

Harmony Hall

by

Duncan Pflaster

HARMONY HALL

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HARMONY HALL

Harmony Hall was originally produced in February 2023 as part of the Frigid Festival at UNDER St. Marks, New York City with the following cast (in order of appearance):

Brother LinusClinton Powell*
Christian.....Wyn Delano*

DirectorDuncan Pflaster
Stage ManagerFiona Hansen
Intimacy Coordinator.....Olivia Kormos
Lighting and Sound DesignCuster Dannflap

* Indicates member of Actors' Equity Association, An Equity Approved Showcase.

Thanks to David Crittenden & Mim Granahan for assistance with costumes, and to Turn to Flesh Productions and EMG Playwright Group for vital developmental readings.

The play is loosely inspired by “Boom!”, the camp classic film adaptation of the Tennessee Williams play “The Milk Train Doesn’t Stop Here Anymore”, but knowing that piece is not necessary to your enjoyment of this one.

HARMONY HALL

Cast: 2 Men

BROTHER LINUS: Early 40s, male. White. An isolated Monk. Semi-Catholic. Innocent, but full of guilt. Jittery and anxious. Hasn't really spoken to another person for 20 years, so his language is somewhat fractured, but not slow. Queer, but has been hiding it all his life.

CHRISTIAN CORDERO: 20s, Male, American Latino, but gets mistaken for Italian in the play. A physically intimidating Tennessee Williams brute, with a poet's soul. Would prefer an actor over 6 feet tall. Scruffy and Intense. Has been hanging out with Beat poets, and aspires to that style. Queer, but might not read as that at first glance; very comfortable in his skin. Has periodic memory loss based in trauma.

Time: 1968, but that's probably not *immediately* obvious from the décor or the costumes.

Place: The antechamber of a small chapel called Harmony Hall, on an island off the coast of Italy.

The appearance of // in a line means that the next line should begin to overlap at that point. An ellipsis... indicates a trailing off of a sentence. An Em Dash — indicates a thought broken off abruptly.

This play was written as one act, but if desired, an intermission could be inserted between scenes vi and vii.

HARMONY HALL

HARMONY HALL

ACT I
SCENE 1
Matins

Setting: A very small and disused chapel called “Harmony Hall” on a nearly deserted island. It’s 1968, but that’s probably not immediately obvious. A sparse antechamber that leads to the outer doors. A little table which used to hold more holy things, but now holds tea, and books and other necessities. A couple of pews against the wall. Perhaps a stained-glass window or two. Maybe a clear window that looks out onto the sky and ocean. An embroidered piece on the wall which reads “Harmony Hall”.

At Rise: The stage is empty. It’s 3am. It’s raining outside, pretty heavily. Thunder, lightning. A CHURCH BELL LOUDLY BONGS THREE TIMES. After a moment, LINUS enters, early 40s, tired, in old-style monk’s robes. He sings to himself, the traditional round “Dona Nobis Pacem”, continuing through the different harmonic parts of the round, though he is alone. A kettle whistles offstage. He sets up a tea cup and puts in a tea bag, goes offstage to get the hot water. He comes back in and pours, singing to himself all the while. Suddenly a loud banging on the front door. Linus nearly spills the tea, he is so startled.

LINUS. Who the... what? *(Linus goes to the doors and throws them open. In falls CHRISTIAN, a rough-looking man in his early 20s, who is drenched with water, and his clothes (t-shirt and jeans) are torn; his shirt particularly in shreds.)*

CHRISTIAN. Water. *(Christian collapses onto the floor, unconscious.)*

LINUS. Oh dear. Oh dear! *(blackout.)*

HARMONY HALL

SCENE 2

Lauds

The same, 2 hours later. Dawn. Still raining. Christian is still asleep, passed out on a pew, covered in a sheet. There is a glass of water next to him on a table. FIVE BONGS of the church bell. The sound of the bell makes him toss and turn a bit. After a moment, Linus enters. He goes to check on Christian, sees he's still asleep. Linus paces.

LINUS. You are a conundrum.

How did you get here?

There's not supposed to be anyone else.

I should just throw you out. Let you lie on the rocky beach.

But is that the Christian thing to do?

You're a big one, aren't you? *(beat)*

I cannot let you interrupt my works.

My solitude.

But perhaps the interruption is a sign. I should not believe in signs.

What should I do?

I don't believe in signs, but I wish I had a sign. *(He prays, reciting from Psalm 119)*

Blessed art thou, O LORD: teach me thy statutes.

With my lips have I declared all the judgments of thy mouth.

I have rejoiced in the way of thy testimonies, as much as in all riches.

I will meditate in thy precepts, and have respect unto thy ways.

I will delight myself in thy statutes: I will not forget thy word.

Deal bountifully with thy servant, that I may live, and keep thy word.

Open thou mine eyes, that I may behold wondrous // things... *(Christian gasps and awakes, interrupting).*

CHRISTIAN. Water. *(Linus jumps to help him, brings him the glass of water.)*

LINUS. Yes, yes. Of course. Water. Here. Drink. *(Christian sits up, the sheet falls off partly, revealing that he's shirtless, a saint medal adorning his neck (Saint Anthony, most likely). Linus gives him the glass of water, and Christian drinks thirstily.)*

HARMONY HALL

CHRISTIAN. Yes. (*Christian passes out again, after drinking. Linus takes his wrist and checks his pulse.*)

LINUS. Open Thou mine eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of Thy law. I am a stranger on the earth; hide not Thy commandments from me. (*Blackout.*)

SCENE 3

Prime

The same, still raining, but less. Christian is still unconscious. There are SIX BONGS of the bell from offstage. The sound makes Christian stir in his sleep; he half-awakes, and speaks groggily.

CHRISTIAN. Water—

It seems that's all—

In my ankles or pants—

A sudden fall into the drink—

Or else— (*He lies back again. After a moment, Linus enters. He has a washcloth and a bowl of water, he dampens the washcloth and lays it on Christian's head for a moment, wiping his face, tending to him.*)

LINUS. Poor lamb. (*Linus goes to the other end of the pew, and, uncovering Christian's feet, begins carefully to wash them.*) If I then, your Lord and Master, have washed your feet; ye also ought to wash one another's feet.

For I have given you an example, that ye should do as I have done to you. Verily, verily, I say unto you, The servant is not greater than his lord; neither he that is sent greater than he that sent him.

If ye know these things, happy are ye if ye do them. (*Linus is finished washing the feet, is conflicted about whether to go further and wash more. He sneaks a peek under the sheet, and is overcome by the sight. Christian stirs in his sleep and mumbles more; Linus drops the sheet, frightened.*)

CHRISTIAN. Landing—

Come on now man—

This is a public place—

HARMONY HALL

I don't even know who you are—

Am I— (*He is out again.*)

LINUS. Poor lamb, poor lamb. I've got you, the Lord will hold you, and so will I. Rest. (*Blackout.*)

SCENE 4

Terce

The same, no longer raining. Christian is still unconscious. We hear NINE BONGS of the bell from off. Christian stirs at the noise again, and finally sits up, still a little disoriented and woozy.

CHRISTIAN. Hello? (Linus enters, excitedly.)

LINUS. Oh, you're up, you're awake! Praise the Lord.

Well, I suppose you're wondering why I'm here. Where you are. This is Harmony Hall. That's the name of the chapel.

Our little chapel. Rhymes with apple.

It was founded fifty years ago, as a small monastery, an isolated spot conducive to meditation and serenity. And ocean views.

I'm Brother Linus. I've been here twenty-one years. I think.

You're perfectly safe here, no one ever comes and no one ever goes.

CHRISTIAN. What, never?

LINUS. (*singing*) "No never! What never? Hardly ever".

Do you like Gilbert and Sullivan? I did HMS Pinafore in high school. It was always a favorite of mine.

CHRISTIAN. I don't know what that is.

LINUS. Well, it doesn't matter. I was just saying, no one comes here. We're perfectly alone.

CHRISTIAN. Alone?

LINUS. Yes. Forgive me if I speak too much, I've been alone for some time, I don't remember how to speak like people do. How do people speak these days?

Do you want some tea?

Or more water?

HARMONY HALL

CHRISTIAN. No more water.

LINUS. No, I suppose you've had enough.

What else should I tell you?

I haven't had to explain myself in a while and it's rather exciting.

CHRISTIAN. You haven't explained anything.

LINUS. Perhaps you're right. I am elliptical. I don't know what's the most important thing to tell first.

I know, why don't you ask me questions?

CHRISTIAN. I don't have ...time for that.

LINUS. No no, of course not. You're very busy.

But "Who are you?", as the caterpillar said, that's the question.

CHRISTIAN. I think they call me Chris.

LINUS. That's a good start.

But you should lie back and relax, you were drenched when you arrived.

(Christian looks below his sheet and sees he's in his underwear.)

CHRISTIAN. Where are my clothes?

LINUS. Nearly destroyed. In the storm or whatever happened to you. I salvaged what I could. Drying in the next room.

I can give you another sheet or something to wear in the meantime when it's safe for you to get up and walk around.

I only have two cassocks and I don't know if they would fit you.

CHRISTIAN. I'm dry...?

LINUS. I fear you were hurt. What happened to you out there?

You were soaked to the bone when you fell in the door; it was raining, but you were drenched as if by immersion.

An enigma.

Do you want some tea? I asked that.

How did you get here?

CHRISTIAN. Here?

LINUS. To the island.

CHRISTIAN. Island? I don't quite remember.

I can't remember how I got here. Or who I am.

LINUS. Perhaps it's shock?

CHRISTIAN. I'm shaking. I'm cold. Maybe?

I was...

HARMONY HALL

I was on a boat?

I think that's what it was. A group of these hep fellas, all dressed in black like jazzbos. They didn't look like proper sailors at all.

LINUS. Pity.

CHRISTIAN. What?

LINUS. I do think, don't you? That some sort of uniform is important when you're in service.

It lets people know what, and by extension, who, you are. Or, who you are or who you intend to be for them.

Intention is important. Don't you think?

CHRISTIAN. Like how when you're out there hitchhiking, They say you should dress like who you want to pick you up.

LINUS. Do they say that? I've never done ...that..

CHRISTIAN. Although, if you're a hippie, or whatever? These kids, I don't know. I've never gone in for that style. I think men should look like men, ya know what I mean?

LINUS. Yes...?

CHRISTIAN. Do I assume they wouldn't want another hippie picking them up? They'd want to find and hail down a Square with a nice car. That'll get them where they're going.

Or maybe a hippie might could prefer the familiar: another longhair with communal marijuana sharing and true love and all that— Not "true love", I meant "Free Love". That's what they say.

And, maybe they wouldn't have the bread to dress like a normal person, to fool someone with a nice car into a ride.

LINUS. Bread?

CHRISTIAN. Money. But then I imagine the hair presents a problem.

LINUS. I don't understand.

REGINA. These kids with the long hair, the hippies, you know? A guy could wear a hat, I suppose, pile it all up under there. But then I guess a girl could, too. Like in all those stories Shakespeare wrote.

LINUS. I don't know what a hippie is. I haven't been off the island in twenty-something years. Is that... what *is* that?

CHRISTIAN. You haven't... *(He suddenly gets panicky)*

What kind of place is this? Where am I?

HARMONY HALL

I don't feel so good. I want to get out of here.

My book, where's my book? (*He tries to stand; Linus forces him back down*)

LINUS. Now now, calm yourself. It's not as bad as all that.

Your pants and things are drying out in the other room on the radiator. You can have them back when they're dry and you're feeling better.

CHRISTIAN. Thank you for your help. Where am I?

LINUS. As I said, it's a monastery, of sorts. You're in the chapel. It's called Harmony Hall. Rhymes with apple.

Here, lie back and close your eyes, if you're not feeling well.

I always find an exposition of sleep does wonders to let the body right itself.

Do you think you might vomit? I'll get a bowl.

CHRISTIAN. No, no vomit. I... how did I get here?

LINUS. A boat, I think you said. Lie back. Calm yourself. Here's your pillow.

CHRISTIAN. Yes, a boat. A boat. A dinghy? No, larger.

The water, rushing in. My book, it... (*Christian trails off, he has fallen back to sleep. Linus sits back, exhausted.*)

LINUS. These turbulent waters have treated you with rough hands, my boy, whoever you are. "Chris".

Like poor Jonah's cry from within the fish:

"You hurled me into the depths, into the very heart of the seas, and the currents swirled about me; all your waves and breakers swept over me."

Jonah was delivered, and so shall you be. (*Linus pulls up a chair (or sits in another pew) to watch over Christian. Blackout.*)

SCENE 5

Sext

The same, Noon. If there are windows, bright daylight streams in.

Christian is as he was at the end of the previous scene, but Linus is gone.

After a few moments, we hear TWELVE BONGS from the bell. Christian stands up, groggily. We see he's in nothing but (60s-fashion) tighty-whitey underwear and his saint medal.

HARMONY HALL

CHRISTIAN. Wstfgl? What place is this? How... *(He looks around, doesn't see anything familiar, and, feeling woozy again, sits back down, heavily, on his pew, and closes his eyes. Linus enters, and sees him sprawled out in his underwear. Linus averts his eyes out of instinct, then looks back at the vision before him.)*

LINUS. Oh dear. Oh dear. *(Linus closes his eyes and goes to his knees in prayer; Psalms 77.)* I cried unto God with my voice, even unto God with my voice; and he gave ear unto me.

In the day of my trouble I sought the Lord: my sore ran in the night, and ceased not: my soul refused to be comforted.

I remembered God, and was troubled: I complained, and my spirit was overwhelmed. Selah. *(Christian opens his eyes and stands, unseen by Linus. He sways a bit, unsteady.)*

Thou holdest mine eyes waking: I am...

I am...

I am so troubled that I cannot speak. So troubled that I—

Thou holdest mine eyes waking. I am troubled.

I have considered the days of old, the years of ancient times.

I call to remembrance my song in the night: I commune with mine own heart: and my spirit made diligent search.

Will the Lord cast off for ever? and will he be favourable no more?

Is his mercy clean gone // for ever—

CHRISTIAN. Where's my book?

LINUS. You're awake? You're awake!

CHRISTIAN. I don't know where I am... Where are my clothes, sir?

You're a ...monk?, should I call you "Father".

LINUS. Brother. Brother Linus.

You've been unconscious, I think you were in shock, you said you were on a boat? Or thrown off a boat?

CHRISTIAN. I don't remember. I can't remember. Where is this?

LINUS. It's a small chapel called // Harmony Hall, it...

CHRISTIAN. Where's my book? I had a little notebook with me, I carry it everywhere. I need it. Where is it?

HARMONY HALL

LINUS. I think it must be in the pocket of your dungarees. Let me look.
(Linus exits. Christian looks around the room. He composes a verse, haltingly.)

CHRISTIAN. This can't be familiar.

I don't know this room.

It's awful peculiar,

An odd sense of doom.

I keep my eyes shut

To suppress my fear,

I've been many places but

Which one is here? *(Linus reenters, holding a small notebook, a pocket-sized black Moleskine. It has been drenched and dried, the pages are warped and wavy. Some of the ink has spread. He also carries Christian's jeans, which he drapes over a pew.)*

LINUS. Here you go, this is yours. May I?

CHRISTIAN. May you what?

LINUS. May I look inside? It may give a clue as to your identity and motivations.

CHRISTIAN. I know my identity. I'm... well, I'm me!

LINUS. Certainly, but to be completely fair about it, I am also "me".

(Linus opens the book and reads the frontispiece.) "In case of loss, please return to Christian Cordero." Is that you? Cordero, is that Italian?

CHRISTIAN. I don't know. It sounds like it. I don't feel Italian. Are we in Italy?

LINUS. We are! And it says there's a reward for whoever found it. Ten dollars. Is that good?

CHRISTIAN. You didn't find it, you found me.

LINUS. I think to be precise, you found me.

You came banging on my door at 3 in the morning, just after I'd rung the bell for Matins, and collapsed, waterlogged and quite pathetic, onto my immaculate floor.

CHRISTIAN. I'm sorry if I made a mess.

LINUS. Oh no, don't apologize.

I'm not really angry, I couldn't be angry at you, a young man, lost and confused, and requiring of the charity the church and I can provide.

HARMONY HALL

I enjoy the break in the monotonous routine.

I just mean, I just, well, that, well, if you found me, it's you that deserves the reward.

CHRISTIAN. I don't deserve a reward.

LINUS. We shall see.

Harmony Hall is welcome to all. A rhyme!

You're the first itinerant traveler to find your way to our doors, my doors, needing succor, but I am determined to provide you comfort and relief.

CHRISTIAN. I thank you. I am not a man of...

Can I have my book? I think somehow it is important.

LINUS. You may, Christian. ...If that is your name.

CHRISTIAN. I have heard it before. It has the ring of the familiar. But Christian is a common word, I think.

LINUS. None so common.

CHRISTIAN. This book, much of it is ruined. My book. Illegible. Pages stuck together. The markings blurred.

LINUS. Water, I'm afraid: never the greatest of friends with ink.

CHRISTIAN. But here: (*He reads*)

"I harbor you as a fugitive in... *blank*?

I will keep you protected within my breast

I don't know if it will help you start

But there is a place for you in my chest"

Ugh.

"And for my love I would do everything

And for my love I am on fire

And for my love I cry

And for my love I am— "

and then the rest is lost to rain. Or ocean. Or both. Water, in any event.

"And for my love I am..."

LINUS. ...Desire? "And for my love I am..." A liar? I am a choir? ...For // hire?

CHRISTIAN. No, no. It's... I don't know, but it's not that, not those.

Is this even mine? Do I write verses?

Do I *rhyme*?

LINUS. You don't look the type.

HARMONY HALL

CHRISTIAN. Yes, Poetry seems effeminate.

I find it hard to reconcile
That I could be condemning it
And spouting it the while.

LINUS. Why, Christian, you're a regular Gerard Manley Hopkins! You must write that down. In your book, if so.

CHRISTIAN. No. Have you a pencil? Or a pen?

LINUS. Let me look. (*Linus pats the pockets of his robe; not finding a writing implement, He exits in search of one. Christian sees his jeans where Linus left them upon entering, goes and tries to put them on, but they are now a little too small. He hikes them up as much as he can, and, losing his balance, falls over, behind the pews.*)

CHRISTIAN. Fug. This isn't me. (*Linus reenters, holding a pen, and is surprised to see Christian "gone".*)

LINUS. Christian?

CHRISTIAN. I'm here, on the floor.

LINUS. Oh dear. Oh dear.

CHRISTIAN. My pants are too tight now. They must have shrunk. I fell over.

LINUS. Do you require ...help?

CHRISTIAN. I think I'll just lie here for a moment. I've lost my first wind.

LINUS. Do you want the pen?

CHRISTIAN. Yes, hand me my book as well.

LINUS. Of course. (*Linus gets them and hands them to him. Christian ponders for a moment.*)

CHRISTIAN. ...I've forgotten what I was to write.

LINUS. Oh, it was something clever, wasn't it? Some notable aperçu, I'm sure, but what was it?

CHRISTIAN. God, I can't remember.

I feel it wasn't my style.

My brain is somehow out of time, there are moments that come, but five seconds later are lost in the mist.

LINUS. It's a good idea to write things down. Then you can read them later.

HARMONY HALL

CHRISTIAN. I have tried and I have failed.

They say to try again
When we have not prevailed,
But I just say Amen.

LINUS. Amen.

CHRISTIAN. Would you help me up? I'm finished with the floor.

LINUS. Of course. *(Linus crosses to him and extends his hand. Christian gets up with his help. Once on his feet, they stand for a moment, holding hands, looking into each other's eyes. A moment of clarity and intimacy for them, then Linus pulls his hand away.)*

CHRISTIAN. Thank you.

LINUS. You need some rest. You're still unsteady. Go back to sleep, I'll come check on you later.

CHRISTIAN. Thank you. *(Linus begins to walk out.)* Wait.

LINUS. Yes?

CHRISTIAN. You know I am Christian now, but what's your name?
You've been so kind.

LINUS. I said before. But I think you were in another state.
I am Brother Linus.

It's nice to meet you. To see another human face. After all this time. Now go to bed. *(Linus exits. Blackout.)*

SCENE 6

None

The same, three hours later. Christian is lying on his stomach, his legs kicked in the air, and has the book and pen and is writing furiously. The bell rings THREE BONGS. After a bit, Linus enters, cautiously, he holds an apple.

LINUS. I don't want to interrupt.

CHRISTIAN. Not at all, I am positively inspired, but I must stop if you've brought food.

LINUS. I have. Here. Eat.

An apple provided from our meager stores here.

HARMONY HALL

CHRISTIAN. Thank you. I am ravenous from what I think may have been quite an ordeal. *(He takes the apple and almost takes a bite.)*

LINUS. Before you eat, I would like to pray for you and your affliction.

CHRISTIAN. Affliction?

LINUS. Your memory loss. You don't know who you are or where you came from.

CHRISTIAN. I'm not sure that's an affliction, per se.

LINUS. Well, I would call it that. I think amnesia is a form of brain damage? Insanity isn't quite the right word...

CHRISTIAN. No, I feel quite sane.

LINUS. But I consulted my Lives of the Saints and Saint Dymphna is the saint of mental illnesses. So, I shall pray for you. *(Linus gets on his knees, gets out his book of Lives of the Saints and prays)*

CHRISTIAN. Thank you. Oh, you're doing it now. *(He dutifully closes his eyes to listen, expecting it to be a short grace, and assumes a couple of times during the following that Linus is done and he may eat).*

LINUS. Lord, our God, you graciously chose St. Dymphna as patroness of those afflicted with mental and nervous disorders. She is thus an inspiration and a symbol of charity to the thousands who ask her intercession.

Please grant, Lord, through the prayers of this pure youthful martyr, relief and consolation to all suffering such trials, and especially those for whom we pray:

This man, Christian Cordero, if that is, indeed, his name.

We beg you, Lord, to hear the prayers of St. Dymphna on our behalf.

Grant all those for whom we pray patience in their sufferings and resignation to your divine will. Please fill them with hope and grant them the relief and cure they so much desire.

We ask this through Christ our Lord who suffered agony in the garden.

Amen.

CHRISTIAN. *(Eating his apple)* Amen. That was very nice of you. Well-intended.

LINUS. You're welcome.

CHRISTIAN. Who was Saint Dymphna?

HARMONY HALL

LINUS. Oh, Dymphna was a princess; her mother died, and her father vowed that he would never marry another woman unless she was as beautiful as his late wife. Then, as these things go // as Dymphna

CHRISTIAN. Let me guess – He wanted to marry Dymphna.

LINUS. Yes! How did you know?

CHRISTIAN. It's a classic fairy tale setup. "Donkeyskin". The Princess runs away in // disguise

LINUS. This isn't a fairy tale, this is the life of a Saint.

CHRISTIAN. I'm sorry, proceed.

LINUS. Well, Dymphna had already pledged her life to Christ, and hearing of her father's indecent suggestion, she ran away in disguise. He eventually found her and chopped off her head.

CHRISTIAN. Why is she the patron saint of lunatics, then?

LINUS. Oh, someone built a small chapel to mark the spot of her martyrdom, and some lunatics who camped there overnight were healed. But you must stop asking questions and eat.

I hope you enjoy the apple, I grew it myself.

CHRISTIAN. That's impressive.

LINUS. It is part of // my vocation.

CHRISTIAN. Rhymes with Chapel.

LINUS. I keep Harmony Hall in shape, including the gardens. Does it?

CHRISTIAN. Why is it called Harmony Hall?

LINUS. It's aspirational, I suppose. The Founders wanted this to be a place where the inhabitants could live in harmony with each other. And with Nature. I understand there are several Harmony Halls throughout the United States, most with the same idealistic nomenclature. Although some were meant ironically, as they were the names for slave quarters on plantations in the South.

CHRISTIAN. Is that ironic?

LINUS. Perhaps more of a warning. "Harmony or else" is a bit more of a dramatic implication.

Anyway, this Harmony Hall you're in is my home, and the name is not meant ironically.

CHRISTIAN. But who are you in harmony with?

LINUS. What?

HARMONY HALL

CHRISTIAN. You said you were alone here, who are you in harmony with?

...Before I arrived.

LINUS. Well, with myself. I... I don't know. I'm in harmony with Nature. Nature?

CHRISTIAN. It's a very strange setup, why are you here alone?

LINUS. Oh, I have an important function. There is another person on this island. Or, well, a household of sorts.

CHRISTIAN. And you commune with them? You're in harmony with them?

LINUS. Not quite. There is, you see, a very rich, very sick old woman who lives on the other side of the island. If you go out into the daylight, you can look up and see her abode on the top of the cliffs above the Mediterranean. She lives up there alone with her doctors and servants. She's the reason why I'm here. She pays for me to survive here. She's been slowly dying for twenty-four years.

CHRISTIAN. I see, so she comes to you periodically for Christian teachings? You are her only religious outreach in her seclusion?

LINUS. Oh, well, not exactly. She doesn't leave her cliffside retreat. Sometimes her servants bring me food or other items of interest, but they don't speak English very well, and I only have rudimentary Italian.

CHRISTIAN. Are we in Italy?

LINUS. Off the coast, yes. I think I said so. That's where She decided to set up her domicile. I'm American, myself. You sound like you are, as well.

CHRISTIAN. I don't know. I don't really feel like anything else? Nothing unusual, but how would I know? What does this woman who you serve look like? Was she once very beautiful?

LINUS. I haven't actually met the Lady, the woman on the cliffs who is my *raison d'être*.

I don't know why she needs the bells of a church to be heard. Perhaps it's just a comfort to her, though the marking of time would be a sad reminder to me if I were she, dying as she is.

CHRISTIAN. She's dying?

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LINUS. Why else would she hide herself away on this island fastness? She's very sick, if not currently in the process of dying, but then in a way we're all currently in the process of dying, no matter what we do.

CHRISTIAN. I hadn't thought of it like that. I think I am in the process of living.

LINUS. Of course, of course. Both can be true.

I've heard she is visited sometimes by witches.

But they may just be her hallucinations from her medications and tinctures.

I don't provide confession or religious advice for her. Or instruction.

Although I could. I did have training as a monk, and I took the vows, of course.

CHRISTIAN. Of course.

LINUS. Perhaps I would be out of my depth with her, in any case, she seems dead-set on being an unchanging block of marble, inured to any metamorphosis, no matter how well-meant.

A natural response to her illness, a vain attempt to keep everything around her unchanged, and therefore by extension, preserve herself.

I think she just likes to hear the bell. I ring the chapel bell here on the canonical hours. I just rang them for "None", which is three p.m. One of the little hours. It's to remind us to pray.

And I pray for her.

She relies on me to be her clock, the comforting sound of church bells in the distance. It maintains her sense of time.

And, hopefully, her sense of Christian duty.

She'd be quite lost without me.

I'm sure.

She may have forgotten all about me, personally, though she remembers the bells.

CHRISTIAN. And that's all there is?

LINUS. Well, I maintain the chapel. I keep it clean.

And if I find someone who needs my Christian charity, I can provide them succor. And here you are.

CHRISTIAN. And I'm the first suck-ee to have found my way here? You've been alone otherwise? How long have you been here, Brother Linus?

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LINUS. Twenty years. Or so. I think.

CHRISTIAN. Alone? Ye gads. How did you get started? How did this all begin for you?

LINUS. I was assigned. The churches could assign a monk to any chapel they wanted. Any district or area. And I got this.

I took it over from the monks who founded Harmony Hall, to preserve and maintain the chapel after they were no longer able. This is my task.

Rhymes with apple.

CHRISTIAN. Was it a punishment?

LINUS. Something like that.

CHRISTIAN. And you've been doing nothing but ringing a bell for some old lady for twenty-something years?

LINUS. Certainly not. There's a lot to do around here. As I said, there's gardening.

I tend the garden for my food. That's important.

And I keep the chapel clean in case anyone should come.

And here you are. You came.

Sometimes I read. Though since I've only had the same five books all this time, I know them already quite well. I wish you'd been able to bring one with you, other than the one you brought and wrote yourself, and which is blurred perhaps beyond recognition.

CHRISTIAN. I didn't plan to end up here.

LINUS. Do we ever end up where we plan to go?

But I mustn't complain.

CHRISTIAN. What are the five books you have?

LINUS. Oh, well, I have the Bible, though that's more than a book, so I don't count that in the five, of course.

CHRISTIAN. Of course.

LINUS. I have *Lives of the Saints*, as you saw; *Alice in Wonderland*, which also has *Through the Looking Glass* and *Bruno and Sylvie* in one volume, so I only count it as one book. *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd*, by Agatha Christie. *The Meditations of Saint Augustine*.

Oh, and...

Oh, I can't remember the name. Isn't that funny? Only five books, and... what's the last one? Oh, Hemingway. *For Whom the Bell Tolls*.

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CHRISTIAN. Bells. Bells again. Hemingway and Lewis Carroll are unusual choices for a monk. And Agatha Christie, I suppose.

LINUS. Charles Dodgson was a reverend. Some of the books were mine to begin with, some personal items I could not relinquish when I took the vows. And I managed to keep them when I was sent here.

I do wish I had more books.

I've read the Poirot over and over: somehow knowing the ending is less of a deterrent than one might think, but still.

Oh, and I have a hymnal, but that's not really a book. Not // a book-book.

CHRISTIAN. Like the Bible. A hymnal; do you sing?

LINUS. Uh... Not well, but enthusiastically.

I like to sing to myself, it makes me happy. And there is scarce entertainment here.

No music but what I make myself. (*He sings a snippet of the Bach hymn "O Sacred Head, Now Wounded"*)

No movies.

Do you like books?

I know you're not a lending library, and one mustn't wish too hard for what you cannot have, but: If you had been able, if you had brought me a book, what would you have brought?

Do you remember any books you love? Or loved?

CHRISTIAN. Oh crumbs, what a question!

I don't know.

Maybe *The Fountainhead*?

LINUS. *The Fountainhead*? I've not heard of it. Is it religious? An ecclesiastical treatise?

CHRISTIAN. Gosh no. It's sort of the opposite. The woman who wrote it, Ann Rand, she's sort of down on religion and all. (*He pronounces Ayn Rand wrong.*)

LINUS. Oh. Maybe you hadn't better tell me about it, then.

CHRISTIAN. No, I think it'll be okay. It's about this architect, see, and he wants to make buildings his way. Like, in a real smart style, not fashionable stuff like everyone else tells him to do. And nobody appreciates him, how he has Standards. So they don't pay him and he has to do hard labor, but he still keeps to his vision, with the few people who

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really believe in him and his art. And then at the end he gets to make a big building that people really love. And he's vindicated.

LINUS. And that's all?

CHRISTIAN. Well, no, there are other characters, there's his school buddy, another architect, and HE does what everyone tells him to do and he makes boring trendy stuff and he gets really rich but not artistically fulfilled.

LINUS. Ah yes "Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal".

CHRISTIAN. Yeah, kind of? And there's a critic who can only make snide comments, and he's all sophisticated, but he can't make anything himself.

Oh, and there's a woman. Her love is like their prize. She loves them all. But especially Howard, the first architect, the one who sticks to his guns, she loves him. Though she ends up marrying the other guy to make Howard envious. They have a real true passion that cannot be contained.

LINUS. I would like that someday.

CHRISTIAN. The book? I liked it.

LINUS. No, I meant I would like to experience a passion that cannot be contained. I haven't felt strongly about something or someone in decades. Aside from the Lord, of course. But that's not a passion. That's my every day. Quotidian.

For various reasons, I learned to hide my desires from the world. I hid my desires so well, I don't even remember what they are anymore. I hid them from myself.

My instincts are blunted.

And there's been nothing on this island to desire in any case.

It's like I'm a hibernating bear just waiting for spring, or for something to happen.

Books and books and always the same books.

Like I'm dead and this chapel is my coffin. Rhymes with apple.

CHRISTIAN. Rhymes with boffin'. What a sad life.

LINUS. Do you think so? No, not sad. I have a duty. I am disciplined. Not oppressed. I have my responsibility.

CHRISTIAN. What if you didn't do your duty?

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LINUS. I don't understand; what can you mean?

CHRISTIAN. What if one day you just didn't ring the bell? Let the silences peel out over the land. Think of that.

Suppose you didn't count off the hours for that ridiculous rich broad up in her tower?

What if you just did what made you happy instead?

LINUS. I don't know what that is. Or should be.

CHRISTIAN. Do I make you happy? You said there wasn't anything to desire on this island, you didn't say there isn't anything. I'm not supposed to be here.

Do I make you happy?

LINUS. Being happy is not my vocation.

CHRISTIAN. Are you happy?

LINUS. "I sing because I'm happy / I sing because I'm free".

CHRISTIAN. His eye is on the sparrow, but I think you're watching me.

LINUS. I mustn't say.

CHRISTIAN. Why not? "I mustn't". You seem to enjoy my company. Do you like me? Your eyes flicker over me again and again // as if

LINUS. You are mistaken. Come, sir. Boy.

CHRISTIAN. Am I? Am I mistaken, Brother Linus? I'm just saying that it seems you like the way that I look. Men have appreciated me for my handsome face before, I think.

LINUS. This is not that.

This is simple human relief at the sight of a friendly face. After so long alone. It's only natural.

CHRISTIAN. I can go.

LINUS. No.

CHRISTIAN. No.

LINUS. I have a duty.

My life is service.

I must offer you succor until you're well enough to leave. And then you will go. You will leave again, it is the natural order of things.

I must go and pray.

And then catch some fish for our dinner.

I will leave you.

HARMONY HALL

Farewell until vespers. (*He exits.*)

CHRISTIAN. What is vespers? (*Blackout.*)

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