









## PREFACE

A weaver goes to the mart with a divided tapestry, and with half in either hand he walks about telling that whoever possesses one must, perforce, possess the other for the sake of the story. But allegories are out of place in popular editions; they require linen paper, large margins, uncut edges; even these would be insufficient; only illuminated vellum can justify that which is never read. So perhaps it will be better if I abandon the allegory and tell what happened: how one day after writing the history of "Evelyn Innes" for two years I found myself short of paper, and sought vainly for a sheet in every drawer of the writing-table; every one had been turned into manuscript, and "Evelyn Innes" stood nearly two feet high.

"Five hundred pages at least," I said, "and only half of my story finished.... This is a matter, on which I need the publisher's opinion."

Ten minutes after I was rolling away in a hansom towards Pater-noster Square, very anxious to persuade him that the way out of my difficulty would be to end the chapter I was then writing on a full close.

"That or a novel of a thousand pages," I said.

"A novel of a thousand pages!" he answered. "Impossible! We must divide the book." It may have been to assuage the disappointment he read on my face that he added, "You'll double your money."

My publisher had given way too easily, and my artistic conscience forthwith began to trouble me, and has never ceased troubling me since that fatal day. The book the publisher puts asunder the author may not bring together, and I shall write to no purpose in one preface that "Evelyn Innes" is not a prelude to "Sister Teresa" and in another that "Sister Teresa" is not a sequel to "Evelyn Innes." Nor will any statement of mine made here or elsewhere convince the editors of newspapers and reviews to whom this book will be

sent for criticism that it is not a revised edition of a book written ten years ago, but an entirely new book written within the last eighteen months; the title will deceive them, and my new book will be thrown aside or given to a critic with instructions that he may notice it in ten or a dozen lines. Nor will the fact that "Evelyn Innes" occupies a unique place in English literature cause them to order that the book shall be reread and reconsidered—a unique place I hasten to add which it may easily lose to-morrow, for the claim made for it is not one of merit, but of kind.

"Evelyn Innes" is a love story, the first written in English for three hundred years, and the only one we have in prose narrative. For this assertion not to seem ridiculous it must be remembered that a love story is not one in which love is used as an ingredient; if that were so nearly all novels would be love stories; even Scott's historical novels could not be excluded. In the true love story love is the exclusive theme; and perhaps the reason why love stories are so rare in literature is because the difficulty of maintaining the interest is so great; probably those in existence were written without intention to write love stories. Mine certainly was. The manuscript of this book was among the printers before it broke on me one evening as I hung over the fire that what I had written was a true love story about a man and a woman who meet to love each other, who are separated for material or spiritual reasons, and who at the end of the story are united in death or affection, no matter which, the essential is that they should be united. My story only varies from the classical formula in this, that the passion of "the lovely twain" is differentiated.

It would be interesting to pursue this subject, and there are other points which it would be interesting to touch upon; there must be a good deal for criticism in a book which has been dreamed and re-dreamed for ten years. But, again, of what avail? The book I now offer to the public will not be read till I am dead. I have written for posterity if I have written for anybody except myself. The reflection is not altogether a pleasant one. But there it is; we follow our instinct for good or evil, but we follow it; and while the instinct of one man is to regard the most casual thing that comes from his hand as "good enough," the instinct of another man compels him to accept

all risks, seeking perfection always, although his work may be lost in the pursuit.

My readers, who are all Balzacians, are already thinking of Porbus and Poussin standing before *le chef d'oeuvre Inconnu* in the studio of Mabuse's famous pupil—Frenhofer. Nobody has seen this picture for ten years; Frenhofer has been working on it in some distant studio, and it is now all but finished. But the old man thinks that some Eastern woman might furnish him with some further hint, and is about to start on his quest when his pupil Porbus persuades him that the model he is seeking is Poussin's mistress. Frenhofer agrees to reveal his mistress (*i.e.*, his picture) on condition that Poussin persuades his mistress to sit to him for an hour, for he would compare her loveliness with his art. These conditions having been complied with, he draws aside the curtain; but the two painters see only confused colour and incoherent form, and in one corner "a delicious foot, a living foot escaped by a miracle from a slow and progressive destruction."

In the first edition of "Evelyn Innes" (I think the passage has been dropped out of the second) Ulick Dean says that one should be careful what one writes, for what one writes will happen. Well, perhaps what Balzac wrote has happened, and I may have done no more than to realise one of his most famous characters.

**G.M.**



## SISTER TERESA

### I

As soon as Mother Philippa came into the parlour Evelyn guessed there must be serious trouble in the convent.

"But what is the matter, Mother Philippa?"

"Well, my dear, to tell you the truth, we have no money at all."

"None at all! You must have some money."

"As a matter of fact we have none, and Mother Prioress won't let us order anything from the tradespeople."

"Why not?"

"She will not run into debt; and she's quite right; so we have to manage with what we've got in the convent. Of course there are some vegetables and some flour in the house; but we can't go on like this for long. We don't mind so much for ourselves, but we are so anxious about Mother Prioress; you know how weak her heart is, and all this anxiety may kill her. Then there are the invalid sisters, who ought to have fresh meat."

"I suppose so," and Evelyn thought of driving to the Wimbledon butcher and bringing back some joints.

"But, Mother, why didn't you let me know before? Of course I'll help you."

"The worst of it is, Evelyn, we want a great deal of help."

"Well, never mind; I'm ready to give you a great deal of help... as much as I can. And here is the Prioress."

The Prioress stood resting, leaning on the door-handle, and Evelyn was by her side in an instant.

"Thank you, my child, thank you," and she took Evelyn's arm.

"I've heard of your trouble, dear Mother, and am determined to help you; so you must sit down and tell me about it."

"Reverend Mother ought not to be about," said Mother Philippa.

"On

Monday night she was so ill we had to get up to pray for her."

"I'm better to-day. If it hadn't been for this new trouble—" As the Prioress was about to explain she paused for breath, and Evelyn said:

"Another time. What does it matter to whom you owe the money? You owe it to somebody, and he is pressing you for it—isn't that so? Of course it is, dear Mother. Well, I've come to bring you good news. You remember my promise to arrange a concert tour as soon as I was free? Everything has been arranged; we start next Thursday, and with fair hope of success."

"How good of you!"

"You will succeed, Evelyn; and as Mother Philippa says, it is very good of you."

The Prioress spoke with hesitation, and Evelyn guessed that the nuns were thinking of their present necessities.

"I can let you have a hundred pounds easily, and I could let you have more if it were not—" The pause was sufficiently dramatic to cause the nuns to press her to go on speaking, saying that they must know they were not taking money which she needed for herself. "I wasn't thinking of myself, but of my poor people; they're so dependent upon me, and I am so dependent upon them, even more than they are upon me, for without them there would be no interest in my life, and nothing for me to do except to sit in my drawing-room and look at the wall paper and play the piano."

"We couldn't think of taking money which belongs to others. We shall put our confidence in God. No, Evelyn, pray don't say any more."

But Evelyn insisted, saying she would manage in such a way that her poor people should lack nothing. "Of course they lack a great deal, but what I mean is, they'll lack nothing they've been in the

habit of receiving from me," and, speaking of their unflinching patience in adversity, she said: "and their lives are always adversity."

"Your poor people are your occupations since you left the stage?"

"You think me frivolous, or at least changeable, Reverend Mother?"

"No, indeed; no, indeed," both nuns cried together, and Evelyn thought of what her life had been, how the new occupations which had come into it contrasted with the old—singing practice in the morning, rehearsals, performances in the evening, intrigues, jealousies; and the change seemed so wonderful that she would like to have spoken of it to the nuns, only that could not be done without speaking of Owen Asher. But there was no reason for not speaking of her stage life, the life that had drifted by. "You see, my old friends are no longer interested in me." A look of surprise came into the nuns' faces. "Why should they be? They are only interested in me so long as I am available to fill an engagement. And the singers who were my friends—what should I speak to them about? Not of my poor people; though, indeed, many of my friends are very good: they are very kind to each other."

"But we mustn't think of taking the money from you that should go to your poor people."

"No, no; that is out of the question, dear Mother. As I have told you, I can easily let you have a hundred pounds; and as for paying off the debts of the convent—that I look upon as an obligation, as a *bonne bouche*, I might say. My heart is set on it." "We can never thank you enough."

"I don't want to be thanked; it is all pleasure to me to do this for you. Now goodbye; I'll write to you about the success of the concerts. You will pray that I may be a great success, won't you? Much more depends upon your prayers than on my voice."

Mother Philippa murmured that everything was in God's hands.

The Prioress raised her eyes and looked at Evelyn questioningly. "Mother Philippa is quite right. Our prayers will be entirely pleasing to God; He sent you to us. Without you our convent would be broken up. We shall pray for you, Evelyn."



## II

The larger part of the stalls was taken up by Lady Ascott's party; she had a house-party at Thornton Grange, and had brought all her friends to Edinburgh to hear Evelyn. Added to which, she had written to all the people she knew living in Edinburgh, and within reach of Edinburgh, asking them to come to the concert, pressing tickets upon them.

"But, my dear, is it really true that you have left the stage? One never heard of such a thing before. Now, why did you do this? You will tell me about it? You will come to Thornton Grange, won't you, and spend a few days with us?"

But in Thornton Grange Evelyn would meet many of her old friends, and a slight doubt came into her eyes.

"No, I won't hear of a refusal. You are going to Glasgow; Thornton Grange is on your way there; you can easily spend three days with us. No, no, no, Evelyn, you must come; I want to hear all about your religious scruples."

"That is the last thing I should like to speak about. Besides, religious scruples, dear Lady Ascott—"

"Well, then, you shan't speak about them at all; nobody will ask you about them. To tell you the truth, my dear, I don't think my friends would understand you if you did. But you will come; that is the principal thing. Now, not another word; you mustn't tire your voice; you have to sing again." And Lady Ascott returned to the concert-hall for the second part of the programme.

After the concert Evelyn was handed a letter, saying that she would be expected to-morrow at Thornton Grange; the trains were as follows: if she came by this train she would be in time for tea, and if she came by the other she would be just in time for dinner.

"She's a kind soul, and after all she has done it is difficult to refuse her." So Evelyn sent a wire accepting the invitation.... Besides, there was no reason for refusing unless—A knock! Her manager! and he had come to tell her they had taken more money that night than on

any previous night. "Perhaps Lady Ascott may have some more friends in Glasgow and will write to them," he added as he bade her good-night.

"Three hundred pounds! Only a few of the star singers would have gathered as much money into a hall," and to the dull sound of gold pieces she fell asleep. But the sound of gold is the sweetest tribute to the actress's vanity, and this tribute Evelyn had missed to some extent in the preceding concerts; the others were artistic successes, but money had not flowed in, and a half-empty concert-room puts an emptiness into the heart of the concert singer that nothing else can. But the Edinburgh concert had been different; people had been more appreciative, her singing had excited more enthusiasm. Lady Ascott had brought musical people to hear her, and Evelyn awoke, thinking that she would not miss seeing Lady Ascott for anything; and while looking forward to seeing her at Thornton Grange, she thought of the money she had made for the poor nuns, and then of the money awaiting her in Glasgow.... It would be nice if by any chance Lady Ascott were persuaded to come to Glasgow for the concert, bringing her party with her. Anything was possible with Lady Ascott; she would go anywhere to hear music.

"But what an evening!" and she watched the wet country. A high wind had been blowing all day, but the storm had begun in the dusk, and when she arrived at the station the coachman could hardly get his horses to face the wind and rain. In answer to her question the footman told her Thornton Grange was about a mile from the station; and when the carriage turned into the park she peered through the wet panes, trying to see the trees which Owen had often said were the finest in Scotland; but she could only distinguish blurred masses, and the yellow panes of a parapeted house.

"How are you, my dear Evelyn? I'm glad to see you. You'll find some friends here." And Lady Ascott led her through shadowy drawing-rooms curtained with red silk hangings, filled with rich pictures, china vases, books, marble consol tables on which stood lamps and tall candles. Owen came forward to meet her.

"I am so glad to meet you, Miss Innes! You didn't expect to see me? I hope you're not sorry."

"No, Sir Owen, I'm not sorry; but this is a surprise, for Lady Ascott didn't tell me. Were you at the concert?"

"No, I couldn't go; I was too ill. It was a privation to remain at home thinking—What did you sing?"

Evelyn looked at him shrewdly, believing only a little in his illness, and nearly convinced he had not gone to the concert because he wished to keep his presence a secret from her... fearing she would not come to Thornton Grange if she knew he were there.

"He missed a great deal; I told him so when I returned," said Lady Ascott.

"But what can one do, Miss Innes, when one is ill? The best music in the world—even your voice when one is ill—. Tell me what you sang."

"Evelyn is going to sing at Glasgow; you will be able to go there with her."

The servant announced another guest and Lady Ascott went forward to meet him. Guest after guest, and all were greeted with little cries of fictitious intimacy; and each in turn related his or her journey, and the narratives were chequered with the names of other friends who had been staying in the houses they had just come from. Evelyn listened, thinking of her poor people, contrasting their simplicities with the artificialities of the gang—that is how she put it to herself—which ran about from one house to another, visiting, calling itself Society, talking always, changing the conversation rapidly, never interested in any subject sufficiently to endure it for more than a minute and a half. The life of these people seemed to Evelyn artificial as that of white mice, coming in by certain doors, going out by others, climbing poles, engaged in all kinds of little tricks; yet she was delighted to find herself among them all again, for her life had been dull and tedious since she left the convent; and this sudden change, taking her back to art and to her old friends, was very welcome; and the babble of all these people about her inveigled her out of her new self; and she liked to hear about so many people, their adventures, their ideas, misfortunes, precocious caprices.

The company had broken up into groups, and one little group, of which Evelyn was part, had withdrawn into a corner to discuss its own circle of friends; and all the while Evelyn's face smiled, her eyes and her lips and her thoughts were atingle. Nonsense! Yes, it was nonsense! But what delicious nonsense! and she waited for somebody to speak of Canary—the "love machine," as he was called. No sooner had the thought come into her mind than somebody mentioned his name, telling how Beatrice, after sending him away in the luggage-cart, had yielded and taken him back again. "He is her interest," Evelyn said to herself, and she heard that Canary still continued to cause Beatrice great unhappiness; and some interesting stories were told of her quarrels—all her quarrels were connected with Canary. One of the most serious was with Miss — —, who had gone for a walk with him in the morning; and the guests at Thornton Grange were divided regarding Miss — —'s right to ask Canary to go for a walk with her, for, of course, she had come down early for the purpose, knowing well that Beatrice never came downstairs before lunch.

"Quite so." The young man was listened to, and he continued to argue for a long while that it was not reasonable for a woman to expect a man to spend the whole morning reading the *Times*, and that apparently was what Beatrice wished poor Canary to do until she chose to come down. Nevertheless, the general opinion was in favour of Beatrice and against the girl.

"Beatrice has been so kind to her," and everybody had something to say on this point.

"But what happened?" Evelyn asked, and the leader of this conversation, a merry little face with eyes like wild flowers and a great deal of shining hair, told of Beatrice's desperate condition when the news of Miss — —'s betrayal reached her.

"I went up and found her in tears, her hair hanging down her back, saying that nobody cared for her. Although she spends three thousand a year on clothes, she sits up in that bedroom in a dressing-gown that we have known for the last five years. "Well, Beatrice," I said, "if you'll only put on a pair of stays and dress yourself and come downstairs, perhaps somebody will care for you."

A writer upon economic subjects who trailed a black lock of hair over a bald skull declared he could see the scene in Beatrice's bedroom quite clearly, and he spoke of her woolly poodle looking on, trying to understand what it was all about, and his allusion to the poodle made everybody laugh, for some reason not very apparent, and Evelyn wondered at the difference between the people she was now among and those she had left—the nuns in their convent at the edge of Wimbledon Common, and her thoughts passing back, she remembered the afternoon in the Savoy Hotel spent among her fellow-artists.

Her reverie endured, she did not know how long; only that she was awakened from it by Lady Ascott, come to tell her it was time to go upstairs to dress for dinner. Now with whom would she go down? With Owen, of course, such was the etiquette in houses like Thornton Grange. It was possible Lady Ascott might look upon them as married people and send her down with somebody else—one of those young men! No! The young men would be reserved for the girls. As she suspected, she went down with Owen. He did not tell her where he had been since she last saw him; intimate conversation was impossible amid a glitter of silver dishes and anecdotes of people they knew; but after dinner in a quiet corner she would hear his story. And as soon as the men came up from the dining-room Owen went straight towards her, and she followed him out of hearing of the card-players.

"At last we are alone. My gracious! how I've looked forward to this little talk with you, all through that long dinner, and the formal talk with the men afterwards, listening to infernal politics and still more infernal hunting. You didn't expect to meet me, did you?"

"No; Lady Ascott said nothing about your being here when she came to the concert."

"And perhaps you wouldn't have come if you had known I was here?"

"Is that why you didn't come to the concert?"

"Well, Evelyn, I suppose it was. You'll forgive me the trickery, won't you?" She took his hand and held it for a moment. "That touch of your hand means more to me than anything in the world."

A cloud came into her face which he saw and it pained him to see it. "Lady Ascott wrote saying she intended to ask you to Thornton Grange, so I wrote at once asking her if she could put me up; she guessed an estrangement, and being a kind woman, was anxious to put it right."

"An estrangement, Owen? But there is no estrangement between us?"

"No estrangement?"

"Well, no, Owen, not what I should call an estrangement."

"But you sent me away, saying I shouldn't see you for three months. Now three months have passed – haven't I been obedient?"

"Have three months passed?"

"Yes; It was in August you sent me away and now we are in November."

"Three months all but a fortnight."

"The last time I saw you was the day you went to Wimbledon to sing for the nuns. They have captured you; you are still singing for them."

"You mustn't say a word against the nuns," and she told anecdotes about the convent which interested her, but which provoked him even to saying under his breath, "Miserable folk!"

"I won't allow you to speak like that against my friends."

Owen apologised, saying they had taken her from him. "And you can't expect me to sympathise with people or with an idea that has done this? It wouldn't be human, and I don't think you would like me any better if I did – now would you, Evelyn? Can you say that you would, honestly, hand upon your heart? – if a heart is beating there still."

"A heart is beating –"

"I mean if a human heart is beating."

"It seems to me, Owen, I am just as human, more human than ever, only it is a different kind of humanity."

"Pedantry doesn't suit women, nor does cruelty; cruelty suits no one and you were very cruel when we parted."

"Yes, I suppose I was, and it is always wrong to be cruel. But I had to send you away; if I hadn't I should have been late for the concert. You don't realise, Owen, you can't realise—" And as she said those words her face seemed to freeze, and Owen thought of the idea within her turning her to ice.

"The wind! Isn't it uncanny? You don't know the glen? One of the most beautiful in Scotland." And he spoke of the tall pines at the end of it, the finest he had ever seen, and hoped that not many would be blown down during the night. "Such a storm as this only happens once in ten years. Good God, listen!" Like a savage beast the wind seemed to skulk, and to crouch.... It sprang forward and seized the house and shook it. Then it died away, and there was stillness for a few minutes.

"But it is only preparing for another attack," Evelyn said, and they listened, hearing the wind far away gathering itself like a robber band, determined this time to take the castle by assault. Every moment it grew louder, till it fell at last with a crash upon the roof.

"But what a fool I am to talk to you about the wind, not having seen you for three months! Surely there is something else for us to talk about?"

"I would sooner you spoke about the wind, Owen."

"It is cruel of you to say so, for there is only one subject worth talking about—yourself. How can I think of any other? When I am alone in Berkeley Square I can only think of the idea which came into your head and made a different woman of you." Evelyn refrained from saying "And a much better woman," and Owen went on to tell how the idea had seized her in Pisa. "Remember, Evelyn, it played you a very ugly trick then. I'm not sure if I ought to remind you."

"You mean when you found me sitting on the wall of an olive-garth?"

But there was no harm in singing to the peasants."

"And when I found you in a little chapel on the way to the pine-forest—the forest in which you met Ulick Dean. What has become of that young man?"

"I don't know. I haven't heard of him."

"You once nearly went out of your mind on his account."

"Because I thought he had killed himself."

"Or because you thought you wouldn't be able to resist him?"

Evelyn did not answer, and looking through the rich rooms, unconsciously admiring the gleaming of the red silk hangings in the lamplight, and the appearance of a portrait standing in the midst of its dark background and gold frame, she discovered some of the guests: two women leaning back in a deep sofa amid cushions confiding to each other the story of somebody's lover, no doubt; and past them, to the right of a tall pillar, three players looked into the cards, one stood by, and though Owen and Evelyn were thinking of different things they could not help noticing the whiteness of the men's shirt fronts, and the aigrette sprays in the women's hair, and the shapely folds of the silken dresses falling across the carpet.

"Not one of these men and women here think as you do; they are satisfied to live. Why can't you do the same?"

"I am different from them."

"But what is there different in you?"

"You don't think then, Owen, that every one has a destiny?"

"Evelyn, dear, how can you think these things? We are utterly unimportant; millions and billions of beings have preceded us, billions will succeed us. So why should it be so important that a woman should be true to her lover?"

"Does it really seem to you an utterly unimportant matter?"

"Not nearly so important as losing the woman one loves." And looking into her face as he might into a book, written in a language only a few words of which he understood, he continued: "And the idea seems to have absorbed you, to have made its own of you; it isn't religion, I don't think you are a religious woman. You usen't to be like this when I took you away to Paris. You were in love with