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## The Last Unction

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This scene of the play, takes place in a room of a rich house on the country side

This action takes place during the twelfth century

The characters are:

Father Joseph/Josepe, a young priest of the Franciscan order. He is thirty-two years old.

Antonio Esposito, a large, simple, grave man of forty-seven.

Mathilde, his young wife, who is only twenty-seven years old.

The Madman.

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At rise: Mathilde is lying upon her death bed

(Father Josepe is sitting beside her). At centre back hangs a large crucifix under which two candles are burning.

Beside Mathilde´s bed is a small table, upon it, the blessed eucharist.

(The madman comes walking through the centre aisle and comes upon the stage to his place down left)

Mathilde: opening her eyes, she looks at Father Josepe.

You came, at last, Father (Pause) Is it not strange that you sit there beside my bed? (Pause)

I have seen you in my dreams, and you know, it was always among cypress trees, and always there was a long, long road.

(She speaks very slowly)

Mathilde: (Continuing, with frequent pauses)

And oh, you always talked of things I would understand. (a longer pause) And Father, I always loved the long, long road ahead us. (A long pause. She speaks weakly). I think I must sleep now. (She turns her face away, for a moment, and closes her eyes. Then, turning back to him again, she looks at him with his eyes half opened).

Father, spring has reached the valley, and now I shall go forth to meet the spring. (She pauses). Pity you cannot come with me. Pity you cannot come. (Longer pause. She gathers all her slight strength and stretches her hand to him).

Now Father, let us touch hands. (She pauses, as he lays her white hand in his). It seems

that I must walk a long way (Pause), before I reach the end of the valley, and meet the spring.

(She turns away and closes her eyes. The shadow of death is upon her face).

Madman: Poor girl, she never sang her song. And now she follows spring to join the choir of all the dead and the dead who would love again.

Josepe: Mathilde, my daughter, my daughter!

Mathilde: Father Jos... Josepe!

(She is sinking now)

Madman: From mid-air she calls him "Father", and from mid-earth he calls her "daughter". But I know more, I know better.

\*Gibran changed the name Mathilde, for Mathilda

(Mathilda's husband enters from the next room. He stands in silent awe and when he speaks it is with a trembling voice)

\*Gibran changed the name of the husband or refers to him with the short name "Luigi"

Luigi: You are with her, Father.

Madman: Yes, but he came too late, my friend; a little too late.

Father Josepe: Forbear, my friend, and be steadfast. She is about to be the bride of our Lord Jesus.

(He gazes at Mathilda for a full minute, touching her hand, her pulse, the speaking to her)

Now, my daughter, I know you cannot speak. Repeat my words with your heart; for they are like paths of light leading your feet to the blessed garden. Repeat all that I shall say to you, my daughter.

(Mathilda makes a slight motion with her head, that she understands and assents)

Father Josepe: (Repeating the Last Unction)

Mary Mother, Tower of Light, I come to you, your handmaiden.

Receive my spirit.

Receive my spirit.

Mathilda: (Repeats this words in a faint whisper)

Father: Mary Mother, Queen of Heaven, I beseech you by your seven sorrows, now the seven stars shining in the firmament. Receive my soul, and take it onto your gracious bosom.

Mathilda: (Repeats these words, still more faintly)

Father: Say in your heart, my child, Lord Jesus, Bridegroom of my heart,

Receive your humble bride at the door of the blessed mansion. Lord Jesus, my beloved, suffers my spirit to dwell in the wounded hand that holds now the scepter.

Mathilda: (Repeats now quite inaudibly)

Father: Say in your heart, Mathilda, Jesus Christ, first born of God, who came from the heart of God, guide me now to our father in heaven.

Mathilda: (Moves her lips trying to repeat the words)

Father: Holy Spirit, white wings in apace (deep and high), carry me to this starry bosom.

Mathilda: (Moves her pale lips)

Father: (He puts his hand over hers and bringing his face nearer to her face gazes intently upon her, and with intense but quiet voice) Say this in your heart, Mathilda my child, our father; I come to you, the bride of your son, upon the wings of the Holy Spirit.

Mathilda: (Her lips can hardly move now)

(A long pause)

(Mathilda opens her eyes wide and looks at the priest. Then as though another person is speaking through her lips, in low clear voice).

Mathilda: Spring has reached the valley, Father Josepe. Now I go to meet the spring.

(An intense silence; Mathilda draws a long quivering breath and her spirit is gone away from the lovely clay)

(Father Josepe crosses himself thrice. Then he is as still as Mathilde herself.)

Madman: The knot is untied; the linen thread is broken; and a chariot is upon the wind

(Father Josepe again puts his hand on hers. It is cold. Then upon her heart. It is silent. He crosses her arms upon her bosom. He turns to Luigi, then looking at her face again says)

Father: Now she is beyond our reach. Now she is beyond our flights.

Madman: A hungry heart shall sit this night at the eternal board.

Father: (Stands up and turns to Luigi compassionately)

My friend, your wife is now on her way to meet the Lord. Stand up, my brother, and come and kneel with me, and let us pray.

(Luigi stands up awkwardly, raises his head and looks at the ceiling as though he sees the shadow of a presence in the room. Then he approaches Josepe. Both of them kneel beside Mathilda's bed and they pray silently, once in a while each crosses himself).

(Father Josepe stands first and while Luigi is still in prayer, he gazes at her face. Then placing his hand upon Luigi's shoulder...)

Father: Rise now, my brother; come into the next room. It is over now. You should sleep. I shall watch her alone.

Luigi: (Luigi rises looking much older than he really is. He is conducted to the door next room. He enters into it. His heavy steps are heard as he moves about, and at length a cracking of the bed under the weight of his bulky body. Father Josepe has gone back to stand beside the bed.)

Madman: Tired bones with lead for marrow

(After the pause, the low, dull heavy breathing of a sleeper is heard from the next room)

Madman: Turtle dove with moonlight for wings! And now behold the gulf; and who shall build the bridge?

(Father Josepe, like a statue, stands beside the bed gazing at the white face. Once or twice he turns toward the door of the next room, the back to look upon Mathilda)

Madman: Speak now. You have been silent too long. Open your locked heart, my youth, she will listen to you now, and as for him, he is asleep, he has always been asleep. He will sleep until green spring comes to his fields.

(The priest brings the two lighted candles from table and places one at her head and one at her feet. He then kneels down touching the edge of the bed with his forehead. He kisses her crossed hands, and gazes long at her face)

Father: (With all his soul in his voice)

Mathilda, Mathilda, Mathilda!

Madman: His voice is quiet as night, as deep as the sea, and it trembles as the hope of humanity. Poor youth, that can only sing to death.

Josepe: Mathilda, beloved of my soul, I can speak to you now. Death has opened my lips to reveal a secret deeper than death. And death has freed my tongue to disclose to you a thing deeper than all pain.

Mathilda, winged spirit, hear this cry of spirit, still in his cage, not yet winged. Now listen, not to the priest, but to the youth! The youth who saw you walking among the gardens, and hid himself in the bushes so that you might not see him. Mathilda hear the youth who heard you singing that time when you were coming home to your father's house. The sunset was in your hair, and a child beside the brook, and your little feet were lovely in the water.

Father Josepe: Mathilda, lily of the field, you are plucked by his gracious hand. I too have been plucked, yet they will say I live.

Madman: Yes, some of us die, and stay here as white phantom, too faint to sing their love for each, too afraid to go beyond. Poor youth! Poor youth!

Josepe: (Shaken with agony, he looks at Mathilda's beautiful face a moment, and the beats his breast)

Madman: Kiss your cross and lay it down. You have carried it far upon your back. Kiss your cross little father and put it upon the shoulders of Jesus. His shoulders are as wide as the shoulders of Orion.

Josepe: (kneeling down beside her)

Rose of Sharon, lily of the valleys, song of my deeper dreams!

Mathilda my beloved!

He kisses her forehead and her eyes, her neck and her hands, again and again.

Madman: You have reached the threshold of the door, and the door is shut. And now the window is shut, and your face is pressed against the window, and it is cold. Poor youth!

Josepe: (suddenly, something changes in him. A wave of penitence sweeps over him. The sorrow for what he has done in his stress of emotion. He withdraws from her, and stands in the middle of the room shaken like a tree in a storm, and then he falls to the floor beating upon it with his fists. Then rising up, he covers his face with his hands.)

Josepe: (in a great voice) My Lord, God, forgive me my weakness! My Lord, God, I was not patient to the end. The secret that life hid in my heart for seven years, death has revealed in one moment. My Lord, God, again with my cross before your altar. (He weeps bitterly. He dares not to gaze upon the face of Mathilda again.)

Madman: Look the other way, my youth look the other way, and you will see a procession of love and worship and the like of death.

Josepe: (as though recovering from a trance. He speaks with a voice born of new confidence in God and life)

Spring has reached the valley. Now I shall go forth to meet spring.

(Slow Curtain)

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