

THE SECOND NUN'S TALE

THE SECOND NUN'S PROLOGUE

At this point, though the gambling hadn't ended,
Some gamblers drifted in, in search of friends.
The nun's companion came and soon intended
To tell a tale. "When the farmer ends,
I have one that God's own message sends,"
She whispered to the nun, "Cecilia's tale,
That should touch many a soul, should I prevail."

"But you must wait," the nun said. "There's a list
With just one person still, as I believe."
"That person will give way, if I insist,"
The second nun replied. "You can just leave
It all to me. I know you can't conceive
Of being rude in God's own interest, though
The tale may save some souls, as well you know."

The farmer finished; the bartender then said,
"We have one more to tell a tale, then all
The telling's done, and we may move ahead
To judge or not the best, as is my call."
"But wait!" the second nun said. "A favor small
I have to ask, for those who've come in late.
We, too, might have some tales to relate."

"That may be," the bartender replied.
"But we don't have all night. We could go on
Forever as more gamblers come inside.
So let's just do what we've agreed upon --
One more tale, and then the telling's done.
It's your turn," he concluded, turning to
The buyer. "Now the telling ends with you."

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"But wait!" again the nun said. "First let's see
Whether we agree with what you say.
Let's vote instead of acting by decree,
And settle this the democratic way!"
"Here! Here!" some said, just newly come from play,
Not knowing much of what was going on,
But hearing words they all agreed upon.

"OK, OK," the bartender agreed.
"How many wish to hear this woman's tale?"
A lot of hands shot up, so that indeed
It seemed the loud protester would prevail.
"And how many not?" It seemed that side would fail,
Since what had been a group was now a crowd,
Becoming swiftly boisterous and loud.

"Tell your tale and be damned!" he cried,
Then realized that she was a nun and blushed.
"I'm sorry, Sister," he apologized,
Seeing that the bar was suddenly hushed.
The second nun just glared, her enemy crushed.
"I'll tell my tale now," she then intoned.
The bartender sat down again and groaned.

THE SECOND NUN'S TALE

This tale is true. It happened to a friend,
A nun, Cecilia, named for that dear saint
Who died for Christ a martyr, and whose end
Was so bloodstained, it used to make me faint,
Though she endured it all without complaint.
My friend was named for her, born on her day,
And so she died in that same saintly way.

In a Muslim country she served Christ,
A nurse among the poorest of the poor,
Nor was one Muslim in her care enticed
By word or deed to feel a faith less pure,
But all her work was to the body cure
And leave the soul to worship as it would.
She touched their hearts only by being good.

For fifteen years she toiled thus, through wars
That came and went like thunderstorms, while she
Treated all alike, and shared her stores
With all who hungered, giving equally
To all sides. None more giving could there be!

She was loved by all whom she had served
Those many years – a love she well deserved!

In time, however, though not by her desire,
A few whom she had helped came to believe,
Drawn like moths to her internal fire,
That faith in Christ would all their sins relieve,
And so they hungered for that sweet reprieve.
They begged her to be baptized, and confess
Their sins, that they the true faith might profess.

This she refused awhile, knowing well
The penalty was death for all who strayed
From Islam to another faith. Her cell,
Containing but her cot and cross would fade
As in distress she to her Savior prayed.
"Dear Lord," she said, "please guide me in this choice!
My way is crooked. Let me hear Your voice!"

It tore her heart to think that souls that would
Be saved must be by Christians turned away.
All she meant in life was to do good,
Yet here the good and bad on both sides lay.
For if this were found out, crazed men would slay
Converts and converters both, while all
The missions in that country soon would fall.

She thought of Saint Cecelia, her namesake,
And knew for her the choice would be quite clear.
Life was little with a soul at stake,
And death for Christ was something she held dear,
Rejoicing as her martyrdom came near.
But now the Church was waffling on the claim
That none could be redeemed but in Christ's name.

Cecelia had been sent with orders strict
Not to proselytize, but only to
Do good to all, and warned not to be tricked
By spies into conversions she would rue,
And would impugn the good that she might do.
Cecelia prayed to Christ all through the night.
Near dawn He spoke and bathed her in His light.

The next day she told those who wished to be
Christians of what Christ had said to her:
That if they prayed to Allah fervently
And were good Muslims, He would not deter
Their entry into Heaven, but it would stir

His heart with love for them, just as it would
For all who loved God and in life did good.

For God loved all who loved Him and had faith
That they would find salvation in His heart,
And even those who thought He was a wraith
And in the life of spirit took no part,
All were loved and could be saved. The art
Of love of God had many signs, she said,
And Christ would know them when He waked the dead.

These Muslims then were satisfied that they
Were saved by Christ though they were Muslims
still,
And to both Christ and Allah they would pray,
Knowing that through both they did God's will,
So long as they did not do others ill.
They would be Christians, but they understood
This compromise would be for their own good.

Years passed, the wars grew worse, until there came
An army of the purest of the pure,
Who said they did jihad in Allah's name
And of the Truth were absolutely sure.
They had for all life's ills the only cure,
Devoted to the triumph of Islam
When all the world would live by the Koran.

Hating Christians, they set out to find
A villager who might betray the nun,
Saying she and others of her kind
Had proselytized among them. But no one
Would bear false witness against her, or would shun
Her hospital until one child, enticed
By candy, said his parents prayed to Christ.

Ah, then! Through torture and the threat of death,
These parents did eventually give way,
Naming all who would, under their breath,
To Christ their Lord as well as Allah pray,
And so did all that little band betray,
Who soon were rounded up and tortured, too,
Till all did just as they were told to do.

Cecelia often spoke of Christ, they said,
And openly disparaged the Koran,
Told how Christ would come to wake the dead
And save those who believed in him, but ban

All Muslims from his heaven. Not one man
Or woman could be saved but through Christ's love,
Which she would often from her Bible prove.

Nor did their lies end there, but they averred,
Hoping their tormentors thus to please,
That she made them repeat what they had heard
And pray before the cross upon their knees
Before a nurse would tend to their disease
Or dress their wounds. Nor would she give them bread
Till they affirmed that Christ rose from the dead.

Thus the jihadists got what they might need
To prove Cecelia tried to proselytize,
With testimony false that soon would feed
A frenzy in the country round. The lies
Became the truth, as those who long had ties
To Christians quickly severed them from fear,
And no one to Cecelia would come near.

Then out of Hell they came, these infidels,
To seize Cecelia, rape and torture her,
Face her with her followers in their cells
As they affirmed what never did occur,
And said they'd been abused, as well they were.
She looked straight into her accusers' eyes,
Burning through both innocence and lies.

"God forgive you!" she said to them, "as I
Forgive you and will pray for you. Your sin
Will be washed clean by love, and by and by
We'll meet in Heaven, spiritual kin
Joined by faith in God and love within.
For the Father and the Son I gladly die,
And here and now forgive you for your lie."

At this they wept, and some tried to recant,
But they were quickly slain upon the spot.
A few, possessed by fear, began to rant
Against the nun, repeating what was not,
And cursed her that they might improve their lot.
But when their captors said that they must spit
Into her face, they could not stomach it.

So they as well were slain, and then the nun
Was dragged before a camera and once more
Asked if she'd converted anyone,
Which she again denied. Forced to the floor,

She said she now knew what her life was for,
And thanked God for the chance, a piece of dust,
To die for Him, as now she knew she must.

She asked God to forgive those who had raped
And tortured her, and those who even now
Prepared her for beheading, as they draped
A hood over her head, and had her bow
Down to them, and like a willing cow
Stretch her neck that they might easily
Find the place where they might set her free.

"Forgive them," then she prayed, just as the knife
Entered her thin neck with a great stroke.
But instead of taking her poor life,
As though it found a rod of steel, it broke,
Its shattered pieces hot and veiled in smoke.
"Allah be merciful!" they cried in fear,
Leaping away, afraid of coming near.

Cecelia bled profusely from her neck,
Lying on the ground in shock and pain.
She used her shirt to keep the blood in check,
Pressing hard upon the open vein
Until she could somehow advantage gain.
Eventually, the bleeding slowed. She lay
There unattended, and began to pray.

"Dear Lord," she said. "I do not know what You
Intended by this miracle, but please
Give me strength that somehow I might do
Your will." And then she got up on her knees
Slowly, and by delicate degrees.
Seeing which, her torturers soon fled,
Not knowing if she was alive or dead.

The camera was still rolling as she knelt
In front of it, as if to it she prayed,
And when she raised her head, the bloody welt
On both sides of her neck was well displayed,
Deep chasm into which a mouse might wade.
Next door three jihadists watched the screen
Rapt with wonder at what they had seen.

"Forgive them, Lord," she pleaded once again.
"They know not what they do. Perhaps someday
All people will know love, and in Your name
Be good to one another. This I pray."

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And then she died, and out of camera lay.
The three jihadists watching were amazed
At the miracle on which they gazed.

They came into the room as to a shrine,
As did the shepherds on a Christmas night,
Looking on what happened as a sign
Of something that did all their deeds indict,
Something more than which belief was right.
And then they prayed as Muslims pray, but to
A God the nun Cecelia also knew.