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SF PERUSALS

Hadrian the Seventh

Peter Luke

A Samuel French Acting Edition

SAMUEL FRENCH
FOUNDED 1830

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CAST

(In Order of Appearance)

Fr. William Rolfe
Mrs. Crowe
First Bailiff
Second Bailiff
Agnes
Dr. Talacryn, *Bishop of Caerleon*
Dr. Courtleigh, *Cardinal-Archbishop of Pimlico*
Jeremiah Sant
The Cardinal-Archdeacon
Father St. Albans, *Prepositor-General of the Jesuits*
Cardinal Berstein
Cardinal Ragna
Rector of St. Andrew's College
George Arthur Rose
Papal Chamberlain
Cardinals
Seminarists
Papal Guards
Swiss Guards
Acolytes

SCENES

ACT ONE

Scene 1: Frederick Rolfe's Bed-sittting room in London

Scene 2: A room in Archbishop House

Scene 3: A Chapel in the Vatican

ACT TWO

SCENE 1: Mrs. Crowe's Parlour

SCENE 2: An Audience Chamber in the Vatican

SCENE 3: Outside a Cafe in Rome

SCENE 4: The Audience Chamber

SCENE 5: The College

SCENE 6: The Audience Chamber

SCENE 7: The Audience Chamber

SCENE 8: Frederick Rolfe's Bed-sitting room

Time: Around 1903

A NOTE ON THE APPEARANCE AND BEHAVIOURISMS OF ROLFE/HADRIAN

Frederick William Rolfe, when the play opens, is a smallish, spare man, of about forty. He wears his greying hair very short, is myopic and can hardly see without his plain, steel-rimmed spectacles, but he is slim, agile and erect.

His tastes are austere but he is fond of such things as goat's milk, apples, raw carrots, fresh linen and particularly water, both to drink and to wash in. He is a practical man and carries a penknife with which he prepares his apples, sharpens pencils, etc.

He smokes a lot, always rolling his own and tucking the ends in with a pencil. Cat-like, his movements are swift, lithe and silent. Likewise, there are moments when he remains utterly still. As Pope, he comports himself with extraordinary dignity when the occasion demands, though "off-duty" he reverts to his more abnormal self. In the early part of Act I and at the end of the play, Rolfe wears a threadbare clerical grey suit. During the rest of the play, Rolfe/Hadrian wears such Canonical dress as may be appropriate.

Hadrian The Seventh

ACT ONE

Scene 1

Scene: *A corner of Frederick Rolfe's bed-sitting room in London. The room is the abode of a poor scholar of fastidious habits and austere tastes. There is a small gas-fire* R., *the meter for which is on the wall* D. R. U. L. *is the door leading to the rest of the house. A small chest-of-drawers is* U. C., *and below it a wooden armchair. Religious painting covers the walls, and there is a small crucifix on the wall below the fire. Next to the gas meter is a mirror. A wooden chair is wedged beneath the door handle. Books lie around, and there is a bottle of ink on the floor below the armchair.*

At Rise: Rolfe *is seated in the armchair writing a manuscript on his knees, and smoking a fat, untidy rolled cigarette which he seldom takes out of his mouth. He is shivering with cold, and has a blanket wrapped around him. After a moment there is a KNOCK on the door.* Rolfe *looks round to make sure the chair is firmly wedged in place and smirks with satisfaction. The KNOCKING is repeated more peremptorily, accompanied by rattlings of the DOOR HANDLE.*

Mrs. Crowe. (*Off.*) Mr. Rolfe. (*She tries the HANDLE, which does not give.*) Mr. Rolfe! (*She rattles the HANDLE.*) What's the matter with this door? Mr. Rolfe, I know you're there.

ROLFE. Tickle your ass with a feather.

MRS. CROWE. (*Off.*) What did you say?

ROLFE. Particularly nasty weather, Mrs. Crowe.

MRS. CROWE. (*Off.*) Mr. Rolfe, I haven't climbed all these stairs just to be insulted. There are two gentlemen below who wish to see you.

ROLFE. (*Starting up; noticeably startled.*) To see *me?*

MRS. CROWE. (*Off.*) Yes, to see you. (ROLFE *quickly takes the fag-end out of his mouth and moves to the door to remove the barricade.* MRS. CROWE *enters furiously. She is a widow of about forty with pretentions to good looks and gentility. She succeeds only in being "genteel."* ROLFE *looks nervously past her down the staircase.*) Ah, I thought you'd come off your high horse when you heard that.

ROLFE. (*Recovering slightly.*) Oh—well, I'm very busy. (*He puts the chair* L. *of the door.*)

MRS. CROWE. They said it was a private matter which couldn't wait.

ROLFE. (*Attempting to bluster.*) I'm not prepared to see them unless they state the precise nature of their business, Mrs. Crowe.

MRS. CROWE. If you think I'm going to run all the way up and down these stairs like a skivvy to carry your messages . . . (*Significantly.*) I think you'd better see them, Mr. Rolfe.

ROLFE. Oh? Hmmmmm! Very well. Please show them up, Mrs. Crowe, but let it be understood— (MRS. CROWE *exits, shutting the door.*) that I haven't got all day. (*Crossing to the mirror.*) Lascivious bitch! (*He quickly takes a stiff white collar and a plain black tie from the chest-of-drawers and puts them on. He hastily puts a packet of oatmeal out of sight in a drawer, then sits and makes notes on his manuscript.*) I'm in an awful state. Calm down, calm down, buck up. (*Hearing footsteps.*) Oh, my God . . . (*There is the sound of FOOTSTEPS mounting the stairs, and with a peremptory KNOCK.*) Come in. (MRS. CROWE *ushers in the* TWO BAILIFFS. *The*

SECOND BAILIFF *is a venerable-looking old man with white hair. His colleague, the* FIRST BAILIFF, *is a tall amiable, healthy-looking fellow in his early forties. It is suggested that they should bear a resemblance to Dr. Courtleigh, Cardinal-Archbishop of Pimlico, and Dr. Talacryn, Bishop of Caerleon respectively. Alternatively, the parts can be doubled to emphasise the likeness.* ROLFE *goes on making notes. After a moment he looks up. Turning on the charm.*) Ah, good-day, gentlemen. (*With a gracious nod to* MRS. CROWE.) Thank you so much, Mrs. Crowe. (*He rises and moves* R. MRS. CROWE *hovers in the hope of hearing something.*) Please don't bother to wait. I shall see my visitors out myself. (MRS. CROWE *exits reluctantly.* ROLFE *draws himself up to the full extent of his inconsiderable height to receive his guests. A trembling knee alone gives away his nervousness.*) And now, gentlemen, please tell me how I can be of service to you.

FIRST BAILIFF. (*Looking at a document in his hand.*) Are you Mr. Corvo?

ROLFE. (*Suspiciously.*) No.

FIRST BAILIFF. (*Looking at his papers.*) Sorry, sir. I mean *Baron* Corvo?

ROLFE. That is not my name.

SECOND BAILIFF. We're try—

FIRST BAILIFF. (*Consulting his papers.*) Oh. Then are you Frank W. Hochheimer?

(*The* SECOND BAILIFF *sits in the chair* L.)

ROLFE. (*Stiffly.*) No.

FIRST BAILIFF. Or Mr. F. Austin?

ROLFE. (*Icily.*) I am not.

SECOND BAILIFF. But you are Mr. Frederick William Rolfe— (*He pronounces it as in "golf."*) are you not, sir?

ROLFE. That is almost correct. My name is Frederick William *Rolfe.* (*He pronounces it as in "oaf."*) And who, may I ask, are you?

FIRST BAILIFF. My colleague and I are Officers of the

Court— Bailiffs, you understand— and we hold a writ against you, Mr. Rolfe— (*Handing the writ to* ROLFE.) on behalf of certain parties— (ROLFE *takes the writ and reads it.*) claiming certain debts. Do you follow me so far, Mr. Rolfe?

ROLFE. Your brevity will assist my comprehension.

FIRST BAILIFF. Quite so, sir. And I'm sure my colleague and I have no wish to remain here longer than necessary, so I will endeavour to constrict myself to the essential details, sir. The position is that, in brief, the Court has seen fit to award against you the initial sum of the debt plus the costs of the several plaintiffs versus yourself for which a remittance must be made into Court forthwith in default of which and in consideration of a warrant of execution there will be no alternative but to attend at your premises and remove the contents thereof for sale by public auction.

ROLFE. (*Mumbling.*) And then throw dice for my garments.

FIRST BAILIFF. I beg your pardon?

SECOND BAILIFF. 'Scuse me asking, but are you by any chance a clergyman or anything of that sort? I mean— Fr. Rolfe—it looks a bit like Father Rolfe. See what I mean?

ROLFE. My name is Frederick Rolfe. I have never taken Holy Orders. Had I done so, no doubt I should have been a bishop by now—not a mere priest.

SECOND BAILIFF. (*Guffawing good-naturedly.*) Ho, ho, sir. Very good.

FIRST BAILIFF. Well, I think if you're quite clear as to the nature of our call, sir, we—

ROLFE. You leave me in doubt as to the nature of your call.

FIRST BAILIFF. (*Producing a slip of paper.*) In that case perhaps you'd be good enough to sign this undertaking not to remove your furniture or effects or any part thereof from the premises until further notice.

ROLFE. You're asking me to sign this document?

FIRST BAILIFF. That's right, sir. Just here.

ROLFE. I'm sorry, but that's something I never do.

FIRST BAILIFF. What's that, sir?

ROLFE. Sign documents. I never sign documents.

FIRST BAILIFF. Purely a formality, sir, I assure you.

ROLFE. You can assure me till the Day of Judgment, as many others have done before. Invariably their assurances were perfervid, perfidious, casuistic and, in a word, false. Ergo, no signature. Sorry.

FIRST BAILIFF. Are you saying you are refusing to sign, sir?

ROLFE. I am saying in the simplest possible language that I do not intend to sign that document. Are you satisfied?

FIRST BAILIFF. No, sir, I am not. If you refuse to sign this B-sixty-three form here, I shall have no alternative but to apply immediately to the Court for a Warrant of Execution. (*The* SECOND BAILIFF *rises and they both move Upstage.*) You've not heard the last of this, I'm afraid, sir.

SECOND BAILIFF. Good day, sir.

(*The* BAILIFFS *exit. Alone,* ROLFE'S *flippant demeanour suddenly changes to that of savage rage. He tears off his collar and tie.*)

ROLFE. (*Through clenched teeth.*) Someone will have to suffer for this.

(MRS. CROWE *appears at the door.*)

MRS. CROWE. Are you by any chance speaking to me?

ROLFE. (*Quickly pulling himself together.*) If I had heard your knock, Mrs. Crowe, I would have given myself the pleasure of addressing you, but since I did not . . . (*He sits in the armchair.*)

MRS. CROWE. Perhaps you would be good enough to tell me who your callers were, Mr. Rolfe.

ROLFE. I'm not aware that it is part of our contract that I have to identify my visitors.

MRS. CROWE. You're in trouble again, aren't you? Were they the police?

ROLFE. No.

MRS. CROWE. (*Moving Downstage a pace.*) Well, why wouldn't they give their names, then? Is it money? (*After a pause.*) It is, isn't it?

ROLFE. How can it be anything else? Of course it's money.

MRS. CROWE. So they were bailiffs then? (*There is a silence while* MRS. CROWE *vacillates between her outraged feelings as a landlady and her concupiscent inclinations as a woman. Moving above his chair; in a wheedling voice.*) Why don't you let me help you? I could help you—if you wanted me to. (*She leans over him.*) You know I have always wanted to be your friend. Couldn't I be now? Mr. Crowe left me quite comfortable. You know that. (*She puts her hand on his arm. In loathing at her touch* ROLFE *jumps up, and in doing so kicks over the ink bottle on the floor in front of him. He hurries to wipe up the mess. Furious at the rejection of her advances.*) There! (*Moving* C.) Now look what you've done! Ink all over the floor! How do you suppose I'll ever get that out? It'll probably go right through the ceiling below.

ROLFE. (*Picking up the bottle.*) I will naturally make good any damage done. (*He moves* D. R.)

MRS. CROWE. Make good any damage! With the bailiffs hardly out of the house? (*Working herself up.*) I'm not fooled by your high-falutin' talk any more. Before you do any more of your "making good" you'll kindly pay me the quarter's rent you owe. Yes, and you'll kindly pay it by the end of the week as well or I shall be obliged to give you notice to leave. As a matter of fact, I need the room for a business gentleman.

ROLFE. A business *gentleman?* Is there such a thing?

MRS. CROWE. An old friend of yours.

ROLFE. I haven't the slightest idea what you're talking

about, neither have I any desire to . . . Who is this person?

MRS. CROWE. Oh, I fancy you'll remember him all right. Don't you remember Belfast?

ROLFE. Sant!

MRS. CROWE. That's right, Mr. Rolfe. Mr. Jeremiah Sant.

ROLFE. Sant and that gutter scandal-sheet of his—what is it called? The Tory Protester?

MRS. CROWE. I want the room.

ROLFE. What excrement is he tooting out of his Orange flute now?

MRS. CROWE. It's none of your business. It's pay up or get out. (*She goes, deliberately not slamming the door.*)

ROLFE. (*Shouting in a paroxysm of rage at the closed door.*) You can't get shit from a wooden rocking-horse, you rapacious, concupiscent—female. (*After a short pause he has second thoughts, runs to the door, opens it, and shouts.*) Mrs. Crowe! Someone will have to suffer for this. (*There is no answer.*) Mrs. Crowe, I know you're listening. When you're sorry for what you've said, don't be afraid to say so, Mrs. Crowe. (*He closes the door and puts the blanket round his shoulders.*) Lascivious bitch. (*He rolls and lights a cigarette, holding it cupped in his two hands for warmth.*) All those curves and protuberances—breeding, that's all they're good for. (*He sits.*) Jeremiah Sant is a gerrymandering gouger! (*After a moment he hears FOOTSTEPS on the stairs again. He listens, wondering if it is* MRS. CROWE *coming back to apologize. Instead, a LETTER is thrust under the door. He rises, looks at it suspiciously, then picks it up and turns it over, looking at the seal.*) What—what's that? Archbishop's House? (*He tears the letter open and reads it with trembling hands. Savagely.*) Hell and damnation! Imbeciles! Owl-like Hierarchs! Degenerates! (*After a pause.*) God, if ever You loved me, hear me. They have denied me the priesthood again. Not a chance do You give me, God—ever. Listen! How can I serve You— (*To the*

crucifix.) while You keep me so sequestered? I'm intelligent. So, O God, You made me. But intelligence must be active, potent, and perforce I am impotent and inactive always; futile in my loneliness. Why, O God, have You made me strange, uncommon, such a mystery to my fellow-creatures? Am I such a ruffian as to merit total exile from them? You have made me denuded of the power of love—to love anybody or be loved. I suppose I must go on like that to the end (*Grimly.*) because they are frightened of me—frightened of the labels I put on them. (*He puts out his cigarette savagely.*) Oh, God, forgive me smoking. I quite forgot. I am not doing well at present, but what can I do? God, tell me clearly, unmistakably and distinctly, tell me, tell me what I must do—and make me do it. (*He sits.*) Oh Lord, I am sick—and very tired. (*His mind is in a ferment and he cannot rest. There is a KNOCK on the door. Fiercely.*) Who is it? (*He rises and moves to* L. *of the door.*)

AGNES. (*Off.*) It's only me, sir.

ROLFE. (*Gently.*) Oh! All right. Come in, Agnes.

(AGNES, *an elderly charlady, enters, wearing working clothes and an overall. She carries a tray on which is a bowl of bread-and-milk and a newspaper.*)

AGNES. I brought you a little bread-and-milk. Whatever have you been saying to the Missus? Oh, well, never mind. Here you are. Eat it up whilst it's hot.

ROLFE. Thank you, Agnes. Please leave it. (*He turns away* L.)

AGNES. (*Putting the tray on the chest.*) My word, isn't it chilly in here? Why ever haven't you turned on the—(*She takes a quick look at* ROLFE, *sees that he is not paying attention, fumbles for her purse, moves* D. R. *and, taking out a coin, puts it in the meter.*)

ROLFE. (*Turning and seeing her.*) Agnes, I forbid you . . .

AGNES. (*Taking matches from her apron and lighting*

the fire.) Get along! Who d'you think you're forbidding then?

ROLFE. (*Moving over to warm himself.*) You're a dear good soul, Agnes, but you shouldn't have done that.

AGNES. You can give it me back before I go to Mass Sunday.

ROLFE. But Agnes—

AGNES. I know you writing folk. I've had some in my time.

ROLFE. I'm trying to tell you, Agnes, that I may not be able to pay you back on Sunday.

AGNES. Sunday? I'm sure I never said *next* Sunday. (*Moving to the door.*) Wait till the number comes up with your name on it and you can stand me a treat.

ROLFE. (*Moving to the chest.*) So I will, Agnes, my word on it. (*He picks up the tray, takes it to his chair, sits, and starts to eat hungrily.*)

AGNES. I don't know why you don't go back to your painting. You had ever such a lovely touch with that. (ROLFE *is still guzzling up the bread-and-milk when his eyes fall on the newspaper. He picks it up and starts reading it, perfunctorily at first, then with ever-increasing interest.*) All those saints large as life. Some of them larger, I wouldn't be surprised. (*She begins to dust the mantelpiece, then the chest.*)

ROLFE. The Pope's dead.

AGNES. (*Not really listening.*) Then there was your photography. I'm sure you could make a bit out of that—but you haven't got your camera now, have you?

ROLFE. Agnes, the Pope is dead.

AGNES. Yes, I know. God rest his soul. The poor old gentleman.

ROLFE. (*Reading from the paper.*) "A Conclave of the Sacred College is to be convened immediately in order to elect a successor to the Holy See."

AGNES. Perhaps they'll choose our own Archbishop this time.

ROLFE. (*Continuing to read.*) "In accordance with the

Council of Lateran, the votes of two-thirds of the Cardinals present at the Conclave will be required for the election of the Supreme Pontiff. A Vatican expert reports, however, that with the present alignment among the various factions in the Sacred College, it is by no means easy to see how a clear two-thirds majority can be achieved. He goes on to suggest—"

AGNES. It's about time they had an English Pope for a change. (ROLFE *turns to stare at her.*) There—I've finished you now, Mr. Rolfe. See you tomorrow, then. (AGNES *exits.*)

ROLFE. (*He stares after her for a brief moment. Then he rises, replaces the tray on the chest, takes a fat-looking reference book from the mantelpiece and looks something up in the index. He sits, takes up his paper and pencil and starts to write rapidly with occasional reference to the book.*) English Pope. Seven-seventy-two to seven-ninety-five, Hadrian the first. Eight-sixty-nine to eight-seventy-two, Hadrian the second. Eight-eighty-four to eight-eighty-five—not every long, that one—Hadrian the third. Ah—here we are. Eleven-fifty-four to eleven-fifty-nine, Nicholas Breakspeare, Hadrian the fourth. Ha! Son of a monk! Hadrian the fifth, a Genoese. Hadrian the sixth, that's right, from Utrecht. Hadrian the fourth, Hadrian the fifth, Hadrian the sixth, Hadrian the seventh. Prologue. No Pro. In mind he was tired, worn out by months, no, years, of hope deferred, of loneliness, of unrewarded toil. (*There is a change in the LIGHTING to a warmer hue. After a few moments,* ROLFE *is interrupted by a KNOCK at the door.*) Who is it?

(MRS. CROWE *opens the door.*)

MRS. CROWE. There are two gentlemen downstairs to see you.

ROLFE. Not now.

MRS. CROWE. They're clergymen.

ROLFE. Clergymen. Come in, Mrs. Crowe. (MRS. CROWE *enters the room.*) What sort of clergymen?

MRS. CROWE. I couldn't really say. One's an elderly gentleman, all in red and black. The other is much younger with bits of purple.

ROLFE. His Grace the Archbishop of Pimlico, and the Bishop of Caerleon—of course.

MRS. CROWE. (*More intrigued than ever.*) Oh. You were expecting them then?

ROLFE. They are not entirely unexpected. Now perhaps you would be good enough to—

MRS. CROWE. Yes, I'll bring them up. (MRS. CROWE *exits.* ROLFE *rushes to pick up his tie and collar and puts them on in front of the mirror. This done, he quickly adopts a dignified posture to receive his visitors. After a pause,* MRS. CROWE *shows in* DR. COURTLEIGH *and* DR. TALACRYN.) This way, gentlemen. I'm sorry for all the stairs. Oh, dear, I'm quite out of breath myself.

ROLFE. Come in. *Thank* you, Mrs. Crowe.

MRS. CROWE. I just wondered if your guests would like some tea—

ROLFE. Not for the moment, thank you.

MRS. CROWE. Very well. (MRS. CROWE *exits.*)

(COURTLEIGH *moves* D. C., TALACRYN D. L. C.)

TALACRYN. Your Eminence, may I present Mr. Rolfe . . .

(ROLFE *ignores* COURTLEIGH, *goes straight to* TALACRYN, *kneels to him and kisses the episcopal ring on his hand. He then returns* R.)

ROLFE. (*To* COURTLEIGH.) Your Eminence will understand that I do not wish to be disrespectful, but the Bishop of Caerleon calls himself my friend.

COURTLEIGH. I hope, Mr. Rolfe, that you will accept my blessing as well as Dr. Talacryn's.

ROLFE. (*He kneels and kisses the cardinalatial ring.*) Please sit down—as best you may.

(COURTLEIGH *sits* C. TALACRYN *stands* L. *of him.*)

TALACRYN. Freddy, His Eminence wishes to ask you a few questions and he thought you would not take it amiss if I were present—as your friend.

(ROLFE *acknowledges* TALACRYN'S *remark and turns to* COURTLEIGH.)

COURTLEIGH. Mr. Rolfe, it has recently been brought to my remembrance that you were at one time a candidate for Holy Orders. I am aware of all the—ah—unpleasantness which attended that portion of your career; but it is only lately that I have fully realized that you yourself have never accepted, or acquiesced in, the verdict of your superiors.

ROLFE. I never have accepted it. I have never acquiesced in it. I never will accept it. I never will acquiesce in it.

COURTLEIGH. Quite, er—

ROLFE. But I nourish no grudge and seek no revenge. I am content to lead my own life, avoiding all my brother Catholics when circumstances throw them— (COURTLEIGH *gets restive.*) in my path. I don't squash cockroaches.

COURTLEIGH. And the effect upon your soul?

ROLFE. The effect upon my soul is perfectly ghastly. I have lost faith in man, and I have lost the power of loving. I have become a rudderless derelict.

COURTLEIGH. How terrible!

ROLFE. Terrible? Yes, it is indeed terrible. And, as head of the Roman Communion in this country, let the blame be upon you for the destruction of this soul. (COURTLEIGH *raises his hands in protest.*) As for your myrmidons, I spit upon them and defy them and you may rest assured that I shall continue to fight them as long as I can hold a pen.

COURTLEIGH. Would you mind telling me your reasons?

ROLFE. I should have to say very disagreeable things, Eminence.

COURTLEIGH. Tell me the truth.

ROLFE. The Catholic and Apostolic Church, with its championing of learning and beauty, was always to me a real and living thing. It was with the highest hopes, therefore, that I entered Oscott College to begin my career as a Clerk in Holy Orders. I was soon obliged to leave, however, after a dispute with the Principal, who seemed to see no offence in grubs grazing on the lettuces and caterpillars cantering across the refectory table. The Archbishop of Agneda then invited me, on recommendation, to attend St. Andrew's College at Rome. I gladly went, on the assurance that my expenses would be borne by the Archbishop. They never were and, in consequence, I was several hundred pounds out of pocket.

COURTLEIGH. Dear me! (*He looks at* TALACRYN *for confirmation.* TALACRYN *nods agreement.*) Yes?

ROLFE. Then after four months in College, I was expelled suddenly and brutally.

COURTLEIGH. And what reason was given?

ROLFE. No reason was ever given. The gossip of my fellow-students—immature cubs prone to acne and versed in dog Latin—was that I had no Vocation.

COURTLEIGH. I see. Go on.

ROLFE. Then there was the occasion in Wales when the machinations of a certain cleric, whose cloven hoof defiled the shrine of the Blessed Saint Winefred of Holywell, defrauded me of my rightful deserts for two years of arduous work undertaken at his request. Having been robbed by the said priest not only of my means of livelihood, but also of health, comfort, friends and reputation, and brought physically to my knees, he then gave me the *coup de grace* by debarring me from the Sacraments. I then had no option but to leave Wales and start life from scratch. (*Crossing below the others to* L.) I walked to London. Two hundred and fourteen miles. It took me eighteen days.

COURTLEIGH. Good gracious! But did no one come forward to assist you at this time?

ROLFE. No one except the Bishop of Caerleon, who somewhat belatedly received me back into Communion. Eventually, others, moved no doubt by the last twitchings of their dying consciences, made tentative overtures. To these I quoted St. Matthew twenty-five, verses forty-one to forty-three.

COURTLEIGH. Now, how does that go? (*He feels in the air with his hand for the quotation.*)

ROLFE. From "I was hungered and ye gave me no meat" down to "Depart from me ye cursed, into aeonial fire."

COURTLEIGH. You are hard, Mr. Rolfe, very hard.

ROLFE. I am what you and your fellow Catholics have made me.

COURTLEIGH. Poor child—poor child.

ROLFE. I request Your Eminence will not speak to me in that tone. I disdain your pity at this date. The catastrophe is complete.

COURTLEIGH. My son, have you never caught yourself thinking kindly of your former friends? You cannot always be in a state of white-hot rage, you know.

ROLFE. Yes, Eminence, there are some with whom, strange to say, I would wish to be reconciled—when my anger is not dynamic, that is. (*He smiles.*) But they do not come to me—as you have come.

COURTLEIGH. They probably do not wish to expose themselves to—ah—quotations from St. Matthew's gospel.

ROLFE. Did I heave china-ware at your Lordship?

TALACRYN. You did not. (*To* COURTLEIGH.) Your Eminence, I believe I understand Mr. Rolfe's frame of mind. A burned child dreads the fire.

COURTLEIGH. True. And what course did you embark on then, Mr. Rolfe?

ROLFE. I determined to occupy my energies with some pursuit for which my nature fitted me, until the Divine Giver of my Vocation should deign to manifest it to

others as well as myself. I took to painting and writing. I began to write simply because, by this time, I had an imperious necessity to say certain things. (*He sits in the chair* L.) In any case, ultimate penury denied me access to painting materials. So literature is now the only outlet you Catholics have left me—and believe me, I have very much to say.

COURTLEIGH. You have not perhaps many kindly feelings towards me personally, Mr. Rolfe.

ROLFE. I have no kindly feelings at all towards Your Eminence, but I trust I shall never be found wanting in reverence towards your sacred purple. I am only speaking civilly to you because you are a successor to Augustine and Theodore Dunstan and Anselm, Chichele and Chichester, and because for the nonce, my friend the Bishop of Caerleon has made you my guest.

COURTLEIGH. Well, well!

ROLFE. My Lord Cardinal, I do not know what you want of me, nor why you have come.

COURTLEIGH. I wish first of all to know if you still remained Catholic.

ROLFE. If I still remained Catholic!

COURTLEIGH. People who have been denied the priesthood have been known to commit apostasy.

ROLFE. Rest assured, Eminence, I am not in revolt against the Faith, but against the Faithful.

COURTLEIGH. (*Trying not to get angry.*) I am trying to determine whether or not, at the time of which we are speaking, you formed any opinion of your own concerning your Vocation, Mr. Rolfe.

ROLFE. No.

COURTLEIGH. No?

ROLFE. No. My opinion concerning my Vocation for the priesthood had been formed when I was a boy of fifteen. I have never relinquished my Divine Gift.

COURTLEIGH. You persist?

ROLFE. Your Eminence, I am not a bog-trotting Fenian

or one of your Sauchiehall Street hybrids—but English and sure; born under Cancer. Naturally I persist.

COURTLEIGH. But the man to whom Divine Providence vouchsafes a Vocation is bound to pursue it. *You* are practising as an author.

ROLFE. This is only a means to an end. (*Rising.*) When I shall have earned enough to pay my debts, I shall go straight to Rome and fix the profligate priest who sacked me.

COURTLEIGH. (*Throwing up his hands.*) Ssh!

TALACRYN. (*Quickly.*) Your Eminence mustn't be offended by Mr. Rolfe's satirical turn of phrase. He is not the man to smite those who have done him ill.

ROLFE. Do not deceive yourself, my Lord. So long as we recruit our spiritual pastors from the hooligan class, I shall smite them with all my strength.

COURTLEIGH. Really, Mr. Rolfe!

TALACRYN. You're a little beside the point, Freddy.

ROLFE. Under the circumstances, His Eminence will indulge me. I've had enough of being buffeted by bishops. Until I'm the possessor of a cheque-book I do not propose to start commerce with the clergy again.

(*There is a pause while* COURTLEIGH *looks into space and* TALACRYN *looks at his toes.*)

COURTLEIGH. Frederick William Rolfe, I summon you to offer yourself to me.

ROLFE. (*After a pause: quietly.*) I am not ready to offer myself to Your Eminence.

COURTLEIGH. Not ready?

ROLFE. I hoped I had made it clear that, in regard to my Vocation, I am marking time until I shall have earned enough to pay my debts which were so monstrously incurred on me.

COURTLEIGH. You keep harping on that string.

ROLFE. It is the only string you have left unbroken in my lute.

COURTLEIGH. Well, well; the money question need not trouble you.

ROLFE. But it does trouble me. And your amazing summons troubles me as well. Why do you come to me after all these years?

COURTLEIGH. It is precisely because of these years—how many was it?

ROLFE. Call it twenty.

COURTLEIGH. —that we must take your singular persistency as proof of the genuineness of your Vocation. And therefore, I am here today to summon you to accept Holy Orders with no delay beyond the canonical intervals.

ROLFE. In two years' time, when I shall have published three more books, I will respond to your summons. Not till then.

TALACRYN. But His Eminence has said that the money question need not hinder you.

ROLFE. Yes, and the Archbishop of Agneda said the same.

(COURTLEIGH *looks as if he is going to explode, and* TALACRYN *hastens to intervene.*)

TALACRYN. I am witness of His Eminence's words, Freddy.

ROLFE. What's the good of that? Supposing in a couple of months His Eminence chooses to alter his mind? Could I hail a prince of the church before a secular tribunal? Would I? Could I subpoena Your Lordship to testify against your Metropolitan and Provincial? (*Crossing below to* D. R.) Could I? Would I? Would you? (COURTLEIGH *makes as if to interject, but* ROLFE *cuts in.*) My Lord Cardinal, I must speak, and you must hear me. You are offering me the Priesthood on good and legitimate grounds, for which I thank God. But, if I correctly interpret you, you are also offering me something in the shape of money, and I will be no man's pensioner.

COURTLEIGH. (*Mildly.*) Please understand me, Mr.

Rolfe, that the monies in question are being offered solely as restitution for the years in which you were denied the Priesthood.

ROLFE. Oh! (*After a pause.*) No, I will not take charity.

TALACRYN. Well, then, Freddy, in what form will you accept this act of justice from us? Do make an effort to believe we are sincerely in earnest and that in this matter we are in your hands. (*Turning to* COURTLEIGH.) I may say that, Your Eminence?

COURTLEIGH. Unreservedly.

(*There is a pause while* ROLFE *considers.*)

ROLFE. (*Quietly but with determination.*) I will accept a written expression of regret for the wrongs which have been done to me by both Your Eminence and by others who have followed your advice, command or example.

COURTLEIGH. (*Taking a folded piece of paper from his breviary.*) It is here.

ROLFE. (*At first surprised, then reading it with care.*) I thank Your Eminence— (*He tears the paper into pieces.*) and all my brother Catholics.

COURTLEIGH. Man alive!

ROLFE. I do not care to preserve a record of my superiors' humiliation.

COURTLEIGH. (*With an effort.*) I see that Mr. Rolfe knows how to behave nobly, Frank.

ROLFE. Only now and again. But I had long ago arranged to do just that.

(*The* PRELATES *makes a gesture of incomprehension to each other.* COURTLEIGH *stands.* ROLFE *kneels and receives Benedictions.*)

COURTLEIGH. We shall see you then at Archbishop's House tomorrow morning, Mr. Rolfe.

ROLFE. I will be there at half-past seven to confess to

the Bishop of Caerleon. Your Eminence says Mass at eight and will give me Holy Communion. Then, if it please Your Eminence, you will give me the four Minor Orders. In the meantime, I will go and have a Turkish bath and buy myself a Roman collar. (COURTLEIGH *moves to the door.* ROLFE *goes quickly up and opens it.* COURTLAND *exits.* TALACRYN *is about to follow.*) Your Lordship doesn't happen to know the price of collars these days?

TALACRYN. (*Apologetically.*) I haven't the slightest idea, I'm afraid.

ROLFE. Well then, just to be on the safe side, perhaps you wouldn't mind springing me a fiver.

TALACRYN. (*Embarrassed.*) Oh, certainly. Certainly. (*He fumbles in his pockets for his wallet. Eventually he finds it and gives a banknote to* ROLFE.) Thank you.

ROLFE. (*Graciously.*) Not at all. See you tomorrow. (TALACRYN *exits, leaving the door open.* ROLFE *goes to the mirror, takes off his tie and turns his collar back to front. He then gives his reflection an episcopal blessing. Suddenly he freezes. He sees a reflection of somebody behind him. He turns round to see* JEREMIAH SANT *standing in the doorway.*) Sant!

SANT. Still at your play-acting, I see! What part is it this time?

ROLFE. What are you doing in here?

SANT. I've come to look at my room.

ROLFE. *Your* room?

SANT. Aye. I've been given to understand that you've got your marching orders again.

ROLFE. What do you mean?

SANT. (*Moving* D. C.) The Order of the Boot. You're out. Just like old times, isn't it?

ROLFE. (*Changing tactics.*) Yes, as a matter of fact, I do have to leave here as it happens. I've been summoned for work elsewhere.

SANT. Summoned, have ye? Summonsed, more likely, from what I know of you.

ROLFE. (*Crossing* L.) Meanwhile this room is mine until the end of the week.

SANT. Aye, if you've paid the rent.

ROLFE. Get out of here.

SANT. Oh, aye, I'm going, but I'll be back on Saturday, so make sure you're away by then.

ROLFE. What makes you persist in hounding me?

SANT. You really want an answer? Read Revelations Seventeen. Do you know how it goes?

ROLFE. I do not.

SANT. Like this: "And there came one of the seven angels, saying unto me, come hither; I will shew unto thee the judgment of the great whore that sitteth upon many waters: With whom the kings of the earth have committed fornication, and the inhabitants of the earth have been made drunk with the wine of her fornication—"

ROLFE. Orange Day rantings!

SANT. Let me finish— "So he carried me away in the spirit into the wilderness: and I saw a woman sit upon a scarlet coloured beast, full of names of blasphemy, having seven heads and ten horns . . ." As far as I'm concerned you're all seven of those heads and all ten of the horns— because you worked for me once. Remember?

ROLFE. It is not a memory I cherish.

SANT. Likely not. A fake, a liar and a cheat hardly likes to be shown up for what he really is.

ROLFE. You've no cause to say that.

SANT. Haven't I? Haven't I? You think I don't know what went on in Skene Street? You think I don't know why they carried you out into the street, in your bed for all to see? (ROLFE *winces at this recollection which obviously hits below the belt.*) Aye! That got ye, didn't it? "And the beast was taken, and with him the false prophet that received the mask of the beast. These were both cast alive into a lake of fire burning with brimstone!"

ROLFE. Ravings of a bog-trotting lunatic.

SANT. Lunatic, is it? Who's the biggest lunatic, you or me? When your lot go to Communion and eat that wafer,

you believe it's the body, blood and bones of Jesus Christ, don't ye? That makes you a Cannibal, doesn't it?

ROLFE. Not on a Friday.

SANT. Ugh, you make me puke, you dirty Popehead.

ROLFE. Get out.

SANT. All right, friend, you asked a question and I've given you the answer. (*He makes for the door.*) As the Lord saith, an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth. I'm not finished with you yet. (*He stops with his hand on the door handle.*) When you go leave the window wide, will ye. It's the smell of a Papist I can't abide. (*Shouting.*) God save Britain from Popery! No surrender! (SANT *exits, leaving the door open, and singing as he goes, "The sash my father wore."*)

"Our Father knew the Rome of old
And evil is thy fame.
Thy kind embrace the galling chain,
Thy kiss the blazing flame."

(ROLFE *rises and stands quite still for a moment. His triumphant mood has vanished and, once more, he looks trapped and hunted. After a moment's thought he springs into action. Pulling a holdall out from the corner* U. C., *he puts it on the chair, takes a few effects from the chest of drawers and throws them in, then goes to the door and listens to make sure the coast is clear. Having satisfied himself on this count he picks up the holdall and tiptoes out, as the lights fade to:*)

BLACKOUT

ACT ONE

SCENE 2

SCENE: *A room in Archbishop House. Seven-thirty the following morning. The only furniture is an upright armchair set* C. *and facing at an angle* U. L. C., *and a thick cushion set close* L. *of the chair.*

AT RISE: *As the LIGHTS come up,* TALACRYN *enters from an opening* U. R. *and moves to the chair. A moment later* ROLFE *enters* U. L.

TALACRYN. Good morning, Freddy. I hope your new lodgings are comfortable.

ROLFE. Compared to Broadhurst Gardens, they are as the Elysian Fields.

TALACRYN. I never cared much for N.W.6 either. (*He sits in the chair, facing* U. L. C.) Now—shall we get this over?

ROLFE. It may take rather a long time.

TALACRYN. All day if necessary.

(*He takes a small violet stole which he has been carrying on his arm, kisses the cross embroidered on it, and puts it round his shoulders. He then sits in the chair, facing* U. L. C. ROLFE *kneels on the cushion facing Downstage, so that he has a three-quarter back view of the* BISHOP. *He makes the sign of the cross.* BOTH *skip through the ritual beginning and end of the confession pretty fast.*)

ROLFE. Bless me, Father, for I have sinned.

TALACRYN. May the Lord be in thine heart and on thy lips, that thou with truth and humility mayest confess thy sins, (*He makes the sign of the cross.*) in the name of the Father and of Son and of the Holy Ghost, Amen.

ROLFE. I last confessed five days ago.

TALACRYN. Since then, my son?

ROLFE. Since then I broke the first commandment by being superstitiously silly enough to come downstairs in my socks because I had accidentally put on my left shoe before my right. I broke the third commandment by permitting my mind to be distracted by the palpably Dublin accent of the Priest who said Mass on Saturday.

TALACRYN. Is there nothing more on your conscience, my son?

ROLFE. Lots. I confess that I have broken the sixth commandment by continuing to read an epigram in the Anthology after I had found out that it was obscene. I have broken the third commandment of the Church by eating dripping toast for tea on Friday. I was hungry; it was very nice. I made a good meal of it and couldn't eat any dinner. This was thoughtless at first, then wilful.

TALACRYN. Are you bound to fast this Lent?

ROLFE. Yes, Father. I should now like to make a general confession of the chief sins of my life.

TALACRYN. Proceed, my son.

ROLFE. I earnestly desire to do God's will in all things, but I often fail. I like to worship my Maker alone, unseen of all save him. That is why I cannot hear Mass with devotion in those churches where one is obliged to squat in a pew like a Protestant, with other people's hot and filthy breath blowing down my neck. My mind has a twist towards frivolity, towards perversity. I have been irreverent and disobedient to my superiors. For example, I said that the legs of a certain domestic prelate were formed like little Jacobean communion-rails. (TALACRYN *reacts slightly to this last.*) I have told improper stories—not of the revolting kind, but those which are witty, anti-protestant—the sort common among the clergy. Being antipathetic to fish. I once made an enemy sick by the filthy comparison which I used in regard to some oysters which he was about to eat. I confess that two or three times in my life I have delighted in impure thoughts in-

spired by some lines in Cicero's *Oration for Marcus Coelius*.

TALACRYN. I don't for the moment recall—well, never mind. Is there nothing further?

ROLFE. There is one thing which I have never mentioned in confession except in vague terms only.

TALACRYN. Relieve your mind, my son.

ROLFE. Father, I confess I have not kept my senses in proper custody. Sometimes I catch myself extracting elements of aesthetic enjoyment from unaesthetic situations.

TALACRYN. Can you be more precise, my son?

ROLFE. Yes, well, for example, I once was present at the amputation of a leg. Under anaesthetics, directly the saw touched the marrow of the thigh bone, the other leg began to kick. I was next to it, and the surgeon told me to hold it still. It was ghastly, but I did. And then I actually caught myself admiring the exquisite silky texture of the human skin. Father, I am a very sorry Christian. I confess all these sins, all the sins which I cannot remember, all the sins of my life. I implore pardon of God; and from thee, O Father, penance and absolution. (*Quickly.*) Therefore, I beseech blessed Mary Ever-Virgin.

TALACRYN. My son, do you love God?

(*From silence, tardily the response emerges.*)

ROLFE. I don't know. I really don't know. He is the Maker of the World to me. He is Truth and Righteousness and Beauty. He is first. He is last. He is Lord of all to me. I absolutely believe in Him. I unconditionally trust Him. I am ready and willing to make any kind of sacrifice for Him. So far I clearly see. Then in my mind, there comes a great gap—filled with fog.

TALACRYN. Do you love your neighbour?

ROLFE. Hmm?

TALACRYN. Do you love your neighbour?

ROLFE. Oh. No. Frankly I detest him—and her. Most

people are repulsive to me, because they are ugly in person, or in manner, or in mind. I have met those with whom I should like to be in sympathy, but I have been unable to get near enough to them.

TALACRYN. Could you not love them?

ROLFE. No.

TALACRYN. Do you love yourself?

ROLFE. On the whole, I think I despise myself, body, mind and soul. I do look after my body and cultivate my mind. And naturally I stick up for myself, but—no, my body and mind are no particular pleasure to me.

TALACRYN. Have you nothing else to confess, my son?

ROLFE. Nothing. Really nothing, Father. I am very tired. I long to be at rest.

TALACRYN. That is actually the longing of your soul for God. Cultivate that longing, my son, for it will lead you to love Him. Thank Him with all your heart for this great gift of longing. At the same time remember the words of Christ our Saviour: "If ye Love Me, keep My Commandments." Remember, He definitely commands you to love your neighbour. Serve the servants of God, and you will learn to love God. You have tasted the pleasures of this world and they are as ashes in your mouth. In the tremendous dignity to which you have been called—the dignity of the priesthood, you will be subject to fiercer temptations than those which have assaulted you in the past. Brace the great natural strength of your will to resist them. Begin to love your neighbour so that you may soon consciously come to love God. My son, the key to all your difficulties, past, present and to come, is love. For your penance, you will say—no, the penance for minor orders is rather long—for your penance you will say the Divine Praises with the celebrant after Mass. And now . . . (*The ritual is gabbled through,* ROLFE *repeating quickly after* TALACRYN.) O my God, most worthy of all love—I grieve from my heart for having sinned against Thee— And I purpose by Thy Grace—Never more to offend Thee for the time to come. (TALACRYN *continues*

alone, making the sign of the cross.) Ego te absolvo in Nomine Patris et Filii et Spiritus Sancti, Amen. Go in peace and pray for me. (ROLFE *and* TALACRYN *rise and move Downstage together.* TALACRYN *resumes his informal manner.*) But before you do, I have been instructed by His Eminence to inform you that you will accompany him to Rome tomorrow.

ROLFE. To Rome!

TALACRYN. You will act as his private chaplain at the Conclave which is to elect the new Pope. We will travel together, Freddy.

(ROLFE *and* TALACRYN *move Upstage towards the exit* R. *A single BELL starts to toll insistently. An echoing LITURGY is distantly heard as the lights fade to:*)

BLACKOUT

ACT ONE

SCENE 3

SCENE: *A chapel in the Vatican.*

AT RISE: *As the LIGHTS come up, a bell tolls in the distance and the liturgy continues to be heard in some remote side chapel. The only furnishings are two candelabra,* U. R. C. *and* L. C. *Two* ACOLYTES (BOYS) *in surplices enter, from* U. R. *and* U. L., *genuflect in unison towards the direction of the altar, and proceed to light the candelabra with long tapers. Having done so, they genuflect again, and* BOTH *exit* U. R. TALACRYN *and* ROLFE *enter together* U. L. *Their hands are folded, clasping breviaries.* ROLFE, *now in Holy Orders, wears a black soutane and biretta.* TALACRYN *wears similar garb suitable to a Bishop. As they speak the following dialogue, they perambulate around the stage together.*

ROLFE. (*Sniffing at the smell of incense.*) Nothing stinks like the odour of sanctity.

TALACRYN. Now, now.

ROLFE. (*Pointing out front.*) Look at those frescos. Wasn't it Mark Twain who said: "The Creator made Italy from designs by Michelangelo"?

TALACRYN. (*Distrait.*) Very possibly. Their Eminences are still sitting, it seems.

ROLFE. On two addled eggs apiece.

TALACRYN. Freddy, I beg you—the whole world is waiting for the imminent announcement of a new Pope, and you make jokes in rather doubtful taste.

ROLFE. Let me assure Your Lordship that my flippancy in no way reflects my concern with the outcome of the Sacred Consistory. I've studied the form of those members of the Sacred College who could be said to be possible starters for the Supreme Pontificate, and it's my belief that the short-odds favourite—

TALACRYN. Short-odds favourite!

ROLFE. A sporting metaphor, indicating—

TALACRYN. I am acquainted with the jargon of the Turf, Freddy.

ROLFE. Then if I may continue the analogy, it's perfectly plain to a student of form that the short-odds favourite must be the present Secretary of State, Cardinal Ragna, whom God preserve.

TALACRYN. Not everyone would say "Amen" to that, I fear.

ROLFE. But then there is the malpractice called "Bumping and Boring"—

TALACRYN. —much frowned upon by the stewards—

ROLFE. —and I very much doubt whether Cardinal Ragna will be allowed to trot away with the race. Our own Archbishop, for example, would nominate the Parish Priest of Ballyjamesduff if it would keep Ragna out.

TALACRYN. Steady.

ROLFE. And I'm prepared to bet a thousand pounds to a penny-halfpenny stamp that the Conclave has broken

down again for the simple reason that Ragna's been nobbled.

TALACRYN. (*Smiling.*) I wish I had it in me to be quite so irreverent as you, Freddy.

ROLFE. Perhaps, but I doubt if Your Lordship has it in him to be quite so devout either. You are a natural Christian, my Lord Bishop. I, on the other hand, am a religious maniac.

TALACRYN. You do yourself an injustice.

ROLFE. (*Casually.*) I know I do. (*Looking up at a fresco on the ceiling.*) Isn't that superb? (*Pointing.*) Look at that. A little lacking in generosity in describing— (*He makes a graphic gesture.*) but compared to a figure like that, what can people see to admire in the female form?

TALACRYN. It's a matter of taste, I suppose.

ROLFE. (*Looking at* TALACRYN.) What a waste!

TALACRYN. What is a waste?

ROLFE. That such a fine, upstanding man as Your Lordship should have felt inclined to accept the celibacy of priesthood.

TALACRYN. Good heavens, Freddy. If you are being serious, I can assure you that from the moment I took Orders no other thought ever occurred to me.

ROLFE. Nevertheless one has to admit that the vestigial nipples on a man are about as useful as the Pontificial pudenda. Had I been a Renaissance Pope, I should have insisted that— (*A BELL begins to clang insistently.*) Something seems to be happening.

(ROLFE *moves* D. L. TALACRYN *follows to* R. *of him.*)

TALACRYN. I think they must have risen.

ROLFE. Who?

TALACRYN. The Cardinal-Compromissaries.

ROLFE. Will they have reached a decision?

TALACRYN. We shall soon see. Here they come.

(*The* NINE CARDINAL-COMPROMISSARIES, *in full purple,*

led by the BEARERS, *appear from the rear of the auditorium and move in procession down the aisles to the Stage, chanting the Christus Vincit as they move. Arriving on the Stage, they form an arc from* R. *to above* TALACRYN L. C. *The* CARDINAL-ARCHDEACON *remains extreme* R. *Lastly comes an* ACOLYTE *bearing the Papal Crown—the Triple Tiara—on a cushion.* ALL *bow in the direction of the altar, then turn inwards. As soon as everyone is in position, the BELL ceases.*)

ROLFE. (*In a whisper to* TALACRYN.) What is it? What is happening?

TALACRYN. I think God has given us a Pope.

ROLFE. Whom?

(*The Litany ceases, and all turn to face* ROLFE *and* TALACRYN. *All except* ROLFE *kneel.*)

CARDINAL ARCH. Reverend Lord, the Sacred College has elected thee to be the successor to St. Peter. Wilt thou accept pontificality? (*Since all present are now facing towards* ROLFE *and* TALACRYN, ROLFE *assumes it is the latter who is being addressed. He turns towards* TALACRYN *with a happy smile.* TALACRYN, *however, is kneeling. Confused,* ROLFE *turns back to look at the* CARDINAL ARCHDEACON. *With greater emphasis.*) Reverend Lord, the Sacred College has elected Thee to be the successor to St. Peter. Wilt thou accept pontificality?

(*There is another pause.* ROLFE, *looking round to where* ALL *are on their knees facing inwards towards him, at last realizes that the awful question is addressed to him.*)

ROLFE. Will *I?*

TALACRYN. (*In a whisper.*) The response is *Volo*—or *Nolo.*

ROLFE. (*He takes a deep breath, crossing his right hand over his left on his breast.*) *Volo*— I will.

(*An ORGAN peals out, as:*)

THE CURTAIN FALLS

ACT TWO

SCENE 1

SCENE: MRS. CROWE'S *parlor in London.*

AT RISE: *When* MRS. CROWE *is seated Upstage on the chaise longue, with* JEREMIAH SANT *beside her. Both have drinks in their hands.* SANT *is a member of the F.R.S.—Fellowship of Religious Segregation, an extremist group, outlawed in Ulster, dedicated to the persecution of Roman Catholics in general and the Pope in particular. He also runs a rabble-rousing newspaper called "The Tory Protestor" dedicated to the same aims.* SANT *himself is a violent and dangerous fanatic.* MRS. CROWE *is reading aloud from a newspaper.*

MRS. CROWE. Where are we? Yes, here it is—" . . . and as representatives of the Catholic world looked on, the Triple Crown was placed on the head of Frederick William Rolfe, the first English Pope to ascend the Throne of St. Peter since eleven-fifty-four when Nicholas Brakespeare became Pope Hadrian the Fourth . . .

SANT. Holy God, doesn't it make you want to puke! To think of an Englishman sinking so low. What paper is that, anyway?

MRS. CROWE. The Daily Mirror.

SANT. Well just listen to what the old "Protestor" has got to say. You'll have no trouble identifying the writer. (*He takes a copy of his own newspaper out of his pocket and starts to read.*) "Recent sorry events in Rome must remind all True Blue Ulstermen that we will never bow down to those who are trying to sell us lock, stock and barrel to Popery. We will have no truck with the English

traitor who calls himself the Pope. He may call himself Pope, but we call him the Roman anti-christ. Let us be reminded of Papist policy in Ulster. They intend to *breed* us out. But the wall of separation reaches to Highest Heaven. We will not allow the rights of the individual, nor the rights of the family, to be interfered with by a debauched priesthood. We had said 'No Surrender' before and we say 'No Surrender' again now. And we shall continue to say 'Keep the Union Jack flying for God and Ulster' . . ." That's telling 'em, hey, Nancy?

MRS. CROWE. Oh, that's very good, Jerry . . . but—

SANT. But what?

MRS. CROWE. I can never understand what there is to get so excited about.

SANT. Get so excited! (*Rising and moving* L.) Rome rule means Home Rule, doesn't it? But I'm thinking maybe the Papish have cooked their own goose this time.

MRS. CROWE. How's that then?

SANT. Well, for one thing, this will queer the pitch for the Home Rulers. One false move and it could be civil war in Ireland with the Fenians cutting each other's dirty throats. And a good job too. They'll not stand for an Englishman giving out the orders, Pope or no.

MRS. CROWE. Oh, I'll never understand Irish politics as long as I live. Here, let me fill your glass.

SANT. Aye, you do that, sweetheart.

(*There is a pause.* SANT *has now blown off most of his steam.* MRS. CROWE *fills both glasses.*)

MRS. CROWE. Looking after men—that's something I do understand.

SANT. True for you, Nancy. (*He sits beside her.*) Never a truer word. (*He raises his glass.*) Good luck!

MRS. CROWE. Here's cheers.

SANT. But there's one thing I've never been able to find out—what you see in that abomination of desolation.

MRS. CROWE. Who?

SANT. Rolfe.

MRS. CROWE. What *I* see in *him?* Oh, please, Jerry. Give me a little credit. Do you know what he used to do? No, I don't want to talk about it. I can't bear to speak about him any more. (*She starts to snivel.*)

SANT. Now, just a moment, Nancy. Just a moment. (*He rises and moves below the chaise longue to* R. *of the table and picks up the bottle.*) Here, give us your glass.

MRS. CROWE. (*Upset.*) Oh, no, thank you, Jerry.

SANT. Come on, sweetheart. Just a half 'un.

MRS. CROWE. Oh, all right then. (SANT *fills both glasses and sits again. They drink.* MRS. CROWE *makes a face.*) Oooh, this is strong. (*She downs it in one gulp nevertheless.*)

SANT. Never mind. It'll do you good. Now, Nance, just now you started to say something, and by-and-by you're going to finish it. But first I'm going to tell you one or two things.

MRS. CROWE. What things?

SANT. Well, first, how would you like to come on a wee trip with me to Rome?

MRS. CROWE. To Rome? But, Jerry, how could I? I mean—

SANT. Oh, don't you worry about that. We'll be properly chaperoned, I promise you.

MRS. CROWE. But I've got nothing to wear.

SANT. No problem at all. As you know, I am an F.R.S.

MRS. CROWE. A what?

SANT. A Senior Brother of the Fellowship of Religious Segregation, who are very disturbed by certain recent events and, as loyal servants of the Crown, we feel it our duty to do whatever we can to protect the Free Churches of the United Kingdom. (*He gets up and postures round the room.*)

MRS. CROWE. Yes, Jerry, but what's all this to do with you and me going to Rome?

SANT. I'll tell ye in a minute. Now, the F.R.S. are sending a deputation to the Vatican to demand certain

safeguards for Protestants in the light of the aforesaid recent events, and I'm heading that deputation.

MRS. CROWE. Oh!

SANT. "Sing and rejoice, O daughter of Zion: for, lo, I come, and I will dwell in the midst of thee, saith the Lord."

MRS. CROWE. (*Impressed.*) Oh, I say.

SANT. Now, you'll be asking yourself—and rightly—why I'm inviting you to come with me, and I wouldn't insult your intelligence by trying to pretend it was just for business reasons only . . . Here, where's your glass?

MRS. CROWE. Not another.

(SANT *refills both glasses and* MRS. CROWE *accepts without further demur.*)

SANT. As leader of this deputation, I said to myself, who knows your man the Pope better than I do? Why, Nancy Crowe, of course, and she shall come with me.

MRS. CROWE. (*Impressed and delighted.*) Oh, I say!

SANT. So what do you say?

MRS. CROWE. What could I possibly say, Jerry?

SANT. You can and shall say "Yes," sweetheart. (*He raises his glass.*) Here's to us.

MRS. CROWE. Oh, Jerry! (*They clink glasses.*) Oh, it is nice to see you again, I must say. (*She begins to look soulful.*) Things haven't been too easy for me, one way and another.

SANT. Aye, I suspected as much when I came. And I wouldn't be surprised if it were something to do with that agent of the Whore of Babylon, the erstwhile Baron Corvo, eh? (MRS. CROWE *does not reply, but consoles herself with another drink.*) I'm right, Nancy, aren't I? (MRS. CROWE *nods her head.*) That little barmstick! And I'll wager he hasn't paid you the rent—sneaking out of the house the way he did.

MRS. CROWE. (*Getting maudlin.*) And not even a line to say he'd got there safely. Not even a postcard. (*She starts to snivel.*)

SANT. Aye. Well, we'll soon get even with him. (*He moves back to his seat beside her, and puts his arm round her shoulders.*) Now, a little earlier you were going to tell me something. Now's the time. Come on, Nance.

MRS. CROWE. No, I couldn't, Jerry. (*She snivels.*)

SANT. (*Getting tough.*) Now, Nancy, you can and you shall tell me.

MRS. CROWE. (*Content that the moment has come to give in.*) Oh, Jerry, it's been going on for years. He—he wouldn't leave me alone, never. He was always—always trying to—to interfere with me, even when Mr. Crowe was alive. I've had no peace whenever he was around, Jerry, and I—I just couldn't keep him away. (*She turns and buries her head in* SANT'S *shoulder, sobbing.*)

SANT. (*Surprised.*) Well I'll be damned!

MRS. CROWE. Well, don't sound so surprised. Aren't I attractive any more?

SANT. No, no, of course I'm not surprised, sweetheart. It's just that I always thought—anyway—I'll not stand for a respectable Protestant lady being defiled by a Papish traitor, no matter who. If I had my way I'd geld the lot of them.

MRS. CROWE. (*Quietly and viciously.*) Make him squirm.

(SANT *kisses her violently on the mouth as the lights fade to:*)

BLACKOUT

ACT TWO

SCENE 2

SCENE: *An Audience Chamber in the Vatican. The only furniture is the pontifical throne, which is set* C. *on a small dais.*

AT RISE: *As the LIGHTS come up,* CARDINAL RAGNA, *Secretary of State, an elderly, bull-like Italian,* CARDINAL BERSTEIN, *a cold, arrogant German, and* FATHER ST. ALBANS, *Propositor-General of Jesuits, the truculent "Black Pope," an Englishman, enter together from* U. R. *and move* D. C. RAGNA *is* C. *with* BERSTEIN *to* R. *and* ST. ALBANS *to* L. *of him.*

ST. ALBANS. To a great extent I blame myself. I should have known what a formidable politician my compatriot, Dr. Courtleigh, was.

RAGNA. Do not tell me what is a politician. I am Secretary of State. I know what is a politician.

ST. ALBANS. (*Drily.*) Do you? A pity you didn't tumble to his trick earlier then.

BERSTEIN. He is crafty like a fox, your English Cardinal.

ST. ALBANS. (*Sarcastic.*) He had seen the light, he said—

RAGNA. Ha!

ST. ALBANS. —while shaving!

BERSTEIN. Ha!

ST. ALBANS. We must search afresh he said. We must search outside the Vatican, he said, for a man of Faith and Constancy, a man of simplicity and humility—he said—

RAGNA. (*Grieving.*) Ay, ay, ay!

BERSTEIN. A disaster!

RAGNA. Catastrophe!

ST. ALBANS. Yes, it was a trifle unfortunate.

BERSTEIN. Psst! My lords, now that it is all over I am able to reveal to you a matter of great interest.

ST. ALBANS. Yes?

BERSTEIN. (*Proudly.*) His Imperial Majesty, the Kaiser, made it known that it was his personal wish that *I* should become the successor to His late Holiness.

ST. ALBANS. Oh, really. Well I can reveal to you that the Imperial Kaiser's royal uncle, King Edward, wouldn't

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