

# ***Reeducating Mr. Thornton***

## *Evvy Journey*

“Cádiz.” Peering into a telescope on the deck of the pilot house, the ship captain announced, at the top of his voice, the pending arrival of the steamship at its destination. It was carrying passengers from Paris to Cádiz.

On the promenade, John Thornton straightened his tall, lean figure and, with his arm around her back, pulled Margaret closer. He could now claim her as his own. They had married six weeks ago. He squinted at the assault of light and wind and strained to catch a glimpse of land in the distance. The strip he saw was awash in white, emerging like an apparition from the cobalt blue Mediterranean.

Mr. Thornton did not have any expectations of what he would find in Cádiz. Nor did he care much to know what the city was like. He was going there to please Margaret, who had not seen her brother Frederick since their mother passed away.

Margaret could not wait to be with Frederick and to meet Dolores, his new wife. She was also anxious for her brother and her husband to get to know each other. When Mr. Thornton and Margaret decided to go to the continent for their honeymoon, a month in Paris and another in Cádiz were their inevitable destination choices.

As the steamship’s propellers brought it closer to land, the apparition Mr. Thornton had been watching began to take shape. He spotted two towers and, next to them, a golden dome. They rose above a mass of white buildings topped by turrets and belvederes. He had seen such structures in some English homes, but they were not ubiquitous like they seemed to be in Cádiz. Fascinated, he scanned the scenery. The golden dome seemed the only colored structure against the blue skyline. But a moment later, splashes of bright colors broke the monotony of white buildings. Flowers, he marveled. Red and orange and yellow flowers one rarely saw in the persistently gray and gloomy days in Milton. And it was only mid-June.

His gaze swept back toward the golden dome soaring like a beacon over the luminous city. “Dramatic,” he muttered.

“Moorish,” Margaret said. “The first mosque, known as Dome of the Rock, has a golden dome.”

Surprised she heard him, he smiled down at her. Moorish—that was to be expected. Bewildering Cádiz was, after all, a very old city in Spain, once a rich and powerful empire that had established territories in North Africa since the Middle Ages. The Moors, in turn, had occupied what was now Andalusia in southern Spain.

The idea of travelling had intrigued him as a young man. Educated young Englishmen of means usually embarked on a grand tour of France and Italy for culture and further education. He dreamt of going on that tour, but Fate did not will it so. He had to leave school and work to support his mother and his sister. Swindled by a business partner, his father had lost everything he owned and, driven by disgrace, killed himself.

Mr. Thornton let out a long breath as he tucked away the painful memories. He had worked hard to succeed in his trade so he could provide his mother and his sister the good life they deserved. All those years of working had made him a practical man, but he feared that, along the way, he had also outgrown the desire to experience the mystique of a city like Cádiz. He was reasonably content with his lot, at least until he met Margaret.

He put his arm around his wife’s shoulder. Margaret held onto her hat and raised her face. Her lips quivered into a smile.

Margaret had taken more care than usual dressing that morning, and he gazed with pleasure at her large expressive eyes and soft generous lips. She always took his breath away. He brushed his lips against her temple and gave her shoulder a tender reassuring squeeze. “You’re looking fresh and lovely, Mrs. Thornton.”

“These trade winds help,” she said. “I am nervous, but I wanted to appear calm and cool, which is rather a challenge when one wears layers of clothing in this heat.”

They were waiting for the ship captain to announce that they could board one of the small boats taking passengers to shore. “This is what you’ve been waiting for. I think your brother will only be too happy to see you.”

The night before, she talked about the letters Frederick had written from Cádiz. After he met Dolores, his letters gushed about her mesmerizing midnight blue eyes which he could not turn away from, long thick black hair he could get lost in, and her mix of appealing naiveté and insatiable curiosity that kept them talking. In ending his letters with hopes that his sister and his wife would like each other, Margaret became equally anxious that they should.

Mr. Thornton had his apprehensions about meeting Frederick—apprehensions that kept him fidgeting in bed for the past couple of nights. He heard enough of Margaret’s stories to conjure an image of Frederick as a paragon

of a brother. Frederick let her win their games when they were growing up and listened to all her childhood cares. As a young man, he went to sea, driven by dreams of being captain of his own ship.

After Mr. Thornton and Margaret found each other again, she told him that, years ago, Frederick was among those accused of leading an alleged mutiny against a tyrannical ship captain. The crime was punishable by death, and Frederick had no choice but to be exiled forever from England.

Despite this, it seemed life had been kind to Frederick, now an ardent husband and lover of most things Spanish. A year ago, he found his redemption—Frederick's word—when he met Dolores. Since then, he had been carving a niche for himself in his new country.

Mr. Thornton and Frederick might not be that different. They both had lofty dreams as well as troubles, despair, and redemption. But much of what Margaret knew about her brother was from a relatively distant past.

And there was that night at the Milton train station when he and Frederick stared at each other, both scowling in unguarded animosity. Would Frederick remember? He himself had been stung with jealousy. He did not know then who Frederick was. How much had Frederick changed? Changes were inevitable, especially when one had been forcibly uprooted and was now living in Cádiz.

An hour later, the boat that ferried them from the steamship docked by an opening through the ramparts protecting the city. Mr. Thornton could sense Margaret's impatience to disembark onto the stairs leading to the quay. He grasped her arm and kept a steady grip until they reached the quay, where Customs employees directed them toward the Customs House.

Before they could reach Customs, Margaret raised her arm and waved. She turned to him, her eyes shining. "Frederick. Do you see him?"

Mr. Thornton looked toward where Margaret waved. He had no trouble spotting a young man who stood a head taller than most of the crowd and whose hair shone like polished copper in a sea of dark hair. A pretty petite woman clung to his arm.

He surveyed the crowd waiting to welcome the arrivals, frowning at seeing jacket-less men out in public. But the sight of so many women wearing skirts strewn with bright colors wiped away his frown and brought a small smile to his lips.

How, he wondered, did they weave large red and pink roses or, maybe, peonies into textiles? Had the Spaniards outdone the English? Had they invented new techniques that made such designs on textiles possible? It was so new, unusual, and attractive that it seemed to have become the current fashion, along with the black lace veils adorning the heads of some women. But he doubted veils

were of much use in windy, sunny Cádiz. He had only been married six weeks and, already, he was paying more attention to women's fashion.

Margaret tugged at his arm and repeated, "Do you see him?"

"Oh. Frederick. Yes, I do. In this crowd, he does stand out. I only caught a glimpse of him in a dark train station, so I might not recognize him in a crowd back home. But here in this bright Mediterranean light, he's unmistakably English. That must be his wife clinging to him."

"Yes. Dolores. Isn't she beautiful?"

"A real exotic beauty. I expected nothing less after what you told me about her," he said, his eyes crinkling in amusement. He grasped her hand and kissed it. "But for me, no one can compare to you, my love."

Her palm brushed soft and warm against his cheek, and she gazed into his eyes. "I'm so glad you're here," she said.

He kissed her hand once more before he tucked it into his arm. They joined the group from their ship going into the Customs House.

Once inside, they both stood gaping at a crowd that seemed to have taken on every possible shade and color—from black and brown Africans to ruddy English sailors and pale-skinned European aristocrats. They surveyed the motley crowd for a couple of minutes before making their way to the line of arriving passengers going through inspection.

More than a half hour later, they emerged from the stifling Customs House. Relieved to be out among the throng and now free to move about in the salty air and intense light of the harbor, Mr. Thornton said, "The whole world must be represented in there."

Margaret smiled, her eyes round with wonder. "Quite a sight, wasn't it? Do you suppose it's this way every day?"

"Ask Frederick. He is behind you and will be here in a few seconds." Mr. Thornton watched Frederick running toward them, leaving his wife behind. He scowled. He would never have left Margaret standing all alone in a crowd.

He heard his wife suck in a sharp shallow breath. Still scowling, he turned to see her take a few steps towards her brother.

She fell into Frederick's arms. Neither said a word but clutched each other tight as tears rolled down their cheeks. Mr. Thornton stared, drawn into the drama of the reunion of brother and sister yet also astonished by such an open display of emotions.

It took a while before Frederick raised his head and held Margaret at arm's length. They gazed long at each other before he pulled her back into his embrace, kissing her cheeks over and over. She returned each one mixed with her tears.

Minutes later, her hands trembling, Margaret dabbed her face with a handkerchief she pulled out of the pocketbook hanging around her wrist.

Frederick, still holding her, was not trembling any less. He threw his sister's husband a quick glance and swiped his red eyes with the back of his left hand.

Averting his eyes, Mr. Thornton gritted his teeth. Were they still mourning their parents? But why now? She should have unburdened her grief on me. Why didn't she?

He sighed. They grew up together, shared intimate family concerns—maybe even secrets—that an outsider, including me, might never understand.

"Hello." The hesitant trill of a girlish voice interrupted his thoughts. He looked down into midnight-blue eyes on an olive-skinned beauty. Dolores.

She stood before him, her abundant wavy tresses cascading over a red shawl draped on her shoulders and down her flowered skirt. Looking closer at the design on the skirt, Mr. Thornton arched an eyebrow and failed to suppress a smile. He realized that the colorful print that attracted his gaze earlier was embroidered, not woven in.

He heard Dolores introduce herself in accented English and, in a move that brought blood rushing to his face, she clasped his shoulders, stood on her toes, kissed his cheeks and offered hers for him to kiss in return.

He planted a quick buss on one cheek as words stumbled out of his mouth. "I'm John Thornton, Margaret's husband." He smiled at Dolores, bemused at the unexpected warmth of her greeting.

Dolores said, "I know. I've heard much about you."

They both turned towards their spouses as Margaret stepped back from Frederick. His eyes red and puffy, Frederick smiled tremulously at his wife. "Forgive me for leaving you behind?"

Dolores did not answer, but she grasped his tear-stained face with both hands and kissed it over and over as she wiped his face tenderly with her fingers. She pulled him into her embrace. For a few moments, Frederick rested his cheek on her head.

Margaret's eyes were once again welling up with tears which she wiped before they fell down her cheeks. With an arm held out to comfort her, Mr. Thornton took a step towards his wife. Before he could put his arm around her, he heard Frederick call his name.

Frederick and Dolores had broken apart. His face drier and a smile playing on his lips, he extended an open hand to Mr. Thornton.

Mr. Thornton grasped the offered hand. In a quick gesture—another he did not anticipate—Frederick clasped him in his arms. "May I call you John? I feel as if I've known you a long time from Margaret's letters. Welcome to our family. *Muy encantado*, as we say in Spanish. You have met my wife Dolores?"

Mr. Thornton extricated himself gently from Frederick's embrace and grinned. "Yes. She has already taught me one of your charming customs."

"Good. You've been introduced to the Gaditano spirit. I hope it doesn't bother you. It's nothing like you'd find in England."

Frederick turned to his wife. He placed an arm around her waist and presented her to his sister.

Margaret raised her face from drying her eyes with her handkerchief and smiled at Dolores. Aware of Spanish customs and predisposed to like Dolores, she embraced her sister-in-law and kissed her on both cheeks. "I feel I know you quite well. Fred's letters are often short and straightforward but, when he talks about you, he fills pages."

Dolores blushed. "I hope I meet your expectations."

"You're more beautiful than I imagined, and you make English sound lovelier and more musical."

Her eyes twinkling, Dolores hooked her arm with Margaret's. "Fred—he does not explain well. Like most men, you know. He said, my sister, she is strong and her spirit ...formidable." She hesitated, glancing at Margaret.

Margaret nodded. "Yes?"

"He made me anxious I do not meet your approval. Now I see you. You are sweet and kind, and you have the most beautiful blue eyes I have ever seen, bluer than his."

"I can see we'll get along well, for we're both anxious to like each other."

Arm in arm, the two women started to walk on.

Frederick said, "Shall we join our ladies?"

"Yes, of course." Mr. Thornton strode in step with Frederick. As they kept pace behind their wives, he thought with both wonder and envy: How easily women make friends. Margaret need not have worried. She and Dolores seemed to have charmed each other.

He, on the other hand, had been thrown off balance from the moment he set foot on the quay. The sunlight that flooded the city even in late afternoon overwhelmed him. Though diffused, it intensified the vibrant colors all around him and made him more aware of the heat.

His jacket was too thick. His cravat was too tight. He tugged at it but did not dare loosen it. He tasted the salty tang of Atlantic winds, so unlike the metallic effusion of industrial machines, dyes, and textiles he inhaled daily in Milton. He looked one way, then another, his attention riveted by the cacophony of harbor sounds—the rhythmic splashing of waves against the hulls of ships arriving or leaving, the grating shrill of seagulls, and the disorienting buzz of strange tongues that he was sure were not all Spanish.

Frederick broke into his thoughts. "You know we've seen each other before. At a train station at night, I believe, more than two years ago. You looked

mysterious, hidden by shadows. Now that I see you better under our Andalusian skies, I have to say I like your smile. A smile says a lot about people."

Uncertain what had passed between brother and sister when they talked about him, Mr. Thornton forced himself to smile. "I'm sure I was scowling at you. But you must understand—to me, you were a stranger embracing the woman who meant the world to me."

Frederick chuckled and laid a hand on Mr. Thornton's shoulder. "I do understand. I hope you weren't left out of our family secret for too long. We all had a difficult time with it, especially my mother."

Mr. Thornton shrugged. "I would have liked to have known about you earlier, not only that you exist but also about the trouble you had at sea. But I am here now, and that's all that matters, I believe."

They followed their wives in silence for a couple of minutes before Frederick spoke again. "We're relieved and thankful when difficult times are over and done with, but sometimes their consequences can haunt us forever."

Surprised at his remark, Mr. Thornton cocked his head toward Frederick. He started to ask which consequences Frederick referred to, but the question died in his throat. If Frederick had a new disclosure to make, he believed Frederick should share it freely.

An easy smile had lingered on Frederick's lips since they started to walk together. It faded, and the flush on his face crept back up. His eyes cast down, he said, "I have these pangs of guilt, sometimes agonizing, that I might have hastened my mother's death. You know that she had often suffered from one little ailment or another. What if they worsened enough to kill her because of what happened to me?"

Mr. Thornton reached out and rested his hand on Frederick's shoulder. Frederick glanced at him, a small grateful smile on his lips, though his eyes remained clouded.

It dawned on Mr. Thornton that his brother-in-law had a vulnerable side. Frederick had seen more of the world than he had and endured life-threatening challenges. He had expected Frederick to have been toughened by his past. But this man walking next to him, with his ready smile and confident air, knew the agony of guilt and blamed himself for his mother's death.

Mr. Thornton was acquainted enough with the Hales to be certain that they would never have thought Frederick responsible in any way for Mrs. Hale's passing. But he was also aware that, in his anguish, Frederick might not be swayed by anyone contradicting his belief.

"You're right about some lasting effects of tragedy and how helpless they make us feel. All we can do is live with them. But surely there are many more good times with people we love that we can celebrate or at least be grateful for."

Frederick's smile widened and his eyes brightened the way Margaret's did when she was pleased. "Yes, surely you're right. I've actually told myself that once or twice, but it reassures me to hear you say it."

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Frederick and Dolores lived on Plaza de Mina in a white three-story house topped by a belvedere that Frederick explained was some type of lookout. From there, former merchant owners of the house could look out to sea for the arrival of trading ships from other countries. Its top two floors had narrow balconies—miradores, Dolores said—that faced the plaza. Like other houses on the plaza, pots of red and pink geraniums and orange nasturtiums hung on the balconies' metal railings. On the second floor, a large verandah jutted out into a courtyard at the back of the house. It had a large daybed of lacquered mahogany and woven cane, six large matching chairs, and a distressed wooden table with elaborate Moorish carvings on the edges.

The house was nothing like Mr. Thornton and Margaret saw in Milton. It delighted her but, while he had taken his cues from his wife when they looked at art and architecture in Paris, he kept silent throughout their tour of the house. In his mind, he debated whether a house should be this open. It was a house that he was certain would not work well in Milton where, frequently, residents had to close windows to reduce the noise of textile machinery or minimize the smell of dyes used in cotton production.

His silent internal debate did not last. By the second day of their stay, he was convinced that verandahs and balconies were a clever idea and necessary in the hot Mediterranean climate. Frederick and Dolores left the doors to the balconies open day and night, letting ocean breezes flow through the house and out the verandah. Mr. Thornton was grateful for the open spaces that provided welcome relief from the heat.

On that second day, he also saw his wife as he had never seen her before.

Margaret kept wiping her neck and face with her handkerchief throughout lunch. Dolores had noticed Margaret's discomfort. When lunch was over, Dolores turned to Margaret and said, "Come with me. We leave our men to get more acquainted, yes?"

Taken by surprise, Margaret hesitated for a moment. She glanced at her husband before she answered, "Where are we going?"

"Your skirt and blouse, they are too hot for this weather, no? Also, your body—it is beautiful. You do not need the....." She groped for words as she traced her torso with her hands.

"Stays," Margaret said.

"... stays, yes. And petticoats. It is cooler without them, you think?"

"Yes, you're right. I'm burning in these clothes." Margaret pushed her skirt down and agreed with an embarrassed laugh.

"You are taller than me but not bigger." Dolores shook her head as she placed her hands on top of her chest "Spanish blouses—they're loose. My skirts are shorter, but no one will notice."

"They would in England. You can't show ankles."

"Many, many ankles show here in Cádiz. In Andalucía, dancers kick their skirts to dance flamenco, and you must watch how fast they click their heels. So, come with me. You'll feel better." Dolores waved her hand toward Frederick and Mr. Thornton. "We join them later."

The two men, glasses of sherry in their hands, got up and went into the verandah to indulge in an after-dinner Andalusian custom. Dolores led Margaret to her bedroom.

When the two women joined their husbands on the verandah, Margaret was wearing a new outfit—a short-sleeved blouse of deep rose through which one could glimpse a shadow of her ivory-colored chemise, and a forest green flowing skirt that clung to her limbs when she moved. She had exchanged her shoes and thick stockings for a pair of sandals.

Mr. Thornton was taken aback. He said nothing while Frederick expressed profuse approval. He had much he could say but judged it best to wait until he and Margaret were alone in their bedroom. She always dressed appropriately, her choice in clothes simple but impeccable. Seeing her in scantier clothing outside the privacy of their home disconcerted him. She did look beautiful in them. They showed her graceful, unbound figure to advantage.

"Isn't my little sister beautiful?" Frederick said, interrupting his musing. He had returned to the seat next to Mr. Thornton's after serving cool chocolate drinks to the two women. "You know, when we were children, she hated wearing petticoats because she could not run fast enough to keep up with me. So she would drag me to the fields away from Dixon's watchful eyes, where she would take them off. Without them, she did sometimes outrun me, partly from sheer determination, I think." Frederick chuckled and finished with another recollection. "Unfortunately, after she was sent to London, she started acting more like a lady, and she was not as much fun anymore."

"She thought you let her win all the time," Mr. Thornton said. "She is quite lovely. But you're right. I suppose I thought, as her husband, I was the only one privileged to see her dressed so ... casually."

Frederick laughed. "You are on the Andalusian coast. We dress for the public when we leave the house but, in here, what you do is between you and your conscience. You make your own rules. Most of the year, we cannot wear those

layers of clothes you do in Britain. This climate won't let you. It encourages an informality that is good for the spirit."

"But does not the Spanish temperament figure into it?"

"I can't be sure about the Spanish temperament. The Gaditano's? Certainly. Cádiz is ancient, dating back several hundred years before Christ. It has endured and absorbed many influences. Its location is a natural for trade, so you will see all kinds of people when you go out for a walk at the plazas."

"They were all at the Customs House."

"They come from all over Europe, North Africa, and the Americas. Many have set roots here, bringing their own culture. To live here, you can't insist on proper English decorum. You must be open to different things, strange things—learn to accept them."

"You seem to have adapted quite well."

"It took years. I was forced to come here and couldn't accept that I'd probably never return to England. But once I accepted my fate, I saw so much about this city and its people that I liked and admired. I believe there's nowhere else in Europe where you'd find a more liberal outlook. And Cádiz is so alive. It infects you with a joie de vivre, though older folk who've lived here a long time insists that, as good as it is now, its most glorious years came and went with the past century. But Cádiz still seduces. It has seduced me. I'm more Gaditano now than English."

"Meeting Dolores probably helped, too," Mr. Thornton said.

"Yes, indeed." Glancing at his wife, Frederick grinned.

Their wives were standing by the stone balustrade. Margaret was enchanted with the garden, gushing with delight as Dolores pointed to purple bougainvilleas and passion flowers climbing toward the balustrade, large pots of red and deep pink roses whose characteristic damask fragrance wafted up the verandah. Flower beds along the edge of the garden were aflame with bluebells, red and orange poppies, and yellow gazanias. Margaret sighed, voicing her doubts that those flowers could ever grow in the smoky atmosphere and dye-saturated soil of Milton.

"Margaret would have adapted to this society with ease, particularly with you here," Mr. Thornton said with a mix of pride and concern as he gazed at his wife.

Frederick shot him a curious glance. "She would have, maybe sooner than most—sooner than me, surely. She has the advantage of all the letters I've sent her about life in Cádiz. And since she can speak French, she'll learn Spanish in no time at all."

"She told me you wrote and invited her to come live with you after your parents died."

“I did. I worried about her,” Frederick said. “She wrote me long letters after our father died. I sensed the silent despair in them, not only because of her grief at Father’s loss. I think Margaret faced the reality that she no longer had anyone in Milton whose wisdom she could trust in her bleakest hours.”

“But she had her aunt and cousin,” Mr. Thornton said. “Her aunt came to take her away from Milton shortly after Mr. Hale’s funeral. I understood that she looked after Margaret, and her daughter could give Margaret comfort and affection while she was grieving.”

“That’s true. But sadly, they could not comprehend all that she was going through. Margaret is capable of deeper feelings, and her intellect is superior to our cousin. Anyway, she considered my offer to live with us, but she wasn’t ready to leave England. She said it was a momentous change, and she was right. Anyway, she understood that she would be welcome any time. I did try to entice her, telling her how much I’ve been enjoying my life here. But maybe, as fate would have it, she married you.”

Although Frederick appeared to have more to say, he paused, his brow creased in thought. When he spoke again, his voice was subdued, regretful. “I wanted to come, give her away in marriage. I couldn’t wait to meet you, but England is now lost to me. I despaired, worrying that I might not see my sister again, and I spent many sleepless nights after our parents died wondering how she was and what would happen to her, alone in England.”

“She wasn’t alone,” Mr. Thornton said with more firmness than he intended, “and, I confess, I am glad she didn’t come here. If she had, I would have invented some excuse to come for her when I found out who you were.”

Frederick chuckled. “I do believe you would have. You’ve been good for her. She has a radiance I’ve never seen before. And I’m extremely glad you’re both here now. I can’t thank you enough for coming to visit.”

Mr. Thornton went to bed that night trying to recall a Spanish tune Frederick was humming as he poured sherry at the end of dinner. When Margaret joined him in bed, all he said about her attire was “You looked so alluring, my love, that I wanted to take you in my arms and kiss you right then and there, in front of Fred and Dolores.”

“Why didn’t you? But I’m glad you didn’t mind my dress. I worried you might not approve.”

He enclosed her in his arms and kissed her. “I was dismayed—for an instant. But it seems it’s how everybody dresses in Cádiz.”

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In summer, the Cádiz sun was at its zenith at mid-day, and local people preferred the comfort of indoor spaces. So the city broke for lunch. Frequently

heavier than dinner, it could last two hours and was usually followed by a siesta. Were Frederick not on vacation, he would have returned to his office after siesta and worked from about 5 p.m. and past 8 p.m. in the evening.

Margaret remembered siesta from Frederick's letters and was not surprised at the practice. Faithful to the custom, Frederick and Dolores treated the hour or two of repose as a necessary indulgence which they spent in their bedroom, leaving Mr. Thornton and Margaret to entertain themselves.

Accustomed to a schedule of continuous work during the day, Mr. Thornton found it perplexing and could not see himself doing nothing, much less dozing off, in the middle of the day. He thought it yet another quaint Gaditano custom that would not suit Milton. He could never adopt the practice at home.

Earlier he had felt uncomfortable at the casual, demonstrative manner of his hosts. At home, Frederick and Dolores touched, embraced, and kissed each other with unabashed playfulness. He and Margaret felt free to express their affection only in the privacy of their bedroom.

Alone at siesta time on the third day, Mr. Thornton persuaded Margaret to visit the cathedral they'd seen on the day they arrived. Inclined to go along with the local customs, she balked at first but relented. He was restless, and she was convinced a brisk walk to Plaza de la Catedral might calm him. Besides, she was eager to see a cathedral that her brother had said was neoclassical but bore the influences of Moorish, rococo, and baroque architecture across the more than a century it had taken to finish it.

The sun sparkled, and the heat hovered just below searing level. By the time they reached the cathedral, their clothes stuck to their skin and their faces were flushed and moist. Mr. Thornton pushed the massive door into the cathedral. But it did not budge.

He said, "I'm sorry to have dragged you on that miserable walk to this cathedral. It seemed so grand, I thought we should see it."

"Oh, no," Margaret said. "I was hoping to sit inside for a while and cool off a bit."

"I was quite impressed with the light in this lively and colorful city. But I must admit that, right now, I'm wishing I was back to the dreary but cool atmosphere of Milton."

Margaret shrugged but said nothing. She stepped into the narrow strip of shade cast by the cathedral.

"Now I understand why they have siestas in the afternoon, but how terribly inconvenient for visitors like us." Mr. Thornton was annoyed. He waved his hand at the sun. "I suppose, in this part of the world, there's nothing much you could do about something you can't control."

Margaret pulled Mr. Thornton toward her. “Oh, John. Relax here for a moment, will you? Cool down a little. Then we’ll go back to the house so I can shed off these petticoats and we can have large glasses of pomegranate juice.”

The next day, Margaret declared that, for the rest of their stay in Cádiz, she would devote the siesta hour to reading. She picked a book from her brother’s library, the first volume of a series titled *The Whale* by Herman Melville, a writer unfamiliar to her. She returned to their bedroom, where Mr. Thornton was looking out the window.

She said, “How about reading with me? I can read this aloud—it sounds fascinating—or you can pick another. I know you prefer nonfiction. Fred seems to have quite a collection of books from father’s library.”

He turned toward Margaret and, leaning against the window sill, he said, “I can’t sit still.”

Looking sympathetic, she approached him and kissed him. “I’m sorry, John,” she said before sitting on the couch at the foot of the bed. She swung her legs up on it and opened her book.

Mr. Thornton resigned himself to staying indoors like everyone else. In Milton, the machines would be running, and he would not have to find something to do. He paced around the bedroom until Margaret looked up from her book. She raised an eyebrow at him, and he walked out of the room to wander around the house and the garden. Wherever he found breezy shaded nooks, he lingered a while. When he had gone through every space he could explore, he returned to the bedroom and, gently laying a hand on Margaret’s shoulder, he said, “Come with me to the verandah. It’s cooler there. You get the ocean breeze.”

Margaret closed her book and rose from her chair. “Let’s not waste another minute here, then. I am getting a bit too warm, even in these lighter clothes.”

In the verandah, she paused for a moment, her gaze darting from the chair to the bed, back to the chair. “How about the bed? Those tiny holes in the cane should keep us cool.”

Mr. Thornton shook his head and scowled. “Lie in bed in the middle of the afternoon?”

Margaret shrugged. “Take the chair if relaxing bothers you. The bed beckons to me. It’s big enough for two in case you change your mind.”

Mr. Thornton chose the chair closest to Margaret and resolved to be content reading the newspaper he picked up in the living room. The paper was in English, but it had come from America, not England. He spent the next half hour reading it with great interest. His familiarity with America had been limited to the textile trade, particularly cotton, but the paper had articles on other products like tobacco, sugar cane, silver from the Spanish colony of Mexico, and one product that Cádiz direly needed: ice.

After perusing these articles, he folded the newspaper and tossed it on the table. He watched Margaret. She had fallen asleep with her open book perched upside down on her stomach, one hand on top of it. She looked so peaceful that he was tempted to join her on the bed. But he hesitated.

Napping in mid-day had never ever occurred to him. He had been quite content being busy at the mill and rarely did anything unrelated to it until he met Margaret's father, Mr. Hale, who inspired him to continue his interrupted education. And pleasure? To him, that meant an efficient mill that brought profits healthy enough to make life much better for his mother and his sister Fanny.

But Margaret did change him, and not only because he fell in love with her. Her influence became clearer to him in Paris, where they had honeymooned before coming to Cádiz. She dragged him to museums and art galleries, cafés, and theaters—places he would not have visited alone. Though this was also her first Paris visit, she had read books and heard stories from one of her father's friends, Monsieur Fleury, a Frenchman. She recognized art pieces and lingered before them, ogling them with a child-like wonder that beguiled him.

She was ambivalent about the structural changes Paris was undergoing. But those changes excited him. They were necessary. Modernization was good. But when he saw Margaret bite her lower lip, her eyes pooling with tears as she witnessed neighborhoods once teeming with life being destroyed, he placed an arm around her waist. He could sympathize.

Through her eyes and her translations from French to English, he saw a culture immersed in arts and pleasure and the pursuit of both. But that land of Diderot and Voltaire was also progressive. The city was rebuilding boulevards and neighborhoods and revitalizing ancient buildings. The French dealt squarely with serious and important matters, but Parisian society and culture also knew the value of "appearances" and frivolities—delightful though not essential to survival or comfort—and indulged in them. Yes, art fed his soul, promenades on the Tuileries relaxed him, and spirited discussions in cafés fired up his imagination.

Cádiz, though, was not like Paris.

He rose from his chair and sat on the opposite side of the bed from where Margaret lay. How he loved her—so much that sometimes he ached from it. He stared, mesmerized by the book rising up and down with her breathing, and he felt the urge to rest his head on her stomach. But he did not want to disturb her. With utmost care, he extricated the book from under her hand and placed it on the table.

He lay down beside her. She stirred, opened her eyes, and gave him a small, dreamy smile before drifting back to sleep. He turned on his side, gently placed his arm on her waist, and pressed a soft kiss on the side of her neck. Before long, he descended into slumber, his face buried in her hair.

In the following days, Mr. Thornton submitted with less reluctance than before to the exigencies of the weather and this strange custom of siestas. Two days after he began to do so, he banished his cravats and vests into their luggage, rolled his shirtsleeves up to his elbows, and led Margaret to the big verandah bed for an afternoon nap right after lunch. Margaret returned her book to the library.

"I could get used to this," he said one afternoon, shifting his body to find the most comfortable position.

"What?" She feigned surprise, suppressing a smile as she faced him.

"I'm only talking about while we're here. Back to Milton, I'll be at work this hour."

"But how could you survive even a few weeks of careless days of ease? I remember you saying how dull that would be."

He gathered her close and planted a kiss on her lips. "How could you remember something I said so long ago? What if I would prefer not to be reminded of it?"

"Really? I rather thought you'd be flattered that I could remember."

"But it offended you at that time, so please forget it."

"It stuck in my mind." She pouted and turned her face away. "It seemed to me you were criticizing life in the South."

"Forget that, too."

"You did redeem yourself when you told us what you had to do and endure after your father died. I was mortified and thought I had been too harsh on you."

"Did you begin to like me after that?"

Margaret did not answer, but she kissed him and laid her head on his shoulder. A couple of minutes later, she said, "I remember another instance when you scoffed at the idea of pleasure. Do you recall when Mr. Bell asked you what you worked so hard for and when you intended to enjoy the fruits of your labor? "

Mr. Thornton groaned. "I ignored him. I was consumed by jealousy, still stung by your rejection, and you sat there looking serene and unconcerned. I told myself I should hate you and ignore you pointedly. Instead, I could not get you out of my mind. Truth be told, I didn't know how to answer Mr. Bell. Was he annoyed?"

"Well, yes, he was. You looked sullen, extremely put upon. Anyway, after you left, I told him you weren't your usual self. Something was troubling you."

He stared at her, his eyes incredulous. "You knew. You defended me."

"I knew by then that I loved you. But I was convinced that you no longer cared for me. How could I possibly have revealed how I felt?"

"Oh, Margaret, my love! All I was waiting for was a look from you so I could show you how contrite I was."

“Things were different then. Anyway, does it matter now? You’ve been as irascible lately, though. In Paris, you were so agreeable and enchanted with everything. Don’t you like Cádiz?”

“I don’t dislike it, but I don’t take to new places as easily as you do—particularly one as foreign to me as Cádiz.”

She wriggled closer to him. “I forgive you, but you must kiss me and hold me close and tell me again how much you love me.”

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The next morning, Frederick invited Mr. Thornton to a dinner meeting of a club of tradesmen. “Merchants from all over the world will be there, and we often ask someone to tell us about his trade. A few are just passing through on their way to Barcelona—traders and adventurers transporting silver from Mexico. You may enjoy it and learn something from their stories. There might be one or two bringing cotton from America. Cádiz is a way station to England. That would be the type of business that would interest you.”

“Thank you for inviting me. I’d like very much to come.”

Twenty men and one woman were at the meeting. Many of them were swarthy and unshaven from weeks spent at sea. But Mr. Thornton was unprepared for a few who looked more foreign than the others. They were short, had dusky skin, thick straight black hair, and black eyes. They didn’t speak much English, and he stayed away from them until Frederick introduced him to the man seated next to him at the dinner table. Benito Hidalgo was the exception, having lived and studied in America in his youth.

Curious about Mexican silver, the club had chosen Mr. Hidalgo to speak that evening. He recounted how the Hidalgo family became rich when silver was discovered in Mexico in the sixteenth century. Generations of Hidalgos searched and claimed mines, which increased their fortune for nearly two centuries until the Napoleonic wars devastated Spain’s economy, sending a gigantic wave across the ocean to Mexico. Mr. Thornton was amazed to hear that silver mining in Mexico enriched the Spanish empire more than it did the Mexican economy. In fact, only a few, like the Hidalgos, made a fortune.

Intrigued by Mr. Hidalgo’s long and diverse history, Mr. Thornton engaged him in conversation at the table while the rest of the party drifted into smaller groups.

Mr. Hidalgo said, “We lost all but the house we were living in. Do you know the agonizing pain of falling from a tall, steep mountain? The hopeless anguish from doubting you had the strength and wherewithal to climb back up?”

Mr. Thornton nodded. “I do, actually. But I was lucky. The woman I loved inherited money and continued to love me despite my misfortune.”

“Yes, you’re fortunate. I’ve had to work until my hands and knees bled. Then I happened upon international trade where my experience in America and the other places I travelled proved useful. But I’ve only recouped some of the property we once owned. I’ve learned a lot, enough to kill my illusions that I could get back the old family glory. I have to look to future generations. But they would need to keep their eyes and ears open.”

“You must have hopes, then, that silver mining will be very profitable again.”

Mr. Hidalgo shook his head. “No, unfortunately. The earth can only yield so much, and wars deplete resources. No, we must learn about or invent new products. Civilization is voracious. It must find things to feed on in order to grow—things people like us must seize before too many others do. We must open our eyes and ears, not just in Mexico and Spain or England, where you live. Going to far-flung places, I’ve learned not to assume that other people think like me. We all have unique experiences which influence our views of the world and the things which matter to us. Being open to those views can tell us something about what the people we serve need or want.

“Are you still doing business in silver?”

“Some. My ship also transports tobacco and cotton, and sometimes chocolate, fruits, and vegetables. My country’s economy is in bad shape, and the government has drastically cut down on international trading. I’m one of the lucky few allowed to continue. One thing I would never do, though, is ferrying slaves. It’s lucrative, but inhumane.”

Mr. Hidalgo stared straight into Mr. Thornton’s eyes, assessing him and, with his jaw clenched, he continued, “Rich Americans and Europeans are greedy for them, but the poor and uneducated deserve to be treated like you and me.” Mr. Hidalgo looked away, and Mr. Thornton could not tell if he was angry or embarrassed by his outburst.

He wanted to put him at his ease, show him he was not averse to his views. He said, “It amazes me how events happening in one part of the world could affect a country far away. You’ve opened my eyes. You’re a remarkable man, Mr. Hidalgo, and I’m lucky to have made your acquaintance.”

Mr. Hidalgo smiled. “Maybe we’ll meet again. We could deal in cotton or those precious bugs that feed on our cactuses.”

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As they climbed into bed that night, Mr. Thornton related his conversation with Benito Hidalgo to Margaret. “I’m ashamed to say I hesitated to talk with him at first. He turned out to be fascinating. I’m sure you’d like him. He’s small, muscular, graying, but energetic. And wise. He’s sensitive to injustices against the

less fortunate, but his eyes glow when he talks about his family and his hopes for the future. They mask the hardships and upheavals he's been through."

Margaret said, "I may never get a chance to meet him, but I like him already and wish him well."

"He's slowly regained a quarter of what his family has lost. He has ventured into other products. His family had been involved in silver mining, but now his ship also brings in cotton and something very unusual—a bug that produces a type of red color much prized by royalty and brings in quite a bit of money."

"A dye, you mean, that could be used on textiles. Are you getting ideas from what he's told you?"

"I am. But my first goal upon our return is to get the mill back in operation and make it run like clockwork. I'd also explore other ways we can improve our production of cotton. After that, I will look into other products. Maybe I won't be lucky enough to come across a bug like Mr. Hidalgo has, but England is industrializing rapidly, and its needs are multiplying."

"It could all be an exciting adventure."

"I expect it to be," he said as he gathered Margaret in his arms. "Fred is right. You have to be open to new things."

"So, do you still think Cádiz isn't that special?"

"Of course, it is special. It's as different from Milton as you probably could find in the continent. And you're here with me. If it weren't for you, my love, I would never have come. Never met your brother or Mr. Hidalgo at this crucial time, before we reopen the mill. I've been forced to pause and reflect on what I want for us. And I'll have much to learn."

Margaret purred with pleasure, cupped his face in her hands, and kissed him. "I'll be there, Mr. Thornton. Always."

Mr. Thornton turned off the gas lamp on the night table and gathered Margaret in his arms.

