

THE YEAR GOD LEARNED ENGLISH
A NOVELLA

A Senior Thesis
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A Novella

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THE YEAR GOD LEARNED ENGLISH: A NOVELLA. Rachel Baker (James Hannah), English, Texas A&M University.

King Henry VIII dissolved every monastery and convent in England between 1535 and 1539. William Tyndale published the first English translation of the Bible in 1534. In the midst of political maneuvering around theological questions, lay women, nuns, had to make decisions concerning similar questions while attempting to survive day-to-day. What options did nuns of a dissolved convent have? How did the publication of translations of the Bible into the vernacular affect personal religious devotion, personal beliefs, and the English Church? The Year God Learned English give one fictional account to answer these questions. Petronilla and Juliana, nuns traveling from a recently dissolved convent to a larger convent in 1536, encounter radical new views and the Tyndale New Testament. Their response determines their future security and well-being.

The Year God Learned English

by Rachel Baker

The convent, its stones green from moisture and age, stood out from its surroundings, a sun among the stars. A wall of protection surrounded the building and enclosed an unusually large tract of land, causing the locals to think the inhabitants more numerous than they were. A barn which housed their animals, a garden in which they grew their vegetables and herbs, a school building, nearest the front gate, to which neighboring girls flocked for the only education permitted them, and numerous paths connecting these with the great house were inside the walls of refuge. The great house perched directly in front of the gates toward the back of the grounds, a small narrow path leading straight to the front door. This building housed the nuns' quarters, dining hall, prioress' suite, receiving room, and chapel.

Inside the Great House few words were spoken and many prayers were lifted to the Lord on behalf of their country, their king, and, formerly, the pope. Since King Henry VIII's break from papal authority two years ago, the nuns had ceased praying for the pope and two factions had emerged in the previously unified cloister.

Petronilla, who found herself supporting the traditional view in the country-wide argument, had been on her way to mass when the prioress pulled her aside. The prioress broke silence to say, "Petronilla, my daughter, it is necessary for one of our own to visit her family. Your position will be one of companion and sister. You will leave on Wednesday with Juliana. Her family will then accompany you to Amesbury."

As the prioress walked away from her, Petronilla nodded her assent then immediately wondered why they would need to travel to Amesbury. Continuing to mass, Petronilla searched her mind to determine who the sister was she would accompany. Although her vow to God was

fifteen years old and she had lived among the sisters for as many years, she could not recall this sister's face. Only during school hours and portions of the mass did Petronilla speak aloud. At other times she observed the old rule of absolute silence and tried to observe the rule of continuous communication with her Lord. Resolving to put the matter out of her mind, Petronilla kneeled inside the chapel and waited for the priest to begin.

Following the service, the women were dismissed to reassemble in the dining hall although the time dictated meditation and prayer, not dinner or supper. A whisper of surprise rose from those who observed the 'new rule', the rule which came from the reformers and did not require absolute silence. Petronilla simply followed others as the lines snaked out of the chapel down the narrow hall to the dining room.

Not sure whether to sit at the tables or to stand behind their chairs, the file of women stood along the walls of the room, glancing nervously toward the front of the room. As the prioress entered the room, she embraced each of the women. After she had greeted each woman she motioned for the door to be shut. Facing the thirty-two women who had been her charges and thinking about the dozen others who had rested in the Lord during her forty-year stay at the convent, the prioress addressed the nuns. "The Lord has seen fit to move our cloister to Amesbury. We shall leave tomorrow. Each woman is responsible to carry a prayer book, hymnal, blanket, and change of undergarments along with the clothes she is wearing. In this way, all the belongings of the convent will be transferred to Amesbury. The prioress there has sent us this greeting."

The prioress walked the length of the hall and opened the door, ushering in a young priest, sent from Amesbury to accompany the nuns. He cleared his throat and began to speak. He spoke of the prioress of Amesbury's great joy in receiving her sisters from Essex. He spoke of the Lord's provision that they would be traveling before the first freeze of the winter. He spoke of

wagons which would arrive Wednesday. Then he read the proclamation which King Henry VIII had drafted and Parliament had signed which legalized the confiscation of monastic lands earning less than £200 a year.

Before the priest had finished, nuns began to kneel and pray silently, tears streaming down their faces. Some women used their veils to wipe the tears from their eyes. The prioress joined the kneeling sisters and prayers were said for safe travel, their town, and the king. The sisters prayed all night and classes at the school were canceled the next day, for it was Monday that they heard the news.

That night Petronilla lay on the straw mat. She pulled the blanket tighter around her ever cooling body and listened to her sister sleep. Regular intervals of breath and release could not coax Petronilla to sleep that night. First she thought of all her students, young girls whose world was opening around them due to the education they received three times a week at the convent. Petronilla saw all six of her students, eyes bright with enthusiasm. Suddenly a large door swung shut in their faces. Try as she might, Petronilla could not stop the swing of the door. Momentarily she wondered whether it was her students or herself who was trapped by the great swinging door.

Petronilla already knew she would find no rest or comfort but rolled to her side anyway, searching vainly for a soft spot on the straw mat, a nun's bed. Her shoulder and hip bones felt the full resistance of the stone floor beneath the straw mat. With a sigh, Petronilla returned to her back and started toward the ceiling through the darkness, hoping Confession would be available as usual the next day.

Tuesday passed quickly for Juliana. Determined not to lose the high quality seeds she had worked hard to generate from the previous year's produce, Juliana sorted through the seed stored

for the upcoming year. She was careful to pick only the healthiest seeds and, having removed her nun's veil, stored them temporarily in the large white cloth. Absorbed in her task, Juliana worked all day in the loft of the barn and did not participate in the day of prayer the prioress had ordered for the nuns.

While she worked and sorted, Juliana hummed to herself. She thought of her sister and how she would look six years later. Juliana's hair, a murky brown color, hung limply in her view. Remembering the luster of her hair before joining the convent, Juliana quickly moved her thoughts to another subject as she brushed her hair over her shoulder. Juliana thought about Petronilla and wondered at the prioress' choice of her traveling companion.

Petronilla held traditional views and Juliana considered her a rival of progress. She watched Petronilla walk from the house to the school and back each day. Petronilla followed the same path, moving her head from left to right but never acknowledging the presence of her sisters. Neither Juliana or her fellow sisters working outside had ever spoken to Petronilla and many of the outside sisters spoke of Petronilla as the Phantom Sister. As the factions formed in the convent, Petronilla and the sisters who observed the rule of silence were at a distinct disadvantage because they had no bond with which they were able to organize.

Neither faction distressed at not praying for the pope anymore, as the pontiff lived far away and rarely touched their lives. But the break from Rome had started many reforms, not all of which London and the king had introduced. Juliana gladly embraced the new openness and talked freely outside the walls of the great house with her sisters who tended the animals. Those sisters whose occupations kept them inside, however, did not hold the new views of free speech and kept silence reigning in the great house from day to day, the only exception being Mass.

On Wednesday morning all thirty-two nuns of the convent, the prioress, the priest who performed the mass, and the young priest from Amesbury stood outside the great house, bundles in hand, waiting for the arrival of the wagons from Amesbury. After Mass that morning the prioress had reflected on the graciousness of God in providing a larger convent to which they would readily be received. Standing in the stiff breeze an hour later, the sisters viewed their home for the last time, each immersed in thoughts and memories.

The sound of the horses and uneven lurches of the wagon wheels became louder and louder until the entire company could hear the approach. Petronilla and Juliana helped others climb into the wagons, lifting up each bundle into waiting hands. Before the sun had fully risen in the sky, the prioress whispered something to the driver of the first wagon and they slowly rolled forward, gaining momentum and speed.

Petronilla and Juliana followed behind the wagons in the dust the wheels and breeze had resurrected from the ground. Petronilla gazed at the school building, Juliana at the garden plot, until they would have had to strain their necks to keep them in view. The wagons passed through the gates and turned toward the North. Petronilla and Juliana passed through the gates and headed west. Soon the sound of the wagons could not be heard any longer.

Juliana was the first to speak. "We should close the gates. No one did."

Petronilla viewed her travel companion with full knowledge of Juliana's radical views. She shook her head and kept walking.

Juliana stopped and put her bundle down. "I'll be right back. You don't have to help."

Petronilla laid down her burden, as well, and the two nuns heaved and pushed the gates closed. The gates were iron and had not been opened wide enough to allow a wagon to enter for several years so the work was exhausting. After expending most of the energy they possessed the gates finally were closed and latched. Walking away from the convent Petronilla allowed tears to

run down her face. Juliana, traveling beside her, did not notice. They walked quietly for half an hour before they spoke again.

Petronilla, holding her skirt with one hand, timidly offered one foot into the marsh and mire; behind her lay a road pitted with holes and ruts of those more fortunate, those who rode carriages or animals. Her eyes followed the road further than she had traveled, appreciating the even path and imagining the unseen destination. Before her mind began to drift away on its own, she called herself back to the situation at hand. She lifted the other half of her skirt with determination, stepping fully into the marsh which gladly gave way beneath her feet and engulfed her boots.

Her companion turned to determine her progress. “We have almost arrived!” Juliana exclaimed, turning back to the field and increasing her stride. The fallow field provided a perfect place to observe the countryside rising the hill before them. What from the road appeared to be smooth planes of alternately colored rugs now could be seen for what it was -- fallow fields pigmented by crop residue separated by thin rows of short bushes. Beyond the perimeter of the fields, on the near side of the horizon and beyond the small bushes, sat a huge tree. Slightly behind and on either side of the tree two saplings witnessed the majesty of the first tree.

Petronilla laboriously pulled her boot out of the soft earth and wondered at Juliana’s choice of path. Her boots fit perfectly snug on her feet, a simple miracle for which she had continuously been thankful since Wednesday. Her clothes, however, were strangely oversized and coarse, giving the impression of bulk and thickness while her thin face displayed the truth. Having traversed only half of the distance of her sister, Petronilla forced herself to walk faster even as the debate raged within her heart.

“I do not want to do this. The others went to Amesbury directly. This waiting is arduous! And Juliana . . .” Petronilla’s thoughts were interrupted.

Juliana turned, walking backwards up the hill. “This is horrible on the shoes, but I so want to see my sister before leaving my county forever. Her husband will no doubt be able to drive us to Amesbury; I told the prioress. The house is right here!” Juliana returned to her course.

The ground became firmer as it rose toward the larger of the three trees, allowing Petronilla to shorten the distance between herself and Juliana. As the two women approached the tree, four markers were recognizable in its shadow. Juliana ran to one of the tombstones and fell to her knees, peering closely at the words deliberately carved in the wood. Petronilla approached softly and heard Juliana muttering, reading aloud. “Two babies. One boy one girl. 1536.”

“No!” Juliana squeezed her eyes shut, forcing a tear to roll down her cheek. As she prayed for their departed souls Petronilla gingerly laid down her parcel and knelt beside Juliana, silently joining her prayer. The women completed their prayer and Petronilla stood up, helping Juliana to her feet as well. Juliana struggled to end her tears and as she succeeded Petronilla gently pressured her at the elbow. “Shall we proceed,” she asked.

Juliana nodded, picked up her parcel, and Petronilla continued to hold her arm as they turned toward the house. Clearly visible from the top of the hill near the trees sat a small house near the edge of a wood beyond. The house appeared to have no window, no chimney and no second room from the angle at which the women approached. Upon close inspection branches could be seen poking out of the walls where the mud was missing. “There’s more grass on the ground than on the roof,” Petronilla thought. Immediately she chided herself for tainted thoughts, remembering also her earlier negative declarations and promised herself, “I’ll ask Juliana’s sister about Confession.”

Approaching the house, Juliana inhaled deeply in preparation to call out a hello when the door slammed open and two children exploded out of the house. Instead of a greeting, Juliana simply squealed with fright at the unexpected activity. The children immediately stopped to

examine the two strangers. The children's mother followed the squeal, expecting to encounter a petty disagreement of children. Instead, she saw Juliana and screamed, as well.

“Juliana! Is that you? It is you! Come here Juliana! I can't walk all the way out there with this!” Juliana's sister pointed at her foot which was larger than the other foot and a dark shade of blue.

“Oh, Mrs. Knox, are you okay?” Juliana rushed to her older sister and hugged her. Bending down to look at the foot, Juliana determined her sister should not be standing. “We have got to get you inside! Let me help you!” The two sisters entered the house, leaving Petronilla and the two children together.

“Poor children - are they girls or boys?” Petronilla wondered. The children were each wearing a man's shirt, worn thin with the sleeves cut off to be worn on arms shorter than intended. The faces were clean, though, with teeth missing in the front of each mouth. When one child suddenly ran off, the other quickly scurried along behind. Both children ran between the tombstones, crossed themselves, and disappeared up the center tree.

With no introduction or welcome, Petronilla ducked into the dark doorway into a house which seemed to draw sunlight into itself yet was never fully illuminated. Three blankets tossed in the corner, a trunk next to a large stool, and the fireplace Julianna and Mrs. Knox huddled around were the only furnishings of the room. “It's more than at the nunnery - and less,” Petronilla thought as she surveyed her surroundings.

Eventually Juliana remembered Petronilla and jumped up. “Oh, how shocking of me to forget you, Sister. Please come here to the fireplace and meet Mrs. Knox. She is the oldest daughter of my parents. Mrs. Knox, this is the Petronilla who is enroute with me to Amesbury. She is a most able traveler and a wonderful companion.”

Doubting Juliana had the experience necessary to make such a bold statement, Petronilla stepped toward Mrs. Knox.

“It is a pleasure, Sister Petronilla, to have you in our home. If only Mr. Knox were here to welcome you properly!” Petronilla attempted to curtsy. “Oh, no, Sister, that is not necessary.” Mrs. Knox blushed at the honor Petronilla had tried to offer.

“I am pleased to meet the family of my Sister.”

“Oh, Mrs. Knox, I had to see you before we left! It has been so long. And to think we won’t even be in the same county now!” Juliana choked back a sob then busied herself tending to Mrs. Knox’s wounded foot.

“You are leaving the nunnery? Is that allowed? Where are you going? What does this mean?” Mrs. Knox, visibly upset, questioned Juliana. Juliana quietly began to cry, never lifting her head. Mrs. Knox silently demanded answers from Petronilla, her eyes imploring and her mouth twisted by her questions.

Petronilla stooped down and sat next to Mrs. Knox. She took a deep breath, searching for the words the prioress had used to break the news three days ago. “Ma’am, the Lord has seen fit to move our cloister to Amesbury.” Petronilla’s voice cracked and her eyes closed. Swallowing deeply she began again with her eyes squeezed shut. “The nunnery has been dissolved. The king has shut our convent. All nuns must leave the grounds and either stay with family or take up residence in another convent.”

Mrs. Knox shook her head at the news. “This can’t be true. Why would King Henry do such a thing? You provided such a service to the county! I was going to send Anna to your school in the spring. What happens to her now? What happens to you? Are you still a nun? Oh, Juliana, of course you may stay with Mr. Knox and his family.” Mrs. Knox pulled her sister to her

chest, rocking her and continuing to plan aloud. “We can build a third room for the two of you. It would be lovely to have you with us again. Just like when we were with our parents!”

Juliana quit crying and hugged her sister. “No, Mrs. Knox. I can’t stay. I took a vow to God six years ago and that vow is not dissolved, only our residence. I love you, but God has ordained this for a special purpose in our lives. Please, we are going to thrive in the Lord at Amesbury. Do not worry about us.”

Juliana and her sister continued talking and Petronilla withdrew from the house. The air had turned colder while she had been inside. Petronilla drew her shawl around her shoulders and walked toward the three trees.

Petronilla saw the children in the tree and she realized how cold it was outside, noticing the children’s bare feet. “Come, children, let us meet one another. What are your names?”

One child hung upside down out of the tree. “My name is Anna. Are you really a nun or did a sister at the convent give you those clothes?”

Petronilla smiled. “I am a nun, but yes, a sister at the convent did give me these clothes.”

Anna’s attention had been captured. She peered at Petronilla from the tree limb. “Are you a teacher there, or are you a praying nun?”

“Well,” Petronilla laughed, “I started out praying and now I teach at the school, too. However, our Lord wants everyone to pray. Do you pray?”

Anna’s expression turned serious. Pulling herself upright, Anna weighed Petronilla in the balance. Anna decided to err on the side of recklessness. Climbing down the tree quickly, she moved to Petronilla’s side, caught her hand, and stepped away from the tree in which her sibling still played. “I haven’t been confirmed. Can I pray? I know the Lord’s Prayer and one other. Is that enough?”

Petronilla weighed her answer carefully. “It is not improper for children to pray. . .”

“Good.” Relief displayed itself on Anna’s face. “I’ve been praying forever and I hoped I wasn’t making God mad.” Anna hugged Petronilla and had climbed back up the tree before the nun could formulate a response. Experiencing the coolness anew, Petronilla turned toward the house as Mrs. Knox leaned out of the door and yelled to her children that it was supper time. For the rest of the evening Petronilla looked for an opening in which to renew her discussion with Anna.

The women and children all sat on the floor around the fireplace to eat that evening. Petronilla sipped hot water flavored lightly with meat from an unidentifiable animal and ate bread as she listened to the two sisters talk of townspeople and events of the past. Six weddings had taken place since Juliana had entered the cloister, twelve deaths, and twenty-eight births, fifteen live. The food at supper was spare, but Mr. Knox was off finding food. Surely dinner would be better tomorrow.

After all the soup and bread had been consumed, but before their hunger had been satisfied, the children ran outside to the forest and back. Mrs. Knox then kissed their foreheads and placed a blanket over their still bodies in the corner. Gradually the women’s talk was joined by the soft snoring of quiet rest.

“Actually,” Juliana said, “that sounds good. Would you be offended, Mrs. Knox, if I retired for the evening?”

“Yes, would that offend you,” Petronilla asked.

“No, no. Not at all. Sorry to keep you up, Juliana, Sister Petronilla. Your companionship is so welcome, I must have paid no attention to the sun. It has been set for hours.” Mrs. Knox struggled to her feet before either sister could help her. “Let me show you to your room.”

Both Juliana and Petronilla were surprised. They watched Mrs. Knox open a door they had not previously noticed. The women followed Mrs. Knox into a small room with a straw bed. “Juliana, if you could bring the two blankets from the corner with you.” Mrs. Knox motioned toward her foot. “I’m sorry, but this foot. . .”

“No, no, Mrs. Knox. We cannot take your bed. Besides, we have blankets with us.”

“I insist. It would insult me if you didn’t . . .” Mrs. Knox won the battle of wills and Juliana and Petronilla slept in the small room on the straw bed while Mrs. Knox lay down by the fireplace with a blanket. Juliana insisted, however, on helping Mrs. Knox back to the fireplace.

When the two sisters left the room, Petronilla removed her shoes and veil and knelt by the bed, the only item in the room, and prayed. While she prayed she contemplated all of the day’s activities, the new people she had met, and her sister, Juliana, whom she had also met that day. As Petronilla finished the prayer, Juliana entered the room and pulled the door behind her. The room now admitted little light and even less warmth.

“She is asleep. Finally she is asleep. She just wanted to talk and talk. I don’t remember people being this talkative, but then again, after the convent. . .” Juliana chuckled and took a breath. “But listen to me. It is only by God’s Grace I am silent inside the convent. I never have been shy. My mom used to say I could talk a hen out of her eggs.”

Petronilla slid over to the far side of the bed and wrapped herself in the blanket she brought from the convent, anticipating the opportunity to rest. She tried to remember the exact wording of midnight worship, but while she could remember the sounds and inflections, one Latin word dissolved into another and no words were distinct to her ear. Juliana’s words, however, were perfectly clear and added to Petronilla’s weariness.

“Of course everyone expected me to marry. But I had wanted to be a nun since I was younger than Anna. I would climb a tree on the edge of the forest near the convent and try to see

over the walls. I just knew God lived there amongst the nuns and I was determined to see Him.”

Juliana laughed and did not hear Petronilla sigh loudly.

She sat down heavily, jostling the straw and causing Petronilla to have to rearrange herself. Juliana changed subjects. “Mrs. Knox lost two babies this year. They weren’t baptized. They didn’t even name them. She said it wasn’t worth the bother and that they hadn’t been to church since last Easter.”

This caught Petronilla’s attention. She turned toward Juliana, the straw crunching underneath her. “But anyone could have baptized the children before they . . .”

“Yes, she knows. My father baptized three of his own children, none of whom reached the fourth day, and the whole family would participate in the baptism, as if we were at church. No, Mrs. Knox knew.” Juliana’s voice broke and she started to cry softly. “Mr. Knox didn’t allow the baptisms. He said all the religious changes, all the different opinions, prove God is a lie made up by the priests for employment. We should leave before he returns.”

Petronilla’s sadness gathered in her stomach and traveled up her throat. “We – We must pray.” But Petronilla did not know a prayer for such a circumstance and she, too, felt helpless and responsible. Sleep did not come easy and rest eluded them all night.

The next morning the women awoke shivering due to the frigid air and water which had seeped through the walls that morning. Immediately Petronilla and Juliana prepared for morning worship, which they invited Mrs. Knox and the children to join. Mrs. Knox said no, she had to get breakfast ready, but she would listen while she worked.

The children, however, appeared fascinated by the diversion. While Petronilla and Juliana prayed, Anna kneeled also, squinting through her eyelashes and silently moving her lips. Next the nuns repeated the morning liturgy in Latin and then sang self-consciously to end the service.

Anna clapped joyfully and asked, “Would you sing again? Would you teach me that song? Is it God’s song?”

“Anna!” Came a sharp rebuke which ended Anna’s questions. During the worship the door had opened and closed without the worshippers noticing. A formidable man stood inside the door. He had several small carcasses, rabbits and squirrels, at his feet, but no weapon in his hands. His eyes roamed each woman, settling on his wife. “Is breakfast ready?”

“Yes, Mr. Knox. The porridge is hot.” Mrs. Knox limped toward her husband with a sup of porridge. In her haste and injury she spilt some onto her hand, burning it, but her husband did not notice.

“I was thinking about this breakfast all morning as I traveled.” Mr. Knox walked over to the fireplace and squatted down to eat in the middle of the warmth. Mrs. Knox picked up a rabbit and carried it over to her kitchen corner. Anna picked up the squirrel and placed it next to the rabbit.

Mr. Knox finished his breakfast, stood up, and spoke again. “It is good to be back! But I missed the arrival of callers.”

“Oh, yes, Mr. Knox. These are nuns from the nunnery. King Henry has closed it. Isn’t that horrible! Anna can’t go to school now!” Mrs. Knox wrung her hands and waited for Mr. Knox’s response.

“Well, come here and let me meet you.”

Petronilla stared after Juliana, who had already walked across the small room, then followed her. Petronilla curtsied and said, “I am pleased to meet you, Mr. Knox. We thank you for the hospitality of your family in our need.” Juliana curtsied as well and held her breath.

Mr. Knox pointed at Juliana. “Don’t I know you?”

Juliana coughed and then said, “Why, sir, I don’t believe I’ve seen you in the nunnery.” She immediately touched Petronilla’s arm. “I will gather our things,” she said and she disappeared into the room they had slept in the night before.

Mr. Knox watched her leave and then turned his attention to Petronilla. “Your nunnery has been sold.” He observed her eyes fly wide in shock. “A noble family will be moving in within the month. They should be good neighbors,” he remarked in the direction of his wife, who was cleaning the animals in preparation to cook them.

After describing the hunting conditions and bringing news from town, Mr. Knox went outside for a short time. Mrs. Knox followed Juliana into the bedroom, anxious to speak to her sister one last time. Anna approached Petronilla and the other child trailed after Mr. Knox. Anna took Petronilla’s hand. “I really wanted to learn that song. I will miss you.”

Petronilla kneeled down to look Anna in the face. “You don’t have to be a nun to love God. Just love Him.” Petronilla searched for something else to say but could not find anything suitable, so she hugged her tightly. At first Anna was rigid and tense, but she eventually returned the hug.

When her father, mother and aunt returned to the main room, Anna and Petronilla were standing at opposite sides of the room watching the doors. “Thank you again, Mr. Knox, for your family’s hospitality.”

The Knox family followed Petronilla and Juliana outside. “Where are you headed?” Mr. Knox asked.

“Amesbury,” Petronilla replied.

“You’ll need to travel that way, then.” Mr. Knox indicated the direction to Amesbury and Petronilla nodded. “We are obliged.”

Without further discussion Juliana and Petronilla walked off the Knox property headed to Amesbury. Petronilla, curious about her sister's family and their sudden departure, did not feel as if she should question Juliana.

Late in the morning the women had not yet seen a town, or even a house. The region they were walking through allowed the nuns to admire the beauty of their surroundings without the added distraction, and danger, of other people.

The roads they traveled were pitted and broken, causing the women often to chose to walk slightly off the road. At times they slogged through mud; at other times their passage was hindered by rocks hidden by dying weeds. In time the road disappeared entirely and the woman walked another hour before stopping. Juliana had been sure there was a town "just over that hill." It quickly appeared, however, that the next town was hours ahead of them.

"We should stop and rest," Juliana said as she chose a patch of sunshine in which to sit down. "I haven't prayed since morning worship. I'll be observing mid-morning worship when I am rested if you wish to join me."

Petronilla nodded slowly and began to prepare herself for worship.

Juliana observed the path they had trod into the grass. The beauty of God's creation overwhelmed her. "God's colors are so many. The different hues of plants, birds' feathers, animal fur, the ever-changing sky," she thought. "Even amidst the cool cloudy day the colors are bright and joyous." Petronilla's rustling revived Juliana for the purpose of mid-morning worship.

Juliana kneeled beside Petronilla and they prayed. After prayer the women sang. The song died as it escaped into the open air and the women chose not to repeat it. No matter how lofty the words, when sung outside by two mezzo-sopranos the notes fled and did not support the intended majesty of the remainder of the repeats.

After mid-morning worship Juliana sat back heavily to the ground. “Are you ready to continue?”

Petronilla joined her sister. “No. Let us sit for another minute.”

Inhaling deeply, Petronilla asked the question that had followed her all morning. “Do you know how far we are from Amesbury?”

Seeming to ignore Petronilla, Juliana spoke. “Anna favored you.”

Annoyed, Petronilla watched Juliana gaze into the distance. “She was interested in God.”

“Too bad, being born into that family. Especially with the school closing. Most likely she’ll grow out of the interest before she goes to church to get married.” Juliana closed her eyes, shutting out Petronilla’s response and drawing her away from her original question.

“Surely. . . I mean. Well, you did not grow out of your interest in God.”

“No.” Her eyes were still closed and her expression was clear except for pursed lips. The next words were so quiet Petronilla doubted they were even uttered. “But it was hard.”

Suddenly Juliana’s brown eyes, slightly glazed but watching Petronilla, opened wide. “I have no idea how far we are from Amesbury.”

The usual sound continued around Petronilla and Juliana, the rustle of moving grass, the noise of late-season bugs, and the reverberation of the women’s heart beats as their situation became tangibly recognized.

“What are we going to do?” Juliana asked.

Petronilla, on the verge of the same question, answered, “We will walk to Amesbury. We will depend on God for safety and townspeople for food and priests for a place to stay in the churches.” Juliana nodded in agreement. “But Juliana, why are we walking? What happened? We were supposed to be able to catch a ride with Mr. Knox.” It pained Petronilla to ask such a question but her body would not let her miss the opportunity to know.

“I thought he would at least give us a ride. But Petronilla, they don’t have any animals. They sold their cart. He doesn’t want anything to do with God or priests or even nuns! Mrs. Knox feared he would see our presence as a bad omen. She wanted us to stay, though.” Juliana tried to justify her family but could not. She shook her head and sighed. “He has changed, as has Mrs. Knox.”

Petronilla repented of her question. She searched for something to say but could find nothing. Her only thought was, “Are we even traveling the right direction?” Standing slowly, Petronilla offered Juliana a hand to stand, as well. “We should keep moving.”

The women continued on their journey through the field and eventually met another road which they followed for several more hours.

“Up ahead!” Juliana pointed toward the horizon. Through the dimming daylight, the women saw a town the size of an apple. No movement was visible from such a distance, but they became ecstatic.

“We will be able to sleep overnight at the church.” The woman had spoken earlier about the possibility of sleeping outside. Now they involuntarily lengthened their strides, carrying themselves farther faster.

“And Mass. We could observe Mass!” Fueled by their passion for the Church and released from the monotony of mile after mile of fields and animals, the nuns advanced toward the town as the sun began to slip headlong toward the horizon.

The town was busy. The women slowed slightly, walked closer together and watched the people, mostly men, scurry past them to their destinations. Petronilla pulled her cloak more tightly around her. Finally spotting a woman walking toward her, Petronilla stopped and cleared her throat as the woman approached.

“Excuse me, could you direct us toward the church?”

The woman stopped and stared at Petronilla and Juliana intently. The nuns stared back. The woman’s yellow dress poked out a slight rent in her cloak. Her cheeks were falsely scarlet and her eyes artificially bright. Furthermore, she smelled particularly fresh yet odorous.

“There is no church here. God isn’t here, either.” The woman brushed past the nuns who watched after her for a moment before regaining their composure.

“No church! That can’t be right!” Juliana exclaimed.

A well dressed man heard Juliana and commented, “No church since the priest died two years ago.” He did not stop walking and soon he, too, disappeared among the crowd down the street.

Petronilla began walking, Juliana struggling to keep up with her. Petronilla strode purposefully out of the center of town, where the most people congregated. Noticing the town’s public well, the nuns set their burdens down and began to confer. Neither one had thought of another plan. No one could imagine a town not having a church.

Juliana observed the three houses closest to the well, huddled together at the end of the street. All three houses were sturdily made and appeared to be well kept. The largest house had windows and shutters but no glass to fill the hole. The smallest house, newly built, required more work to the roof before the house would truly be finished. From the third house children’s voices could be heard, screaming and laughing and being told to be quiet.

A woman exited the larger house carrying a pitcher and walked to the well. Only after she had cranked the bucket up from the bottom of the well did she look at the strangers, then down at the ground and addressed them. “You must be holy women. You should stay away.” The woman filled her pitcher with water from the well’s bucket and walked back toward her house.

Juliana hurried after the woman. Walking up beside her, Juliana took the pitcher out of her hands and continued to walk in the direction the weary woman had set. Juliana could see curious faces peeking out of windows and doors to watch the silent scene. People stopped their hustle to observe. Juliana wondered at the attention they were attracting. Resolving to ignore the stares, she decided to say something.

“Hello. My sister and I are passing through town and have nowhere to stay. Can we trouble you for a space on your floor?” The other woman looked up sharply and Petronilla began to speak more rapidly. “We had wanted to stay at the church but you do not seem to have one-”

“You cannot stay with us. Nights we are busy. You cannot stay with us.”

At the front door, the woman grabbed the pitcher from Juliana and the door opened from within. A man walked out, smoothing his shirt with his hands. He nodded cheerily at the first woman and then, observing Juliana, paled and stammered, “May God bless you.”

Juliana nodded in return and the first woman disappeared into the house and the door slammed shut. Petronilla appeared at Juliana’s side carrying both bundles and the food basket. She handed Juliana the bundles and whispered, “We should probably move on.”

Juliana mechanically followed Petronilla back toward the center of town. At the first break between buildings, they ducked into a small alleyway. Along the street more and more men were attracted to the building next to the nuns. The sounds from within the building grew louder and louder but the nuns ignored the noise as they thought.

“I grew up in London. I know about these things.” Petronilla shook her head. Silence reigned between them. Eventually Juliana’s eyes brightened.

“We haven’t worshipped all day. Why don’t we observe evening worship without the Mass?”

“And without the church?” Petronilla watched Juliana’s face radiate her love for God.

“Why not?” Juliana knelt down into the soft mud. Petronilla, too, knelt into the mud and the two began to worship God as they would in church or at the convent. Many people, attracted by the singing and joyful voices, watched from the street. Quickly they would lose patience with the praying, singing nuns and would leave, only to leave a spot which was immediately filled by another curious passerby.

A crowd of ten or fifteen greeted the nuns at the close of their worship. However, when the nuns started toward the crowd in the street, everyone scattered. Many of the men entered the boisterous activity inside the tavern which had leant its wall to the nuns. The women returned to their place of worship, discussing the strangeness of the town without a church.

They did not hear the man approach due to the noise from the tavern and they did not see him because the sun had set and their surroundings were pigmented in the blacks and grays of shadows. Therefore, when the man spoke, shivers of fear ran through the nuns and paralyzed them momentarily.

“You women can’t stay here.” The voice came from a dark shadow between themselves and the street. “You should come with me.”

Petronilla and Juliana remained motionless, trying to make the dark shadow into a man’s figure. “Please pardon me. I am Richard Daley. My wife and I would like you to come stay with us this night. I cannot guarantee your safety in the streets, but will protect you to the best of my ability from my own home.”

“It is a pleasure to meet you, Mr. Daley. We seem to be at the mercy of such a generous offer.” Petronilla did not know whether to believe the man or not but could see the foolishness of staying in the alley adjacent to a tavern. Quickly the women gathered their bundles of clothing, only to have those items taken out of their hands by Mr. Daley.

Out in the street the women followed Richard Daley past the tavern, the house of ill repute, and various other houses and businesses. After leaving town, Juliana found her voice and asked. "Where exactly do you live, Mr. Daley?"

"I am afraid, for your sake, that my home is quite far from town."

"Oh, don't worry about us. We are quite used to walking and exertion. We have walked all day." Petronilla nudged Juliana and she quit talking. Several minutes passed in silence, only the clamor of the town dimming behind them and the whistle of the wind before them. The sky overcast, the nuns could barely see Mr. Daley's dark form in front of them and they almost followed straight when he turned left off onto another road. This second road felt irregular beneath their feet. Occasionally Mr. Daley would warn of a hole or hold back a tree branch. Otherwise, the air hung silent and crisp between the nuns and their guide.

The three arrived at a house and Mr. Daley walked up the steps and opened the door. He entered the house, inviting Petronilla and Juliana to follow him. "Elizabeth! We have guests."

From another room they could hear a slight rustling. As Mr. Daley lit an oil lamp, Mrs. Daley entered the room, draping a blanket over her shoulders. In the crude light of the lamp, Mr. Daley appeared to be forty or fifty years old. His wife, drawn out of her sleep by her husband's return with company, appeared to be half his age. Mrs. Daley rushed to the fireplace and grabbed the kettle off the coals.

"Richard. Back so soon! And who did you bring with you?" Mrs. Daley deftly located three cups and split the remaining contents of the kettle into the three cups. Offering one to her husband and each of her guests, she introduced herself. "My name is Elizabeth Daley. It is a pleasure to have you in our home."

"Thank you," Petronilla accepted the cooled tea. "I am Petronilla and my sister, Juliana. We are en route to Amesbury."

“But they were kneeling outside the tavern when I found them, praying and singing and attracting much attention around town. They could not sleep under the tavern porch. Please, please, sit down.” Mr. Daley refused the cup his wife offered and insisted his wife drink, instead.

Accepting the drink, Elizabeth joined Juliana and Petronilla at the table. “Of course you could not sleep there! I am glad Mr. Daley brought you here where it is safe and warm. We have an extra room if you wish to share it.”

“We graciously accept your hospitality and kindness. Surely the Lord will bless you.” Juliana presented the traditional thanks but Mr. Daley did not respond.

“He already has,” Elizabeth answered warmly. “Let me show you to your room.”

The nuns left the empty cups on the table and followed their hostess and the oil lamp into a hallway and through the door to the spare room. Inviting the nuns to enter the room, Mrs. Daley handed the lamp to Juliana, wished the women a good night’s sleep, and disappeared into the darkness beyond the influence of the lamp’s light.

Juliana closed the door behind herself as she entered. Not much of the room could be observed at once with lamp light, so the women followed the light around the room and found a pitcher and bowl set, a bed, and a dressing table. Suddenly exhausted from the day’s activities, Petronilla yawned loudly. Juliana began to giggle before she, too, yawned.

Juliana laid down the bundles, took off her shoes and veil, lay down on the bed and immediately went to sleep. Petronilla took more time in preparing for bed yet she, too, fell asleep without much of a delay.

Brightness filled the room and Petronilla awoke with a start. Sitting up, she observed the dressing table and stool at the foot of the bed where she had left her cloak the previous night. The surface of the table had only a simple doily, crocheted out of soft yellow thread and hanging

casually off the far end of the table. A window, tightly covered with canvas, shone light into the room.

Rising from bed, Petronilla went to the window and peered outside. Immediately blinded by the sun, Petronilla realized it was already late into the morning. Dismayed, she called softly to Juliana. “Juliana. Wake up. Juliana!”

Juliana yawned loudly and pulled the bed cover over her head, mumbling. Petronilla had to physically touch Juliana before she opened her eyes to the light of the room. Shielding her face from the brightness, Juliana hurried out of bed toward the pitcher and bowl. Juliana splashed water onto her face and turned back to Petronilla. “How late is it? How could we sleep so long?”

Petronilla began to arrange the bed covers as they had been the previous evening. Juliana, not as concerned about the appearance of the room as the appearance of her hair, stood at the mirror, smoothing her hair with her hands. The women put on their veils, gathered the bundles, and exited the room. Petronilla led the way into the main room which was furnished with a large wooden table with intricately carved legs and four chairs to match, two rocking chairs carved in a similar style in front of the fireplace, and two baskets, one full of material scraps and the other full of yarn and thread. Large quilted shades covered not only the three windows but each wall, offering protection from ceiling to floor.

“Good morning, ladies. It’s a glorious day!” Elizabeth nearly sang as she greeted the women.

“Please forgive us for sleeping so late into the morning,” Petronilla began.

“Madness,” Mrs. Daley exclaimed, “not to sleep long after such a rough journey! Robert told me you had been traveling all day. You must have been so tired!”

“We were.” Juliana said, shifting the bundles slightly in her hands. “Thank you for the room and hospitality. . .”

“Certainly you are not leaving already! You cannot be adequately rested; you must stay at least the night. Robert and I have discussed it and we invite you to stay another evening.”

Elizabeth Daley had crossed the room and lightly rested her fingers on Petronilla’s arm. “Stay. It really would be best.”

Without looking at Juliana, who was silently saying “no,” Petronilla nodded. “We will stay. You are quite persuasive.”

“Yes, thank you for your generosity. This one day would be beneficially restful.” Juliana thanked Mrs. Daley then left the room, taking the bundles to the bedroom she had slept in the night before.

Elizabeth clapped her hands. “Excellent. I want to tell Robert you are staying. Please excuse me. . .” She turned toward the door then whirled around. “. . . and help yourself to the breakfast biscuits on the table.”

When the door shut behind her, Petronilla turned to the table and lifted a biscuit to her mouth. Until that moment she had not remembered her previous meal had been breakfast on Thursday. Before she ate the biscuit, however, Juliana reentered the room and sighed. Petronilla turned slightly, considered her sister, then returned to the biscuit. “It is cold, Juliana! We would not have gotten far today, anyway. The morning is half over.”

Juliana sighed again, advancing toward the table. “I know. But you should have consulted me! Are there any more biscuits?”

Petronilla gestured toward the biscuits and Juliana continued her conversation. “We are traveling together and we should decide these things together. . .”

Petronilla allowed Juliana to continue convincing her to consult before making any decisions. Petronilla saw the question as to whether to stay another night as if it had been answered when they awoke to a day already warmed by the sun; she did not understand Juliana's point or her need to discuss a decision made in the past.

Before the conversation could progress further, Elizabeth returned. Breezing through the door, she was singing. "Praise be to God, praise, praise. . . Robert is thrilled you are staying the day. I must confess I am, too. I haven't seen another woman in days! I haven't been to town yet and Robert usually rescues men, never women! And if you are to be my friends you must call me Elizabeth! I must be much younger than you both!"

Petronilla ignored Elizabeth's comments and proceeded to the business she had decided upon. "Although we are outside the convent, Juliana and I have attempted to maintain the worship practices to which we are accustomed. It is time for mid-morning worship and I invite you to join us."

"I would love to. I need to hang more quilts today, but that can wait until this afternoon. How shall we begin?"

Juliana began to explain the routine of mid-morning worship and the three women knelt to the floor. Just as Juliana began her portion of the prayer Elizabeth spoke. "Why don't we worship outside? It makes more sense to worship God in His Creation, does it not?"

The nuns agreed and followed Elizabeth outside. Although the day was chilly and cloudy, the women were temporarily blinded by the brightness of the partially hidden sun. The Daley house was surrounded by a fence of bushes which stood three foot tall. A wooden gate, through which the women had passed the previous night, sheltered the only break in the bush wall. A path connected the gate to the front door, splitting the brown grass. A smaller dirt path led around the house, and down this path the women followed Elizabeth. On the far side of the house, the

bushes grew leaning against the house. On the other side of the house, the fence grew much farther away from the house, so the house did not sit in the center of the enclosed land, but rather to the side. Around the corner there was a large patch of dark tilled top soil organized into shallow rows.

“This is my favorite spot on earth! There is not much of a view from here, but the vegetables that grow from this garden are witnesses of God and a perfect place to worship. ‘For whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he reap’.” Elizabeth spoke as if she was quoting something, but Petronilla identified the sower reaping from a biblical lesson. “Do either of you garden?”

Petronilla shook her head but Juliana answered excitedly. “At the convent I tended the garden from Easter to harvest. It was a rewarding labor! But wasn’t that last part from the Holy Scriptures?”

“Yes, it was.”

“So you know Latin?” Juliana’s question, but more importantly Elizabeth’s response, interested Petronilla. The Bible was only available in the Latin vulgate. If Elizabeth knew Latin and could read the Bible, perhaps she would be able to help her learn the exact words to the prayers which repeated in Petronilla’s mind but which repeated only in fragments.

“No, of course not, although Richard has been to Europe and knows German. Shall we worship?”

“Of course.”

“Certainly.”

The women again knelt down and Juliana began the call to worship. During the liturgy, Elizabeth failed to participate fully. She knelt watching the women on either side of her. She saw the expressions of love and devotion flow across the nuns’ faces as they worshipped God. Listening intently, Elizabeth would hum a few bars as she heard them and she learned the tune.

Juliana concluded the observance and Elizabeth began to recite. “O our father which art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Let thy kingdom come. Thy will be fulfilled, as well in earth, as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our trespasses, even as we forgive our trespassers. And lead us not into temptation: but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom and the power, and the glory for ever. Amen.”

Stunned, Juliana and Petronilla stared at Elizabeth, whose tone and facial expressions mirrored their own just moments earlier. Both women recognized within her prayer portions of the Lord’s Prayer which they both knew in Latin, the language authorized by the crown as the only official religious language. Elizabeth opened her eyes after concluding the prayer and laughed. “God knows English too! I don’t know why people believe you have to know Latin to worship God!”

The women stood up but Elizabeth bent down again to examine the nuns’ skirts. “You have mud all over your habits! We must wash them, and if they are going to dry by the morning, they have to be washed now. We can’t send you to your new convent with mud on your clothes!”

Elizabeth had determined to wash the two dresses and no amount of protesting changed her mind. The only argument to slow Elizabeth’s plans, after returning to the house, was when Juliana said, “We have no change of clothes. We have one habit only.”

Momentarily set-back by nevertheless undaunted, Elizabeth paced the length of the room. Hands on hips, she surveyed the nuns. “You will have to wear a dress of mine, then.” She left the room.

“We can’t wear her clothes!” Petronilla addressed Juliana.

“Either we wear her clothes and wash ours or we offend Elizabeth and wear dirty clothes to the convent. I choose a clean dress and happy hostess.”

Juliana surveyed the clothes she was wearing. Although Petronilla's clothes were too big, Juliana's dress fit decently but due to many washings was faded from its original deep charcoal to muted gray and suffered from pilling. As many pills as Juliana had pulled off had not improved the look of the garment. Juliana had counted the days until arriving at Amesbury simply to rotate the dress to another nun. She and Petronilla could not trade because they stood different heights.

Elizabeth called from her bedroom, "Sister Juliana, Sister Petronilla, please come here."

The women followed the voice and found Elizabeth inside a wardrobe. Elizabeth, hunched over and backing out of the wardrobe, stepped gingerly down to the floor and straightened her back, handing a dress to Juliana. "I wore this dress several years ago; it should be the right length." Elizabeth stood taller than Juliana, so the red dress on the hanger represented an older style Elizabeth had worn in her youth. "Go ahead, try it on. I have another if that one isn't right."

Juliana left the room for the other bedroom and Elizabeth regarded Petronilla with a scowl. "I have been shorter, but I have not been taller." Turning back to the wardrobe, her words became muffled. "We'll have to find some of Richard's . . . if the dress . . . short. Let me see. . ."

Petronilla considered the room around her. This room did not have quilts on the wall, but a stack of folded quilts rested at the foot of the bed and on the lid of the trunk. "Oh!" exclaimed the voice in wardrobe. ". . . forgot!" Again Elizabeth backed out of the wardrobe and breathed deeply.

"I almost forgot! You will have to help me lift these quilts." Elizabeth walked over to the trunk and Petronilla followed. "Richard helped me yesterday and this morning. We could not wait another day; it is getting too cold to sleep with nothing on the walls. Did you have this problem in your convent?"

Petronilla and Elizabeth lifted quilt after quilt off the trunk and laid them on the bed. The top of the wooden trunk was carved beautifully depicting a group of people and a casket. Trees barren of leaves and clouds spotted the horizon. The focal point of the picture were two people singled out of the group and looking up to heaven. “This is so beautiful! What is its meaning?”

Petronilla remembered herself and began to speak quickly. “Please excuse me. I did not answer your question. Yes, it was frequently cold at the convent but we did not hang quilts to block the draft. . .”

Elizabeth lightly touched Petronilla’s arm. “It is okay. Richard carved that for me as a wedding present. We met two years ago at my brother’s funeral.” Elizabeth’s voice became soft with memory. “He had just returned to England the day my brother died. In the absence of a priest, Richard assisted with the burial.” She reached with her other hand and touched the casket. “He was the last of my family. Well,” her voice almost returned to its normal cheerfulness, “that is why I have all these quilts. They are my mothers’, aunts’, grandmother’s and that was the one started by older sister.”

“I am sorry,” Petronilla began.

“No, no. No sorrys.” Elizabeth lifted the lid of the trunk and began to pull out books and boxes. Juliana entered the room in the red dress. Looking up, Elizabeth hooted. “Look at you. You don’t look like a nun!”

Elizabeth was right. The red dress fit Juliana snugly and the rich color brightened her complexion from sallow to fair. Juliana instantly blushed at Elizabeth’s words. “Oh, I am sorry. I should not have done that. I should have said, ‘That dress looks like it will be okay for a few hours.’”

Juliana waved her hand helplessly. “Don’t trouble over it.”

As the color slowly drained from Juliana’s face, Petronilla searched to change the subject.

“Is there a dress in the bottom of the trunk?”

“Yes, here it is.” Elizabeth gingerly pulled what looked to be thick folded fabric out of the trunk. Unfolding it, she explained its origins. “My sister was making this dress when she died. It was to be the first dress she wore after the birth of her baby. But, the baby wouldn’t wait and came early. She never finished the dress. But, if I remember right, it was practically finished.”

“I cannot wear this.” Petronilla stammered her regrets but Elizabeth would not allow it.

“You certainly can. It only lacks a hem. Besides, my sister was taller than I am. It should fit nicely.”

Petronilla accepted the rumpled dress from her new friend and left to change clothes.

Juliana advanced to help Elizabeth repack the trunk. Placing boxes at the bottom, Elizabeth identified the contents and sentimental value of every item. Juliana accompanied Elizabeth on the journey through childhood as they repacked the items she had kept. Holding up a book with a blank paper cover, Juliana asked, “Is this a family history?”

“No, it’s the Bible.” Elizabeth continued packing the trunk with boxes and cotton bags full of treasures. Juliana viewed the Bible as if it might vanish into the air or burn her hands. She had heard from a younger sister that such unauthorized translations of the Bible existed, but had dismissed the notion of an English Bible as rumor. Tenderly she opened the cover and read the title page. Tyndale’s New Testament, she read. Realizing the words were written in English, she shut the book and nearly threw it into the trunk. Placing another book beside it, Elizabeth shut the lid of the trunk.

At that moment Petronilla returned. With the dirty clothes wadded in front of her, the fit of the dress was hard to see, but the hem, although unfinished, hung perfectly to the ground and covered her feet.

“Perfect,” Elizabeth sang. “I’ll start the water boiling.” She left the room and Petronilla tried to follow her.

Juliana grabbed her arm and spoke sternly. “We must talk.” Juliana led the way into the other bedroom and shut the door behind Petronilla. “They have a Tyndale Bible. It isn’t a rumor. There really are Bibles in English!”

“Are you certain? Did you see it? That is impossible!”

“I personally held it! They have a copy of the Bible in English. That is what she has been quoting!”

“But. . . it is illegal. They are in much danger. King Henry will kill them. That is the law.” Petronilla sat heavily on the bed. “But I would like to see this English Bible.”

“I am not making this up, Petronilla!” Juliana’s voice raised, threatening detection.

“I know. Juliana, I believe you. I just want to see this English Bible!” Juliana nodded her head in agreement. After several minutes of silence the nuns left the room and for rest of the day thought of little else.

When Mr. Daley returned home that evening the clothes were hanging out on the line drying, quilts were protecting the entire house from cold drafts, and the visitors were wearing cheerful clothes instead of their habits. Tactfully ignoring the difference in their appearances, Mr. Daley instead complimented the women on the protection their afternoon of labor had provided the house and its contents.

Dinner consisted of a bird Mr. Daley had shot while out, interrupting its flight south. “He wouldn’t have made it anyway,” Elizabeth teased as she plucked the bird. The dinner conversation consisted of news from town and the people with whom Mr. Daley had spoken. Evidently the cool day had brought many people into town, fearing a trip in the future would be impossible.

After dinner Mr. and Mrs. Daley retired to the fireplace and invited Petronilla and Juliana to join them in their worship service. The women could not refuse and each pulled a chair toward the fireplace as Mr. Daley left the room. He returned with a book whose cover did not have an inscription. The nuns watched in great anticipation. Petronilla hardly knew whether to flee the room or to stay. The very presence of the book in his hand removed from Petronilla what strength she might have possessed; Petronilla and Juliana remained in the room. Juliana leaned forward to the front of her chair, watching the care and reverence the Daley’s expressed toward this book. Petronilla could only clasp and unclasp her hands in her lap. Momentarily, Petronilla hoped Juliana had been wrong about the contents of the inconspicuous book. In the next moment she had no doubts.

Mr. Daley settled into his rocking chair and bowed his head. Praying in English, he asked God to reveal himself to those present that evening. At the conclusion of the prayer Mr. Daley opened the Book and began to read.

“Thus saith the Holy Bible:

‘James the servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, sendeth greeting to the twelve tribes which are scattered here and there. My brethren, count it exceeding joy when ye fall into divers temptations, for as much as ye know how that the trying of your faith bringeth patience: and let patience have her perfect work, that you may be perfect and sound, lacking nothing.

‘If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God which giveth to all men indifferently, and casteth no man in the teeth: and it shall be given him. But let him ask in faith and waver not. For he that doubteth is like the waves of the sea, tossed of the wind and carried with violence. Neither let that man think that he shall receive any thing of the Lord. A wavering-minded man is unstable in all his ways.

‘ . . . Err not my dear brethren. Every good gift, and every perfect gift, is from above and cometh down from the father of light, with whom is not variableness, neither is he changed unto darkness. Of his own will begat he us with the word of life, that we should be the first fruits of his creation.

‘ . . . Wherefore lay apart all filthiness, all superfluity of maliciousness, and receive with meekness the word that is grafted in you, which is able to save your souls. And see that ye be doers of the word and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves with sophistry. For is any hear the word, and do it not, he is like unto a man that beholdeth his bodily face in a glass. For as soon as he hath looked on himself, he goeth his way, and forgetteth immediately what his fashion was. But whoso looketh in the perfect law of liberty, and continueth therein (if he be not a forgetful hearer, but a doer of the work) and same shall be happy in his deed.’

That ends the first chapter of the Epistle of Saint James.” Mr. Daley again prayed to God.

Then Mr. Daley instructed each person to reflect on the passage for the entirety of the evening. Elizabeth shut her eyes for several minutes then pulled the thread out of the basket beside her and began to stitch. Mr. Daley pulled scrap material out of the basket next to his rocking chair and resumed piecing a quilt. Juliana sat quietly for nearly half an hour after the biblical passage had been read then moved her chair to the table and stared across the table at a quilt for the rest of the evening. Her only movement was infrequent lip movement or the shift of her head.

At first Petronilla expected the Daleys to begin talking again, to read more. She wanted the reading to continue. What happened in chapter two, Petronilla wondered. She tried to recall every word she had heard; every word of the first chapter of the Epistle of Saint James. Frustrated at her inability to remember each word, she went to bed early but did not claim her immediately.

Lying in bed that night one sentence frequented her thoughts. “Whoso looketh in the perfect law of liberty . . .” Petronilla had heard of the Law, the Ten Commandments, but she had never heard of the Law of Liberty. Petronilla thought silently, “What is the answer? I need your help to find the answer.”

Petronilla awoke into opaque blackness. Sitting up in bed, she felt a slight tug on the covers and knew Juliana was sleeping beside her. The coldness of her surroundings prevented Petronilla from rising immediately from bed and she used the time to think about the English Bible. “I would like to read the entire book and learn about the Law of Liberty. Oh, why am I so drawn to this unlawful book? King Henry has decreed against it! Why would he prohibit it if it was a legitimate rendering of the Holy Bible?”

She slid her feet out of the bed and stood up, the coldness of the floor chilling her whole body at once. Petronilla felt along the bed to the dressing table where she had laid Elizabeth’s dress when she prepared for bed the previous night. Quickly she dressed and pulled a blanket from the convent around her for added protection.

Uncoiling her hair from the top of her head, Petronilla began to comb out tangles and knots. As she worked, her eyes became more accustomed to the dark. Elizabeth’s red dress lay folded on the dressing table’s stool. Petronilla rubbed the fabric between two fingers and remembered wearing dresses of similar material. Her relatives in London were not rich, but her clothes as a child would appear fine if compared to her clothes the past fifteen years. In an effort to promote unity and dissolve personal autonomy, all items in the convent were shared. No one owned anything. Dresses were rotated between women of the approximate same size, blankets were returned every morning and even rooms and roommates changed often. Finished combing her hair, Petronilla rolled the length on top of her head and secured it with hair pins.

Petronilla walked softly to the door and let herself out of the room. From the hall she observed a low light burning and followed the dull brightness to the front room. Elizabeth sat in a chair, rocking and reading from the Bible. When Petronilla entered, Elizabeth closed the book and entreated her to sit also.

“Did you sleep well?”

“Yes, thank you. And yourself?”

“I slept properly, thanks to you and your sister’s help hanging the quilts. We hung them at the perfect time!” Elizabeth gazed toward the quilt which covered the door of the house.

“Richard went to check on the animals. Sometimes the sheep don’t gather together during bad weather and we lose a few. When I was a girl, we would eat well for several days after the first freeze!”

“Your father raised sheep, then?”

“Oh, yes. He built this house and tilled this land for Lord Byron. My brother worked it when my father died, even though he took orders and was a priest, he subjected himself to serf farming to provide for me. Now, of course, Richard farms the land and raises the livestock. To provide for me.”

Elizabeth looked at Petronilla sadly. “I love Richard Daley with all of my heart and am thankful for him. If he had not married me, I would have starved to death or wound up at Tilley Murrey’s house in town. I certainly would not be reading this.” She lifted the Bible out of her lap and waved it in the air. “But I would love to go to Amesbury with you and Juliana. To be devoted to the Lord and prayer all day, everyday! That is my idea of heaven.”

Petronilla reached out her hand and touched Elizabeth’s shoulder. “Surely you worship God here and are devoted to Him. One place of service is not more noble than another.”

Elizabeth nodded quickly. “Yes, yes. We have a steady stream of visitors, people Richard rescues, like you. We are able to share God’s Word with everyone who enters our house. Also, Richard Daley is known in town for replacing our priest. Except for administering the Eucharist.”

“The bishop did not appoint another priest?” Petronilla was stunned.

“No,” Elizabeth answered. “The rectory and church were sold to Lord Byron and he was supposed to support a priest, but he hasn’t yet.”

Petronilla felt slapped. Leaning heavily back, the chair responded by rocking violently several times before Petronilla regained control of the oscillations. First her convent had been sold, now this town's church. "Could King Henry be behind all of these changes," she thought.

"Richard did not attend the university, but he has studied the Bible ardently for years. That is better training, in my opinion."

Petronilla could not control herself any longer. "So this town is radically Protestant!"

"No, no," Elizabeth shook her head. "The citizens of the town on the whole do not care about spiritual matters. Until they need a baby baptized or buried. And the constable would most likely arrest us if he knew about this." Elizabeth raised the book again. The fire had begun to die down and shadows in the room became less black and blended into the darkness which surrounded the small circle of light. Elizabeth leaned forward and poked at the logs with a long stick, brightening the fire and sending crackling sparks up the chimney.

"Why did you share the Bible with us so freely, then?"

Elizabeth leaned back into her chair slowly, staring straight into the fire. "It was shared freely with us."

"Overseas, yes. But it is unauthorized here." Petronilla tried desperately to understand what motivated the Daleys but she could not.

Elizabeth's eyes widened, she sat up perfectly straight, and addressed an audience outside the room. "King Henry VIII has a problem with the language. English is *my* language and if God is God, He knows my language. And the king does not have the power to render the Word of God illegitimate!"

"That is treason!" Petronilla jumped to her feet. The empty rocking chair rocked wildly.

"Whether it be right in the sight of God to obey you more than God, judge ye. For we cannot but speak that which we have seen and heard!' The Acts of the Apostles, chapter 4. Is it

right to set the king and government above God and his kingdom? How do people know what God has done or said if they cannot read Latin? They don't! How can the king be against his subjects knowing what God has done and said?"

The women stared at each other, each considering what had just transpired, both praying rapidly, fervently. Silently. In the stillness that followed the outbursts, Juliana stepped into the circle of light from the doorway in which she had been standing. The red dress appeared vibrantly adorned in the fire light. Elizabeth looked from Petronilla to Juliana, hoping to God that she had not overspoken the bounds of the Holy Spirit. Mr. Daley stepped out from behind the quilt which covered the door. He had entered the house earlier but had not wanted to interrupt.

Mr. Daley finally broke the silence. "I brought these clothes in from the line early this morning." He gestured toward women's clothing hanging on hooks which also held quilts. "They should be dry."

Juliana regained the ability to talk first. "Thank you, Mr. Daley, we appreciate your thoughtfulness." Juliana gathered the clothes and handed the longer habit to Petronilla.

"Yes, thank you both," Petronilla managed before fleeing to the bedroom.

The women changed silently into their habits. Changing the soft, luxurious linen for the rough wool did not appeal to either woman initially, but Petronilla felt comforted in the familiar material.

"Something is wrong here." Petronilla looked up and observed Juliana. Juliana had put on her dress, but large holes were missing in the fabric, as if the fabric had disintegrated. Some threads remained running through the holes, but it was easy to see through the fabric to the underclothes below. The material had worn away in five patches the size of a hand on the skirt and bodice.

“We will patch it,” Petronilla decided, then left the room to ask Elizabeth for thread and a needle. Elizabeth followed Petronilla back into the room, holding needle and thread. She took one look at Juliana’s dress and announced, “You cannot wear that. We cannot patch it. There is not enough material left!”

A few minutes later it had been decided that Juliana would wear Elizabeth’s red dress and Elizabeth had offered Juliana her second dress, a light green one, as well. “You can always donate it to the poor when you arrive in Amesbury. I’ll never be that short again!”

Petronilla folded the unhemmed dress and left it on the seat of the dressing table. Entering the front room, she interrupted Mr. Daley comforting his wife. Quickly Elizabeth stepped out of his hug. Mr. Daley stepped forward, “Sister Petronilla, it has been a pleasure to have you as a guest in our home. We hope to visit with you again at a later time; if not here then in Heaven when we go to join the Lord. Sister Juliana,” Mr. Daley acknowledged her as she entered the room, “we look forward to seeing you in the future, as well.”

“I believe it will be in Heaven when we next meet,” Juliana said. “Then we’ll all praise the Lord in a manner in which we are unfamiliar!”

The small group nodded in agreement, Petronilla and Elizabeth eyeing each other carefully. The darkness began to bleed away as the sunrise lightened the room. The morning fire, now dying down into a soft glow of coals, cast their shadows long across the room.

“We must be leaving. I fear we are far from Amesbury.”

“Sister Petronilla, Sister Juliana, please sit down and hear us first. The gift we wish to give you requires an explanation.” The women sat at the table, as did Mr. and Elizabeth. “I am an Englishman by birth and education. After raising a family and burying a wife within the Catholic Church, revering the pope, and attending mass, my king renounced the pope and required that I convert to Protestantism. Some of my neighbors saw no difference between

Catholicism and the Anglican Church; some of my neighbors converted when the king's ministers came eight years ago to administer the oath. I did not know what was true anymore, so I decided to leave England since I could not swear allegiance to King Henry's children.

"I had been gone three years when I met William Tyndale. I had never heard of William Tyndale but found him to be an extraordinary man in word and deed. Sensing I had found a true friend who was wise and devoted to God, I began to ask him questions about these new trends in religion. He did not have any answers to my questions, but he returned later that evening with a package.

"Richard," he said, "I have been translating the New Testament from Greek into English. This manuscript is the book of St. John. I don't have any answers for you but James said 'If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God which giveth to all men indifferently, and casteth no man in the teeth: and it shall be given him.' Richard, ask the Lord!"

"William handed me the book of John, still in his handwriting, and told me he had to move but that a messenger would retrieve the manuscript. Before that messenger arrived two days later I had read the book of John through four times. And I had some answers. When I returned the manuscript to the messenger, I asked if there was more to the Bible. He gave me a complete printed New Testament.

"Since that day, I have read the New Testament through several times, as has my wife. Moreover, we have worked at copying the New Testament in order to pass more copies along. If you are willing, we are offering you a hand-copied English New Testament."

Silence permeated the room. Even the fire knew the heaviness of the gift and did not crackle once while the women thought. Petronilla's eyes closed immediately, her lips mouthed quickly a soundless answer. Juliana, too, contemplated the consequences of accepting the gift. Legislation promised death, drawn and quartered, for anyone possessing an English translation of

even one book of the Bible. Despite her desire for increased knowledge, Petronilla, eyes still sealed shut, shook her head and tried to speak. No sound escaped her lips, however, and she tried again.

Juliana impulsively spoke. “We would be honored to accept such a gift. We will accept this translation on behalf of our prioress and the other sisters at Amesbury.”

Elizabeth jumped up and rushed to her side. “Praise God, Praise the Lord! It is my utmost desire that His bride should know His Word!” She hugged Juliana tightly, pulling her out of the chair.

Petronilla released the breath she had held and stood as well. She received Elizabeth’s affection cautiously then turned toward Mr. Daley. “You have honored us with such a generous gift. May the Lord bless you for your benevolence toward the sisters of Amesbury.”

Looking deep into Petronilla’s heart, Mr. Daley responded. “The Lord has blessed us already. It is my sincere hope that you would find liberation at the hands of God. That is the truest blessing.”

With a few more adieus, the women left the Daley cottage behind and headed northeast toward Amesbury. At times the women traveled roads, other times they followed streams. At all times the two women thought on their covert possession at the bottom of a bundle, wrapped in Elizabeth’s light green dress, under a blanket and the seeds Juliana had brought.

Despite the monotony of the scenery, Petronilla had begun to enjoy the brisk pace they had set for themselves. The day warmed beyond the expectations of the nuns and they removed their cloaks as perspiration began to form above their lips. As the morning drew toward afternoon, however, the steps became less frequent and shorter; even before the women realized the hour their stomachs started a slow rumble.

“This,” Juliana acknowledged her mid-section, “is a testimony of Sister Verona’s great cooking skill.”

Petronilla politely nodded yet did not recall Verona’s name or face from among the women she had lived with for fifteen years.

“Verona would help me in the garden during the harvests. She would enjoy this journey!”

Petronilla glanced at Juliana and resisted her desire to speak.

“Of course, all the outside sisters will have to confess after I tell them of our adventures!”

Petronilla looked sharply at Juliana and she had to explain. “They’ll be jealous!”

“Of this? Of walking? Of not knowing where we are going?” Petronilla increased her pace out of frustration and desperation. “I would not be jealous!”

Juliana considered her advancing sister then stated, “You must be hungry.”

As Petronilla formed a response she spotted a town. Instead of a retort, she spoke good news. “A town.”

Sure enough, the women were headed directly into a town. As they approached, delicious smells wafted toward them as the noon meal was prepared in house after house. Insects of all sorts seemed to hover what would have to be the butcher’s shop, attracted from all directions by the raw meat. The women strained to see if church but could not identify one. Several buildings appeared to be houses, their single story giving them away.

“Maybe someone down there has extra food.” Juliana opened her clenched fist, palm up. Her hand held two coins.

Petronilla could not imagine where Juliana had gotten money. All their needs were provided for at the convent and Petronilla had never seen money in the possession of anyone but the prioress. “Where did you? Certainly the Prioress did not. . . No.” Petronilla stood up and

lifted her right hand, her palm raised toward heaven. "Praise God for the provision of this money."

"Praise God," Juliana echoed. Within shouting distance of the first houses, Juliana paused and Petronilla stopped beside her. "Which house do we go to?"

"The first one," Petronilla answered, expressing more confidence than she felt. She walked resolutely toward the house. Looking round at Juliana, who shrugged and smiled, Petronilla reached out and knocked on the door jam. Immediately Petronilla spoke. "Hello. Hello."

The door opened. A girl appearing ten years old peered out at the women then turned and ran into the recesses of the house. Seconds later a woman appeared in the doorway with a child on each side. "To what may we credit your presence?" The woman spoke with stilted formality and a slight quiver in her voice.

"We are traveling to Amesbury. We are merely passing through town and do not have any food. We would appreciate any you might spare. We can pay you." Petronilla's voice turned from confident to uncertain as a man joined the woman at the door.

"You are welcome at the Stanley home. Come in, Sisters, come in." The husband and wife backed away from the door, allowing Petronilla and Julianna to enter the crowded house. Although larger than the Daley home, this house appeared to be packed with children and furniture. After a full round of introductions, the wife excused herself to gather some food, and her daughters followed her into the next room. Two boys were left with their father. Mr. Stanley offered the women a seat but remained standing himself, as did his sons.

After a momentary silence at Mrs. Stanley's departure, her husband spoke. "So you are traveling to Amesbury. Where are you from?"

"We are from the convent in Essex," Petronilla answered.

Mr. Stanley examined Juliana. "And her?"

"I am a nun also, but my habit is torn." Petronilla nodded in agreement and Mr. Stanley proceeded in another line of questioning.

"Where did you live before you joined the convent?"

Petronilla answered. "I lived in London. My sister has lived in this county all her life."

Mr. Stanley surveyed Juliana then returned to Petronilla. "Do you know much of London, of the King's pleasure?"

"I am sorry, sir, but I have been absent from London these fifteen years and do not have any news of his royal will that would enlighten our present situation. I have lived quite secluded in the convent since leaving London."

"Yes. I see. King Henry sought a divorce from his queen and the Pope did not allow it. Have you heard of this matter?"

"Oh, yes," Petronilla answered nervously, thinking of the contraband of which she and Juliana had possession. "We were not so secluded as to miss such unfortunate occurrences. We also have heard of the religious changes which are sweeping the country."

Mr. Stanley shook his head. "The changes are not sweeping through all the country." Mr. Stanley paused, observing the women closely. "Is there truth to the rumor of the closing of the convents?"

"Yes. We are traveling to Amesbury for that very reason."

"Will all of the convents be closed in England? Several of my daughters are destined to be cloistered. They are destined by necessity."

"Sir," Juliana spoke out of ingrained loyalty but not truth. "Our King would not remove the main expression of religious devotion from young women such as yours!"

Petronilla did not feel the same conviction but added to Juliana's words. "Although we have no such confidences to share, it is hard to imagine the removal of all monastic houses from the countryside. The closure of our convent was due to the small yearly income which it earned; only the smallest convents and monasteries are being closed."

Juliana, seizing the opportunity, asked Mr. Stanley if he knew the way to Amesbury and if he had any counsel for their journey.

Mr. Stanley explained the way to Amesbury and suggested they travel off the roads as much as possible, as dangerous men traveled the road often. Then Mrs. Stanley entered the room carrying a basket. She handed it to her husband, who in turn offered it to Petronilla. The nuns rose from their seats. Petronilla grasped the basket and quickly had to hold it with two hands due to its weight.

"May the Lord be with you in your journey and this food nourish his servants."

"Our sisters join with us in our thanks to you for the beautiful basket. Please accept this small token of our gratitude." Juliana put the two coins she still grasped in her fist into Mr. Stanley's hand. "May the Lord bless you for your kindness to strangers."

"May the Lord bless us for kindness shown to his bride," Mr. and Mrs. Stanley spoke in unison with their children.

The nuns left the Stanley house, waving to the small children who followed them out into the street. Juliana's eyes and head darted back and forth, taking note of everything she passed and everything that occurred before her. Merchants reopened their stores after their noonday meal. Adults, weary from the morning's work, left the comfort of their homes to return to the grueling afternoon. Children ran between adults and animals.

Petronilla contemplated her situation. "I have no choice. I have no family to live with. My husband is Christ; any earthly union would be adultery. I am walking to the only home I

have,” but Petronilla feared Amesbury was in danger, too. She saw the town grow smaller in the distance. Turning back toward the road ahead of her, she lifted the basket higher onto her hip and thought aloud, “It will never be.”

Juliana, curious, observed Petronilla for a moment before walking off the road. “We will stop here to eat.”

Petronilla continued along the path. “If we keep walking, we can sit among those bushes.” She nodded toward a clump of brush further along and set far off the road.

Juliana looked from the bushes to the path and back to the bushes, judging the distance. Without a word she stepped back onto the path and walked quickly toward them. Petronilla hurried to keep up. As they approached, the wind picked up and consumed the travelers with the sound of leaves being stolen from their beds of rest and flung to the ground.

Juliana arrived at their destination first and laid down their bundles amongst the bushes. She then walked back to Petronilla and took the basket out of her hand, joined Petronilla in step and began to talk. “This trip has been more pleasant than I imagined! Just think, our sisters whisked by here in a cart and we have the opportunity to wallow in the experience. Can you think of a more appropriate manner of travel than by foot?”

Petronilla did not answer. “I can’t help but feel a sort of specialness about this time. I can’t describe it exactly. What do you feel?”

“Cool, to tell the truth. I had not thought of this trip as anything but a transition between two living arrangements.” Petronilla shrugged and arrived at the lunch-time destination.

Petronilla spread a blanket on the ground on which the woman sat to eat. They rummaged through the basket as they spoke, pulling food out and eating portions of it before returning the item to its proper place. “When the prioress first read the proclamation concerning the recent legislative action, I immediately thought that life would change and I didn’t want that.” Juliana

blushed at the confession of her own will but Petronilla nodded in understanding, thinking of her own apprehension about leaving the convent. “But now . . . Now I am excited about the change, about joining the sisters in Amesbury. I’m sure I am. And the book. I am excited about the book.”

Petronilla’s thoughts rolled into one general feeling of anticipation and apprehension which she could not have expressed upon pain of death. Juliana waited an appropriate length of time for a response, but after an entire morning without mentioning it, Juliana was anxious to broach the subject. “I wanted to read some of the New Testament, so I accepted the gift. I maintain the responsibility when we rejoin our sisters. The prioress will not discipline you, I’m sure. This was my doing.”

“If we make it to Amesbury with this book we stand together in correction.” Petronilla’s heart beat strongly as she confessed. “I, too, want to read the Holy Bible. I can hardly tolerate a longer wait.”

Juliana wanted to ask Petronilla to repeat herself, but did not dare. Instead she reached into her bundle and pushed aside the material of the green dress, revealing the book. Juliana grasped the book; with a deep breath and a quick look in the direction of the town, Juliana lifted the volume from its secure hiding place.

“Where should we start?” Juliana whispered.

“The Acts of the Apostles,” Petronilla answered quickly.

“Shouldn’t we start at the beginning?” Juliana gingerly opened the cover and flipped reverently through the first half of the New Testament. Petronilla nodded.

“Of course. How quickly can we read to the Acts of the Apostles? There is something I want to see in chapter four.”

Juliana attempted to hand the book to Petronilla. Petronilla shook her head but Juliana said, “You are the teacher; you must read better than I.” Petronilla accepted the book and began to read the Gospel of St. Matthew:

‘This is the book of the generation of Jesus Christ the son of David, the son also of Abraham. . .’

Three hours later the women were still reading out of the forbidden book. They had read of Jesus’ birth and early miracles, of His followers and sudden death. The sun had slipped past the horizon line of the sky and bushes; they were engrossed in the ministry of Jesus and had not kept track of the sun’s progress. Realizing the lateness of the hour, they quickly repacked the blanket they sat on and put the New Testament under some food in the basket.

Petronilla peeked through the bushes to judge whether the path carried travelers who would question their being in the bushes. No one appeared to be traveling the road and the nuns practically ran from their hiding place to the path leading away from the town. Still nervous, they continued to watch behind them until their hearts had ceased their pounding and their feet had lost the urge to run.

Although she wanted to reach Amesbury quickly, Juliana hoped that they would be able to stop again and read from the small book hidden in the Stanley’s basket. She expressed this desire to Petronilla and they began to discuss the various portions of the Gospels which they remembered. The Gospel of St. John, chapter one:

‘For the law was given by Moses, but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ.’

They continued in this manner until the path they followed branched into another larger and well maintained road.

Petronilla remembered Mr. Stanley's advice about the other travelers who frequented the road and wanted to ask her sister whether they should resume their discussion along another route, but a lone man was traveling the wider road. Not wanting to draw attention to them, Petronilla and Juliana joined the main road without debate. Petronilla began to slow her pace, hoping to create distance between the man and themselves. Juliana, however, had seemed to forget the advice of Mr. Stanley and did not match her stride.

Preoccupied with her own worried thoughts of dangerous vagabonds and the contraband she carried at her side, Petronilla stumbled into a wheel rut, lost her footing, and dropped the basket. Sprawled in the dirt on the road, Petronilla watched food spill out onto the ground and the basket roll away from her toward the man who had stopped at her thud. The man caught the basket and stooped to pick up the biscuits, jerky, and vegetables which had previously been protecting the Bible from detection.

Frantic about the whereabouts of the Bible, Petronilla found it laying open a short distance from her right foot. She shifted herself toward the book and only then did she lift herself onto her feet, still hunched over, appearing to examine her foot. Juliana, who had been overwhelmed at her sister's accident, now approached her with the man, finished replacing the food, following close behind.

"Sister Petronilla, did you hurt your foot?" Juliana preferred to examine the foot herself, but Petronilla prevented her from doing so solely with her expression. Instinctively, Juliana whirled on the man trailing her and stood between her stooping sister and the man. "She appears to be unharmed."

The man stopped at Juliana's unuttered request but continued to plead his own mind. "Really, I would feel better if I were able to establish that myself. I cannot in good conscience leave a woman injured on the road. Please allow me to pass."

Realizing the position of the man whom she confronted, Juliana moved quickly away from her sister, muttering, "Of course, Father."

Petronilla, newly exposed but already upright, held her cloak tightly around her. "As you can see, that is not necessary, Father. I have suffered no injury."

As she paced to prove her point, her cloak's hood fell away to reveal the white veil covering her hair. The priest responded immediately; he backed away from her. Petronilla hoped the priest would simply leave but he stayed. Petronilla had hid the book under her cloak and wished desperately to regain the basket so she could repack the New Testament inside. However, the priest continued to carry the basket and made no movement to return it to the nuns.

"May I be of any assistance to you, Sister?"

Juliana answered, to the young priest's amazement. "Do you know how far we are from Amesbury?"

Again, the priest addressed Petronilla instead of Juliana but she hardly noticed.

"Amesbury is in Wiltshire, not far from Salisbury and Wilton. It is a one-day trip by beast from Salisbury, the town we are approaching. What business do you have at Amesbury?"

"We are sisters of the order of Fontevrault. Our convent in Essex has been dissolved and we are wishing to join our sisters at Amesbury." Petronilla explained their situation and continued to hold the book and her cloak tightly, fearful of discovery.

"Well, you must stay at the church in Salisbury overnight. You will not reach a safer place by nightfall and the coolness has turned to cold. The vicar in Salisbury is known to me; I will accompany you there and request on your behalf. If, of course, that is pleasing to you."

"We would appreciate your kindness," Juliana said. The priest, still confused by Juliana's clothing as to whether one or both of the women were nuns, had plenty of time to discover

Juliana was, indeed, cloistered as, to Petronilla's horror, Juliana talked nonstop with the priest along the entire road to Salisbury.

As the travelers began to see the spire of the cathedral of Salisbury, the priest recounted the history of the town. "Old Sarum was a town established by the Romans. When they left, Britons moved into the old Roman buildings. William I renamed the town Salisberie and ordered the strengthening of the town's defenses as well as the building of a wooden castle on the central mound." The priest pointed to an area to the south of the cathedral but the women could not decide at that distance whether they noticed a raised area of earth or not. The priest continued. "In 1057 work on the cathedral began. Ultimately this forced the foundation of the modern city of Salisbury; there was insufficient acreage for the military and the clergy to share."

The women accompanied the priest through the smooth stone streets as the priest told of the town's charter issued in 1227, how the town had lost their charter in 1306, and how the idle and unemployed had increasingly become a problem in recent times. Although the priest spoke of a fading star on the verge of collapse, to the nuns the houses appeared luxurious.

Each house was built in the same style with even white plaster walls with crossbeams painted dark brown. Windows were trimmed in the dark brown timber as well as the doors. Steep roofs were thatched and the women could not see any holes in the roofs as they passed. Each house had a brick chimney raising from the back of the house, possibly the kitchen. Petronilla reflected on the Stanley home; built similarly yet in worse condition with plaster missing from portions of the outside wall. Juliana wished her sister were living in Salisbury instead of in the hovel her husband had built.

When they turned onto St. Johns Street the cathedral loomed large in their vision and the women involuntarily stopped under the influence of the magnificent edifice. Although they could

not see the entire building from where they stood, the intricate patterns on the spires and sheer size of the cathedral contrasted sharply with the humble lives to which they had pledged themselves.

The priest doubled back to recover his companions. “It is beautiful, is it not? Salisbury has the tallest spire in England. In the world! Is it not grand?”

Petronilla pressed the forbidden book more tightly against her ribs as Juliana attempted to answer. “Well, yes, it is. . .”

“Of course,” the priest continued smugly, “the reformers have removed all the treasures inside, but they could not destroy the building itself.”

The priest held the door of the cathedral for the nuns and followed them inside saying, “I will find the vicar. Please wait here.” He set the basket down; he disappeared around the corner into another wing of the cathedral. Petronilla listened until the echo of his footsteps was impossible to hear

The women’s eyes became accustomed to the dimness inside but even after they could see adequately they were unable to move. The sheer magnitude and beauty stilled any curiosity they might have felt. Petronilla saw Juliana’s face, one of awe and reverence, yet aversion and knew her own body betrayed her, too. Petronilla felt the cramp of her fingers clutching the Bible and took the opportunity to bury it in a bundle she wrenched away from Juliana’s clinched fists.

The women stood at the back of the sanctuary. To their left and to their right towering arches stretched across several benches each. These arches led to chanceries on each side of the main chamber. Smaller arches perched atop the taller arches and lifted the ceiling farther away from the nuns on the ground. On the far wall a stained glass window cast a myriad of colors onto the alter. Juliana watched the color of the window change as alternately clouds and sunshine affected the light flow through it.

The women heard the echo of footsteps before they actually saw the priest return with another man. The two clergymen walked down the center isle between the benches and stopped in front of the nuns. Quickly introductions were concluded and the younger priest excused himself to return to his own affairs.

Silently the nuns followed the vicar down the isle and proceeded to exit the building into a beautifully landscaped courtyard. Despite the coldness of the weather, flowers in perfect bloom decorated the tombs of the holy men buried in the quadrant. The stone path framed the burial ground and connected the worship center from the other areas of the cathedral structure. Each side of the square had a door which opened into a room. One room, the vicar mentioned, held an original draft of the Magna Carta. Another set of rooms along the other side housed the clergymen who called the cathedral home and where the vicar showed the women the room they could use that night. The wing opposite the sanctuary was the chamber in which meals were served and administrative tasks were performed. Along with the lawn surrounding the cathedral, the grounds were larger than the amount of land Mr. Daley had to farm and raise sheep.

Notified of the time of the evening meal and mass, the nuns entered the room they would occupy that evening. After the affluence of the outer chambers, the inner room's plainness struck the nuns strangely. The only furniture in the room was a straw-mattress bed, a small table, and an oil lamp which lighted the room. The walls were a nondescript light color with no ornamentation.

The day had been long and tiring and Petronilla set down her burden and laid on the bed to rest before dinner. Juliana did the same but brought the New Testament with her. Handing it to Petronilla, Juliana turned up the lamp. "Is there a short part? We don't have long."

Petronilla thumbed through the book and then stopped. "I found one - the first epistle of St. Peter the Apostle." Juliana nodded eagerly and Petronilla began:

'Peter an apostle of Jesus Christ, to them that dwell here and there as strangers throughout Pontus, Galacia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, elect by the foreknowledge

of God the father, through the sanctifying of the spirit, unto obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ. Grace be to you and peace be multiplied.

‘Blessed be God the father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which through his abundant mercy begat us again unto a lively hope, by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from death, to enjoy an inheritance immortal and undefiled, and that putrieth not, reserved in heaven for you, which are kept by the power of God through faith, unto salvation, which salvation, s prepared all ready to be shewed in the last time, in the which time ye shall rejoice, though now for a season (if need require) ye are in heaviness, through manifold temptations, that your faith once tried, being much more precious than gold that perisheth (though it be tried with fire) might be found unto laud, glory, and honour at the appearing of Jesus Christ: whom ye have not seen and yet love him, in whom even now, though ye see him not, ye yet believe, and rejoice with joy unspeakable and glorious: receiving the end of your faith, the salvation of your souls.

‘Of which salvation have the prophets inquired and searched, which prophesied of the grace that should come unto you, searching when or at what time the spirit of Christ which was in them should signify, which spirit testified before, the passions that should come unto Christ, and the glory that should follow after: unto which prophets it was declared, that not unto themselves, but unto us, they should minister the things which are now shewed unto you of them which by the holy ghost sent down from heaven, have preached unto you the things which the angels desire to behold.

‘Wherefore gird up the loins of your minds, be sober, and trust perfectly on the grace that is brought unto you, but the declaring of Jesus Christ, as obedient children, not fashioning yourselves unto your old lusts of ignorance: but as he which called you is holy, even so be ye holy in all manner of conversation, because it is written. Be ye holy, for I am holy.

‘And if so be that ye call on the father which without respect of person judgeth according to every mans work, see that ye pass the time of your pilgrimage in fear. Forasmuch as ye know how that ye were not redeemed with corruptible silver and gold from your vain conversation which ye received by the traditions of the fathers: but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb undefiled, and without spot, which was ordained before the world was made: but was declared in the last times for your sakes, which by his means have believed on God that raised him from death, and glorified him, that your faith and hope might be in God.

‘And forasmuch as ye have purified your souls though the spirit, in obeying the truth for to love brotherly without feigning, see that ye love one another with a pure heart fervently: for ye are born anew, not of mortal seed, but of immortal, by the word of God which liveth, and lasteth for ever. The grass withereth, and the flower falleth away, but the word of the Lord endureth ever. And this is the word which by the gospel was preached among you.’

Petronilla paused to catch her breath and someone knocked on the door. Petronilla and Juliana sat up quickly out of shock. Continuing toward the door, Petronilla stashed the book among the bundles they brought from the convent. Juliana opened the door and confronted a priest.

“It is time for the evening meal. Please follow me.”

The nuns accompanied the priest into the common eating chamber they had heard of earlier. Five other people, all men, presumably all priests, were standing behind chairs around a long rectangular table. Places had been set for Juliana and Petronilla at the other end of the table, away from the priests and their conversation. The women stood behind their chairs and waited. When the sixth priest, the one who had retrieved them, had taken his place one of the other men prayed and everyone took their seats.

Petronilla and Juliana were served first, then the clergymen. The distance between the priests and nuns prevented them from talking but many eyes wandered during the course of the meal to the far end of the table to observe the nun in a red dress and no head covering. Wishing she had remembered her veil, Juliana worried about whether she would be able to attend mass that evening without one.

Petronilla observed her sister's embarrassment but did not know how to change the subject. Instead, she mentioned the offending garment. "You can wear my veil. You might feel more comfortable covered. The habit gives me away, anyway."

When the women spoke to one another all of the priests looked away or engrossed themselves in the conversation among their end of the table. When Petronilla realized this, she immediately began to talk in a quiet voice and continued throughout the meal although it gave her great pain to do so. She spoke of anything and everything which came to mind, often jumping from one subject to another. "I am not sure I want to go to Amesbury at all. The book will most definitely be taken from us, if not worse, and I am beginning to like freedom from the regulations of the convent."

Horrified, Petronilla quit talking and sat looking at her lap, realizing for the first time that she wished to leave the cloister. While Petronilla remained appalled at herself Juliana pretended

not to have heard her sister's statement but instead spoke on a safe topic, describing the beauty of the cathedral and the goodness of the clergymen of Salisbury to allow them to stay overnight.

Finally, as the clergymen left one or two at a time, Petronilla relaxed. The last priest to leave approached to women nervously. "Please do not take offense, but we supposed you might not have had access to a Confessor in several days. Confession will be immediately preceding Mass if you wish to participate."

"Thank you, Father." Juliana said. Petronilla's face flushed as the priest turned away.

"Can I truly confess tonight? It will be my death!" Tears frolicked in Petronilla's eyes as Juliana shook her head.

"Not at all. You will not die unless you want to! Let me think." Juliana pushed away from the table, causing a horrid sound as the foot of the chair scraped against the ground. "Come with me."

The women returned to their room, conscious of the few minutes they had to decide what course of action to take. Juliana paced inside the room and Petronilla hunched dejectedly on the bed. "My idea." Juliana tried to appear enthusiastic. "Confess everything," Petronilla, who had lifted her head expectantly, dropped it again, "to different priests."

Petronilla thought for a moment. Then nodded slowly. She looked her sister in the eye and said, "I will do that."

The women went together to Confession. There were only two priests hearing confessions that evening; not as many as Petronilla had hoped but still more helpful than only one Confessor. Petronilla entered the first booth and rehearsed her sins, including her reluctance to return to a convent, omitting only that she had read the Bible in spite of direct legislation against it. She accepted the penance which included numerous prayers as well as telling the prioress of her doubts. Exiting, Petronilla traded booths with Juliana. Once she was there, however, she

could not bring herself to confess to reading the Bible. Try as she might, she could not. Exiting the second booth with the second booth with the same penance for twice-confessed sins, Petronilla reluctantly attended Mass. In the midst of the townspeople of Salisbury, Petronilla for the first time did not participate fully.

As soon as she returned to the room that night, she knelt and began praying fervently, working on her penance. While she prayed, Juliana read more of the New Testament. As she knelt, Petronilla fleetingly wondered whether Juliana had not sinned or did not confess. Petronilla added one more prayer to her list of penance to cover her thought against Juliana.

When she finished her penance, with the exception of speaking with the prioress, she wanted to go to sleep. Juliana put the book aside and started talking. "We need a plan."

"For what?"

"You don't want to go to Amesbury, I don't want to, we need a plan."

Petronilla sat up from her reclined position to look at her sister. "You are serious."

"I am. Are you? We leave here tomorrow but don't head for Amesbury. We just walk away."

"Where would we go?"

"Don't you have any ideas?"

Petronilla, annoyed, laid back down. "I am not going to participate in this foolishness. We have nowhere to go except to Amesbury."

Juliana turned out the lamp with a sigh. "I confessed Mrs. Knox's money."

Petronilla did not want to hear it but she did not say anything and Juliana continued. "The money Mrs. Knox had been stashing away, her tithe money. She gave it to me. She said we were the closest she would ever get to God, so she gave it to us."

“Tithe? We can not possibly spend the Lord’s money.” Petronilla’s eyes flew open wide, shocked and horrified that she had eaten the food purchased with God’s tithe.

“If we were married to a man, we would spend his.” Juliana smiled hopefully at Petronilla through the dark, but Petronilla remained silent. Over and over Petronilla watched Juliana’s small hand deposit the coins into Mr. Stanley’s callused hand and remembered that Mr. Stanley had not come home from the fields, he had been in the house already. Petronilla saw Mr. Stanley’s shirt, missing cuffs and a collar. She saw sons whose skin pulled tight across their faces due to lack of nourishment. Daughters who did not wear aprons and whose dresses were one color on the back and another, the color of splattered food, on the front. She saw young women who no longer had the opportunity to devote their lives to Christ and knew that the family only had enough dowry to marry off one or two of the oldest sisters. Petronilla saw the youngest daughter, holding onto her mother’s skirt hiding from strangers, and understood Mrs. Stanley’s eyes brighten, her shoulders straighten, when her husband took the coins. Petronilla wanted to do more for the Stanley’s.

“But I have nothing else to give,” thought Petronilla.

“My penance is to give the rest of the money to the Church.” Juliana would not leave the subject.

“There’s more money?”

Juliana nodded. “Four years worth of tithe. But if I give it to the church we will not have any money to start with. What do you think?”

“I thought we were going to Amesbury. I do not want to discuss it with you! I am not a part of this!”

Juliana tossed loudly over onto her other side, her voice whining slightly. “But this was your idea!”

Petronilla allowed the comment to pass and lay tensely until soft, even breathing replaced Juliana's sighing. Petronilla crawled out of bed, pulling a blanket around her. In the dark Petronilla groped around the bed for the Bible Juliana had laid down previously. Finding it, Petronilla sat on the ground and held the book all night.

Juliana awoke the next morning to find Petronilla still curled up with the Bible. Slipping out of bed, she sat next to her sister. Petronilla spoke first.

"I will go with you. Do you have any idea what we could do?" Juliana shook her head sadly. "It does not matter. This is hopeless, but this," Petronilla waved the Bible in her hand, "has given me hope."

The women gathered the few items they carried then left the room. They shut the door behind themselves. Juliana pulled her cloak out of her bundle, as the morning was unexpectedly colder than Friday. As Juliana put her cloak on, the Vicar approached the sisters and spoke. "Sisters, is it not a pleasant morning? Please join me for breakfast. I have news which will bring you joy."

They reluctantly followed the vicar into the dining room they had supped in the evening before. Seated with him, instead of at the end of the table, the women ate heartily of the warm porridge which they were served. No one said much during the meal and Petronilla began to worry that one of the Confessors had told the vicar of her doubts. They would not do that, she reasoned with herself.

Finally the vicar spoke of his news. "A young man, known to myself and greatly trusted in all of Wiltshire, has offered to take you to Amesbury by wagon. He will arrive shortly. You will be in Amesbury before lunch!"

Juliana sat speechless. Petronilla, realizing she could not talk, offered her objections to the plan but the vicar would not hear her. While Petronilla still protested, a plain-clothed man entered the room and strode directly to the table.

“James, James Lancaster, the women are ready to go!” Mr. Lancaster, a tall man gentlemanly in all his features except his clothing, bowed to each of the women, his eyes lingering shortly on Juliana.

“It will be a pleasure to accompany you to Amesbury.” Mr. Lancaster picked up the basket and two bundles, putting one under each arm. Juliana and Petronilla had little to do besides follow the men out around the courtyard, through an iron gate, and toward a wagon. Mr. Lancaster helped the women into the wagon and then mounted the seat himself. Petronilla thanked the vicar and they were off to Amesbury.

The women sat silently in the back of the wagon, attempting to communicate with their eyes only but failing miserably. As bad as the road appeared when they were walking, the road felt even worse as they rode in the back of a wagon. The sun had not appear that morning; clouds covered it and prevented any warmth from escaping to earth. The temperature continued to drop and the nuns each wrapped herself in a blanket. Mr. Lancaster glanced over his shoulder at the shivering women and stopped the wagon. As shocking as the jostling of movement had been, the termination of movement was equally as shocking.

Mr. Lancaster climbed over the seat and squatted in front of them. “Amesbury is three hours from here. Wilton House, my home, is less than an hour. If you would like, we can stop there for today and Sunday. Perhaps it will be warmer Monday. I will take you anywhere you want to go.”

Juliana looked into James Lancaster’s eyes. “Wilton House is your home?”

James Lancaster blushed. “Not exactly, although I was born there. I am the steward of the grounds. Wilton House is the residence of Lord Winchester, who recently left for London for the winter. However,” James was quick to add, “not all of Lady Winchester’s attendants went with her to London.”

Petronilla and Juliana considered each other momentarily. “Wilton House,” they said in unison. James Lancaster nodded and climbed back over the seat. After the wagon had resumed its journey the women sat back, contented for the moment.

True to James’ word, the wagon soon turned onto a smoother path. First they entered, then exited, a dense portion of woods. On the far side of the grove the view was not blocked and the women could see the house Juliana would soon call home. Just short of a castle, the only building either woman had seen which rivaled its finery was the cathedral they had just left. In front of the house a path circled a stone pond which, for the winter, was empty.

Before the wagon stopped two men ran from the front door. They helped Petronilla and Juliana out of the wagon and unloaded their bundles and basket before taking the wagon from James. He picked up their items and led them to the front door.

That night the sky opened and dropped icy rain onto southern England, making the roads muddy, icy, and impassable. For two weeks it was impossible to travel or even to send word to Amesbury that Petronilla and Juliana would be delayed. During that time the women finished reading the New Testament and had even started reading it with other servants left in the countryside at Wilton House. Throughout the winter Petronilla and Juliana found no reason to leave Wilton House, but soon Juliana found a reason to stay.

December 13, 1536

Dearest Sister Petronilla,

It is with extreme joy that I write to you, as it was with extreme joy I read your letter. Mr. Daley and I know it was with utmost deliberation that you have decided not to return to the cloistered life and we admire your decision to honor your vow to God. Mr. Daley and I would be pleased to invite you into our home, and Mr. Daley has already begun to discuss the possibility of a school with the townspeople. Come as quickly as you are able, although we know you prefer to wait until Lord Winchester has returned from London and the wedding can be affirmed. Greet Juliana with a hug and kiss. We both wish her and her fiancée the best of God's blessings.

Your friend out of our differences,
Elizabeth Daley

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