹⁴

The ghost of JUDAS ISCARIOT enters

SIMON. Who is this? [*A silence.*] Answer me: what is this?

LUNA. That is what came from the bottom of the universe.¹⁵

SIMON. I know that. What is it? Answer me.

LUNA. Ask him.

SIMON. I ask you. [*He swings his staff.*] Answer me.

LUNA. Ask *him*.

[*She falls*]

SIMON. So! Very well then, you; if you will not speak to us by any voice but your own, answer in that. Who are you?

JUDAS. I am Iscariot.

SIMON. Why have you come here, Iscariot?

JUDAS. Because you called me.

SIMON. We did not call you. What god has presumed to send you?

JUDAS. I was alone at the bottom of the light when your will came down feeling and fishing for me, and I came up it because I was the only thing down there that could. All I know is that I am an Apostle.¹⁶ An Apostle of Jesus.

SIMON. You are one of the fallen creatures, one of those that crawl about the bottom of the universe; you are the stuff of matter and of chaos kept to itself. We never called you. Go; let Jesus come and speak to us.

JUDAS. I am an Apostle, I tell you. I may be in hell, but even in hell I am an Apostle. I am dead twice over, but I am an Apostle in the second death. He sends me on his errands there. They have filled my chair above, and made another

one for a lord of instruction in my place, but they cannot take away my office in the schemes of death. I am Judas Iscariot, an Apostle of the Lord.

[He begins to shuffle nearer

SIMON. Keep where you are. We know all you dead creatures; obey us. [JUDAS stops.] Why have you come here when we did not call you?

JUDAS. I was the nearest thing to what you did call.¹⁷ You know very little, Simon. You are a great magical worker, but when you put yourself in the way of the light of the heavens you will suffer for it as we do. I call it light; it is not light; it is beyond light. It is what lay on the waters before light was. Do you know how the worlds were made, Simon?

SIMON. Go back; go to your dead; go to your stones in the bottom of the light.

[He swings his staff

JUDAS. No, Simon.

SIMON. Go back.

JUDAS. No, Simon.

[He begins to shuffle nearer¹⁸

SIMON. Go back. I am the Standing Pillar between all the

worlds.

[He swings his staff]

JUDAS. You can command all the dead except me. I am an Apostle. God has shut me out of heaven and I have shut myself out of earth, but Jesus has not taken away my apostolate in the place of the judgment of the dead. I know my own who live at the bottom of the light among the stones. An apostle of Jesus has authority among the stones. The Devil himself cannot speak the name that I can speak because of that authority. He can torment me but he cannot silence me.

SIMON. By the names written on this staff, by the pronounciation of the titles of the Emanations, by the Mother of all the Aeons, go back.

JUDAS *[breathing on the staff]*. When the light began to move it put an end to this. *[SIMON drops his staff.]* We both wanted to use the light, Simon. Now we shall have it.

PETER *and* MARY MAGDALEN *come out*

MARY MAGDALEN *[breathlessly]*. What has happened?

PETER. It is what he said; the Spirit has come. The fires were the tongues that flickered at the edge of the light; we could not have borne the light itself. It came out of the air; the air gave up the light; the brightness of the cloud of light that received him. I saw everything—for one second, and then the fires were merciful and came between.

Jerusalem is drunk with it. Did they call us drunk? He has given them a glory to be drunk on. But we cannot be drunk; the lines of his order are too severe, the death too certain. What did I say to them? I myself do not know.

MARY MAGDALEN. You told them—you told us—what Jesus was.

PETER. What did I say he was?

MARY MAGDALEN [*shuddering*]. I do not know; I cannot remember.

PETER. Nor I, now. I had said, long ago, it was not necessary and should not happen, and in that light I saw that it was necessary and must happen and was happening. I was afraid that he would die and that we should die with him, and in that light I saw us dead there and living there. I said he was lord and Christ—what does that mean? I must say so. I must say so.

MARY MAGDALEN. You spoke in a hundred languages: all the Companions spoke. There was a dance of terrible syllables; only it was not about Mary, and there was no fire on her.

PETER. Do not let us be afraid of the Gospel.

[*He comes down*

MARY MAGDALEN. When the flames rode out of the air and the speaking began, I saw millions of creatures in the air,

listening.

PETER. Heaven and hell were listening to his promulgation of himself, and yet he has charged us with it. We will speak it everywhere, on earth and in heaven and in hell.... Here are two more. Have you come to be baptized? If so, go in and you shall be instructed in the way.

MARY MAGDALEN. Iscariot!

PETER. What!

MARY MAGDALEN. It is—body or soul it is.

PETER. Iscariot!... What are you doing here, Iscariot?

JUDAS. The Lord sent me, Peter. Do you know me still?

PETER. I know you, traitor. Are you dead or alive?

JUDAS. I am dead, apostate. Are you alive or dead?

PETER. I am alive, by the Compassion.

JUDAS. And I am dead by the Justice. What is the difference?

PETER. That. Yes, that only. [*He strikes his breast.*] No; more! For I repented in agony.

JUDAS. Was the agony that left you alive greater than the agony that drove me to death? Was that why you were quick to choose another in my place? Someone who had

never been offered a bribe.

PETER. Traitor, none of us would have taken it.

JUDAS. Apostate, you were not offered it.

MARY MAGDALEN. O go, go! I cannot bear it; even with the heavenly air fresh in my lungs, I cannot bear it. Peter, call him to go. It is horrible; he stands there between death and life, caught in that moment of dying when he became himself. Look! his face is the very passage into death. Send him away to the bottom of the light where he came from.

PETER. Why are you here at all?

JUDAS. I was called.

SIMON. No.

JUDAS. Yes. The acts of necromancy are oblique. Those who raise the body do not always raise the body they mean, and those who love do not always love what they think they love. Those who pierce the light in the universe find a voice moving everywhere in the light, and among the stones too like a worm stinging, singing and stinging. It says 'Friend, why are you here? Friend, why? Why? Why?'

MARY MAGDALEN. Voice in the light of the morning, singing and springing! Yes, it was that. 'Woman, why are you weeping? why? why? Answer for me, answer for me,

my lord! glory of Love, answer!

PETER. He has told us to-day; but the answers cannot live together. Judas Iscariot, I do not denounce you but you have no place here. The function that belonged to you had to be filled, and we have filled it. You would be separate from us and you shall be separate; you went out of communion, and out of communion you shall remain. In the name of Christ, we remit you to the judgment of God; in the name of the Church we assent to your own volition; we lay upon you the compulsion of your own act. Go.¹⁹

[JUDAS *begins to go*

MARY MAGDALEN. Judas!

JUDAS [*with his back to her*]. Mary!

MARY MAGDALEN. Judas, I have been angry with you till now. But if there is a Union, I see now that the only way to it is to obey the Union. If you are doing that, will you do it more, and forgive me for being angry?

JUDAS. I am returning to death; if there is any life anywhere and I find it, I will live it.

[*He goes out*

SIMON. I see that you can control the rebels of your own mystery. You have proved your illumination, I must understand it. What is this Holy Ghost?

PETER [to SIMON]. What do you know of the Holy Ghost?
Did you do this? I thought you came to be baptized.

SIMON. If that is your initiation I am willing, but I hope that I may take the Grades quickly. I am not disposed to wait among the common crowd, and climb slowly up the mystical ladder of your method. I may speak to you as one of the Perfect adepts. You have some power that I have not, just as I have some power that you have not. Can you command the spirits down from heaven, whether the guardians of heaven choose to let them go or not?²⁰

PETER. I do not any longer desire to control heaven. When I desired heaven to remain secluded on the mountain top and when I wished to prevent heaven hurrying on into Jerusalem, heaven refused me both times. I am wiser since heaven has opened about us to-day. I shall try to control it no longer.²¹

SIMON. I can show you how to do so if you choose. I will exchange all my knowledge with you if you will let me know how the body is raised into the heavens. Without my body I am quite free, but it seems your Master has taught you how to be free with your bodies. Will you exchange magic with me?²²

PETER. No, I have no magic to exchange. I can tell you a formula, Simon the Magus, but it will not help you.

SIMON. Tell me then.

PETER. Others he saved; himself he could not save.

SIMON. That is not magic; that is pulpit-stuff, bourgeois-stuff. If the magician cannot save himself he is lost. He must learn the stress on the self by all the labours. No one can save others if he cannot save himself.²³

PETER. Could you have saved yourself from Iscariot? from the body of the damned?

SIMON. Yes. Do you think you have saved me? Sooner or later, in an hour or in a thousand years, I should have controlled him. You must not think about time or pain or death, or anything but power, in the game which we play with the gods. Come, if you are so foolish as not to want more knowledge, if you are content to be a disciple and no master, if you are afraid of your Jesus, I will not offer you such things. Tell me the magic, and I will give you all the money you want.

PETER. Money!

SIMON. Even to the greatest magician a little money is useful. Come; name your sum and tell me the secret.

PETER. Perish your money and you! Do you think I will sell the mysteries for trash? I have told you the formula of the Kingdom, without payment. You will not be able to use it. That is your affair. You are like the creature that was here just now. I see indeed that it was right that he should come when you desired to inquire into what you call our

magic—and it is nothing but the knowledge of Jesus. He sold our Lord for money; you would make money a means to buy the strength and domination of yourself. But money will no more be used so than the soul itself. Money is a medium of exchange, and exchange is a kind of little love and a medium of greater love. It is a way of losing the self. (The lover who buys perfumes for his mistress in the markets of Jerusalem because she likes them is wiser than the greatest magician who secures them because he wills to control the spirits of heaven. Your money shall perish with you and you with it. But those who make it a way—mites of love, talents of love—shall find that the ways are paved with pure gold, their gold refined into stuff for their souls to walk on.) It may be said of any man others he saved; himself he cannot save, but others shall save him, and another shall save him. This is the mystery, Simon the Magus, and you cannot know it: this is the forgiveness of our sins which is the communion of the saints and the resurrection of all bodies and the life of the nature of the everlasting: the word of God and of Christ and of us the Church. Go to your ceremonies; seek your power; pronounce formulas; exercise necromancy. Others you cannot save; yourself you cannot save. Go.²⁴

SIMON. I have given you an opportunity; if you will not take it you must do as you like. Keep your slavery; I will not trouble you again. [*He goes up to LUNA.*] Awake, Luna.

LUNA [*in the voice of JUDAS*]. Those who come down to us at the bottom of the light cannot easily return. The Holy

Ghost does not surrender what has been sent to him. She is not in pain, leave her.²⁵

SIMON. By the name that is yours where the science of the Return is reflected in that which does not go forth, awake!²⁶

LUNA [*in the voice of JUDAS*]. She sleeps in the darkness at peace. Unless the peace commands her, she remains in the peace.²⁷

SIMON. By the one most secret name—

[He leans forward and whispers in her ear

LUNA [*after a violent convulsion, speaking in her own voice*]. It is no use, Simon; you cannot use the name against itself. I can hear you, and see you, and speak to you, but I cannot come to you.²⁸

MARY MAGDALEN. Peter, will you not set her free?

PETER. Am I the judge of the living and the dead? If this man cannot raise her, let her lie.

MARY MAGDALEN. But she will lie there for ever.

PETER. Let her lie there for ever.

MARY MAGDALEN. Must we?

PETER. The Spirit of Christ can free her if it chooses. We

must not lay our power upon her for the benefit of unbelievers.

MARY MAGDALEN. Not even to heal the blind or the lame?

PETER. What?

MARY MAGDALEN. Not even to offer her the peace? The Mother of Love told me that we were dead and our lives hidden; Peter, would not our hidden lives live through her? We are not our own any longer.

PETER. Will you die for her?

MARY MAGDALEN. Yes—if that is the way. [*She goes up to LUNA.*] May I, Peter?

PETER. If you choose.

MARY MAGDALEN. Simon, mightiest of magicians, will you let me speak to the Holy Ghost for her?

SIMON. Do as you choose. If you can reach her whom the Invincible name cannot reach, I will say that there is no magician like you in the world.

[He crouches back

MARY MAGDALEN. There is no magic, Simon; there is only exchange. [*She leans over LUNA.*] Luna, this is the veil that the Mother of Love sewed for me because her Son wished it, and because I was dead. Graveclothes for

graveclothes. Luna, if our Lord wishes you to lie still, then lie on, but if not, then live. [*She throws the veil over LUNA.*] And declare the works of the Lord. And I will die for you or live for you in the Lord.

[*She covers her face*

LUNA. Mary!

MARY MAGDALEN [*dropping her hands*]. Rabboni!

LUNA [*springing up*]. Simon!

[*He rises to catch her*

UNION. Are you free?

LUNA. There was a woman lying by me, and then both of us lived, both of us. [*She sees MARY.*] It is she. Sister!

MARY MAGDALEN. Sister! [*They catch each other's hands; then MARY breaks away and runs to PETER.*] Peter, it was he as he was in the garden and everything was alive. I was never alive before.

PETER. What do you say, Simon?

SIMON. I will not say anything now. There are semblances and apparitions and I will wait till I am sure this is true. But if it is, as I think it is, I will come back and find you out, and you shall teach me whatever you will. Come Luna.

LUNA. Sister. [MARY *and she embrace.*] May I keep this?

MARY MAGDALEN. My veil! O!

LUNA. I will give you a score of others for it!

MARY MAGDALEN. O but that ... No; I mean, yes, of course you may keep it.

[*She looks longingly at it*

SIMON. Come. Farewell; if there is cause for gratitude, I shall pay in full.

PETER. You can never do that. No one can.

SIMON. No? Then I will be content to be a debtor.

[*They go out*

MARY MAGDALEN. O Peter, my veil! She has taken my beautiful veil!

[*She bursts into tears*

PETER. But you offered her your life. Why are you crying when she has only taken your veil?²⁹ I do not understand you in the least!

MARY MAGDALEN. No. Our Mother will understand. I do not mind—no, really, Peter, I do not mind. It was only just at first. Please forgive me.³⁰

PETER. You threw it over her, didn't you?

MARY MAGDALEN. Yes. It is all right indeed. [*She dries her eyes and begins to laugh.*] I wasn't quite ready.

PETER. I shall go in.

[*He goes in to the house. A moment afterwards SAUL rushes in through the orchard*

SAUL. Where is John? Tell me, where is John?

MARY MAGDALEN. I do not know. Why do you want him?

SAUL. To get him away from the mischief that is going on here. I will have no more of it. I cannot get through the streets, they are so thick with people, all crushing here, all talking and shouting and the voices from the house—whose voice is it? Tell me, who is talking?

MARY MAGDALEN. Any of them or all of them. The twelve are always one; indeed I think all of us are one, but it is they chiefly who speak, and of them Peter.

SAUL. I do not know Peter. It shall not go on. I will rouse the Council against them. God of our fathers, why are our people tried thus? There is a single voice or many voices like one voice—it beats down on the street like a very wind; it is breaking the crowd into madness, and some of them are always near it, wild dwellers in the desert, lunatics from inmost Asia; and even the quietest men are aroused and staggering; and all the time the voice goes

on. Were we brought out of the idolatries of Egypt and saved from the Greek Antiochus for this? It is always the same scream—God manifest, God manifest! Hawk-headed gods, beasts carved on walls; or the King Epiphanes, Ptolemy the Saviour, or whatever mad hero chooses to be a little deified; and now these, new tellers of an old tale, but this time flames and crowns of flame and winds and a shrieking tongue—he who died on a cross was a god! a god—that a Jew should say it!³¹

MARY MAGDALEN. He did not—no! no! even Peter dared not say *that*.

SAUL [*taking no notice of her, but standing up as if in prayer*]. God, Almighty, Everlasting, Unchanging; God of Israel, save thy people! We have sinned and done evil, but hear thou in heaven thy dwelling-place and when thou hearest forgive. Thou art the only Exalted One; man cannot come near thee; thou art beyond flesh and blood and name and thought; thou art thyself only and there is none like thee. Thou turnest man to destruction; again thou sayest: *Come again, ye children of men*. Save thy people, save thine inheritance. Draw them from blasphemy and evil imagining, from the persuasions and inventions of sinful souls, from the idolatries of the Gentiles, and from the deceptions of false prophets. Blessed are thou, O God, and there is none like thee or second to thee in all the heavens and the earth. [*He turns to MARY.*] Go and fetch John.

MARY MAGDALEN. John is busy.

SAUL. Speaking or baptizing? Fetch him.

MARY MAGDALEN. I shall not. He will come when he wishes.

SAUL. Listen, you ... vagrant. This sort of thing is not going on. I shall go myself to the Council and they will act. Then presently—tomorrow perhaps—I shall come with a guard and take everyone in this house. Because I have known John, I wish to tell him so; if he chooses to escape first he shall have that chance. Call him.

MARY MAGDALEN. I will not.

SAUL. Do you know what will happen?—What does happen to heretics? It will happen to John and to you. They will take you into a field—perhaps the field where your friend Judas died—and they will tie your feet and make you kneel down: perhaps, if you are very much afraid, you will fall quite flat. Then they will throw great stones on you. Stones. I have heard they did that to Judas too, but he was dead; you—and John—will be alive. The stones will fall on you, and break you, and crush you, and you will lie under them—probably not quite dead—until you do die. You will be in a great deal of pain—until you die. Your arms have been round many men: do you want to have them bruised and cracked and broken and crushed under the stones? Why do you let John bring you into such danger? Why do you bring him? Do you want to know that he is—

MARY MAGDALEN. Stop! Stop!

SAUL. We are Abraham's children: we must be honest.

Almighty God has given us the Law to guard, and though I do not want to hurt anyone, yet as the Lord liveth I will do what I must. Go to John; save him; get him away.

MARY MAGDALEN. O do not be silly! Do you suppose John would come away for me?

SAUL. He is in love with you, I suppose.

MARY MAGDALEN. He is nothing of the sort! Do you know what has happened? Our Lord has happened; the Holy Spirit has happened. Do you suppose that John would betray them to save me?³²

SAUL. He will do it if he loves you. But that is your business. Mine is to stamp this madness out. I shall do it, and I swear that if John is to die I will see that you die first. My God shall not be mocked while I am there to prevent it.

MARY MAGDALEN [*laughing a little hysterically*]. It will be a bad day for your God when you are not.

[SAUL *leaps at her, as THOMAS enters*

THOMAS [*coming between them*]. What on earth is going on here?

MARY MAGDALEN [*recovering herself*]. It is all right, Thomas. This is a friend of John's—and of mine. He is

trying to save us.

THOMAS [*a little coldly*]. I have heard of that kind of saviour before. They are quite common. Caiaphas is a little like it, and even Peter, my dear Mary, has a touch of it.

SAUL. Do not insult the High Priest.

THOMAS. I am not insulting him. I do not myself care for this crucifying and stoning and mutilating people to make them see the light. I think the true light—the light that is He—has a tendency to follow its own habits and not ours. But many great and good men disagree with me.

SAUL. It is proper that I should find an atheist here too!

THOMAS. I am not an atheist. I am, if anything, a limitation. I shall now permit myself to be a limitation. Has this gentleman any immediate business here?

MARY MAGDALEN. He is a friend of John's.

THOMAS. Really? He was about to strangle you on John's behalf?

MARY MAGDALEN. He would not have hurt me.

THOMAS. I shall see that he does not.

SAUL. Of course I should not have hurt her. This is not a private quarrel. The Council will crush you.

THOMAS. Well, if the Council is to crush us, we need not give you the trouble, need we?

SAUL. It is easy to sneer at what you do not believe!

THOMAS. Sneer is a harsh word. It is not so easy to be hot and cold at once, to be devoted and intelligent, to trust God and keep your mind dry. But we do what we can. Please God the Holy Ghost will always let people like me hover between the dogmatists and their victims. Faith is a great danger and a great temptation; one can be more wholly oneself in the name of faith than in the name of anything else.

SAUL. Atheist! Prostitutes and atheists and drunkards—there are the disciples of Jesus.

THOMAS. I keep on repeating that I am *not* an atheist. Say lovers and logicians and the common people, and it sounds quite different. The truth lies between the two; I saw it to-day on the house-top, and why you called our lord a glutton and a wine-bibber. It is only a dead faith that is abusive.

SAUL. If I had a sword, I think I would kill you here and now.

THOMAS. O no, no. I have kept up my practice and I am probably better at the sword than you are. [*He unbelts his own.*] But I should not kill you, or even hurt you, unless you insisted on it; not before a lady, and not with any idea of being useful to the Holy Ghost. I could find it in my

heart to love a little sword-play now, but I suppose it would not do. Sa ha, sa ha, for the scepticism of the Holy Ghost! Sa ha, sa ha, for the glorious intelligence of Love!

[He makes play with his sheathed sword, driving SAUL back

SAUL. Put it down, you fool!

THOMAS. Protector of God, champion of faith, must the Holy Ghost be grateful to you for your defence of him?

SAUL. You will suffer for this!

THOMAS. I suspect your depth of passion; you may be one of us yet. Ambivalency and so on. When you are a disciple of Jesus—

SAUL. I a disciple!

THOMAS.—come to me, and say 'You were right, Thomas', as I know now that you are right. Then we will praise each other in the exchanges of heaven, and feed on each other in the substitutions of heaven. But I cannot do all the work alone. Scepticism is the need of faith, and faith of scepticism. Blessed and praised and hallowed be the Holy Ghost who is the entire compensation for himself! Meanwhile, this path will bring us to a gate in the wall. Sa ha!

[He forces him out

MARY MAGDALEN. O Thomas...! The poor Saul! He has

turned his back and is walking off. [*She begins to laugh.*]
How dignified the back of faith looks!

JOHN [*coming in*]. Mary!³³

MARY MAGDALEN [*turning*]. John! [*They look at each other gravely.*] Have you been looking for me?

JOHN. No. But it is wonderful to see you.

MARY MAGDALEN. John ... it is so astonishing that you should be John.

JOHN. Not so astonishing as that you should be Mary.

MARY MAGDALEN. No?

JOHN. Yes then. I suppose it must be. We have known each other all this time; we have been together all this time; and it is only today that I have seen you—only since the light was in you and you in the light.

MARY MAGDALEN. He has exchanged us with each other. I have begun to live in him through you ever since that morning in the garden. After he had ... gone you were the first thing I saw.

JOHN. I had been very quick to run there, but you were there already. You were the first thing I saw after I had come out of the grave. Everything began to grow again, and everything was new. But you were the first.

MARY MAGDALEN. Do not say that. I am afraid of it. In the old days I always wanted to be the first. I am frightened of wanting it again.

JOHN. That is what we all wanted—to be the first. James and I asked for it and the Companions argued about it: and yet even then I think we knew it was foolish. In there—to-day—was there any first? I love you, but yet I do not love you at all.

MARY MAGDALEN. I have loved you ever since he vanished in the garden, and then—how long was it?—I saw you.

JOHN. I cannot find any other word. If we do not call this love, we must call it something that is more love than love. But is very unlike all we mean by love.

MARY MAGDALEN. Love me like *that*! Oh, today I saw you when It came—among all the living creatures that were in the air. I all but saw him, but I did not; only I think I saw you instead. He will have it so.

JOHN. We are the witness to each other of the passage into life. Your face is the vision of the passage into life. It is unbelievable, but it is so. Thomas would understand.

MARY MAGDALEN. Thomas understands a great deal.

JOHN. Must I love everyone like this? And find eternity?

MARY MAGDALEN. Perhaps. We will try. But we shall have

been the first to each other—yes? It will be lovely to have been the first.

JOHN. Adorable glory, when it comes to eternity, I do not see how you can be even that. There will be no first or second there.

MARY MAGDALEN. We shall know it happened so once—even in eternity, and we shall be a little different. I shall be loved as myself, shall I not? You will love other people for themselves, the selves that the light loves. But you will have to love me for myself—even then.

JOHN. Philosophically it is difficult to define selves in eternity. And, most adorable wonder, there is certainly no 'then' in eternity.

MARY MAGDALEN. No? I shall never understand your ... metaphysics? There is a 'then' in everything I do understand. But I too saw something in the light and I know that all the 'thens' are happy.

JOHN. Are you sure of that?

MARY MAGDALEN. Of course. Nothing can alter it—not even if they are unhappy. Is it He that is this?

JOHN. It is this that is He. He lights everyone that comes into the world. Did they know it? The Holy Ghost has taught us. Mary, Mary, make me love.

MARY MAGDALEN. Love whom?

JOHN. Love. Is this what Peter meant when he quoted Joel, about the young men seeing visions? You are the vision, the vision of the city of God. You are to be loved because He loves you—and everyone is to be loved because He loves them. But I cannot do that yet. Mary, do you know how difficult it will be?

MARY MAGDALEN. Oh, John, even now, even in Him, even with you, I am frightened of it. It is all very well for you, dearest John; you do at least understand what you mean, but I—if it were not that His Glory is in you now, I do not think I could bear it. You will be happy because you are loving me for God's sake. But I—Oh, I—still do not want to be loved for God's sake.

JOHN. No?

MARY MAGDALEN. No. But it is right; you must do it, and know it, and teach it. And I will do what I can. And you must never alter for me: you must keep me to it always. It is the only way of love.

JOHN. Mary, there are moments when I suspect that you are being what I am talking about. I can understand that I must love only because God loves, but you love as God loves. You love the plain simple thing that is there. Oh Augustitude pray for me.

MARY MAGDALEN. Dearest Apostle, pray for me. Look ...

MARY comes in

JOHN. Madonna!

[They recede from her

MARY. Perseverant, perseverant, is the Nature of God. The heavens are doubled and reflect each other; blessed are they who know it, blessed who see the mark of the other, who love the other, who rejoice in the other. Blessed is each in another. I have seen Iscariot.

JOHN. Iscariot, Madonna!

MARY MAGDALEN. Hush: I will tell you presently.

MARY. I saw him among the trees, an apparition of the dead among growths of the living. I came down from the roof and he was moving among the trees of the orchard. He came to my lord along the path of a garden among the fires of the torches in the moon, and I came to him at the will of my lord among the fires of my lord in the light of the Spirit. At the moment when he obeyed the voice of the Companions and of the Church which is more than the Companions—at that moment my lord exposed us to each other—

JOHN. He obeyed?

MARY MAGDALEN. He did obey!

MARY. He repented and threw away the silver; he chose as he could among the impossibles. You, children, can you love?³⁴

MARY MAGDALEN. Yes, mother.

JOHN [simultaneously]. Yes, madonna.

MARY. Be happy. Judas shall be like you; I saw him too in the way of the Spirit. My lord's mercy is more almost than we can bear, but Judas shall bear it. He shall love another; he shall love Matthias.

JOHN [*as it breaks on him*]. Heavenly richness!

MARY. Judas has betrayed my Son and his own place; very well—his place shall be given to Matthias. Matthias shall be a substitute for Judas; very well,—but Judas shall be glad of substitution and love it, and in degree as he loves it where can he be but in the substitution? Miracle of healing! His exclusion shall become his inclusion. Blessed and blessed and blessed for ever be the mystery of the life of my lord. I have spoken to Iscariot; now I have nothing more to do.³⁵

JOHN. Nothing more?

MARY MAGDALEN. Nothing? O mother!

[*They recede further*

MARY. Nothing. Our lord the Spirit secluded himself till to-day in this flesh, but now he has given himself in a thousand places, and there is, I think, no need of me here. The glory has issued out of Themselves—

JOHN. Themselves?

MARY. Themselves who are He; and you shall go out with it—where you choose, or where you are commanded. But I shall go inward, to be secluded in the kingdom. Spirit outward through flesh and flesh inward through spirit ... Call Peter.³⁶

[MARY MAGDALEN *runs into the house*

JOHN. Must I lose my charge, madonna?

MARY. If I were to be of much use to you, John, I would stay—if my Son permitted. But I should not be—not now.

JOHN. I guessed it to-day—when I saw all the tongues of fire and not one on you. I knew then that the light had always been intertwined with your body, but we had not seen it; and that the wind of the Spirit had been in your voice, but we had never heard it. Nor could we. And now when we can, when we can see and hear, you will go!

MARY [*smiling at him*]. Suffer it be so now, for thus—

JOHN [*smiling back*].—it becomes us to fulfil all righteousness. It does.

MARY. Besides, you see it elsewhere, do you not? You may have to teach other people to see it—or to reassure them that they do see it.³⁷

PETER *comes in*

PETER. Lady, you sent for me?

MARY. Yes, Peter. I am dying.

PETER. Dying! But, lady, you must not ...

MARY. Yes, Peter. Were you going to tell me that I must not die?

PETER [*conquering his intention*]. No. But—what will the Companions of your Son do? and the whole Church?

MARY. The Companions will direct the Church and each other. Do not forget that they are all directed in and through each other. And if there is anything that they cannot direct, let them be humble about it—and especially, dear Peter, you yourself.

PETER. Yes. I am a common man, mother. I am not a saint like John nor an intellectual like Thomas ...

MARY. No. I do not see that that is anything to be proud of, or particularly pleased about—except in God.

PETER. Proud! pleased!

MARY. Dear Peter, you must try and endure the saints and the intellectuals. It would never do for the Church to be left to them, and my Son has directed them to their proper place.³⁸ But do not you forget their place. You and all the common men will, no doubt, praise them; but see that you do not pervert them. You are the better image of all the

relationships, but I would not have you know it too much.

THOMAS *returns*; JOHN *checks him*

PETER. I will not.

MARY. Your children will despise Thomas and admire John and be as far from either as from you. The City can only be built on all the foundations. Thomas!

THOMAS. Lady!

[He goes to her

MARY. You and I have been twins in the Spirit, Thomas. I asked a question of the archangel, and you would not believe for the mere noise of many voices. It is true you should have understood my Son better, but the Companions are not in a position to blame you for that. Without you there can be no peace in the Church, nor any proper scope of goodwill. I leave you my question: How shall these things be? That is your vocation: be blessed.

THOMAS. I am the least of your servants, lordliness.

MARY. I do not know where you will go, when the Companions begin their journeys. India, perhaps—you will have enough work there, my brother in scepticism. But the school of your followers will have even harder work within the Church. You and John. Love each other; love each other: when Thomas and John are divided, the Church wanders.

JOHN. Never, Thomas; wherever we go.

THOMAS. Never, John, though we are separated.

MARY. You and you. [*To JOHN and MARY MAGDALEN.*]
You and Mary. [*To THOMAS.*] You and Peter. Peter and
I. All of us³⁹ and He.

PETER. Tell us more of that which came to us on the roof.

MARY. It was that which lay first on the waters and moved,
and there was light; and lay entwined in my body and
moved, and there was my son; and lay about you, the
Companions, and moved and there was the Church. Joyful
and sorrowful and glorious are the children of His love.
Light on the waters, light in the body, light in the Church.
O my Son is waiting; he is waiting. I am keeping him too
long. I must go in.

MARY MAGDALEN. Mother!

MARY. Dearest! Where is your veil?

MARY MAGDALEN. You know. You know how it had to be
given to the woman who was the companion of Simon the
Magus; and she has it.

MARY. Yes. My lord never leaves anything with us for very
long,—and yet for ever. Well ... John must buy you
another before you go.

PETER. But where shall we go?

MARY. Rome, I think, for you, Peter. There is something about both Rome and you that would suit each other. But for the rest—do I know? Only let each keep his own witness; no one can witness for another till the great substitutions are known. It was said that the light is the calling, and the calling is the light; there is one light and many callings. Go, go!

PETER. We will go.

MARY. Babylon and Bactria and the islands of Thule; to the little men in the jungles and to the myths beyond the sources of the Nile; to all the pulses of all the peoples. I must go: he is waiting. Come with me as far as my Lord allows.

JOHN. Mother of our Lord, leave a blessing to the world.

MARY. Son of my body, have mercy upon the body of the world.

ALL THE COMPANIONS. Alleluia!

MARY. Let us go. [*MARY and JOHN support her.*] Blessed be God ...

ALL THE COMPANIONS [*murmuring*]. Blessed be God.

MARY. ... to whom be ascribed, as is most justly due—

[*Her voice stops suddenly. JOHN looks at her and looks up at PETER*

PETER AND ALL. All might, majesty, dominion, and power,
now and for evermore.



Note:

This play was the author's last. He made revisions after the first performance, adding changes in pencil in the margins of the playscript. The text above renders this revised version. The footnotes below present the original version.

FOOTNOTES:

[1] MARY MAGDALEN. No. I do not know what I do want. I do not know what is happening.

[2] MARY. No. I told you that you were very young in this new life. I have had thirty-three years of it. [*breaking out*]—blessed for ever and ever and ever be He who made it.

[3] JOHN. O but such a lot more. You are behind-hand, Saul; it comes of living in provincial centres like Tarsus and Antioch. Now here in Jerusalem things *happen*. [*Thoughtfully.*] You have no idea how much *has* happened.

[4] JOHN. O, Mary! O yes, certainly. At least, she is alive now; more alive than I am—you can see that—but ...

[5] SAUL. I do not think you *that* or I should not be appealing to you now. I say again—you and I should have some honour and a little loyalty. You are a Jew as well as I am, even if you know more of the Greek philosophers. And if *they* attract you, they are in danger too. It is not only the Religion that is being attacked; it is Reason too—by all these filthy new notions coming in out of Syria. We ought to recollect ourselves and not go mad over our private emotions. Civilization is in very great danger. Religion itself is being attacked. Jesus may or may not have been a good man in himself. I was not here during the trial and I won't pretend to decide. But even if you think the Council acted hastily—or I will go further, I will say even if you think they let themselves be influenced by a kind of mob hysteria and acted as they should not—still, I beg you to consider that the High Priest himself is not Judah and the grand tradition of the Law. The covenant of Abraham is our pledge—nothing less. Jesus may have been the best of men; he may not have meant to set himself against the God of our fathers; but at best he must have been rash, at worst—leave it. We are called by our God to stand by him—we the true Israel, the faithful remnant, the sons of those who came out of Egypt. John, you are a master, you can be so great an energy; do forget all this irrelevance. Did Jesus ever say anything that is not said better in the prophets? Did he teach anything that is not in Isaiah and Ezekiel and Micah? Forget him; forget all this riff-raff: help me, help us, help our God!

[6] JOHN. Let someone tell him to come here. And thank you.

MARY MAGDALEN. Dear John! (*She goes in*)

[7] SIMON. No; that is right, for all such as we are. We can have none. Yet he was betrayed, they tell me, by one of his company. It is what surprises me. Did he not know? I should know, and I should blast the traitor.

[8] THOMAS. A wind is blowing out of the air—it is gentle but it is increasing; it loses itself suddenly; the house cannot be separated into it. Come.

He goes

JOHN. You will excuse me, gentlemen?

[9] SIMON. They are working their Rites very unceremonially. [*He goes towards the house.*] No; I will not go in; I might spoil their magic,

and I want to understand more of it first. Luna!

[10] SIMON. ... earth into the heavens. I cannot yet go up and down the ladder of all things in this body. If it is true that the Nazarene has done so—Come; we will not waste time. You are quite safe here; you are the vessel of the knowledge and the instrument of compulsion, the rod of magic over the spiritual world. Come; remember yourself.

[11] SIMON. ... Look into the vessel and into the light; see what is happening in the light.

[12] LUNA. In the house. They are the companions of anguish, voices of the light,...

[13] SIMON. Return.

[14] LUNA. He has gone past me; he is ascending. I cannot stand upright here. I shall be one of the dead creeping things. Simon, remember me. Be careful: he is coming for you.

The ghost of JUDAS ISCARIOT enters

SIMON. Who is this? [*A silence.*] Answer me: what is this?

[15] LUNA. That is what came from the bottom of the light.

[16] JUDAS. I was alone at the bottom of the light when your will came down feeling and fishing for me, and I came up it because I was the only thing down there that could. If the lights had chosen to go up it I could have stopped there among the stones, where I crawl about, in and out among the stones since they threw them down on me. I cannot find anything among the stones, and I am hurt in the middle where I fell. Sometimes I can almost stand but the pain pulls me down or a stone falls on me suddenly and strikes me down. All I know is that I am an Apostle.

SIMON. Whose Apostle?

[17] SIMON. We did not call anyone. We laid our will upon the Mother of Knowledge to tell us what things we wished to know. Why do you come without calling?

[18]

[He begins to shuffle nearer

SIMON. By the names written on this staff, by the pronunciation of the titles of the Emanations, by the Mother of all the Aeons, by the shape of the woman who is the vessel of the Mother, go back.

JUDAS. You can command all the dead except me. I am an Apostle. God has shut me out of heaven and I have shut myself out of earth, but Jesus has not taken away my apostolate in the place of the judgment of the dead. When the light began to move all mankind died, as when the light first moved all mankind lived. Now there are the dead who can live in the light and the dead who cannot live in the light. Every man and woman on earth is one or the other. No one knows which. Jesus knows his own who live in the light, and I know my own who live at the bottom of the light among the stones. That is where you belong and I have come to take you there, Simon. An apostle of Jesus has authority among the stones. The Devil himself cannot speak the name that I can speak because of that authority. He can torment me but he cannot silence me.

SIMON. Get back. I am the Standing Pillar between all the worlds.

[He swings his staff

JUDAS [*breathing on the staff*]. When the light began to move it put an end to this. [SIMON *drops his staff*.] We both wanted to use the light, Simon. Now we shall have it.

PETER *and* MARY MAGDALEN *come out*

[19] PETER. ... the compulsion of your own act. Go.

JUDAS. Not without this man.

SIMON. Without me or any. Are you hoping to control us, creature of the depths? Your own companions cast you off. Go, and since you came to us without calling be very sure that in future, when we call you, you shall come.

JUDAS. We shall see that in the future. I will not struggle against the Companions now, but you do not know the Companions and you shall find your own end.

MARY MAGDALEN. Judas!

JUDAS [*with his back to her*]. Mary!

MARY MAGDALEN. Judas, I have been angry with you till now. But if there is a Union, I see now that the only way to it is to obey the Union. If you are doing that, will you do it more, and forgive me for being angry?

JUDAS. I am returning to death; if there is any life anywhere and I find it, I will live it. [*He goes out*

PETER [*to SIMON*]. Did you do this? I thought you came to be baptized.

[20] SIMON. If that is your initiation I am willing, but I hope that I may take the Grades quickly. I am not disposed to wait among the common crowd, and climb slowly up the mystical ladder of your method. I may speak to you as one of the Perfect adepts. You have some power that I have not, just as I have some power that you have not. You can drive the dead back to their holes. I thought I could do so, but it seems that there are some I cannot easily reach. Can you command the spirits down from heaven, whether the guardians of heaven choose to let them go or not?

[21] PETER. I do not any longer desire to control heaven. When I desired heaven to remain secluded on the mountain top and when I wished to prevent heaven hurrying on into Jerusalem, heaven refused me both times. I am wiser since heaven has opened about us today. I shall try to control it no longer.

[22] SIMON. I can show you how to do that if you choose. Can you make a body out of air and earth and fire and water, and make a boy of it? No? Can you kill that boy in the Ritual of the Offering of the Blood, and send its spirit back to the place of futurity? No? Can you summon it again from heaven, and make it speak to you of what it has seen there? No? I can do all that.

PETER. What is it to me what you can do?

SIMON. I will exchange all this knowledge with you if you will let me know how the body is raised into the heavens. Without my body I am quite free, but it seems your Master has taught you how to be free

with your bodies. Will you exchange magic with me?

PETER. No, I have no magic to exchange. I can tell you a formula, Simon the Magus, but it will not help you.

SIMON. Tell me then.

PETER. Others he saved; himself he could not save.

[23] SIMON. That is not magic; that is pulpit-stuff, bourgeois-stuff. If the magician cannot save himself he is lost. He must learn the stress on the self by all the labours, by the sharpening of the knife, by the cutting and polishing of the rod, by the making of the sheepskin, the purifying the oil for the lamps, the learning of the Rites. Then the making the circle, the inscription of names, the dedication of the Ritual and the concentration of the purpose along the rod towards the spirit of the proper sphere: in all this he must be himself, utterly and wholly himself. No one can save others if he cannot save himself.

[24] PETER. Perish your money and you! Do you think I will sell the mysteries for trash? I have told you the formula of the Kingdom, without payment. You will not be able to use it. That is your affair. You say that you have killed others for your profit; we know now that he decreed his own death for our profit. You are like ...

[25] LUNA [*in the voice of JUDAS*]. Those who come down to us at the bottom of the light can not easily return. The Holy Ghost does not surrender what has been sent to him. She is not in pain; she is asleep among the stones at the bottom of the sea. Leave her.

[26] SIMON. By the seal of Solomon, awake! By the secret names of knowledge, return! By the name that is yours where the science of the Return is reflected in that which does not go forth, awake!

[27] LUNA [*in the voice of JUDAS*]. You sent her into the light when she could not bear the light, and the light was kind and hid itself and remained apart, and she sleeps in the darkness at peace. Unless the peace commands her she remains in the peace.

SIMON. By the one most secret name—

[He leans forward and whispers in her ear]

[28] LUNA [*after a violent convulsion, and speaking in her own voice*]. It

is no use, Simon; you cannot use the name against itself. I can hear you and see you and speak to you, but I cannot come to you. You were a kind master. Find a place for me on earth and let me lie there as my soul must lie here.

[29] MARY MAGDALEN [*stamping her foot*]. O my life! What nonsense you talk, Peter, prince of the apostles though you are! And John has hardly seen me in it.

[30] MARY MAGDALEN. No. Our Mother will understand. I think our Lord is very severe. I do not mind—no, really, Peter, I do not mind. It was only just at first. Please forgive me.

[31] SAUL. I do not know Peter. It shall not go on. I will rouse the Council against them, but I will tell John first. God of our fathers, why are our people tried thus? There is a single voice or many voices like one voice—it beats down on the street like a fuming wind;...

[32] MARY MAGDALEN. He is nothing of the sort! Do you know what has happened? Our Lord has happened; the Holy Spirit has happened. Do you suppose that John would betray them to save me? Saul, you may be a Rabbi and a learned man, but you do not know what a woman means to a man, and you never will. It is our worst grief and our very great joy. We should be completely happy if they were different, except that if they were different there would be nothing for us to love. John come away for me indeed!

[33]
The original version, given in the following footnotes, begins with the entrance of JOHN and continues to the entrance of MARY.

JOHN [*coming in*]. Mary!

MARY MAGDALEN [*turning*]. John!

JOHN. How lovely to see you again!

MARY MAGDALEN. Have you missed me?

JOHN. No. But that makes it all the lovelier. Everything has turned over. We are all changed.

MARY MAGDALEN. You and I?

JOHN. A little. I never knew before how much I lived from you.

MARY MAGDALEN. I knew how I lived from you—ever since he went away. I knew it when I saw you in the light, among the creatures that were in the air; I almost saw him behind you, but you and he were exchanging yourselves; you were his substitute. O I see the words happening, but I cannot use them; I am a fool at words. John ... it is so astonishing that you should be John.

JOHN. Not so astonishing as that you should be Mary.

MARY MAGDALEN. No?

JOHN. Yes then. I suppose it must be. I am in you and out of you at once. In the light one can be that, because one is nothing but in the light. I think I do not love you at all.

MARY MAGDALEN. I do love you. I must.

JOHN. Yet I cannot find any other word for it. If this is not love then there is something that is more love than love.

MARY MAGDALEN. John, my sweet! Love me like that.

JOHN. It happened when the fires took us. It is the fire in me that loves you, and I because it drives me. It is unbelievable but it is so. Thomas would understand. Must I love everyone like that? and find eternity?

MARY MAGDALEN. Perhaps. But I shall have been the first—yes? It will be lovely to have been the first.

JOHN. Adorable glory, when it comes to eternity, I do not see how you can be even that. There will be no first or second there.

MARY MAGDALEN. I shall know it happened so once—even in eternity. And I shall still be a little different. I shall be loved as myself, shall I not? You will love other people for themselves, the selves that the light loves. But you will have to love me for myself—even then.

JOHN. Philosophically it is difficult to define selves in eternity. And, most adorable wonder, there is certainly no 'then' in eternity.

MARY MAGDALEN. No? I shall never understand your ... metaphysics, do you call them? There is a 'then' in everything I do understand. But I too saw something in the light, and I knew that all the thens were

happy.

JOHN. Are you sure of that?

MARY MAGDALEN. Of course. Nothing can alter it—not even if they are unhappy. Is it he that is this?

JOHN. It is this that is he. He must have come to so many like this. Did they know it? The Holy Ghost has taught us. Mary, Mary, make me love.

MARY MAGDALEN. Love whom?

JOHN. Love. Is this what Peter meant when he quoted Joel, about the young men seeing visions? You are the vision, the vision of the City of God. You are to be loved because he loves you—and everyone is to be loved because he loves them. But I cannot do that yet. Mary, do you know how difficult it will be? It is much easier to love you because I love you.

MARY MAGDALEN. It would be much more delightful, I think—for a long time anyhow, perhaps for all our lives. It is all very well for you, dearest John; you do at least understand what you mean, but I—if it were not that you are so like him now I do not think I could bear it. You will be happy because you are loving me for God's sake. But I—I do not altogether want to be loved for God's sake.

JOHN. No?

MARY MAGDALEN. No. But I think it is right for you: to do it that way, and to know it, and to teach it. And I will do what I can. And you must never alter for me.

JOHN. Mary, there are moments when I suspect that you are being what I am talking about. I can see that I must love only because God loves; but you love as God loves. You love the plain simple thing that is there. O Augustitude, pray for me.

MARY MAGDALEN. Dearest, pray for me. Look, the Mother of Love is coming.

MARY comes in

[34] MARY. He repented and threw away the silver; he chose as he could

among the impossibles; and my Son tore him from the tree he was to hang on, and he chose again as he fell, and he obeyed Peter. He had yearned to choose another way; my lord brought him into the way of another. You, children, can you love?

[35] MARY. They shall run a double course in each other for ever. They shall burn opposite Peter like a double star. Judas has betrayed my Son and his own place; very well—his place shall be given to Matthias. Matthias shall be a substitute for Judas; very well—but Judas shall be glad of substitution and love it, and in degree as he loves it where can he be but in the substitution? Miracle of healing! His exclusion shall become his inclusion; he shall be carried back again by the wind that drove him away. Neither shall be secure without the other; the rest of the Companions shall see the glowing mystery of the Spirit. Blessed and blessed and blessed for ever be the mystery of the life of my lord. I have spoken to Iscariot; now I have nothing more to do.

[36] MARY. Themselves who are He; and you shall go out with it—where you choose, or where you are commanded. But I shall go inward, to be secluded in the kingdom. Spirit outward through flesh and flesh inward through spirit—double courses of heaven, blessed in all the universes.... Call Peter.

[37] MARY. Besides you see it elsewhere, do you not? You may have to teach other people to see it—or to reassure them that they do see it; you have much to do—you and Mary.

[38] MARY. Dear Peter, you must try and endure the saints and the intellectuals. It would never do for the Church to be left to them, and my Son has put them in their place. But do not forget their place. You and all the common men....

[39] MARY. You and you. [To JOHN and MARY MAGDALEN.] You and Mary. [To THOMAS.] You and Peter. Peter and I. All of us. O he is waiting; he is waiting. I am keeping him too long. I must go in.

[The end of *Terror of Light* by Charles Williams]