

THE HAWK AND THE DOVE

The
Hawk
and the
Dove

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LION FICTION

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*For David Bowes
with deep gratitude*

Foreword

Through the years this series has been in print, lots of people have reviewed the stories. Opinions often divide over the structure of the first two novels, to the extent that I thought an explanatory note might be helpful.

The first book in the series, *The Hawk and the Dove*, is written not so much as a consecutive narrative as a series of short stories about a medieval monastery, contained within a modern setting in which a mother tells the stories to her daughter.

This structure and the somewhat naïve style of the book came about not through mere whimsy, but as a tribute to two particular medieval texts – Chaucer’s *Canterbury Tales* and the *Fioretti* of St Francis of Assisi.

The *Canterbury Tales* employs the literary conceit of the frame tale, and the *Fioretti* gathers together a sequence of short stories (not fictional) recording the early days of the Franciscan movement from which the Order began.

In writing *The Hawk and the Dove*, intrigued by the style and structure of these medieval texts, I constructed my novel similarly. It also offered the possibility of balancing two worlds – the medieval and the modern, the monastic and the secular, the feminine and the masculine. The second book, *The Wounds of God*, I crafted along the same model. In subsequent volumes in the series I wanted to tackle issues that did not lend themselves to this structure, so I set it aside for *The Long Fall* and the books that followed.

Now, twenty-five years after the first book was published, as the series returns (in this new edition) from its long and happy stay in the United States to England where it began, I wondered whether to re-write the first two books, re-crafting them into the simple narrative style of the later volumes in the series.

I decided not to, in the end. Partly because many mothers have enjoyed the family stories, partly because many readers whose lives are harassed and busy have been glad of a novel that divides easily into short sections that can be read in a lunch break or as a bedtime story. Also because I do love St Francis, and Chaucer and the whole medieval world, and wanted to keep my little tribute to them. And because I still have an affection for *The Hawk and the Dove*, the first book I ever wrote. I think it has something that speaks of the simplicity of Jesus.

Penelope Wilcock
February 2015

The Community of St. Alcuin's Abbey

Monks

Brother Edward	<i>infirmarian</i>
Father Chad	<i>prior</i>
Father Columba	<i>abbot – known as Father Peregrine</i>
Father Lucanus	<i>elderly brother briefly mentioned</i>
Brother John	<i>works in the infirmary</i>
Brother Gilbert	<i>precentor</i>
Brother Cyprian	<i>porter</i>
Father Matthew	<i>novice master</i>
Brother Walafriid	<i>herbalist/winemaker</i>
Brother Giles	<i>assistant herbalist</i>
Brother Michael	<i>assistant cook/infirmary</i>
Brother Andrew	<i>cook</i>
Brother Ambrose	<i>cellarer</i>
Brother Clement	<i>scriptorium and library</i>
Brother Fidelis	<i>garden, with special care of the roses</i>
Brother Peter	<i>cares for the horses</i>
Brother Mark	<i>beekeeper</i>
Brother Stephen	<i>farm</i>
Brother Martin	<i>porter (takes over from Brother Cyprian)</i>
Brother Paulinus	<i>gardener</i>
Brother Dominic	<i>guestmaster</i>
Brother Prudentius	<i>farm</i>

Brother Basil *elderly, assists in guest house*
Father Gerard *almoner*

Novices and postulants

Brother Thomas *abbot's esquire; also works on the farm*
Brother Francis *works in a variety of locations*
Father Theodore *works mainly as a scribe and illuminator*
Brother Cormac *kitchen*
Brother Thaddeus *occupation varies*
Gerard Plumley *later Father Bernard*
Brother Richard
Brother Damian
Brother Josephus
Brother James

Sick or aged brothers living in the infirmary

Brother Denis *once the beekeeper*
Father Aelred *in infirmary – not mentioned in this book*
Father Anselm *in infirmary – not mentioned in this book*
Father Paul *in infirmary – not mentioned in this book*
Father Gerald *in infirmary – not mentioned in this book*

Mother

I wish you had known my mother. I remember, as clearly as if it were yesterday, toiling up the hill at the end of the school day, towards the group of mothers who stood at the crest of the rise, waiting to collect their children from the county primary school where my little sisters went.

The mothers chatted together, plump and comfortable, wearing modest, flowery dresses, pretty low-heeled sandals, their hair curled and tinted, and just that little bit of make-up to face the world in. Some had pushchairs with wriggling toddlers. Together, they smiled and nodded and gossiped and giggled, young and friendly and kind... . But there at the top of the hill, at a little distance from all the rest, stood my mother, as tall and straight and composed as a prophet, her great blue skirt flapping in the breeze, her thick brown hair tumbling down her back. By her side stood my littlest sister, her hand nestling confidently in my mother's hand, her world still sheltered in the folds of that blue skirt from the raw and bewildering society of the playground.

My mother. She was not a pretty woman, and never thought to try and make herself so. She had an uncompromising chin, firm lips, a nose like a hawk's beak and unnerving grey eyes. Eyes that went straight past the outside of you and into the middle, which meant that you could relax about the torn jersey, the undone shoe laces, the tangled hair and the unwashed hands at

the dinner table, but you had to feel very uncomfortable indeed about the stolen sweets, the broken promise, and the unkind way you ran away from a little sister striving to follow you on her short legs. My mother. Often, after tea, she would stand, having cleared away the tea things, at the sink, just looking out of the windows at the seagulls riding the air-currents on the evening sky; her hands still, her work forgotten, a faraway expression in her eyes.

Therese and I would do our homework after tea, sitting at the tea-table in the kitchen. The three little ones would play out of doors until the light was failing, and then Mother would call them in, littlest first, and bath them in the lean-to bathroom at the back of the kitchen, brush their hair and clean their teeth, help them on with their nightgowns, and tuck them in to bed.

This was the moment of decision for Therese and me. Ours was a little house in a terrace of shabby houses that clung to a hillside by the sea, and we had only two bedrooms, so all five of us sisters slept in the same room on mattresses side by side on the floor. Mother hated electric light—she said it assaulted the sleepy soul and drove the sandman away, and when the little ones were ready for bed, she would tuck in Mary and Beth, and light the candle and sit down with Cecily, the littlest one, in the low comfortable chair in the corner of the room. If she put them to bed and left them, there would be pandemonium. Cecily would not stay in bed at all and romped gaily about the room, and Beth and Mary would begin to argue, starting with a simple remark like ‘Beth, I can’t get to sleep with you sniffing,’ and finishing with a general commotion of crying and quarrelling.

So Mother resigned herself to stay with them as they fell asleep, and she sat, with the littlest one snuggled on her lap, in the room dimly glowing with candle-light, softly astir with the breathing and sighing and turning over of children settling for the night.

Therese and I, at sixteen and fourteen years old, had to choose between staying alone downstairs to read a book or paint or gaze

into the fire; and creeping upstairs with the little ones, to sit with Mother in the candle-light, and listen to her lullabies.

Most often, Therese stayed down, but I crept upstairs to Mother and lay on my bed, gazing at the candle as the flame dipped and rose with the draught, watching the shadows as they trembled and moved about the ceiling. After a while, as we kept our quiet, shadowy vigil, I would whisper, ‘Mother, tell me a story.’

I was just beginning to ask questions, to search for a way of looking at things that would make sense. The easy gaiety and simple sorrows of childhood had been swallowed up and lost in a hungry emptiness, a search for meaning that nothing seemed to satisfy. At school, I was only a number, a non-person. They could answer my questions about the theory of relativity and whether it was permissible in modern English to split an infinitive: but when it came to the great, lonely yearning that was opening up inside me, they didn’t seem even to want to hear the question, let alone try to answer it. I went to church every Sunday, and I listened to what they said about Jesus, and I believed it all, I really did; but was there anyone anywhere who cared about it enough to behave as if it were true? I felt disenchanting.

I began to wonder, as spring wore on to summer in that, my fifteenth year, if I would ever meet anyone who could look me in the eye, who could say sorry without making a joke of it, who could cry without embarrassment, have a row and still stay friends. As for mentioning the word ‘love’, well ... it provoked sniggers, not much else. The hunger of it all ached inside me. Maybe Mother knew. Maybe she could guess what I never told her, could not even tell myself; that I was desperate for something more than smiles and jokes and surfaces; that I was beginning to wonder if it was possible to stretch out your hand in the darkness and find it grasped by another hand, not evaded, rejected, or ignored.

So I wish you had known my mother. I wish you could hear the stories she told in her quiet, thoughtful voice. I wish I could take you into the magic of that breathing, candle-lit room, which she filled with people and strange ways from long ago. I wish I could remember all of them to tell you, but years have gone by now, and I am not sure of everything she said. But for the times you, too, have a quiet moment, and need to unhook your mind from the burden of the day, here are some of the stories my mother told me. They are the stories she told me the year I turned fifteen.

Mother said these stories were true, and I never knew her to tell a lie ... but then you could never be quite sure what she meant by ‘truth’; fact didn’t always come into it.

Father Columba

When I was a girl, a bit younger than you (my mother began) I had someone to tell me stories, too. It wasn’t my mother who told me stories though, it was my great-grandmother, and her name was Melissa, like yours. Great-grandmother Melissa told me all sorts of stories, stories about my uncles and cousins, about my great-aunt Alice who was a painter and lived in a little stone cottage at Bell Busk in Yorkshire. Old Aunt Alice’s cottage was one of a row of terraced cottages, all the same except that Aunt Alice’s was painted in psychedelic colours.

Great-grandmother Melissa told me about my auntie’s duck that had four legs—and she took me to see it too. She told me about one of my far-off ancestors, who was found on the doorstep as a tiny baby, in a shopping bag. She told me about my cousin’s dog Russ, who bit off a carol-singer’s finger, and about my grandfather’s dog that had to be put down because it loved him so much it went out one night and killed twenty hens and piled them all up on his doorstep. She told me about how she and her sisters took it in turns to pierce each others’ ears with a needle and a cork, and socks stuffed in their mouths to stop them screaming, so that their mother wouldn’t find out what they’d done. All kinds of tales she told me, and all about our family. But the ones I liked best were about a monastery long ago. These stories had been handed down, grandmother to granddaughter, for seven hundred