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This translation of *Ancrene Wisse* is based on J. R. R. Tolkien's semi-diplomatic edition for EETS (os 249 [1962]) of the Corpus MS.¹⁴ This has been translated into English twice before, by James Morton in his 1853 edition,¹⁵ and by Mary Salu in 1955;¹⁶ we have made grateful use of Salu's usually very accurate rendering, which is also based on Corpus. Ackermann and Dahood's edition of the Introduction and part I,¹⁷ and Shepherd's of parts VI and VII, both provide useful guidance to these sections, and we have referred to them as well. Unfortunately, Bella Millert and Jocelyn Wogan-Browne's edition of parts VII and VIII was published too late for us to refer to it.¹⁸ As well as clarifying obscurities and commenting on the work's structure and strategies, our notes identify the sources of the Latin quotations in the work, and indicate the works on which passages of the English may be closely or loosely based. Here, we have brought together the findings of a number of scholars, including Hope Emily Allen, Mary Salu, Geoffrey Shepherd, Sister Ethelbert Cooper, E. J. Dobson, Alexandra Barratt, and Mary Baldwin.¹⁹ For our policies as to the translation of the Latin in the work, and as to our attempt to avoid gender-specific language, see the Notes on Translation and Style above.

Introduction

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, here begin: "The Guide for Anchoresses."¹

"*Recti diligunt te*"—in *Canticis*, sponsa ad sponsum. Est rectum grammaticum, rectum geometricum, rectum theologicum, et sunt differentie totidem regularum. De recto theologico sermo nobis est, cuius regule due sunt, una circa cordis directionem, altera versatur circa exteriorum rectificationem. [The righteous love you—in the Canticles, the bride to the bridegroom. There is righteousness in grammar, righteousness in geometry, righteousness in theology, and for each there are special rules. Our discussion is about right theology, which has two rules, one to do with the guidance of the heart, the other with the right ordering of external things.]²

Recti diligunt te (Canticles 1:3)—"Lord," says God's bride to her precious bridegroom, "The righteous love you." They are righteous who live according to a rule; and you, my beloved sisters, have for a long time begged me for a rule.³ There are many kinds of rules, but there are two among all of them that I will speak of at your request, with God's grace.

One rules the heart and makes it even and smooth, without the lump and hollows of a crooked and accusing conscience which says, "Here you sin," or, "This is not yet amended as well as it should be." This rule always within and sets the heart right. *Et hec est caritas quam describit apostolus, de corde puro et conscientia bona et fide non ficta* (1 Timothy 1:5)—"This rule is charity of a pure heart and a clean conscience and true belief." "Pretende," inquit psalmista, "miser ricordiam tuam scientibus te pe fidem non fictam, "et iustitiam tuam"—*id est, vite rectitudinem*—"his qui recto sunt corde," qui scilicet omnes voluntates suas dirigunt ad regulam divinam voluntatis. *Iste dicuntur "boni" antonomastice: psalmista: "Benefac dominus bonis et rectis corde"; istis dicitur ut gloriantur testimonio videlicet bone conscientie: "Gloriamini omnes recti corde," quos scilicet rectificavit regula illa suprema rectificans omnia, de qua Augustinus: "Nichil petendum preter regulam magisterii"; et apostolus: "Omnes in eadem regula permanemus. [Extend your mercy," says the psalmist, "to those who know you" through unfeigned faith; "and your justice," i.e., righteousness of life, "to those who are righteous in heart"—those who direct their whole will to the rule of the divine will. These are antonomastically called "good": the psalmist: "Do good, (*

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Lord, to the good and righteous in heart"; they are told that they should rejoice in the witness of a good conscience: "Rejoice, all who are right in heart"—i.e., those who have been set right by that supreme rule which sets all right, of which Augustine says, "Nothing is to be sought beyond the rule of the master," and the apostle says, "Let us all remain in the same rule" (1 Timothy 4:8, 12:4-4, 3:16); Philippians 3:16).⁵

The second rule is entirely concerned with outward things, and rules the body and bodily actions. This reaches everything about how a person should behave outwardly—how to eat, drink, dress, sing, sleep, keep vigil. *Et hec est exercitio corporis que iuxta apostolum "modicum valet," et est quasi regula recti mechanici quod geometrio recto continetur.* [And this is the bodily exercise which, according to the apostle, is "worth little," and is like the rule of "right mechanics," which is part of "right geometry"] (1 Timothy 4:8). And this rule exists only to serve the other. The other is like the lady, this like her handmaid. For all that a person ever does according to the latter, outwardly, is only to rule the heart within.⁶

So, you ask what rule you anchoresses should keep. You should in all ways with all your might and strength guard well the inner, and the outer for her sake. The inner is always the same, the outer differs; for each should keep the outer according to the way she can best serve the inner using her.

Now then, it is true that all anchoresses can properly keep one rule, *quantum ad puritatem cordis circa quam versatur tota religio*—that is, "All may and should keep one rule to do with purity of heart," which is a clean and shining moral sense (*consience*),⁷ free from consciousness of sin that is not remedied through confession. This makes up the lady rule, who rules and sets right and smooths away sin from the heart and the conscience. For nothing makes the heart crooked except sin; all the good and all the virtue of every religion and every order is for setting her right and smoothing her. This rule is not made by human invention but is a commandment of God; therefore she is always the same without changing, and all ought always to keep her in the same way.

But all cannot keep to one rule, and need not and ought not to keep in one way the outer rule, *quantum, scilicet, ad observantias corporales*,⁸ "that is, to do with bodily practices," following the outer rule which I called "handmaid" and which is a human invention—fashioned for nothing else than to serve the inner; which directs one to fasting, vigils, wearing cold and harsh clothing, and such other hardships, which the flesh of many can bear, but many cannot. Therefore this one changes in different ways, according to each individual's character and capacity. For one is strong,

another is not strong and may be very well acquitted and pay God with less. One is learned, another not and must work more and say her prayers in another way. One is old and weak and is the less to be feared for, another is young and lovely and has need of a closer watch. Therefore each anchoress shall keep the outer rule according to her confessor's counsel, and do whatever he asks and commands her in obedience, he who understands her character and knows her strength. He may change the outer rule according to his wisdom, as he sees how the inner may best be kept.

By my counsel, no anchoress shall make profession, that is promise as a vow, except in three matters: these are obedience, chastity and stability of abode, so that she will never change that abode again except only in case of need, such as force and fear of death, obedience to her bishop or to his superiors. For whoever takes a matter in hand and promises God to carry it out as a vow, binds herself to it and sins morally in its breach if she breaks it voluntarily. If she does not promise it, she can still carry it out and leave it when she wants to: concerning food, drink, whether to forgo meat or fish, all other such matters concerning clothing, rest, the canonical hours or other prayers, to say such a number or in such a way—these and other things like them are all left to one's own choice, to do or leave while one wants and when one wants, unless they are vowed.⁹

But charity—that is, "love"—and humility, and patience, and faith, and the keeping of the ten old commandments, confession and penitence: these and others like them, some from the old law, some from the new, are not human inventions nor a man-made rule, but are God's commandments; and therefore each person has to keep them—and you above all, for these rule the heart.¹⁰ The greatest part of what I write is about ruling her, except in the beginning of this book and in the very end. The things that I write here of the outer rule, you keep them all, my dear sisters, our Lord be thanked, and will do the longer the better through his grace. And yet I would not have it that you promise to keep them as vows, for as often as you might break any of them afterwards it would hurt your heart too much, and make you so frightened that you might soon, God forbid, fall into despair, that is into a loss of hope and a loss of faith in being saved. Therefore you shall not make vows, my dear sisters, about what I write for you of outer things in the first part of your book, about your devotions, and especially in the last, but keep it in your hearts and do it as though you had vowed it.¹¹

If any ignorant person asks you what order you belong to, as you tell

me some do, who strain out the gnat and swallow the fly (Matthew 23:24), answer, "Of St. James, who was God's apostle, and for his great holiness called God's brother." If such an answer seems strange and wonderful to them, ask them what an order is, and where they find religion more plainly described and made clear in Holy Writ than it is in St. James' canonical epistle. He says what religion is, what makes proper order: *Religio munda et immaculata apud Deum et Patrem hec est: visitare pupillos et viduas in necessitate, et immaculatum se custodire ab hoc seculo* (James 1:27)—that is, "Religion pure and without stain is to see and help widows and fatherless children, and to keep oneself from the world, pure and unstained." Thus St. James describes religion and order. The latter part of his saying has to do with recluses. For there are two parts for the two kinds of religious; to each belongs its part, as you may hear. There are some good religious in the world, especially prelates and true preachers, who have the first part of what St. James said—who are, as he says, those who go to help widows and fatherless children. The soul is a widow who has lost her husband, that is Jesus Christ, through any mortal sin; a person is also fatherless who has lost the Father of heaven through sin: "To go and see such people, and comfort and help them with the food of holy teaching—this is true religion," says St. James. The latter part of his saying has to do with your religion, as I have said, you who guard yourselves from the world, pure and unstained by the world more than other religious.¹² In this way the apostle St. James describes religion—and does not name in his order either white or black.¹³ But many strain out the gnat and swallow the fly, that is, attach most importance where there is least.

Paul the first anchorite, Anthony and Arsenius, Macarius and the others, were they not religious, and of St. James' order? Also St. Sarah and St. Synclitica and many other such men and women with their rough sleeping-mats and their harsh hair shirts, were they not of a good order?¹⁴ And whether they were white or black (as the foolish ask you who believe that the order lies in the habit), God indeed knows that they were truly both—though not in their clothing, but in the sense God's spouse sings of herself, *Nigra sum set formosa* (Canticles 1:5): "I am black and yet white," she says, "uncomely without, shining within." In this way answer those who ask about your order, whether white or black.¹⁵ Say you are both, through the grace of God, and of St. James' order, as he wrote latterly: *Immaculatum se custodire ab hoc seculo*—that is, as I have said, "to keep oneself from the world, clean and unstained." Herein is religion, not in the wide hood, nor in the black cape, nor in the white mantle, nor in the grey cowl.

Where many are gathered together, there for unity of purpose one should attach importance to uniformity of clothing and other kinds of outer things, so that the unity without can betoken the unity of one love and one will that they all have in common within.¹⁶ By their habit, which is uniform, and which each has the same as the others—and also by other means—they proclaim that all together they have one love and one will, each the same as the others. Look that they do not lie.

Thus it is in a convent; but wherever a woman or man lives by themselves, hermit or anchoress, not much importance is to be attached to outer things when no scandal comes of them. Listen to Micah: *Indicabo tibi o homo quid sit bonum et quid Deus requirat a te: utique facere iudicium et iustitiam et sollicitè ambulare cum domino Deo tuo* (Micah 6:8): "I will show you, man," says the holy Micah, God's prophet, "I will show you truly what is good, and what kind of religion, what order and what holiness God asks of you. Hear this—understand it: Do well, and judge yourself always weak; and with fear and with love walk with God your Lord." Where these things are, there is right religion, there is true order. And if you do all the rest and leave this, there is nothing but trickery and false guile. *Ve vobis scribe et pharisei ypocrite qui mandatis quod deforis est calcis et parapetis, intus autem pleni estis omni spurcitia similes sepulchris dealbatis* [*Woe unto you scribes and pharisees, hypocrites who clean the outside of cup and dish, but within are full of every foulness, like whitened sepulchres*] (Matthew 23:25, 27). All that good religious do or wear according to the outer rule, all is entirely for this, all is nothing but a tool to build toward this, all is nothing but a handmaid to serve the lady in ruling the heart.

This one book is divided into eight smaller books.

Now, my beloved sisters, I divide this book into eight distinctions, which you call parts. And each, without confusion, speaks all by itself of separate things, and yet each follows properly after the one before, and the latter is always tied to the former. The first part speaks entirely about your devotions. The second is about how through your five senses you must guard your heart, within which are order and religion and the life of the soul; in this distinction there are five chapters, like five branches, corresponding to the five senses which guard the heart like watchmen when they are faithful; and they speak of each separately, one after the other. The third part is about a kind of bird, which David in the Psalter compares himself to as if he were an anchorite, and about how the nature of these same birds is like that of anchorites. The fourth part is about bodily temptations and spiritual ones too, and about comfort for them and their reme-

dies. The fifth part is about confession. The sixth part is about penance; the seventh about a clear heart, why one ought and why one must love Jesus Christ, and what deprives us of his love and prevents us from loving him. The eighth book is entirely about the outer rule: first of food and drink, and of other things to do with them; then about the things you may receive, and what things you may keep or own; then about your occupations, about haircutting and bloodletting and the rule of your maidservants; lastly, how you must reach them lovingly.¹⁷

Part I: *Devotions*

Here begins the first book of Hours and prayers which are good to say.¹

When you first get up, cross yourself and say, *In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, Amen.* And begin *Come creator Spirit right away with eyes and hands lifted toward heaven, bowing forward on your knees on the bed; and in this way say the whole hymn, with the versicle Send forth your Spirit, and the prayer, God who taught the hearts of the faithful.* After this, while putting on your shoes and clothing yourself, say *Our Father* [i.e., the Lord's Prayer], *I believe* [i.e., the Apostles' Creed], and *Jesus Christ, Son of the living God, have mercy on us; you who deigned to be born of a virgin, have mercy on us*—keep saying this prayer until you are fully dressed. Keep this prayer much in use and often in your mouth whenever you can, sitting or standing. When you are fully dressed, sprinkle yourself with holy water (which you must always have) and think on God's body and on his precious blood which is on the high altar, and prostrate yourself toward there with these salutations:

Hail, author of our creation!

Hail, price of our redemption!

Hail, viaticum of our journeying!

Hail, reward of our longing!

Hail, comfort in our waiting!

Be our gladness,

you who are to be our reward,

in you be our glory

through all eternity.

Lord, remain with us,

take away the dark night,

wash away all sin,

give us holy healing.

Glory to you, Lord,

who were born of a virgin,

who with the Father, etc.

Part II: *The Outer Senses*

Here begins the second part, of the defense of the heart by the five senses.¹

Omnia custodia serua cor tuum quia ex ipso uita procedit (Proverbs 4:23). "Protect your heart well with every kind of defense, daughter," says Solomon, "for if she is well locked away, the soul's life is in her." The heart's guardians are the five senses, sight and hearing, tasting and smelling, and the feeling in every part. And we must speak of all of them, for whoever protects these well does as Solomon commands: protects well their heart and their soul's health. The heart is a most wild beast and makes many a light leap out.² As St. Gregory says, *Nichil corde fugiat*,³ "nothing flies out of a person sooner than their own heart." David, God's prophet, at one time mourned that she had escaped him: *Cor meum dereliquit me* (Psalm 39:13), that is, "My heart has fled from me." And another time he rejoices and says that she has come home: *Inuenit seruus tuus cor suum* (2 Samuel 7:27)—"Lord," he says, "my heart has come back again; I have found her." When so holy a man and so wise and so wary lets her escape, anyone else may anxiously dread her flight. And where did she break out of David, the holy king, God's prophet? Where? God knows, at the window of his eye, because of one sight that he saw while looking out just once, as you will hear after.⁴

Therefore my dear sisters, love your windows as little as you possibly can. Let them all be little, the parlor's smallest and narrowest. Let the cloth in them be of two kinds: the cloth black, the cross white, both inside and outside. The black cloth symbolizes to the world outside that you are black and unworthy, and that the true sun has burned you outwardly, and so made you as outwardly unlovely as you are, with the gleams of his grace (Canticles 1:5). The white cross is proper to you. For there are three crosses, red and black and white. The red is proper to those who are ruddied and reddened as the martyrs were through the shedding of their blood for God's love. The black cross is proper to those who are doing their penance in the world for terrible sins. The white cross is rightly proper to white maidenhood and to purity, which it is very hard to keep well. By a cross, hardship is always to be understood—so the white cross symbolizes the defense of white chastity, which it is very hard to protect well. The black cloth, apart from its symbolism, does less harm to the eyes and is thicker

against the wind and harder to see through, and keeps its color better against the wind and other things. Look that your parlor cloth is fastened on every side and well-attached, and guard your eyes there in case your heart flies out and goes away as it did from David, and your soul sickens as soon as she is gone.⁵

I write much for others that in no way touches you, my dear sisters.⁶ For you do not have a name—nor ever will have through the grace of God—for being peeping anchoresses, or using enticing looks and behavior, as some, alas, sometimes unnaturally do. For it is against nature and an immoderately strange thing that the dead should dote on those living in the world, and go mad with them through sin.

"But dear sir," says someone, "Is it then so mightily evil to peep out?" Yes it is, dear sister, because of the evil which comes of it. It is evil and mightily evil to every anchoress, especially to the young—and to the old because they set a bad example to the younger, and give them a shield to guard themselves with. For if anyone blames them, then they say right away, "But sir, she does it too, who is better than I am, and knows better than I what she ought to do!" Dear young anchoress, often a most skillful smith forges a most puny knife. Follow the wise in their wisdom and not in their folly. An old anchoress may do something good that would be bad if you did it. But to peep out without harm neither of you can do. Take note now what harm has come of peeping: not one harm or two, but all the woe that now is and ever was and ever will be—all comes from sight. See here the proof that this is true.⁷

Lucifer, because he saw himself and gazed at his own fairness, leaped into pride, and from an angel became a hideous devil. Of Eve our first mother it is written that sin found its very first entry into her through her sight: *Vidit igitur mulier quod bonum esset lignum ad uescendum, et pulcrum oculis, aspernataque delectabile, et uult de fructu eius et comedit, delictum uero suo* (Genesis 3:6): that is, "Eve looked on the forbidden apple and saw it was fair; and she began to delight in looking at it, and set her desire on it, and took and ate of it, and gave it to her husband." See how Holy Writ speaks, and how profoundly it tells the way sin began, thus: sight went before and made a way for harmful desire—and the act that all humanity feels came after it.⁸

This apple, dear sister, symbolizes all the things that desire and the delight of sin turn to. When you look at a man, you are in Eve's situation: you look at the apple. If someone had said to Eve when she first cast her eye on it, "Ah, Eve, go away, you are looking at your death," what would she have answered? "My dear sir, you are wrong, why are you challenging me?"

The apple that I look on is forbidden me to eat, not to look at!" Thus would Eve readily enough have answered. O my dear sisters, Eve has many daughters who follow their mother, who answer in this way: "But do you think," someone says, "that I will leap on him just because I look at him?" God knows, dear sister, stranger things have happened. Eve your mother leapt after her eyes, from the eye to the apple, from the apple in paradise down to the earth, from the earth to hell, where she lay in prison four thousand years and more, she and her husband both, and condemned all her offspring to leap after her to death without end.¹⁰ The beginning and the root of all this sorrow was one light look; just so, as it is often said, much comes from little.¹¹ So let every weak woman fear greatly—seeing that she who had just then been wrought by the hands of God was betrayed through a single look, and brought into deep sin which spread over all the world.

Egressa est Dyna filia Iacob ut uideret mulieres alienigenas, et cetera (Genesis 34:1): "A maiden, Jacob's daughter, called Dinah," as it tells in Genesis, "went out to look at strange women"—yet it does not say that she looked at men. And what do you think came of that looking? She lost her maidenhood and was made a whore.¹² Thereafter, because of that same act, the pledges of high patriarchs were broken and a great city was burned, and the king, his son and the citizens were slain, the women led away. Her father and her brothers were made outlaws, noble princes though they were. This is what came of her looking. The Holy Spirit caused all such things to be written in the book to warn women of their foolish eyes. And take note of this: that this evil caused by Dinah did not come from the fact that she saw Hamor's son, whom she sinned with, but came from her letting him lay eyes on her—for what he did to her was very much against her will at first.¹³

In the same way Bathsheba, by uncovering herself in David's sight, caused him to sin with her, a holy king though he was, and God's prophet (2 Samuel 11:2-5). Now, here comes a weak man—though he holds himself estimable if he has a wide hood and a closed cloak—and he wants to see some young anchoresses. And he just has to see whether her looks please him, she whose face has not been burnt by the sun—as if he was a stone! And he says she may confidently look upon holy men—yes, someone like him, with his wide sleeves. But, arrogant sir, have you not heard about David, God's own darling?—Of whom God himself said *Inveni virum secundum cor meum* (Acts 13:22): "I have found," he said, "a man after my own heart." This man, whom God himself in this precious saying declared a king and a prophet chosen above all, this man, because of one look cast on a woman as she washed herself, let out his heart and forgot himself, so that

he did three immeasurably serious and mortal sins: with Bathsheba, the lady he looked at, adultery; on his faithful knight, Uriah her lord, treachery and murder (2 Samuel 11). And you, a sinful man, are so brazen as to cast foolish eyes upon a young woman! Yes, my dear sisters, if anyone is eager to see you, never believe good of it, but trust him the less. I would not have it that anyone see you unless he has special leave from your director. For all the three sins I have just spoken about, and all the evil caused by Dinah that I spoke about before, all came about not because the women looked foolishly on men, but //¹⁴ because they uncovered themselves in the sight of men, and did things through which they had to fall into sin.

For this reason it was commanded in God's law that a pit should always be covered, and if anyone uncovered a pit and a beast fell in, the one who had uncovered the pit had to pay for it (Exodus 21:1:33-34). This is a most fearsome saying for a woman who shows herself to the eyes of men. She is symbolized by the one who uncovers the pit; the pit is her fair face and her white neck and her light eyes, and her hand, if she holds it out in his sight. And also her words are a pit, unless they are well-chosen. Everything to do with her, whatever it may be, which might readily awaken sinful love, our Lord calls all of it a pit. This pit he commanded to be covered, lest any beast fall in, and drown in sin. The beast is the animal man who thinks nothing about God, and does not use his senses as one ought to do, but seeks to fall into this pit that I speak of, if he finds it open. But the judgment is very severe on whomever uncovers the pit, for she must pay for the animal that has fallen in. She is guilty of that animal's death before our Lord, and must answer for his soul on Doomsday, and pay for the loss of the animal, and have no other coin but herself. This is a most heavy payment! And God's judgment and his commandment is that she pay without fail, because she uncovered the pit in which it drowned. You who uncover this pit, you who do anything by which a man is carnally tempted through you, even if you do not know it, fear this judgment greatly. And if he is tempted so that he sins morally in any way, even if it is not with you but with desire toward you, or if he tries to fulfill with someone else the temptation which has been awakened through you, because of your deed, be quite sure of the judgment. For opening the pit you must pay for the animal, unless you are absolved of it. [You must, as they say, suffer the rod, that is,] suffer for his sin. A dog will happily enter wherever he finds an opening.¹⁵

Impudicus oculus impudici cordis est nuncius—Augustine: "What the mouth cannot say for shame, the wanton eye speaks, and is like a messenger for the wanton heart."¹⁶ But now, here is some woman who would not for

anything desire uncleanness with a man—and yet she does not care if he thinks about her, and is tempted by her. Yet St. Augustine puts these two both in one pairing: to want, and to wish to be wanted: *Non solum appetere sed et appeti velle criminiosum*—“To desire a man, or be willing to be desired by a man, both are deadly sins.” *Oculi prima tela sunt adhaerere*—“The eyes are the arrows [and the first weapons] of lechery’s pricking.” And just as men war with three kinds of weapons—with arrow’s shooting, and with spear’s point, and with sword’s edge—with just the same weapons—that is with arrows from the eyes, with the spear of wounding words, with the sword of deadly handling—this stinking whore lechery wars with the lady’s chastity, who is God’s spouse. First she shoots arrows from wanton eyes, which fly lightly forth like a feathered shaft and stick in the heart. Next she shakes a spear and advances on her, and with stirring words gives the spear’s wound. The sword’s blow—that is, handling—is final, for a sword strikes from near at hand and gives the death-blow. And, alas, it is as good as over for those who come so close together that they handle one another or in any way touch one another. Whoever is wise and innocent should guard herself from the arrows, that is, guard her eyes; for all the evil that follows comes from the arrows of the eyes.¹⁷ And is she not most reckless and foolhardy, who holds her head out boldly over an exposed battlement, when someone is attacking the castle with bolts from outside? Truly our enemy, the warrior from hell, shoots more bolts at one anchoress, so I believe, than at seven and fifty ladies in the world. The battlements of the castle are her house’s windows [and she does not lean out of them lest she have the devil’s bolts in her eyes when she least expects it, for he is always attacking. She keeps her eyes in, for once she is blinded she is easily felled; blind the heart and she is easily overcome, and with sin soon brought to the ground.]

Bernardus: Sicur mors per peccatum inorhem, ita per has fenestras in mentem—“Just as death came into the world through sin,” says St. Bernard, “so through the window of the eye death has her entrance into the soul.”¹⁸ Lord Christ! People would shut fast every window of the house if they could shut death out of it, [the death of the body]—and an anchoress will not enclose her eye—windows against the death of the soul?—And they might quite as properly be called “ill-windows”;¹⁹ for they have done much ill to many an anchoress.

[All Holy Writ is full of warnings about the eye.] David says *Averte oculos meos ne videant vanitatem* (Psalm 118:37)—“Lord,” says David, “Turn away my eyes from the world’s wrongness.” Job says, *Pepigi fedus*

cum oculis meis ne cogitarem de virgine (Job 31:1), “I have made an agreement with my eyes,” says Job, “so that I may not miscalculate.” What is he saying? Do we think with our eyes? God knows it, he speaks well. For after the eye comes the thought and after that the deed. Jeremiah knew this well who lamented in this way: [*Oculus meus depredatus est animam meam* (Lamentations 3:51)—“Alas,” he says, “my eyes have robbed all my soul.”] When God’s prophet made such a lament over his eyes, what lamentation and sorrow on account of their eyes do you think comes to many men [and to many women]? The Wise Man asks in his book whether anything harm women more than their eyes: *Oculo quid nequius? Totam faciem lacrimarum faciet quem vidit* (Ecclesiasticus 31:15): “The whole face must flow with tears,” he says, “just because of what the eye sees.”²⁰

So for the reasons I have given, in the same way as all the openings of all your windows have been kept closed from the view of everyone, so let them remain closed from now on—and the more tightly they can be closed the more tightly they should be. In general, the rule is: God will guard well all those who close them; and all those who <leave them open, God will punish and allow to fall into sin> . . . either with their foolish eyes, or their mouth, or their hands. . . . These and many other such things, unbecoming and unnatural in an anchoress more than in anyone else, would never have happened if she had kept her window tightly shut. And if anyone contradicts me, I call her conscience to witness fiercely against her, that if she lingers at her window with an eye or a mouth, or ever receives a hand or foolish word, she is all adorned and falsely tricked out in a spurious sanctity. Ah, treacherous traitor! “God, I would not do something evil or dirt to you,” says he or she—but these very people soil themselves and anger God, who sees what // treason is inside the foolish heart. Not only ever, fleshly touching but even every foolish word is a hateful villainy and worthy of God’s anger, though it grow no further between a man and an anchoress. Yet through the just vengeance of God it goes further and further, and often—and when one least expects it—turns into that foul sin. Alas, we have heard of it plenty of times! Let no one trust in the anchoress who lets in a man’s eye and shows herself. Above everything that you have written in your rule about outward things, I would have this point, this article about being well-enclosed, best kept.

To a woman who desires it, open, for God’s sake. If she says nothing about it, leave it be, unless you are afraid that she may be offended later. Some have been tempted by their own sisters. Do not bid any man to look in at your altar unless his devotion requires it and he has leave. Draw well

inside and draw the veil down over your breast, and quickly do up the cloth again and fasten it very tightly. If he looks toward your bed, or asks where you lie, answer lightly, "Sir, it doesn't matter," and keep silent. If the bishop comes to see you, go to him at once. But if he asks to see you, sweetly entreat him that in this regard you may hold yourself toward him as you have done and do toward others. If he insists on a look anyway, take care that it be very short; quickly drop your veil and draw back. An anchorress humbly refused St. Martin a sight of her, and because of that he did her honor as he never did any other. And for this reason her saying is remembered to this day in Holy Church, as we read of her: "She who wants to guard her windows well from the evil must also do so from the good."²¹

Whenever you have to give something to anyone, let your hand not go out nor theirs in; but if it has to come in, neither must touch each other. "She is secure," says Holy Writ, "Who draws herself far away from snares"; and "She who loves peril, into peril she will fall"—*Qui caret laqueo securus est* (Proverbs 11:15), and *Qui amat periculum incidit in illud* (Ecclesiasticus 3:27). The devil's snare is often set where least expected. No one who is without fear will escape being trapped, for God will not protect anyone who is so foolhardy that she does not warily protect herself against the devil.

Enough has now been said of this sense for the moment to warn the innocent. We will, however, speak more about it a little later.

Speech and taste both belong to the mouth as sight does to the eye. But we will leave taste until we speak of your food, and speak now of speech, and afterwards of hearing—and sometimes of both at once, since they go together.²²

First of all, when you have to go to your parlor window, find out from your maid who it is who has come, for it might be someone you should excuse yourself from seeing; and when you altogether have to go out [i.e., into the parlor], cross yourself fervently on mouth, eyes and ears, and breast as well, and go out in fear of God. To a priest say first the "*I will confess*," and then, after the "*Blessed is he*," which he ought to say, listen to his words and keep completely quiet—so that when he parts from you he knows neither good nor evil of you, nor knows whether to blame or praise you. Someone, perhaps, is so learned or so wise in speaking that she wants him who sits and speaks with her to know it, and pays him back word for word. And she who should be an anchoress becomes a teacher, and teaches him who has come to teach her. She wants to be recognized and known at once for her talk among the wise. Known she is—because on account of the

very things for which she expects to be held wise, he understands she is fool, since she hunts for praise and catches blame; for at the very least when he has gone away, he will say, "This anchoress talks a lot."

Eve in paradise held a long discussion with the serpent, told him the whole lesson about the apple that God had taught her and Adam; and so the enemy understood her weakness right away through her words, and found a way into her for her destruction. Our Lady St. Mary behaved quite differently: she did not discuss anything with the angel, but asked him briefly about what she did not understand. You, my beloved sisters, follow our Lady, and not the cackling Eve—because an anchoress, whatever she is, however much she knows, should keep quiet. She does not have the nature of a hen. The hen, when she has laid, can only cackle—and what happens on account of it? The crow comes right away and steals her egg from her, and eats what should bring forth living birds. In just the same way the devil-crow carries off and swallows all the good which cackling anchoresses have given birth to, which should bear them up like birds toward heaven if it had not been cackled away.²³ The poor, wretched peddler makes more noise to sell his soap than the rich merchant all his precieuses, as is said below (p. 104).

It is good that you ask some spiritual man whom you can trust—as you can but few—to give you advice and to teach you remedies against temptations; and declare to him in confession, if he will hear, your gravest and your most hateful sins, so that he may take pity on you, and out of that pity beg mercy for you from Christ the more sincerely, and have you in his prayers.²⁴ *Set multi veniant ad vos in vestimentis ovium, intrinsecus autem sunt lupi rapaces* (Matthew 7:15): "But defend yourself and be wary," says our Lord, "for many come to you hidden in lambs' fleeces, and are in wolves." Trust secular priests little, religious still less, and do not desire their acquaintance too much. Eve fearlessly spoke with the serpent; our Lady was afraid of Gabriel's words. Our preaching friars and our beggary friars are of such an order that everyone would be amazed if any of them cast an eye on the woody grove.²⁵ So each time any of them come through charity to teach and to comfort you in God, if he is a priest, say before he parts "*Mea culpa*. I confess to God almighty and to you, that I have never been justly repentant for the greatest sins which I have revealed to my confessors; and though my intent is to amend them here, I confess it very poorly. And I have sinned in other matters daily since I was last confessed, which was at this time, and with this one"—and name him. I have sinned in these ways," and tell in what ways, as it is written in your confession manual toward the end (see part V, pp. 173-175). And lastly

say "This and much more," then the *I will confess*, and ask him to take you especially into his goodwill, and thank him for his coming in, and entreat him finally to greet this and that person, and that they may pray for you.²⁶

Speak with no one often, or for long, without men or women as witnesses who can hear you. And even if it is for confession, let a third sit at least in the same house with you, or in some place where they can see you, unless there is no room for a third. This is not said for your sakes, dear sisters, nor for others like you. Nonetheless, the true person is often disbelieved, and the guiltless defamed, like Joseph in Genesis by that treacherous lady (Genesis 39:6–18), for want of a witness. People are quick to believe evil, and the base lie blithely about the good—and some wretches who have said they were confessing themselves have done so in very strange ways. So the good should always have a witness, especially for two reasons. The first is so that the envious cannot lie about them without the witness proving them false; the second is to set others an example, and to deprive the wicked anchoress of that wretched deceit that I have mentioned.²⁷

Do not talk with anyone through the church window, but hold it in honor because of the holy sacrament that you see through it. And use the house window for talking sometimes with your women; for others, the parlor window. You should not speak except at these two windows.

Always keep silence at meals; since other religious do this, as you know, you above all ought to do it. If anyone has a loved guest, let her have her maid entertain her fairly as though in her place—and she will have leave to open her window once or twice and make signs toward her with a cheerful face. The courtesy of some has turned to their harm. Under the appearance of good sin often lies hidden. There should be a great difference between an anchoress and the lady of a house.²⁸

Every Friday of the year keep silence unless it is a double feast, and then hold it on some other day in the week: in the Advent and Ember weeks, Wednesday and Friday; in Lent, three days, and all Holy Week until noon, except on Easter eve. But to your women you may say what you want, in a few words. If any good man has come from far off, listen to his speech and answer his questions with a few words.²⁹

Someone would be a great fool if they could grind for their own profit whichever they wanted, grit or wheat, and ground the grit and left the wheat. Wheat is holy talk, as St. Anselm says.³⁰ A woman grinds grit when she chatters: her two jaws are the two grinding stones, her tongue is the clapper. See to it, dear sisters, that your jaws never grind anything but soul-food, and your ears never drink in anything but soul- tonic. And shut

not only your ear but the window of your eye against idle speech; let no ta-
nor tiding of the world come to you.

You shall not curse or swear for any reason, unless you say "indeed or "surely," or something like that. Do not preach to anyone. Let no man ask you counsel or talk to you; advise only women. St. Paul forbade women to preach: *Mulieres non permittit docere* (1 Timothy 2:12). Do not criticize any man, nor blame him for his vices unless he is over-familiar with you. Holy old anchoresses may do it in a certain way, but it is not a sure thing nor is it proper for the young: it is the business of those who are set over others and have to guard them, as teachers of Holy Church; the anchoress has only to see to herself and her maids.

Let everyone mind their own business and not poach from other. Many believe they do well who do disastrously, for as I said before, sin often lies hidden under the appearance of good. By giving such criticism an anchoress has sometimes built between herself and her priest either treacherous love or a great war.³¹

Seneca: *Ad summam volo vos esse rariloquas tuncque pauciloquas*. "This is the point," says Seneca the wise, "I want you to speak seldom, and the little."³² Many dam their words so as to let more out, as one does water at a mill. Job's friends who had come to comfort him did this. They sat silent for seven nights, but once they had all begun to talk they could never stop their babbling. *Gregorius: Censura silentii nutritura est verbi*. So it is with many, St. Gregory says: "Silence is the nurse of speech and brings forth babbling."³³ On the other hand, as he says: *Tage silentium cogit celest. meditari*—"A long and well-kept silence impels our thoughts up toward heaven."³⁴ Just as you can see water, when someone dams it and stops it so firmly so that it cannot go downward, having to go on rising upward, exactly this way dam your words, stop up your thoughts, since you want them to climb and rise toward heaven, and not fall downward to flood through the world like so much babbling. When you have to, open the flood-gates of your mouth a little, as one does at a mill, and let them do again right away. The word kills more than the sword. *Mors et vita in manibus lingue* (Proverbs 18:21)—"Life and death," says Solomon, "are in the tongue's hands." *Qui custodit os suum custodit animam suam* (Proverbs 13:3)—"Whoever guards well their mouth," he says, "guards the soul." *Sicut urbs patens et absque murorum ambitu, sic et cetera; qui murum silentii non habet patet inimici iaculis cunctis mentis*—"Whoever does not withhold their words," says Solomon the wise, "is like a town without wall, which an army can enter on all sides."³⁵ The enemy from hell with his army goes all the way through a mouth which is always open, into the hear-

In *The Lives of the Fathers*, it tells what a holy man said when someone praised some brothers whom he had heard talked a lot: *Boni atique sunt, set habitatio eorum non habet inquam; quicumque vult intrat et animam soluit*—"They are good," he said, "but their dwelling has no gate; their mouths are always jabbering; whoever wants can go in and lead out their ass," that is, their unwise soul.³⁶ So St. James says *Si quis se putat religiosum esse non referens linguam suam set seducens cor suum, huius vana est religio* (James 1:26)—that is, "If anyone thinks he is religious, and does not bridle his tongue, his religion is false, he tricks his heart." He says very well, "Does not bridle his tongue." A bridle is not only in a horse's mouth, but sits above the eyes, and goes around the ears, for there is great need that all three be bridled. But the iron sits in the mouth, and on the wanton tongue, for there a guard is most needed, when the tongue is on the run and beginning to go wild.

Often, when we start to say something, we mean to speak few and well-placed words. But the tongue is slippery, for it wades in wetness, and slides lightly from few words into many.³⁷ And then, as Solomon says, *In multiloquium non deerit peccatum* (Proverbs 10:19): "No long speech, however well it begins, can be without sin"—for from truth it slides into falsehood, out of good into some evil, from measure into immoderation, and from a drop it grows into a great flood which drowns the soul. For with such floating words the heart also floats away, so that for a long time afterwards she cannot be properly gathered back to herself. *Et os nostrum tanto est Deo longinquum, quanto mundo proximum; tanto que minus exaudiat in prece, quanto amplius conquinatur in locutione*. These are St. Gregory's words in his *Dialogues*: "The nearer our mouth is to worldly speech, the farther it is from God when it speaks to him, and prays any prayers to him."³⁸ It is for this reason that we often cry out to him and he turns himself away from our voice and will not hear it: because it smells to him of all the world's babbling and her jabbering. Whoever, then, wants God's ear near her tongue, let her turn from the world, or she may be crying out for a long time before God hears her, and says through Isaiah: *Cum extenditis manus vestras, avertam oculos meos a vobis, et cum multiplicaveritis orationes, non exaudiam vos* (Isaiah 1:5)—that is, "Though you multiply your prayers toward me, you who play with the world, I will not hear you, but I will turn away when you lift high your hands toward me."

Our precious St. Mary, who ought to be an example for all women, was of so few words that nowhere in Holy Writ do we find that she spoke, except for four times; but because of this rarity of speech, her words were heavy and full of power. Bernard to Mary: *In sempiterno Dei verbo facti*

*sumus omnes, et ecce morimur. In tuo brevi responso reficiendi sumus ut ad vitam revocemur. Responde verbum et suscipe verbum; profer tuum et concipe divinum. [In the eternal word of God were we all made, and behold, we are dying. In your short answer we are to be made again so that we may be called again to life. Answer with the word and receive the word; offer up yours, and conceive the divine.]*³⁹ Her first words that we read of were those she answered to the angel Gabriel. And they were so powerful that as she said them—*Ecce ancilla domini, fiat michi secundum verbum tuum* [Behold the handmaid of the Lord, let it happen to me according to your word] (Luke 1:38)—at these words God's Son and true God became man, and the Lord whom all the world might not contain enclosed himself in her maiden's womb. Her second words were when she came and greeted her kinswoman Elizabeth; and what power was shown at these words? Listen! That at them a child who was St. John began to play in his mother's womb: *Idem: Vox eius Iohannem exultare fecit in utero* [Again: Her voice made John exult in the womb] (Luke 1:41). The third time that she spoke was at the wedding; and there through her entreary water was turned into wine (John 2:3). The fourth time was when she had lost her son and found him again; and how great a wonder followed those words! That God almighty bowed to humankind, to Mary and to Joseph, to a smith and to a woman, and followed them as their own wherever they would (Luke 2:51). Take a lesson from this and learn it ardently, that sparse speech has much strength.⁴⁰

Vir linguosus non dirigitur in terra (Psalm 139:12)—"A man of many words," says the psalmist, "will never lead a right life on earth."⁴¹ Therefore he says elsewhere: *Dixi custodiam vias meas ut non delinquam in lingua mea* (Psalm 38:1). This is hypallage,⁴² and is as though he said "I will defend my ways with my tongue-guard; if I defend my tongue well, I can well keep to the way toward heaven." For as Isaiah says, *Cultus iustitiae silentium* (Isaiah 32:17)—"Silence is the cultivation of justice." Silence cultivates her, and when she is cultivated she brings forth the soul's eternal food. For she is undying, as Solomon witnesses: *Iustitia immortalis est* (Wisdom 1:15). Thus Isaiah joins both hope and silence together, and says that in them will stand spiritual strength: *In silentio et spe erit fortitudo vestra* (Isaiah 30:15)—that is, "In silence and in hope will be your strength." Take note of how well he speaks. For whoever is very quiet and keeps silence for a long time, can hope with confidence that when she speaks to God he will hear her. She can also hope that through her silence she will sing sweetly in heaven. This, then, is the reason for this connection—why Isaiah joins hope and silence and couples both together. Besides that, he says in the same verse that in silence and in hope our strength will

be in God's service, against the devil's tricks and his temptations. But see for what reason. Hope is a sweet spice in the heart that sweetens all the bitterness that the body drinks.⁴³ But whoever chews spice must shut her mouth, so that the sweet breath and its virtue stay inside. But she who opens her mouth with much chattering, and breaks silence, she spits out hope and its sweetness entirely with worldly words, and loses spiritual virtue to the enemy. For what makes us strong in God's service and to endure temptations, to wrestle stalwartly against the devil's assault, but hope of high reward? Hope keeps the heart whole whatever the flesh suffers; as it is said, "Without hope the heart must break." Ah, Jesus, your mercy! How is it for those who are where all woe and grief are, without hope of escape, when their hearts cannot break? Therefore if you will keep hope and its sweet breath which gives the soul power within you, chew her in your heart with mouth closed; do not blow her out with a chattering mouth, with a yawning maw. *Non habeatis linguam vel aures prurientes*—"See to it," says St. Jerome, "that you have neither an itching tongue nor ears," that is to say, that you desire neither to speak nor to listen to worldly speech.⁴⁴

Up to now I have been speaking of your silence, and how your speech shall be seldom. *Contrarium eadem est disciplina* [*The same rule applies to their opposites*]. There is only one rule for silence and for speech, and therefore in this book they are both run together. Now we will speak somewhat about not listening to evil talk, how to close your ears against it, and, if you must, to shut your windows.⁴⁵

Stop your ears against all evil speech, my dear sisters, and be disgusted by the mouth which spews out poison: *De omni verbo otiosa, et cetera* [*From every idle word, etc.*] (Matthew 12:36). Evil speech is threefold: poisonous, foul and idle.⁴⁶ Idle speech is evil, foul speech is worse, poisonous is the worst. Idle and unclean is all speech from which no good comes. And every word of this speech, our Lord says, must be counted, and reasons given why the one said it and the other listened to it—and yet this is the least evil of the three evils. Listen! How then shall an excuse be given for the worst? Listen! How for the worst—that is, foul and poisonous speech—not only by the one who speaks it, but by the one who listens to it? Foul speech is about lechery and about the other filth that unwashed mouths sometimes speak. Let all these be scraped out of the anchoress's rule! Anyone who spits out such filth in any anchoress' ears should have his mouth stopped not with sharp words⁴⁷ but with hard fists. Poisonous speech is heresy,

downtight lying, backbiting and flattery; these are the worst. Heresy, God be thanked, is not prevalent in England. Lying is so evil a thing that St. Augustine says that you should not lie even to shield your father from death.⁴⁸ God himself says that he is truth (John 14:6), and what is more against truth than lies? *Diabolus mendax est et pater eius* (John 8:44)—"The devil is a lie and the father of lies." So anyone who stirs her tongue in lying; she makes her tongue into a cradle for the devil's child, and rocks it eagerly; like its nurse. Backbiting and flattery and egging on others to do evil; these are not human speech, but are the devil's breath and his own voice. If all worldly people ought to stay far from them, how much ought anchoresses to hate them and avoid hearing them? I say "hear," for she who speaks them is not an anchoress. Solomon: *Si mordet serpens in silentio, nichil minus eo habet qui detrahit in occulto* (Ecclesiastes 10:11)—"the snake," says Solomon, "sings quite silently; and those who say behind backs what they would not in front are no better." Do you hear how Solomon compares the backbiter to a stinging snake? So it is, for sure: she who speaks evil is the snake's offspring and carries poison in her tongue.

"The flatterer blinds the one he flatters and sticks a pin in his eye." Gregory: *Adulator ei cum quo sermonem convertit, quasi cecum in ocula figit*.⁴⁹ The backbiter often devours human flesh on Fridays, and pecks at living flesh with his black bill like the devil's crow out of hell. Solomon *Noli esse in conviviis eorum, cetera, qui conferunt carnes ad vesendum* [*Do not desire to feast with those who gather to eat meat*] (Proverbs 23:20–21). If he would pluck and tear apart rotting and stinking flesh with his bill, like raven-kind—that is, if he would say evil about nobody except those who rot and sink in the filth of their sins—it would be less horrible. But he alights on living flesh, and tears it apart limb from limb, that is, he says evil of those who are alive in God. He is too greedy a raven, and much too bold.

Now, secondly, notice what two offices these two ministers perform for their lord, the devil of hell—it is disgusting to talk about, but more disgusting in every way to be. *Ne vidatur hec morbilias minus deens; recolat in Esdra, quod Melchia bedificavit portam terroris. "Melchia" enim "corus domino" interpretatur; "filius Rechab," id est, "mollis parris"; nam "Ventus aquilo dissipat pluvias, et fatis tristic linguam detrahentem"* [*In case this moralization seems less than decent, remember how Melchias, in the book of Esdras, built a gate for the midlans; for "Melchias" means "The north wind of the Lord"; "son of Rechab," that is, "of a mild father"; for "The north wind brings rain, and a backbiting tongue will bring you sadness"*] (2 Esdras 3:14, Proverbs 25:23).⁵⁰ They are the devil's privy-men, and are always in his

privy. The flatterer's office is to cover up the privy-hole, which he does as often as he covers up a person's sin, which stinks more foully than anything, with his flattering and praising. And he covers and hides it so that the sinner does not smell it.⁵¹ The backbiter unids it, and uncovers the filth so that it stinks far and wide. In this way they are always busy in this foul office, and each competes with the other over it. Such people sink because of their stinking office, and bring their stench every place they go near. Our Lord forbid that the breath of their stinking throats should ever come near you! Other kinds of talk be foul, but these poison both the ears and the heart. So that you may know them better if they come toward you, here are their kinds.

Flatterers are of three sorts. The first is evil enough, but the second is worse, and the third the worst. *Ve illis qui ponunt pubillos et cetera; Ve illis qui dant bonum malum, et malum bonum, ponentes lucem tenebras, et tenebras lucem—hoc scilicet detractoribus et adulatoribus pervenit [Woe to those who put cushions (under every elbow to catch souls); Woe to those who call good evil and evil good, making the darkness light and the light darkness: these words apply to detractors and flatterers]* (Ezekiel 13:18, Isaiah 5:20, and gloss). The first, if someone is good, praises them to their face and soon enough makes them out still better than they are; and if they say or do well, they build it up too high with overpraise. The second, if someone is evil, and says and does so much wrong and sins so openly that they can in no way altogether deny it, still makes out the person's evil to be less, to their face. "Now," they say, "it isn't so very bad as they make it out to be, and you're not the first or the last in this thing. You've plenty of company. Forget it, my good friend—you're not the only one. Many do much worse." The third kind of flatterer is worst as I said, for they praise the evil person and their evil deed—like the one who says to the knight who robbed his poor: "Ah sir, this is good. For one should always strip and crop the peasants—for they are like the willow which sprouts the better the more one prunes it." *Laudatur peccator in desiderii anime sue et iniquus benedicitur. Augustinus: Adularium lingue alligant bonum in peccatis. [The sinner is praised in the desires of his heart and the evildoer is blessed (Psalm 9:24). Augustine: The tongues of flatterers bind a man in his sins.]*⁵² So these false flatterers blind those who listen to them, as I said before, and cover their filth so that they cannot smell it. And that is their great misfortune, for if they smelled it, they would be disgusted by it, and run to confession and spew it out there, and shun it from then on.

Clement: Homicidarum tria esse genera, dixit beatus Petrus, et eorum parem penam esse voluit: qui corporaliter occidit, et qui detrahit fratris, et qui

*invidet [Blessed Peter said that there are three kinds of murderers, and he thought they should each have the same punishment: the one who kills bodily, the one who backbites his brother, and the one who envies].*⁵³ Backbiters who bite behind others' backs are of two kinds, but the second is worse.⁵⁴ The first comes quite openly and speaks evil of someone else, and spews out his poison, as much as ever comes into his mouth, and pours out all at once what his poisonous heart sends up to his tongue. But the second approaches in a completely different way. He is a worse enemy than the other is, and hangs down his head under the cloak of friendship, starts sighing before he says anything, and makes a gloomy face. He offers excuses at length so as to be better believed. When it all comes out it is yellow poison. "Oh dear," he says, "What a shame that so-and-so has attracted such gossip. I tried hard, but nothing I could do was any use. I've known about it a long time, although it would never have gone any further on my account—but now that others have brought it out so much into the open, I can't deny it. They say it's bad, but it's even worse. I'm very sorry and sad that I have to say it, but it is the truth—and that's a crying shame, for in all sorts of ways there's much to be said for so-and-so. But in this thing, more's the pity, there's no excuse at all." These people are the devil's snakes that Solomon speaks of (Ecclesiastes 10:11). May our Lord through his grace keep your ears far from their poisonous tongues, nor let you ever smell that filthy pit that they uncover—just as the flatterers cover it and hide it, as I said. Let those who own the pit uncover it to themselves—and very properly hide it from others—rather than to those who would smell it and have the filth.

Now my dear sisters, keep your ears far from all evil speech that is of this threefold kind, idle, foul and poisonous. It is said of anchoresses that almost every one of them has some old woman to feed her ears, a gossip who tells her all the local tid-bits, a magpie who cackles about all that she sees and hears, so that the saying now runs, "You can hear the news from a mill or a marker, from a smithy or an anchorhouse."⁵⁵ Christ knows this is a sorry saying!—that an anchorhouse, which should be the loneliest place of all, can be compared to these three places that are most full of gossip. But may our Lord grant it that all others be as free of this kind of thing as you are, dear sisters.⁵⁶

Now I have spoken separately of these three organs, of the eye, of the mouth, of the ear. All this last part is for the benefit of the anchoress in her hearing. For while it is not to be believed that an anchoress could have such a mouth, it is greatly to be feared that she might sometimes bow her ear to such mouths in others.

Sight, speech, hearings: each in turn has been dealt with separately. Let us go back to them now and speak of them all together.⁵⁷

*Zelatus sum Syon zelo magno—in propheta Zacharia (Zacharias 8:2).*⁵⁸ Understand, anchoress, whose spouse you are, and how he is jealous of all your doings. *Ego sum Deus zelotes—in Exodo (Exodus 20:5).* “I am the jealous God,” he says about himself. *Zelatus sum, et cetera*—“I am jealous of you, Zion, my beloved, with great jealousy.” He did not think it enough to say that he is jealous of you, but he added “with great jealousy.” *Auris zeli audit omnia [The ears of the jealous hear everything] (Wisdom 1:10), says Solomon the wise. Ubi amor ibi oculus [Where love is, there the eye follows].*⁵⁹ Now understand this well: his ear is ever toward you and he hears everything. His eye always sees you, if you make any appearance, any show of love toward sin. *Zelatus sum Syon—Zion, that is, “mirror.”*⁶⁰ He calls you his mirror—so much his that you are nobody else’s. For this reason he says in the Canticles: *Ostende michi faciem tuam (Canticles 2:14)*—“Show your face to me,” he says, “and to no one else; look at me if you would have clear sight with your heart’s eyes. Look within where I am and do not seek me outside your heart. I am a bashful lover, I will not embrace my beloved anywhere but in a secret place.” In this way our Lord speaks to his spouse.⁶¹ Let it never seem strange to her that he shuns her if she is not much alone—and so much alone that she puts all the thronging world and every earthly disturbance out of her heart. For she is God’s chamber.⁶² Disturbance only comes into the heart from something that one has either seen or heard, tasted or smelled, or felt outwardly. And know it to be true that the more these senses spring outward, the less they go inward. The more the recluse stares out, the less inner light she has from our Lord—and the same is true of the other senses. *Qui exteriori oculo negligenter utitur, iusto Dei iudicio interiori recatur; see what St. Gregory says: “Whoever guards her outward eye carelessly is blinded, through God’s just judgment, in her inner.”*⁶³—so that she may not see God with her spiritual sight, nor through that sight know him, nor through that knowledge love him above everything. For as one knows his great goodness, and as one feels his sweet sweetness, so one loves him the more or the less.⁶⁴

Therefore, my dear sisters, be blind outwardly, as were the holy Jacob and Tobias the good. And, as he gave it to them, God will give you light within, to see him and to know him, and through that knowledge to love him over all things.⁶⁵ Then will you see how all the world is nothing, how her comfort is false. Through that sight you will see all the devil’s wiles, how he deceives wretches. You will see in yourself which of your own sins

are yet to be amended. You will look sometimes toward the torments of hell, so as to be frightened by them, and so as to flee them the more strongly. You will see spiritually the joys of heaven, which kindle your heart to hasten toward them. You will, as in a mirror, see our Lady with her maidens, all the host of angels, all the army of saints, and, over them all, him who gives joy to them all and is the crown of them all. This sight, dear sisters, will comfort you more than any worldly sight could. Holy men who have discovered it know well that every earthly gladness is worthless compared to this. *Manna absconditum est, et cetera; Nomen novum quod nemo scit nisi qui accipit (Revelation 2:17)*—“it is a secret balsam,” says St. John the evangelist in the Apocalypse; “it is a secret balsam,” says St. John who has not tasted it.” This tasting and this knowing come from spiritual sight, from spiritual hearing, from spiritual speech, which those will have who forgo for God’s love worldly hearing, earthly speech, fleshly sights *Videamus enim quasi per speculum in enigmate [Now we see as through a mirror in obscurity] (1 Corinthians 13:12).* And after this sight now, which is dim here, you will have above—much more than anyone else—the clear sight of God’s face, which is the cause of all the gladness in the joy of heaven. For so the righteous God has decreed: that the reward of each person there will be according to the work and according to the trouble that they have suffered humbly for his love here. So it is fitting that anchoresses more than all others have these two marriage-gifts: swiftness and the light of clear sight. Swiftness because they are now so constrained; the light of clear sight because now they enclose themselves in darkness here, and desire neither to see men nor to be seen by them. All in heaven will be as swift as human thought is now, as is the sun’s ray glancing from the east into the west in the twinkling of an eye. But anchoresses, shut in here, will be—if any can be—both lighter and swifter there, and play in the wide meadows of heaven in such loose chains, as they say, that the body will be wherever it wants to go in a moment. This, then, is one of the marriage-gifts that I said anchoresses should have more than others. The other is: sight. Gregory: *Enim quod nesciant ubi scientem omnia sciunt. [Because they do not know here, there they know all things.]*⁶⁶ All those in heaven see everything in God. But because of their blindfolding here, anchoresses who do not care to know about outward things with ear or eye now, will see and understand God’s hidden secrets and his secret judgments the more clearly there.⁶⁷

Therefore my dear sisters, if any man asks to see you, ask him what good could come of it. For I see much harm in it, and no benefit. If he is pressing, believe him the less. If anyone is so mad that he puts his hand out

toward the window-cloth, at once quickly shut the window tight and let him be. Further, as soon as anyone ever falls into wicked speech tending toward foul love, seal your window right away and answer him nothing, but go away with this verse so that he can hear it: *Declinate a me, maligni, et scrutabor mandata Dei mei; Narraverunt michi iniqui fabulationes domine, sed non ut lex tua [Depart from me malignant one and I will study the commandments of my God; The wicked have told me fables, Lord, but not according to your law] (Psalm 118:115, 85)*—and go over to your altar with the *Miserere* (i.e., Psalm 50). Never rebuke any such man in any other way, for with the rebuke he might answer so, and blow so lightly, that some spak might quicken. No wooing is so underhanded as one in the form of a plaint—as if someone said this: “I would rather die than think anything impure about you”—swearing deep oaths—“but even though I had sworn not to, I must love you. Who is worse off than I am? It deprives me of many a night’s sleep. Now I am sorry that you know it—but yet forgive me for telling you. Even if I go mad, you will never again know what I feel.” She forgives him for it because he speaks so fair. Then he speaks of something else, but “the eye is always on the grove in the woods.”⁶⁸ The heart dwells on his earlier words; even when he is gone, she often turns over such words in her thought when she should be meditating on other things. Again, he looks for the chance to break his promise, swears he must, and so the grief grows, the longer the worse. For no enmity is so evil as false friendship.⁶⁹ An enemy who one thinks a friend is the worst of deceivers. Therefore, my dear sisters, do not give such a man any opening to speak, for as Holy Writ says, “Their speech spreads like a cancer” (2 Timothy 2:17). But before he has time to answer go away from him just as I said above. There is no better way to save yourselves, to check him.

Look now how fittingly the lady in the Canticles, God’s dear spouse, teaches you through her words how you must speak: *En dilectus meus loquitur michi, “Surge, propera amica mea,” et cetera (Canticles 2:10)*—“Lo,” she says, “Listen: I hear my love speak. He calls me, I must go.” And you go immediately to your dear lover, and complain into his ears, who calls you to him lovingly with these words: *Surge, propera amica mea, conlumba mea, formosa mea, et veni. Ostende michi faciem tuam. Sonat vox tua in auribus meis (Canticles 2:13–14)*—that is, “Rise up, hurry up to heaven, and come to me my lover, my dove, my fair one and my shining spouse.” *Ostende michi faciem tuam*—“Show me your dear face, your lovely looks. Come away from others.” *Sonat vox tua in auribus meis*—“Say who has done this to you, who has hurt you, my dear. Sing in my ears. Because you want to see only my face, to speak only to me, your voice is sweet to me and

your face shining”—*Unde et subditur, Vox tua dulcis et facies tua decora (Canticles 2:14)*. Now, these two things are greatly loved, sweet speech and a beautiful face, in whomever has both of them. Such a one Jesus Christ chooses as a lover and a spouse. If you want to be such a one, show no man your face nor easily let him hear your speech, but turn them both to Jesus Christ, to your precious spouse, as he bids above—if you want your speech to seem sweet to him and your face beautiful and to have him as a lover, who is a thousand times more shining than the sun.

Now listen earnestly, my dear sisters, to quite a different and distant speech from this earlier one. Listen now to how Jesus Christ speaks as though in wrath, and says as though in grim mockery and scorn to the anchoress, who ought to be his beloved and yet seeks pleasure and comfort outwardly, with eye or with tongue—in the Canticles: *Si ignoras te, O pulcra inter mulieres, egrederere et abi post vestigia gregum tuorum, et passe edas tuas iuxta tabernacula patorum (Canticles 1:7)*. These are the words: “If you do not know yourself, O fair one among women, go out and follow after goat-herds, and pasture your kids by herdsmen’s huts of twigs and leaves.” This is a cruel saying, and a grim saying too, that our Lord says, as if in anger and scorn,⁷¹ to peeping and to news-greedy and to gossipy anchoresses. It is wrapped up and hidden, but I will unfold it. “If you do not know yourself,” our Lord says. Now take good heed—this means, “If you do not know whose spouse you are, that you are queen of heaven if you are true to me as a spouse ought to be. If you have forgotten this and care little about it, go out and leave.” Where? “Out of this high state, of this great honor, and follow herds of goats,” he says. What are herds of goats? They are the fleshly lusts which sink like goats before our Lord. “If you have forgotten now your honorable estate as lady, go and follow these goats, follow the lusts of the flesh.” After this comes “And pasture your kids,” which is as though he said: “Feed your eyes with peeping out, your tongue with jabbering, your ears with gossip, your nose with smelling, your flesh with soft touching.” He calls these five senses “kids,” because just as from a kid with its sweet flesh grows a sinking goat or a foul buck, in the same way from a young sweet look or a sweet hearing or a soft touching grows a sinking lust and a foul sin.

Has any peeping anchoress ever proved this, as she kept pecking outward like an unruly bird in a cage? Did the cat of hell ever snatch at her and seize the head of her heart in its claws? Yes, and dragged out the whole body after, with claws of crooked and sharp temptations, and made her lose both God and man with widespread shame and sin, and betrayed her at a stroke of the earth and also the heavens. A most sorry loss; an anchoress has

always pecked out to her sorrow. "Egrederere," he says in anger. "Go out, as Dinah, Jacob's daughter did, to her own destruction, her own sorrow": that is to say, "Leave me, and my comfort that is in your breast, and go seek outside the world's foul comfort, which must always end in pain and in grief. Take it and leave me when you would rather, for you can by no means have these same two comforts, mine and the world's, the joy of the Holy Spirit and also the comfort of the flesh, together. Choose, now, one of these two, for the other you must leave."⁷²

O pulcra inter mulieres—"If you do not know yourself, O fair one among women," says our Lord, "O you fair one among women, hear now: Do what you should here and you will be fair elsewhere, not only among women but among angels. You, my worldly spouse," says our Lord, "will you follow the goats, which are the lusts of the flesh, to the field?"—the field is desire's breeding-ground. "Will you follow goats through the field in this way? You should beseech me for kisses within your heart's bower, as my lover, who says to me in the book of love: '*Oculetur me osculo oris sui*' (Canticles 1:1)—that is, 'Let my lover kiss me with the kiss of his mouth, the sweetest of mouths.'" This kiss, dear sisters, is a sweetness and a delight of the heart so immeasurably sweet that every taste of the world is bitter compared with it. But our Lord kisses no soul with this kiss who loves anything but him, and those things it helps to have for his sake.⁷³

And you then, God's spouse, who could hear earlier how sweetly your spouse speaks, and calls you to him so lovingly, then afterwards how he changes his tune and speaks so grimly if you go out: stay in your chamber, and do not feed your kids outside your gate, but keep your listening, your speech and your sight within, and close fast their gates, mouth and eye and ear. She is locked in for nothing, inside fence or wall, if she opens these gates, except to God's messenger and the soul's nourishment.⁷⁴ "*Omni custodia custodi cor tuum* (Proverbs 4:23)—"Above everything, then," as Solomon teaches, and as I said a long time ago at the beginning of this part, "my dear sisters, guard your heart." The heart is well locked in if mouth and eye and ear are wisely locked in. For they, as I said there, are the heart's guardians, and if the guardians go out, the home is badly guarded.⁷⁵

Now I have spoken about three senses. Let us now speak briefly of the two others (though speech is not a "sense" of the mouth; rather, taste is, though both are in the mouth).

Smell, which belongs to the nose, is the fourth of the five senses. Of this sense St. Augustine says: *De odoribus non satago nimis. Cum assumt, non respicio, cum absumt non requiro*—"I do not care very much about smells," he

says; "for God's sake I am indifferent to whether they be near or distant."⁷⁶ But our Lord, through Isaiah, threatens those who have their delight in fleshly smells here with the stench of hell: *Erit pro suavi odore fetor* (Isaiah 3:24). Conversely, they will have heavenly smells who sweat from wearing iron or hair shirt here—or suffer from sweaty attire, or from stale air in their house, or from rotting things, or sometimes from stench and foul breath in their noses. So be warned, my dear sisters, that sometimes the enemy makes something sink that you need to make use of, because he wants you to avoid it. At other times the deceiver makes a sweet smell come from some hidden thing that you cannot see, such as the dust of hidden seeds, as though it were from heaven—to make you think that God is sending you his comfort because of your holy life, and to think highly of yourselves and leap into pride. Smells that come from God comfort the heart more than the nose. These and other tricks with which he deceives many will be brought to nothing with holy water and with the sign of the holy cross. If anyone thought of how God himself was tormented in this sense, she would suffer its pain with patience.

On the mount of Calvary, where our Lord hung, was the killing-place, where often rotting bodies lay above the earth and stank very strongly. As he hung there he could smell their reek, in the middle of all his other suffering, full in his nose.⁷⁷

He was also tormented in all his other senses: in his sight when he saw his precious mother's tears—and St. John the evangelist's and the other Mary's—and when he saw how his dear disciples all fled from him and left him alone. He wept himself three times with his fair eyes. He suffered being blindfolded quite patiently, when his eyes were so shamefully covered in order to give anchoresses the bright sight of heaven. If you blindfold your eyes on earth for his love and in memory of this, to keep fellowship with him, it is no matter for amazement.

He was struck smartly in the mouth many times as they beat his face, as they spat upon him in scorn—and an anchoress goes out of her mind over one word! Since he patiently suffered the Jews to shut his precious mouth as they buffeted him with their bloody fists, you also, for love of him and for your own great benefit, should shut your chattering mouth with your lips. He also tasted gall on his tongue, to teach the anchoress that she should never again grumble about any food or drink, however unappetizing it may be. If she can eat it, eat it and thank God sincerely for it; if she cannot, let her be sorry that she must ask for more delicate food. But rather than have the asking should raise any scandal, she should die as a martyr in her discomfort. One should flee death so far as one can without sin, but one

should rather die than commit any deadly sin. And is it not a great sin to make people say, "This anchoress is dainty—she asks a lot"? It is still worse if people say she is a grumbler and undisciplined, haughty and hard to please. If she were in the world, she would sometimes have to be fully satisfied with less and with worse.

It is quite unreasonable to come into an anchorhouse, into God's prison, readily and willingly into a place of discomfort, in order to look for ease there, and more mastery and ladyship than she could readily have had in the world. Think, anchoress, what you looked for when you forsook the world in your enclosure: to weep for your own and others' sins, and to lose wholly all the joy of this life so as to embrace your joyful lover joyfully in the eternal life of heaven.⁷⁸ O, says Jeremiah, *Quomodo obscuratum est aurum optimum, et cetera* (Lamentations 4:1)—"O alas, alas, how the gold has darkened, how the fairest color has changed and faded." The apostle speaks to such people grimly, as if in anger: *Quis vos fascinavit, et cetera, ut cum spiritu ceperitis, carne consumamini?* (Galatians 3:1, 3)—"But what unblest spirit has so bewitched you, that you began in the spirit and will end in the flesh?" Those who began the spiritual life in the Holy Spirit have become utterly fleshly: laughing, frivolous, speaking carelessly at one time, foully at another, luxurious and querulous, women who grumble and complain, and (what is still worse) curse and chide, bitter and poisonous with swollen hearts. Such things would be unfitting for the lady of a castle; it is a contemptible and unreasonable thing that an anointed anchoress, and an anchoress buried—for what is an anchorhouse but her grave?—wishes to be more graciously regarded than the lady of a house. She ought to direct her anger against the guilt of sin, pronouncing her words so levelly that she does not seem stirred up, and not being led beyond reason, but speaking thoughtfully and truthfully without haste and arrogance in a soft voice.⁷⁹ *Filia fatua in deminoratione erit* (Ecclesiasticus 22:3)—this is Solomon's saying: may God never grant that it should apply to any of you—"The foolish daughter becomes like the moon in its waning." She prospers like the fool, the longer the worse. You, if you want to wax and not to go backwards, must row confidently against the current, force your way ahead with much hard work, and pull stalwartly with your spiritual arms. And so must you all. For we are all in this stream, in the world's wild water, which carries many under. As soon as ever we tire and rest ourselves in sloth, our boat goes backward⁸⁰ and we are the foolish daughter who wanes as she goes, the lukewarm whom God spews out (as is written below [p. 195]), who began in the spirit and end in the flesh. No, no. But as Job says, those who dig for a hoard of gold, the closer they get to it, the more ardent

gladness of heart makes them, and the keener to dig and delve deeper and deeper until they find it (Job 3:21).⁸¹ Your heart is not on earth, so you need not delve downward. But lift the heart upward. For that is this rowing against the world's current: to drive against it, so as to delve the gold-hoard that is up in heaven. And what is that delving? Eager, seeking thought: Where it is; what it is; how it can be found. This is the delving: to be busily and eagerly always about it, with a constant yearning, with the heart of the hungry heart; to wade up out of sin; to creep out of the flesh; to break up above her; to rise above her on your own with high thought toward heaven—and so much the more needfully since your weak, tender flesh cannot bear harsh things.⁸² So then, instead of those give God your heart in softness, in sweetness, in every kind of meekness and gentlest humility—not first grumbling and fretting, then becoming unworthily angry with raised voice, emphasizing her words, twisting away, shrugging the shoulders, throwing the head round so that God hates her and men scorn her. No, no. Mature words, mature manners and behavior are fitting for an anchoress. When words are humble and truthfully said, not in a badly-disciplined or haughty way, then they have the weight to be properly understood.⁸³

Now, this has all been said so that you, like Jesus Christ, struck in the mouth and given gall to drink, may guard yourselves against sinning with the mouth, and endure some suffering through the same sense in which he was tormented.

In his ear the heavenly Lord had all the reproach and the upbraiding, all the scorn and all the shame that ears might hear; and he says about himself, to teach us, *Et factus sum sicut homo non audiens et non habens in ore suo redargutiones* (Psalm 37:14–15)—"I kept myself," he says, "as silent as a mute and deaf man, who does not answer back even though people mistreat him and speak insults against him." This is your lover's saying. And you, innocent anchoress, who are his beloved spouse, learn it eagerly from him, so that you know it and can truly speak it.

Now I have spoken about four of your senses, and about God's comfort: how he, through his senses, comforts you as often as you feel any need in yours. Now, hear about the fifth, which demands the most courage, because the pain in it—and the pleasure too if it turn out that way—is the greatest: that is, feeling.⁸⁴

The fifth sense is feeling. This same one sense is in all the others, and throughout the body; and therefore it needs to be guarded best. Our Lord knew this well, and therefore he wanted to suffer most in this sense, all so

as to comfort us if we suffer pain through it, and to turn us away from pleasure which the lust of the flesh especially demands in the sense of feeling, more than in any other. Our Lord did not suffer pain in a single place through this sense, but had pain all over, not only throughout his body, but also in his innocent soul—in her he felt the stabbing of painful, sorrowful sadness, which made him sigh in grief.

This stabbing was threefold, like three spears which struck him to the heart. The first was his mother's and the other Mary's weeping, who flowed with tears. The second that his own beloved disciples did not believe in him anymore or think that he was God, because he did not help himself in his great pain, and all fled from him and left him like strangers. The third was the great pain and inner regret he had over the loss of those who drove him to his death, and that he saw that, so far as it concerned them, all his hard toil on earth was wasted. These same three things stabbed in his soul. In his body, as St. Augustine says, every part suffered its own pain and died throughout his whole body, just as earlier he sweated the sweat of death with his whole body.⁸⁵ "And hear," says St. Bernard, "that he did not weep with the eyes alone, but wept, as it were, with all his limbs"—*Quasi, inquit, membris omnibus fletisse videtur*.⁸⁶ For so full of anguish was that compulsive sweat that fell down from his body in anticipation of the anguished death he had to suffer, that it seemed like red blood: *Factus est sudor eius quasi gutte sanguinis decurrentis in terram* (Luke 22:44)—"So fully and so freely flowed that bloody sweat from his blessed body on all sides that the streams ran down to the earth." Such horror had his human flesh in the face of the dire pains that it had to endure. And this is not at all strange. For the more alive the flesh, the stronger are its sensations and its pain. A little wound in the eye is more painful than a large one in the heel, for there the flesh is more deadened. Everyone's flesh is dead flesh compared with God's flesh, for it was taken from the tender maiden, and there was never anything in it that could deaden it; but it was kept continually alive by the living Godhead that dwelt in it. Therefore the pain in his flesh was stronger than anyone ever suffered in the flesh.⁸⁷

Look, here is an example of how his flesh was more alive than any flesh. A person who has some sickness does not have blood let from the sick part; but it is done from a sound part to heal the sick one. But in the whole world, which was in a fever, there was not among all humanity a single healthy part found where blood might be let, except God's body alone—from which blood was let on the cross, not just in the arm, but in five places, to heal humanity of the sickness that the five senses had aroused. See, in this way the sound part, the living part, drew out the

harmful blood from the unsound, and so healed the sick. By blood in Holy Writ sin is symbolized—the reasons why are shown clearly later (p. 93). But take heed of this, my dear sisters. Your precious spouse—the Lord so worthy of love, the heavenly healer, Jesus God, God's Son, the ruler of all the world—when he was thus bled, understand what his drink was on that day. During that same bloodletting so baleful and so bitter, the very people he bled for did not bring him as a gift either wine or ale or water, even though he said *Sicio [I thirst]* (John 19:28), and moaned for thirst as he bled on the cross—but brought bitter gall. When was so poor a provision ever given to any bloodletter?⁸⁸ And yet he did not complain, but humbly received it to teach his own. And he did still more as an example for us: he put his dear mouth to it and tasted it, though it could be no use to him.

Who then, after this, and most especially what anchoress, can complain if she does not have either meat or drink to her taste? And certainly, whoever does grumble offers to our Lord the same evil provision as the Jews did then—and is the Jews' companion in offering him in his thirst a drink of sour gall. His thirst is nothing but yearning for our soul's health; and the complaining of a bitter and sour heart is sourer and more bitter for him now than the gall was then. And you, his dear spouse, do not be the Jews' mate to pour out such a drink for him, but bear him company, and drink with him cheerfully all that your flesh thinks sour or bitter—that is, pain and lack and all discomfort—and he will repay you like a true companion with healing drink from heaven.

In this way was Jesus Christ, the almighty God, tormented grievously in all his five senses—and especially in this last, that is feeling, since his flesh was as alive as is the eye in its tenderness. And guard this sense, that is the feeling in the flesh, above all the others. God's hands were nailed on the cross. By these same nails I implore you, anchoresses—not you my dear sisters for there is no need, but others—hold your hands within your windows. Handling or any other touch between a man and an anchoress is a thing so ugly and a deed so shameful and so naked a sin, to all the world so hateful and so great a scandal, that there is no need to speak or write against it, for it can be seen as foul without any writing. God knows that I would greatly much rather see all three of you, my dear sisters, dearest of all women to me, hanging on a gibbet to avoid sin, than to see one of you give a single kiss to any man on earth in the way I mean. I am silent about what is worse. Not only joining hands but putting your hand out, unless it is necessary, is courting harm and asking for his anger; looking at her own white hands does harm to many anchoresses, who have them so fair because they are idle. They should be scraping the earth up every day out of the pit they

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must rot in! God knows that this pit does much good to many an anchoress—for as Solomon says: *Memorare novissima tua et in eternum non peccabis* [Remember your last hour, and you will never sin] (Ecclesiastes 7:40). She who always has her death as though before her eyes remembers that pit. If she thinks hard about the doom of Judgment Day, when the angels will tremble, and of the endless and hateful pains of hell, and above all, in everything, of Jesus Christ's passion, how he was tormented in all his five senses (as has partly been said)—she will not now lightly follow the flesh's pleasure after the will's desire, nor bring upon herself any mortal sin through her five senses.⁸⁹

Enough has now been said of the five senses which are like wardens outside the heart, in which is the soul's life—as we said above at the beginning, that Solomon said *Omni custodia custodi cor tuum quoniam ex ipso vita procedit*. Now the first two parts of the book have been got through, Christ be thanked. Now go we, with his help, to the third.

Part III: *The Inner Feelings*

My dear sisters, just as you guard well your senses outwardly, so, above all else, see to it that you are gentle and mild and humble within—sweet and tender-hearted, and patient in the face of evil words said of you and deeds done to you—lest you lose everything.¹

David says this verse against bitter anchoresses: *Similis factus sum pellicano solitudinis, et cetera* (Psalm 101:7)—“I am,” he says, “like a pelican who lives by itself.”² The pelican is a bird so ill-humored and so angry that it often kills its own chicks in fury when they anger it; and then soon after it becomes very sorry, and makes a very great lamentation, and strikes itself with the bill it has just killed its chicks with, and draws blood from its breast; and with that blood it brings back to life its slain chicks. This bird, the pelican, is the ill-humored anchoress; her chicks are her good works, which she often kills with the bill of acute anger. But when she has done so she does as the pelican does: repents very soon, and with her own bill rends her breast—that is, with confession of her mouth, with which she sinned and killed her good works, she draws the blood of sin out of her breast, that is, out of the heart, in which is the life of the soul. And in this way her slain chicks, which are her good works, will be brought back to life.³

Blood symbolizes sin, for just as a person covered with blood is grim and horrible to the human eye, so is the sinner before the eye of God. Yet no one can rest blood properly before it has cooled. So it is with sin. While the heart boils with anger inwardly, it lacks right judgment;⁴ again, while the desire is hot for any sin, you cannot at the time judge well what it is, or what will come of it. But let desire pass over, and you will be glad; let the heat cool, as someone does who wants to rest blood, and you will rightly judge the sin, that you thought fair, foul and loathsome, and productive of so much evil if you had done it while the heat lasted, that you will judge you were made when you were inclined to it. This is true of every sin, which is why blood symbolizes it, and especially of anger. *Impedit ira animum ne possit cernere verum*—“Anger, while it lasts,” it says, “so blinds the heart that she cannot know the truth.”⁵ *Maga quaedam est transformans naturam humanam*—“Anger is an enchanter, like one hears of in stories, for she deprives a person of their wits and changes their whole appearance, and transforms them from a human into the likeness of a beast.”⁶ An angry woman is a wolf; a man is a wolf or lion or unicorn; for as long as anger is in

a woman's heart, though she say her versicles, *Hail Marys, Our Fathers*, she does nothing but howl. In God's eyes she looks just like someone who has turned into a wolf, in his keen ears she has a wolf's voice. *Ira furor brevis est*—"Anger is a madness."⁷ Is not someone who is angry mad? How do they look, how do they speak, how are their hearts within? What is their outward behavior like? They do not know other people—how then are they human? *Est enim homo animal mansuetum natura*—"By nature humans are mild";⁸ as soon as they lose their mildheartedness they lose their human nature, and anger, the enchanter, transforms them into beasts, as I said before. And what if any anchoress, Jesus Christ's spouse, is transformed into a wolf: is this not a sorry thing? All she can do is to shed that rough pelt from about her heart at once, and make herself smooth and soft with soft reconciliation, as a woman's skin is by nature. For with that wolf's pelt nothing that she does is pleasing to God.⁹

See! Here are many remedies against anger, a great flock of comforts and a variety of helps. If people insult you, think that you are earth. Does one not tread on earth, and spit on earth? Even if they did this to you, they treated the earth properly. If you bark back, you have a dog's nature; if you sting back, you have an adder's nature, and not that of Christ's spouse. Think if he did so, *Qui tanquam ovis ad occisionem ductus est et non aperuit os suum* (Isaiah 53:7); after all the shameful tortures that he suffered on the long night of Good Friday, they led him out in the morning to hang him on a criminal's gallows, and to drive iron nails through his four limbs—but a criminal's gallows, as the Holy Writ says, "did he struggle or speak."¹⁰ No more than a sheep," as the Holy Writ says, "did he struggle or speak."

Think also, on the other hand, what is a word but wind? She is too weakly buttressed whom a puff of wind, a word, can fell and cast into sin.¹¹ And who would not find it extraordinary that an anchoress should be felled by wind? Yet again, does she not show that she is dust and an unstable thing, if she is immediately blown over by a little word's wind? The same puff out of someone's mouth, if you cast it beneath you, would bear you up toward the joy of heaven—but indeed, our great folly is to be wondered at! Understand this saying: St. Andrew could endure that the hard cross should hoist him up toward heaven, and lovingly embraced it; St. Lawrence also endured that the gridle should hoist him upward with the burning coals; St. Stephen endured the stones they threw at him, and took them gladly, and prayed on bended knees for those who threw them at him—and we cannot endure that the wind of a word may bear us toward heaven!¹² But we are angry at them, whom we ought to thank as those who perform us a great service, though it be unwillingly. *Impiis vult pio velit nolit*: "All that the wicked and the evil do for evil, all of it is good for the good, all is to their

advantage and builds them up toward joy."¹³ Let them braid your crown, and that gladly. Think how the holy man in *The Lives of the Fathers* kissed and blessed the hand of the other one who had harmed him, and said most earnestly, while kissing it eagerly, "Blessed be this hand for ever, for it has built me the joys of heaven."¹⁴ And you should say this too about the hand that harms you, and also about the mouth which insults you in any way: "Blessed be your mouth," say, "for you make of it a tool to build my crown. I am glad for my good, but sorry for your evil, for you benefit me and harm yourself." If any man or woman has said or done you harm, dear sisters, so should you say. But it is very strange, if we consider it well, how God's saints suffered wounds on their bodies, and we are angry if a wind blows a little at us—and the wind wounds nothing but only the air. For the wind—that is, a word someone says—can neither wound you in your flesh nor befool your soul, even if it blows on you, unless you cause it to happen yourself. Bernard: *Qui irriatit, quid inflammatis ad verbi flatum, qui nec carnem vulnerat nec inquinat mentem? [Why are you irritated, why inflamed, at a word's breath, which can neither wound your flesh nor soil your mind?]*¹⁵ You can easily perceive that little of the fire of charity that is kindled entirely from our Lord's love was there; there was not much fire if a puff blew it out. For where there is a great fire it grows with the wind.¹⁶

See here finally the best remedy against harmful deeds or words—and know it through this illustration. A man who lay in prison and had to pay an enormous ransom, and could in no way come out except to be hanged unless he had paid his ransom in full—would he not greatly thank someone who threw a bag of coins at him to redeem himself with and release himself from suffering—even if it was thrown very hard at his heart? All the pain would be forgotten in his gladness. In the same way we are all in prison here, and owe God great debts of sin, so that we cry to him in the *Our Father*, *Et dimitte nobis debita nostra*—"Lord," we say, "forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors." Any wrong that is done us, either by word or by deed, that is our ransom with which we should redeem ourselves and settle our debts, which are our sins, toward our Lord. For without payment no one is taken out of this prison who is not hanged at once, either in purgatory or in the torment of hell. And our Lord himself said, *Dimitte et dimitteur vobis* (Luke 6:37)—"Forgive, and I will forgive you"; as though he said, "You are heavily in debt toward me with your sins, but would you like to make a good deal? All that anyone ever says or does against you I will reckon against the debt that you owe me." Now, even if a word should hit you very hard on the breast, so that you think at first that it hurt your heart, think of it as the prisoner would whom the other person

hurt badly with the bag of coins, and take it gladly to free yourself with, and thank the one who sent it to you—even though God can never thank him for sending it. He harms himself and benefits you, if you can endure it. For as David said, and very well, “God puts the wicked and the evil in his treasury, so that with them he may pay, as one does with money, people who fight well!”—*Poenas in theauris abyssos: Glossa: crudelis quibus donat milites suos* (Psalm 32:7).¹⁷

Also, on the other hand, this bird the pelican has another feature, that it is always lean.¹⁸ Thus as I said, David compares himself to one in the person of an anchorite, speaking in an anchorite’s voice: *Similis factus sum pellicano solitudinis* (Psalm 101:7)—“I am like a pelican which dwells by itself.” And the anchoress should say this, and be like a pelican in its leanness. *Judith clava in cubiculo ieiunabat omnibus diebus vite sue, et cetera* (Judith 8:5–6)—“Judith, enclosed,” as it tells in her book, “led a very hard life; she fasted and wore haircloth.” “Judith enclosed” figures the enclosed anchoress who ought to lead a hard life as the lady Judith did, according to her capacity, not as a pig shut up in a sty to grow fat and large waiting for the axe’s blow.

There are two kinds of anchoress whom our Lord speaks about. And he says in the gospel, about the false and the true: *Vulpes foras habent et volucres celi nidus* (Matthew 8:20)—that is, “Foxes have their holes and birds of heaven have their nests.” The foxes are false anchoresses, for the fox is the falsest of beasts.¹⁹ These “have holes,” he says, which they burrow into the earth with earthly vices. And they draw into their hole all that they can grab and run with. So hoarding anchoresses are compared by God in the gospel to foxes. The fox is also an insolent beast, and voracious with it; and the false anchoress draws into her hole and eats both geese and hens, as a fox does. Like the fox, they have an innocent look some of the time, and yet they are full of guile. They pretend to be other than they are, like the fox, who is a hypocrite. They expect to beguile God, as they fool simple men—and they beguile themselves most. They boast, as the fox does, and brag of their goodness whenever they dare and can. They chatter about idle things, and become so very worldly that in the end their name stinks, like the fox whenever he goes out. For if they do evil, what people say of them is even worse.

These people went into an anchorage as Saul went into a hole,²⁰ not as David the good did. They both went into a hole, Saul and David, as it tells in the book of Kings (1 Samuel 24). But Saul went into it to do his filth there, as is the case with many. Some wretched anchoress has gone into the

hole of the anchorage to befoul that place, and to practice the filths of the flesh there more secretly than she could if she were in the world. For who has a better chance to do her wickednesses than the false anchoress? So Saul went into the hole to defile the place. But David went in only to hide himself from Saul, who hated him and sought to kill him. So the good anchoress does. This Saul, who is the enemy, hates and hunts her. She goes in there to hide herself from his keen claws.²¹ She hides herself in her hole, both from worldly men and worldly sins, because she is spiritually David—that is “Strong against the enemy”—and her face is lovely to our Lord’s eyes. For the name “David” means this in the Hebrew language.²² The false anchoress is Saul, after what his name means: “Saul”: “*Abutens*” *sive* “*Abusio*”—for “Saul” in Hebrew is “Abuse” in English, and the false anchoress abuses the name of anchoress and all that she does.²³

The good anchoress is Judith, as we said earlier, who is enclosed as she was and also fasts, keeps vigil, works and wears haircloth as she did. She is one of the birds that our Lord speaks of after the foxes, who do not burrow downward with their lusts, as do the foxes who are false anchoresses, but who have built their nests—that is, their rest—on high, like birds of heaven. True anchoresses are called birds because they leave the earth—that is, the love of all worldly things—and, through yearning in their hearts for heavenly things, fly upward toward heaven.²⁴ And though they fly high, in their high and holy life, they nonetheless keep their heads low with mild humility—as a flying bird keeps its head down—think all the good that they do is as nothing, and say, as our Lord taught all his own, *Cum omnia benefeceritis, dicite: Servi inutilis sumus* (Luke 17:10)—“When you have done everything well,” says our Lord, “say that you are unprofitable servants; fly high and yet always keep your heads low.” The wings that bear them upward, these are good habits that they must bear into good works, as the bird bears its wings when it wants to fly. Again, true anchoresses, whom we compare to birds (though it is God who does, not us), spread their wings and make a cross of themselves as a bird does when it flies—that is, in the thoughts of the heart and in the bitterness of the flesh they carry God’s cross.²⁵

Those birds fly well who have little flesh and many feathers, as the pelican has.²⁶ The ostrich, on account of its heavy flesh, and other birds like it, try to look as if they are flying and beat their wings; but their feet are constantly dragged to the earth. It is just the same with the fleshly anchoress, who lives in fleshly desires and follows her ease. The heaviness of her flesh and fleshly vices deprive her of her flight, and though she tries to look the part and makes much noise with wings—others’ wings, not her own—

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so that it looks as though she is flying and is a holy anchoress, whoever looks carefully will laugh her to scorn, for her feet, which are her lusts, constantly drag her down to the earth, as they do with the ostrich. These are not like that lean bird, the pelican, and do not fly on high, but are earthbound birds and nest on the earth. But God calls the good anchoresses birds of heaven, as I said before: *Vulpes foetas habent et volucres celi nidus*—“Foxes have their holes, and birds of heaven have their nests.”²⁷

True anchoresses are rightly birds of heaven, who fly high up and sit singing merrily on the green boughs—that is, think upward to the joy of heaven that never fades but is ever green. And they sit on this greenness singing merrily—that is, they dwell in such thoughts, and, like those who sing, they have mirth in their hearts. Yet at some times a bird alights on the earth, to seek its food as its flesh requires; but while it stays on the earth, it is never secure, but often turns round, and keeps looking intently about. In the same way the good anchoress, fly she ever so high, must at some times alight down on the earth of her body to eat, drink, sleep, work, speak and hear about what she needs to of earthly things. But then she must look carefully about her as a bird does, keep watch on every side, so that she does no kind of wrong—lest she be caught by some of the devil’s snares, or hurt in some way, during the time she stays so low.²⁸

“These birds have nests,” our Lord says—*Volucres celi nidus*. A nest is harsh with prickly thorns on the outside, downy and soft on the inside. So should an anchoress suffer harshness and pricking pains on her flesh without; but yet she must mortify that flesh so discreetly that she can say with the psalmist, *Fortitudinem meam ad te custodiam* (Psalm 58:10)—that is, “I shall guard my strength, Lord, for your use.”²⁹ Thus the mortification of the flesh should be according to each one’s capacity. That nest should be harsh on the outside, and soft and sweet the heart within. Those who are bitter or hard-hearted and are soft to their flesh make their nests backward: soft outside and thorny within. They are the ill-tempered and indulgent anchoresses, bitter within where they should be sweet, and indulgent outside where they should be harsh. People in such a nest can have a bad resting-place even if it seems good to them, for they shall be slow in bringing forth chicks—which are good works which fly toward heaven—from such a nest. Job calls the anchorhouse a nest, and says, as though he were an anchorite, *In nidulo meo moriar* (Job 29:18)—that is, “I shall die in my nest, be in it as though dead.” For that is proper for an anchorite, and to live in it until death: “So that I will never cease while the soul is in the body to suffer harshness outwardly, as a nest is harsh, and to be soft within.”³⁰ Learn wisdom and knowledge from the dumb beasts. The eagle keeps

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in his nest a precious gem called “agate,” because no poisonous thing may come near the stone, nor harm his chicks while it is in the nest.³¹ This precious stone is Jesus Christ, true as a stone, and full of every power over all gemstones. He is the agate that the poison of sin never came near. Keep him in your nest, that is, your heart. Think how much pain he suffered in his flesh outwardly, how sweet-hearted he was, how soft within. And in this way you shall drive out every poison from your heart and bitterness from your body. For in this thought the pain which you suffer for love of him who suffered more for you, however bitter, shall seem sweet to you. This stone, as I said, puts poisonous things to flight. Have this stone within your breast, where God’s nest is—you need not fear the poisonous serpent of hell. Your chicks, which are your good works, are all safe from his poison.³²

Whoever cannot have or hold this gemstone in the nest of her heart should at least have its likeness, that is the crucifix, in the nest of her anchorhouse; let her look on it often and kiss the places of the wounds it sweet memory of the true wounds which he patiently suffered on the true cross.³³ So far as she can, let her be Judith, that is, live harshly; let her offer acknowledge to God his many goodnesses toward her and her faults toward him, and that she repays him for them badly. Cry him eagerly for mercy and grace, and let her confess herself often. Then she is Judith, who slew Holofernes—for Judith in Hebrew is “confession” in English, which spiritually kills the devil from hell.³⁴ Judith means “confession”; this is why the anchoress begins by saying *I will confess* to every priest (see p 73) and confesses herself often, so as to be Judith and slay Holofernes that is, the devil’s strength. For the name Holofernes is as much as to say, “stinking in hell”; *Secundum nominis etymologiam, Olofernus*—“*Oleus in inferno*”; *secundum interpretationem*—“*Infirmus vitulum saginatum*” [According to the etymology of the name, Holofernes means “stinking in hell” according to the interpretation, “weakening the fattened calf.”]³⁵ In the Hebrew language, Holofernes is the devil, who enfeebles and weakens the fat and wild calf, that is, the flesh, which runs wild as soon as ever it gets free through ease and comfort: *Incrassatus est dilectus et recalcitrauit* (Deuteronomy 32:15)—“My love has grown fat,” says our Lord, “and strikes me with his heel.” As soon as the flesh has its will, it kicks like a fat and idle horse. The enemy has the strength to weaken this fattened calf and bend it toward sin—the name Holofernes says as much. An anchoress must be Judith through a harsh life and through true confession, and slay, as Judith did, this evil Holofernes. Let her tame her flesh very well as soon as she feels it becoming too willful, with fasting, with keeping vigils, with hair

cloth, with hard work, with harsh disciplines—but wisely and carefully. *Habebe, inquit, sal in uobis. Item: In omni sacrificio offeretis michi sal* (Leviticus 2:13)—that is, “In every sacrifice,” says our Lord, “always offer me salt. Fasting, keeping vigil!”—and other things that I just mentioned—“are my sacrifices.” Salt signifies wisdom,³⁶ for salt gives food taste, and wisdom gives savor to all that we do well. God considers all our deeds savorless without the salt of wisdom. On the other hand without salt meat attracts worms, sinks very foully, and soon rots away. Just so without wisdom flesh eats itself like a worm and wastes itself; it passes away like a thing that rots, and kills itself in the end. But such sacrifices stink before our Lord.

Though the flesh is our enemy, we are commanded to uphold it. We must cause it grief as it very often deserves, but not destroy it altogether, since however weak it is, it is so joined and so tightly fixed to our precious soul, God’s own image, that we could easily kill the one with the other. *Augustinus: Natura mentis humane que ad ymaginem Dei creata est, et sine peccato est, solum Deus maior est [The nature of the human mind which was created in the image of God, if it is without sin, is such that only God is greater].*³⁷ And this is one of the greatest wonders on earth, that the highest thing under God, which, as St. Augustine testifies, is the human soul, should be fixed firmly to flesh which is nothing but mud and foul earth—and that through this same glueing together the soul should love the body so much, that in order to please it in its foul nature she should leave her high heavenly nature; and in order to gratify it, angers her maker who made her like himself, who is the king and ruler of earth and of heaven. A wonder beyond wonders, a strange mockery! That so immeasurably low a thing, *ferè nichil*, “very nearly nothing,” says St. Augustine, should entice into sin something so immeasurably high as the soul, that St. Augustine calls *ferè summum*, that is, “very nearly the highest thing apart from God.” But God did not want her to leap into pride, nor wished her to climb and fall as Lucifer did—for he was tied down by no weight—and so he tied a clod of heavy earth to her, as one puts a hobble on a cow, or on any other beast that tends to pull itself loose and wander. This is what Job said: *Qui fecit uentris (id est, spiritibus) pondus* (Job 28:25, with gloss)—“Lord,” he says, “you have made a weight to weigh down souls,” that is, the heavy flesh which draws her downward.

But through the soul’s sublimity, the flesh shall become very light, lighter than the wind is and brighter than the sun, if it follows her here, and does not draw her too much into its own low nature. Dear sisters, for the love of him whose likeness she bears, do her honor, and do not let the low

flesh master her too strongly. She is here in a strange land, put in a prison, enclosed in a torture-chamber; nor is it clear how much dignity she possesses, how high her nature is, nor how she shall yet appear in her own kingdom. Here the flesh is at home, like earth which is in the earth, and so is clever and bold—as they say, “the dog is brave on its own dung-heap.” It has too much mastery over many, alas. But the anchoress, as I have said, ought to be all spiritual if she wants to fly well, like a bird which has little flesh and many feathers.

Yet not only this, but as well as taming the undisciplined flesh, and strengthening and giving honor to the precious soul—as well as this she must also, through her example and through her holy prayers, give strength to others and uphold them so that they do not fall into the dung of sin. And so David, just after he has likened the anchoress to a pelican likens her to the bird of night under the eaves: *Similis factus sum pellicano solitudinis, factus sum nicticorax in domicilio* (Psalm 101:7). The bird of night under the eaves symbolizes recluses, who dwell under the eaves of a church because they understand that they should be of so holy a life that the whole of Holy Church, that is, Christian people, can lean upon them and trust them, while they hold her up with their holiness of life and their blessed prayers.³⁸ This is why an anchoress is called an anchoress, and is anchored under a church like an anchor under the side of a ship, to hold that ship so that waves and storms do not overturn it. In the same way all Holy Church, which is called a ship, must anchor on the anchoress, in order that she may so hold it that the devil’s blasts, which are temptations, do not overturn it. Every anchoress has made this agreement, both through the title of anchoress and the fact that she dwells under the church, to shore her up if she shows signs of falling. If she breaks the agreement, see to whom she lies, and how continuously: for she never stirs; an anchorhouse and her name always affirm this agreement, even when she sleeps.³⁹

Again, the night-bird flies by night and gathers food in darkness.⁴⁰ In the same way an anchoress must fly by night toward heaven with contemplation—that is, with high thoughts and with holy prayers—and gather her soul-food by night. By night an anchoress ought to be vigilant and busy about her spiritual gathering, because immediately after it adds, *Vigilavi et factus sum sicut passer solitarius in tertio* (Psalm 101:8). *Vigilavi*—“I was awake,” says David, in the person of an anchorite, “and like a sparrow under the roof alone.” *Vigilavi*, “I was awake”—because it is proper for an anchoress to keep frequent vigils. Ecclesiasticus: *Vigilia bonestatis tabefaciunt carnes* (Ecclesiasticus 31:1): “Nothing rules wild flesh or makes it

tamer than many vigils." In Holy Writ, the vigil is praised in many places: *Vigilate et orate ne intretis in temptationem* (Mark 14:38)—"So that you will not fall into temptation," says our Lord, "keep vigil and pray; that will help you stand against it." Again he says: *Beatus quem invenerit vigilantem* (Luke 12:37)—"Blessed is the one who when our Lord comes is found awake." And he himself at one time *pernoctavit in oratione* (Luke 6:12)—"stayed awake in prayer all night." And so he taught us to keep vigil not only with his teaching but by his deeds.⁴¹

Eight things especially demand that we be always vigilant and working at some good thing: 1) the shortness of this life; 2) the difficulty of our journey; 3) our goodness, which is so meager; 4) our sins, which are so many; 5) death that we are certain of, and uncertain when; 6) the stark judgment of Doomsday and its extreme strictness, when all idle words and idle thoughts which were not atoned for here will be brought forth: *De minus in evangelio: De omni verbo otioso et cetera. Item: Et capilli de capite non peribunt, id est, cogitatio non evadet impunita. Anselmus: Quid facies in illa die quando exigetur a te omnia tempus impensim qualiter sit a te expensum, et usque ad minimum cogitationem?* [*The Lord in the gospel: "For every idle word" etc. Again: "Not a hair of your head shall be lost"—i.e., your thoughts shall not escape unpunished. Anselm: What will you do in that day when you must account for how you have spent all your precious time, and down to the last thought?*] (Matthew 12:36, Luke 21:18).⁴² See now what comes of evil desires and sinful works. Yet in the seventh thing which reminds us all to keep vigil, that is, 7) the grief of hell, behold three things: the countless number of torments; the eternity of each; the immeasurable bitterness of each. The eighth thing: 8) how great is the reward in the joy of heaven world without end.⁴³

Whoever keeps vigil here for a little while, whoever has these eight things often in her heart, will shake from her the sleep of evil sloth. In the still night when one can see nothing, nor hear anything that hinders prayer, the heart is often most clear: for there is no witness of anything one does except God's angel, who at such times goes about busily to urge us to do good; for nothing is wasted then, as it often is by day.⁴⁴

Hear now, dear sisters, how evil it is to disclose, and how good a thing it is to conceal good deeds, and fly by night like the night-bird, and gather your soul-food in the darkness, that is, privately and secretly. *Oratio Hester placenti regi Assuero* (Esther 5:4)—that is, "The prayer of queen Esther was agreeable and pleasing to King Ahasuerus." "Esther" in Hebrew means "hidden" in English, and shows that prayer and other good deeds which are done hiddenly are pleasing to Assuerus—that is, the king of heaven (for

"Ahasuerus" in Hebrew means "blessed" in English, that is, our Lord, who is blessed above all).⁴⁵

To an anchoress who used to do good in secret and afterwards in some way exposes it and shows it, David says: *Ut quid advertis manum tuam et dexteram tuam de medio sinu tuo in finem?* (Psalm 73:11)—that is, "Why do you draw your hand, and your right hand at that, from the middle of your bosom?" *In finem*—"In the end." "The right hand is good works, the bosom is secrecy, and it is as if he said: "The right hand that you kept, you anchoress, in your bosom, this is your good works that you have done privately, as something is kept secret in one's bosom. Why do you draw it out *in finem*, in the end, that is, so that your reward ends so soon? Your reward, which would be endless if your good deeds were hidden; why do you expose it, and reach for so short a payment—a reward that has gone in a little while?" *Amen dico vobis, receperunt mercedem suam* (Matthew 6:2). "You have exposed your goodness," says our Lord, "truly, you have received your reward." St. Gregory is amazed, and says that people must be mad who bargain so badly: *Magna vecordia est grandia agere et laudibus inhiare, unde celum mereri potest, minimum transitorii favoris querit*—"It is a great madness," he says, "to do well and to want for it a mere word: to do something through which one could buy the kingdom of heaven, and sell it for a wind-puff of wordy praise, of human praise."⁴⁶ Therefore, my dear sisters, keep your right hand within your bosom, lest an endless reward have a short end. We read in Holy Writ that the hand of Moses, God's prophet, as soon as he had taken it out of his bosom, appeared to have the hospital evil, and seemed leprous (Exodus 4:6)—through which it is signified that good deeds drawn forth are not only lost through being exposed, but seem even ugly in God's eye, as the hospital evil is ugly in people's sight. Hear a wonderfully good thing that the holy Job said: *Reposita est spes mea in sinu meo* (Job 19:27)—"In my bosom," he says, "is all my hope held"; as though he said, "If whatever good I do was drawn out of my bosom and exposed, all my hope would be gone. But because I cover and conceal it as if in my bosom, I may hope for reward." Therefore if anyone does anything good, do not draw it out nor boast in any way of it, for with a little puff, with a word's wind, it may all be blown away.⁴⁷

Our Lord, in the book of Joel, complains very hard about those who lose and destroy all their goodness through desire of praise, and says these words: *Decoravit fenum meum, nudans spoliavit eam, et proicit; albi facti sunt rami eius* (Joel 1:7)—"Alas," says our Lord, "those who reveal their goodness have peeled my figure, torn all the bark off, despoiled her stark naked, and thrown her away; and the green boughs are dried out and have

become dry white sticks.⁵⁴⁸ This saying is difficult, but now pay attention to how I will clarify it. The figtree is a kind of tree that bears sweet fruit which people call “figs.”⁵⁴⁹ The figtree is peeled and the bark torn off when good works are exposed. Then, when its bark is off, the life is out, then the tree dies, and it never bears fruit nor grows green lovely leaves after that; but the boughs dry out and become white sticks, better for nothing than feeding the fire. The bough, when it dies, becomes white outside and dries up inside, and loses its bark. In the same way, a good work which is going to die loses its bark, that is, exposes itself. The bark which covers it is the tree’s defense, and keeps it in strength and in life. Just so concealment is the life of a good work, and keeps it in strength. But when the bark is off, it becomes white on the outside in the same way as the bough does, through worldly praise, and dries up inside, and loses the sweetness of God’s grace which made it green and satisfying for God to behold—for green comforts the eyes more than any other color. When it is dried out like this, it is good for nothing so much as the fire of hell, for that first act of peeling which caused all this harm comes from nothing but pride.

And is this not a great pity?—that the figtree which should with her sweet fruit, that is, good works, feed God the Lord of heaven spiritually, must dry out without bark because it is exposed, and become food for the fire of hell without end? And is she not too foolish who will with the price of heaven buy herself hell? Our Lord himself in the gospel compares the heavenly kingdom to a hoard of gold which “Whoever finds it,” as he says, “hides it”: *Quem qui invenit abscondit* (Matthew 12:24). The hoard of gold is good works, which are to be compared to heaven because one can buy heaven with them; and this hoard of gold, unless it is the better hidden and covered up, is soon lost. For as St. Gregory says, *Depredari desiderat qui thesaurum publice portat in via*—“Whoever bears a treasure openly along a road that is utterly full of thieves and of robbers, must want to lose it and be robbed.”⁵⁵⁰ This world is nothing but a road to heaven or to hell, and is utterly beset with hellish bandits, who steal all the hoards of gold they can find that a man or a woman makes public on this road. For that is as sensible as the person who said, and shouted it out, while going along, “I’m carrying a hoard of gold! I’m carrying a hoard of gold! Look at it here: red gold, plenty of white silver, and precious stones!” A soapmaker who carries nothing except soap and needles cries his wares aloud; a rich merchant goes forth very quietly.⁵¹ Ask what happened to the good king Ezechias because he showed his cellars of spices, his great possessions, his precious treasure (Isaiah 39). In the holy gospel it is not written for nothing of the three kings who came to offer Jesus Christ the three precious gifts: *Procedentes*

adoraverunt eum et apertis thesauris suis obulerunt, et cetera [Falling down they adored him, and, opening their treasures, they offered him gifts, etc.] (Matthew 2:11). They kept the things they wanted to offer him always hidden until they came before him; then for the first time they undid the presents they were carrying.

Therefore, my dear sisters, be eagerly busy by night, like the bird of night to which an anchoress is to be compared. “Night” is what I call secrecy; you can have this kind of night at any time of the day, so that all the good that you ever do is done as if by night and in darkness, out of human eyesight, out of human earshot. So fly about in the night, seeking your soul’s heavenly food. Thus do not only be a *pellicanus solitarius* but be also a *mittiorax in domicilio*.⁵²

Vigilavi et factus sum sicut passer solitarius in tecto (Psalm 101:8). Yet again, an anchoress is here compared to a sparrow that is alone under the eaves like an anchoress. The sparrow is a chattering bird; she chatters and chirps the whole time. But because many anchoresses have this same vice, David compares her not to a sparrow who has a mate but to a sparrow alone: *Sicut passer solitarius*—“I am,” he says as an anchoress, “like a sparrow that is alone.” For so should an anchoress always chirp and chatter her prayers on her own in the lonely place she is in.⁵³ And understand this lovingly, my dear sisters: that I am writing about the solitary life to encourage anchoresses, and especially you.⁵⁴

It is made clear how good it is to be alone in both the old law and the new law; for in both it is found that God did not show his dearest friends his hidden counsels and heavenly secrets in a crowd of people, but did so where they were alone by themselves. And in just the same way one always finds that they too, whenever they wished to think clearly of God and make pure prayers, and be lifted spiritually in heart toward heaven, fled human disturbance and went by themselves, for there God illuminated them and showed them himself and answered their prayers. Because I said that this is found both in the Old Testament and also in the New, I shall give examples from both.⁵⁵

Egressus est Isaac in agrum ad meditantium, quod ei fuisse creatur consuetudinarium (Genesis 24:63)—“Isaac the patriarch, in order to think deeply, sought a solitary place and went by himself,” as Genesis tells.⁵⁶ And so he met with the blessed Rebecca, that is, with God’s grace. *Rebecca enim interpretatur “multum dedit, et quiquid habet meriti preventrix gratia donat”* [For Rebecca is to be interpreted “She has given much, and preventrix grace has given her whatever merit she has”].⁵⁷ In the same way the blessed

Jacob, when our Lord showed him his precious countenance and gave him his blessing and gave him a better name, was fleeing from people and was all by himself—never had he received any such a gift among people (Genesis 32:22–32). By the example of Moses and Elijah, God's precious friends, it is clear and obvious how troublesome and how fearful life always is in a crowd, and how God shows his secrets to those who are by themselves in secret. These stories, my dear sisters, must be told you, for they were too long to write here; and then you shall understand all this clearly.⁵⁸

Set et Jeremias solus sedet—the blessed Jeremiah says that he “sits alone” and says the reason why: *Quia comminatione tua replesti me* (Jeremiah 15:17)—our Lord “had filled him with his threat.” God’s threat is woe and misery in body and soul world without end. Whoever was filled with this threat as he was would have no empty place in his heart open for fleshly laughter. And so he prayed “for a well of tears”—*Quis dabit michi fontem lacrimarum?*—and that the well would never again dry up, so that he might weep for his slain people—that is almost the whole world, which is spiritually slain with deadly sins: *Ut hageant interfectos populi mei* (Jeremiah 9:1). And in order to weep see how the holy prophet prays “for a solitary place”: *Quis michi dabit diversorium viatorum in solitudine, ut et cetera* (Jeremiah 9:2)—in order to show clearly that whoever wishes to weep for her own and others’ sins as an anchoress ought to do, and whoever wants to find mercy and grace from the strict judge, is most seriously hindered by being known, that is dwelling, among people—and is most usefully assisted by a solitary place, for either a man or a woman to be alone in.⁵⁹

Yet Jeremiah says more about solitary places: *Sedebit solitarius et tacebit* (Lamentations 3:28)—“One must sit alone,” he says, “and be still.” He speaks of this stillness a little earlier: *Bonum est pretolari cum silentio salutare Dei. Beatus qui portaverit iugum domini an adulescentia sua* (Lamentations 3:26–27)—“It is good to watch for God’s grace in silence and to bear God’s yoke right from one’s youth.” And then after that comes *Sedebit solitarius et tacebit quia levabit se supra se* (Lamentations 3:28): whoever will do so she must “sit alone and keep silent and so lift herself above herself” that is, rise toward heaven through sublimity of life above her nature. As well as this, there follows at once how much more good can come of this sitting alone, and of this blessed silence, that Jeremiah speaks of: *Dabit percussenti se mullam et saturabitur obprobriis* (Lamentations 3:30)—He says, “She who lives in this way will lift her cheek to the smiter, and be completely filled with shameful words.” Here in this saying are two blessed things to take very earnest note of, which are especially appropriate for anchoresses: patience in the first part; in the second the humility of a

mild and meek heart. For someone is patient who patiently endures the wrong done to them; someone is humble who can suffer whatever is spoken against them.

The people whom I have mentioned here were of the Old Testament. Now we come to the New.

St. John the Baptist, of whom our Lord said, *Inter natos mulierum non surrexit maior Johanne baptista* (Matthew 11:11)—that “Among the sons of women there never arose a greater”—teaches us openly by his own deed that a solitary place is both more secure and more profitable. For though the angel Gabriel had foretold his birth, and though he was filled with the Holy Spirit at once, within his mother’s womb, though he was born through a miracle from a barren woman and in his birth unloosed his father’s tongue into prophecy: for all this, he still did not dare to live among people, so fear-inspiring he found life there, even taking only speech into account. So what did he do? “Young in years he fled away into the wilderness, lest with speech he should sully his pure life.” For this is what it says in his hymn:

*Antra deserti teneris sub annis
civium turmas fugiens petisti,
ne levi sahem maculare vitam
famine posses*

[*Young in years you went into desert caves,
fleeing the crowds of people,
so that you would not stain your life
even with light speech*].⁶⁰

It is as if he had heard Isaiah who mourned and said: *Ve michi quia homo pollutis labiis ego sum*—“Alas woe is me,” says the holy prophet, “for I am a man with sullied lips”; and he says the reason why—*Quia in medio populi pollutata labia habentis ego habito* (Isaiah 6:5)—and it is, he says, “Because I dwell among people who sully their lips with every kind of speech.” See how God’s prophet says he was sullied by living among people. So it truly is. There is no metal so bright—gold, silver, iron or steel—that does not catch rust from another that has rusted, when they lie together for a long time. Thus St. John fled the fellowship of foul people so that he would not be befouled; and also, in order to show us that one cannot flee the evil unless one flees the good, he fled his holy family, chosen by our Lord, and went into a solitary place and lived in the wilderness. And what profit did

he find there? His profit was so great that he baptized God. O how sublime a thing, that he held under his hands in baptism the Lord of heaven, who holds up the whole world with his own power! There all the Holy Trinity (the "threeness" in English)⁶¹ showed itself to him, the Father through his voice, the Holy Spirit in the likeness of a dove, the Son under his hands (Matthew 3:13-17). In his solitary life he found three preeminent things: the privilege of a preacher, the merit of martyrdom, the reward of a virgin. These three kinds of people have in heaven crown after crown, with an overflowing reward. And the blessed John in his solitary place earned all these three estates just for himself.⁶²

Our dear Lady, did she not live a solitary life?⁶³ Did not the angel find her all alone in a solitary place? She was not outside, but was closely shut in. For so we find: *Ingressus angelus ad eam, dixit: Ave Maria gratia plena, dominus tecum; benedicta tu in mulieribus* (Luke 1:28)—that is, "The angel went in to her when she was inside, in a solitary place, on her own." An angel has very seldom appeared to someone in a crowd. And again, seeing that nowhere in Holy Writ is it written that she spoke, except four times, as I said above (pp. 76-77), this is a clear proof that she was much alone, who kept such silence.

Why do I seek others?—God alone is example enough to all, who himself went into a solitary place and fasted while he was alone in the wilderness, in order to show by it that no one can do penance properly among a crowd of people. "There in a solitary place he hungered" (Matthew 4:2) it says, to comfort anchoresses who are in distress. There he allowed the enemy to tempt him in many ways, but he overcame him—again in order to show that the enemy tempts greatly those who lead a solitary life, because of the envy he has for them, but he is overcome there. For our Lord himself stands by them in the fight there and emboldens them, says how they must stand strongly against him, and gives them of his strength. As it says in Holy Writ, when he, whom no noise or throng of people could hinder in his prayers nor trouble his goodness, wanted to pray, yet still he fled not only other people but also his holy, precious apostles, and went alone up into the hills—as an example to us that we should turn by ourselves and climb with him into the hills, that is, think sublimely and leave low under us all earthly thoughts while we are in prayer.⁶⁴ Paul and Anthony, Hilarion and Benedict, Syncletica and Sarah and many others like them, both men and women, certainly experienced and truly understood the benefit of a solitary life—as those who did with God all that they wished.⁶⁵ And St. Jerome, more recently, says of himself, *Quotiens inter homines fui, minor homo recessi*—"As often as I have ever

been among people," he says, "I have left them less human than I was before."⁶⁶ Therefore the wise Ecclesiasticus says, *Ne oblecteris in turbis, asidua est enim commisio* (Ecclesiasticus 18:32)—that is, "Never think yourself good among a crowd of people, for sin is always there." Did the voice from heaven not say to Arsenius, *Arseni, fuge homines et sababerris*—"Arsenius, flee from mankind and you will be saved." And it came again and said, *Arseni, fuge, tace, quiesce*—that is, "Arsenius, flee, be still, and live in one place away from mankind."⁶⁷

Now, my dear sisters, you have heard examples from the old law and also from the new why you ought to love the solitary life very much. After these examples now hear some reasons why one ought to flee the world, eight at least. I will say them briefly, so pay the closer attention.

The first is security. If a mad lion was running through the street, would not a sensible woman shut herself in at once? And St. Peter says that "Hell's lion always ranges and prowls around, to look for an opening to swallow the soul," and he bids us "Be watchful and busy in holy prayers" lest he catch us: *Sobrii estote et vigilate in orationibus, quia adversarius vester diabolus tanquam leo rugiens circuit querens quem devoret* (1 Peter 5:8). These words I have just said are St. Peter's; so anchoresses are wise who have shut themselves in well against hell's lion in order to be the more secure.⁶⁸

The second reason is: if someone is carrying a precious liquor, a valuable liquid like balm, in a fragile vessel, an ointment in a brittle glass, would she not avoid a crowd, unless she were a fool? *Habemus thesaurum istum in vas fictilibus, dicit apostolus* [We have this treasure in a fragile vessel, says the apostle] (2 Corinthians 4:7). This brittle vessel, which is woman's flesh—though the balm, the ointment, is maidenhood held within it (or chaste purity once maidenhood is lost)—this brittle vessel is nonetheless as brittle as any glass; for if it is once broken, it is never mended to the wholeness it had, any more than glass. But it breaks more easily than brittle glass does. For glass does not break unless something hits it, but with respect to the loss of maidenhood the flesh can lose its wholeness with a sinking desire, if it go far enough and last long enough.⁶⁹ Yet this kind of breakage can be mended again, as entirely whole as it ever was, through the medicine of confession and true repentance. Now, the proof of this: St. John the Evangelist—Did he not bring a bride home? Had he not intended to lose his maidenhood there if God had not prevented him? But afterwards he was never the less completely a maiden, and "As a maiden, he was given a maiden to protect": *Virginem virgini commendavi*.⁷⁰ Now, as I say, this precious ointment in a brittle vessel is maidenhood and purity in your

brittle flesh, more brittle than any glass; so that if you were in the world's throng, you could lose everything with a little jostling—like the wretches in the world who jostle together and break their vessels, and spill their purity. So our Lord calls in this way: *In mundo pressuram, in me autem pacem habebitis* (John 16:33)—“Leave the world and come to me. For there you shall be in the throng; but rest and peace is in me.”⁷¹

The third reason for flight from the world is: the gaining of heaven. Heaven is very high; whoever wishes to gain it, and to reach up there, is not doing much if she throws the whole world under her feet. Thus all the saints made of the whole world a stool for their feet, to reach up to heaven. *Apocalypsis: Vidi mulierem amittam sole et lune sub pedibus eius* (Revelation 12:1). These are the words of St. John the Evangelist in the Apocalypse: “I saw a woman clothed with the sun, and under her feet the moon.” The moon wanes and waxes, and is never steadfast, and so stands for worldly things, which are ever-changing like the moon. The woman who wishes to reach up to heaven and there be clothed with the true sun must keep this moon under her feet, that is, tread down and despise worldly things.

The fourth reason is: as a proof of nobility and largesse. Nobles and gentlefolk do not carry packs, nor do they go about trussed with bundles or purses. It is for beggarwomen to bear bags on their backs; townswomen to bear purses—not God's spouse, who is a lady of heaven. Bundles and purses, bags and packs, are worldly things: all earthly gains and worldly revenues.

The fifth reason is: noblemen and women give generous alms. But who can be more generous than he or she who says, with St. Peter, *Eccc nos relinquimus omnia et secuti sumus te* (Matthew 19:37)—“Lord, to follow you we have left everything.” Is this not generous almsgiving? Is this not leaving much? My dear sisters, kings and emperors have their livelihood from the generous alms that you have left. “Lord, to follow you,” says St. Peter, “We have left everything.” It is as though he said, “We wish to follow you in the great nobility of your generosity. You left to others all riches, and gave a generous legacy and alms—everything there is. We want to follow you, we want to do the same: to leave all as you did, to follow you on earth in that and in every other way, in order also to follow you into the joy of heaven—and even there still to follow you wherever you go, as none can do except for maidens: *Hii secuntur agrum quocumque ierit—utroque scilicet pede; id est, integritate cordis et corporis* [These follow the lamb wherever he goes—that is with both feet; that is, in wholeness of heart and body] (Revelation 14:4, with gloss).⁷²

The sixth reason why you have fled the world, companionship, many

relations, is: in order to be intimate with our Lord. For this is what he says through Isaiah: *Ducam te in solitudinem, et ibi loquar ad cor tuum*—“I shall lead you,” he says to his beloved, “into a solitary place, and there I shall speak lovingly to your heart; for I dislike a crowd”⁷³: *Ego dominus et civitatem non ingredior* (Isaiah 11:9).

The seventh reason for which you have fled the world and hide yourselves from it here is: in order to be the brighter, and to see God's bright countenance more brightly in heaven. Yet there, besides that, you shall be as swift as the sun's gleam, because you are buried with Jesus Christ as if in a sepulcher, enclosed as he was on the precious cross, as is said above.⁷⁴

The eighth reason is: to have living prayers—and pay attention why. The humble queen Esther stands for the anchoress, for her name means “hidden” in the English language. As was written in her book, she was more pleasing to king Ahasuerus than anything; and through her prayer she saved from death all her people, who were condemned to death (Esther 7:3ff.). This name “Ahasuerus” is interpreted “blessed” as I said before, and stands for God blessed over all. He grants to Esther the queen—that is, the true anchoress who is a proper Esther, that is, “properly hidden”—he hears and grants her all her prayers, and through them saves many people.⁷⁵ Many would have been lost who are saved through the anchoress' prayers, as they were through Esther's—provided that she is Esther, and behaves as Mordecai's daughter did.

Mordecai is interpreted *Anare conterens impudentem*, that is “Roughly trampling down the shameless.”⁷⁶ Shameless is the man who says or does anything immodest in front of an anchoress. But if any do so and she roughly break in on his immodest speech or his foolish deed, treading down at once on his unworthy speech, then she is Esther, Mordecai's daughter, roughly trampling down the shameless. She can never trample him down more roughly or in a better way than is taught above (pp. 83–84), with *Narraverunt michi* [They have told me], or with these words, *Declinate a me maligni et scrutator mandata Dei mei* [Go away from me, malignant ones, and I shall study the laws of my God] (Psalm 118:115, 85)—and by going in right away toward her altar, and staying at home, like Esther the hidden.

Shimei in the book of Kings deserved death, but he cried for mercy and Solomon forgave him, though with this provision: that he kept himself in Jerusalem where he lived, and hid himself in his house; if he went out anywhere (such was the agreement), he would again be guilty and condemned to death. Nonetheless he broke the agreement through his misfortune: his servants fled away from him and escaped; he followed them and

went out after them. What more to say? He was soon accused to king Solomon, and because the agreement was broken was condemned to death (1 Kings 2:36–46).

Understand this fully, my dear sisters. Shimei stands for the anchoress who is outward-looking, not Esther the hidden; for Shimei means *audians*, that is “hearing” in our tongue.⁷⁶ She is the recluse who has asses’ ears—long to hear far and to listen for gossip. The place Shimei should have hidden himself if he wanted to live was Jerusalem. This word “Jerusalem” means “sight of peace” and stands for the anchorhouse, for in there she need never see anything except peace.⁷⁷ Let her never be Shimei, who is the recluse so deeply guilty toward the true Solomon, who is our Lord; let her stay at home in Jerusalem, that she may know nothing of the world’s clamor. Solomon gladly grants her his mercy. But if she meddles with outward things more than is needful, and her heart is turned outward, although a clot of earth that is her body is within the four walls, she has gone out of Jerusalem with Shimei, as he did after his servants. These servants are the wicked five senses, which should be at home and serve their lady. They serve their lady the anchoress well when she uses them well for her soul’s needs—when the eye is on a book or some other good thing, the ear turned to God’s word, the mouth in holy prayers. If she guards them badly, carelessly lets them flee from her service, and follows them outward with her heart—as it almost always happens, that when the senses go out the heart goes out after them—she breaks Solomon’s agreement with the unfortunate Shimei, and is condemned to death.⁷⁸

Therefore my beloved sisters, do not be Shimei, but be Esther the hidden, and you shall be raised into the joy of heaven. For the name of Esther does not only mean *abscondita*—that is, not only “hidden”—but also means *Elevata in populis*—that is, “raised to high estate from among the people.” And thus was Esther, as her name declares, “raised high” to a queen from a poor maiden. In this word Esther “hiding” and “highness” are joined together (and not only highness, but highness over the people), to show certainly that those who hide themselves properly in their anchorhouse will deservedly be lifted up in heaven above all kinds of other people. Both the name of Esther and her upraising prove what I say.⁷⁹

Besides this, consider: you are in Jerusalem, you have fled to the church’s sanctuary—for there is not one of you who has not sometime been God’s thief. People that you know very well are waiting for you outside, as they do thieves who have escaped into a church. Keep yourself fast within: not only your body, for that is of least significance, but your five senses, and above all the heart, in which is the whole life of the soul. For if she is

caught outside, there is nothing for it but to lead her forth to the gallows, that is the gibbet of hell. Be afraid of every man, as the thief is, lest he draw you outward—that is, betray you with sin, and lie in wait to get his claws into you. Entreat God eagerly, like a thief escaped into a church, that he may defend and guard you against all who wait for you. And always charter your prayers as the sparrow alone does. For this word “alone” is spoken of solitary life, of the solitary place where one can be Esther, hidden away from the world, and gather every spiritual profit better than in a crowd. Therefore David compares the anchoress to “the pelican who leads a solitary life,” and to “the sparrow alone.”

The sparrow has yet another characteristic suitable for an anchoress, though many hate it, and that is the falling sickness—for an anchoress of sublime and holy life has great need of the falling sickness.⁸⁰ I do not mean the sickness so-called [i.e., epilepsy] but I call the falling sickness bodily illness or temptations of the flesh, through which she thinks that she is falling downward from her holy sublimity. Without this she would go wild or else think too much of herself and so come to nothing; the flesh would grow wild and become too badly disciplined toward her lady if it were never beaten, and make the soul sick if sickness did not tame it with illness or sin. If neither the body nor the spirit were sick, as seldom happens, pride would awaken, which is the most dreadful sickness of all. If God tries anchoresses with any outward illness, or the enemy within with spiritual vices such as pride, anger and envy, or with the flesh’s lusts, she has the falling sickness, which they say is the sparrow’s sickness. God desires it so that she may always be humble, and by holding herself low fall to the earth lest she fall into pride.⁸¹

Now we go on, beloved sisters, to the fourth part, which I said would be about many temptations, for there are many of both, outer ones and inner ones. I promise to teach you remedies and medicines against them; and how whoever has them can gather comfort and help against them all from this part. May he grant me, through your prayers, that through the teaching of the Holy Spirit I may keep my promise.

Part IV: Temptations

Let no one who lives the life of sublimity imagine that she will not be tempted.¹ The good, who have climbed up high, are more tempted than the weak; and this is natural, for the higher the hill, the stronger the wind on it.² Since the hill of sublimity and holy life is higher, the enemy's blasts, the winds of temptations, are greater and stronger on it. If there is any anchoress who feels no temptations, she should fear greatly that at this very point she is being all too much and all too greatly tempted. For St. Gregory says this: *Tunc maxime impugnavis cum te impugnavi non sentis* [You are most greatly under attack when you do not feel yourself being attacked].³

Someone who is sick can suffer from two very alarming conditions. The first of them is when they are not aware of their own sickness, and for that reason seek no doctor or medicine, do not ask anyone's advice, and suddenly die when least expected. This is an anchoress who does not know what temptation is. To such as her the angel in the Apocalypse speaks: *Dicis quia dives sum et nullius egei; et necis quia miser es et nudus et pauper et cecus* (Revelation 3:17)—“You say you have no need of medicine, but you are blind of heart and do not see how you are poor and naked of holiness, and spiritually wretched.” The second worrying condition that a sick person has is quite different from this, which is when they feel so much pain that they cannot endure anyone handling the sore place, nor that anyone heal them. This is any anchoress who feels her temptations so painfully and is so sorely frightened that no spiritual comfort can gladden her, nor make her understand that she can and should be all the more confident of salvation because of them. Does it not tell in the gospel that “the Holy Spirit led our Lord himself into a solitary place to lead a solitary life, in order to be tempted by the enemy of hell?” *Ductus est Iesus in desertum a spiritu ut temptaretur a diabolo* (Matthew 4:1). But the temptation of him who could not sin was only from without.⁴

Understand then first of all, dear sisters, that there are two kinds of temptations, two kinds of testing,⁵ outer and inner; and both are of many different sorts. Temptation without is that from which comes outer or inner pleasure or pain: outer pain such as sickness, discomfort, humiliation, misfortune, and every bodily suffering that afflicts the flesh; inner, such as grief of heart, outrage, and also anger at one's pain; outer pleasure, such as bodily health, food, drink, quantities of clothing, every ease of the flesh

derived from such things; inner pleasure such as false happiness, either from people's praise or because one is loved more than another, more flattered, given more good things or honor. This inner portion of the temptation known as “outer” is more treacherous than the other part. Each belongs to a single form of temptation, both of the two parts of which [i.e., pleasure and pain] can be subdivided into inner and outer. But as a whole this temptation is called “outer,” because it is always in an outer thing or from an outer thing; and the outer thing constitutes the temptation.⁶ This temptation comes at times from God, at times from people: from God, as in a friend's death, sickness either in them or oneself, poverty, misfortune, and other such things—also as in health and ease; from people, as in various injuries, either by word or by deed (yours or someone else's)—also as in praise or good deeds. These come from God, too, though not as the others do, without any intermediary; but in everything he tests how much someone fears him and loves him.

Temptations within are various vices, or the desire for them, or treacherous thoughts which nonetheless seem good. These inner temptations come from the devil, the world, and sometimes from our flesh.⁷ Against the outer temptations patience, that is long-suffering, is needed; against the inner is needed wisdom and spiritual strength. We shall now speak of the outer, and teach those who have it how they can with God's grace find remedy, that is strength against it, with which to comfort themselves.⁸

Beatus vir qui suffert temptationem, quoniam probatus fuerit accipiet coronam vite quam repromisit Deus diligentibus se (James 1:12)—“Blessed and fortunate is the one who has patience in temptation; for when she is proved,” it says, “she shall be crowned with the crown of life which God has promised his beloved chosen.” “When she is proved,” it says. This is well-said, for God proves his beloved chosen ones, just as the goldsmith tests gold in the fire and destroys the false gold in it, so that the good comes out brighter (Ecclesiasticus 3:6, Job 23:10). Sickness is a hot flame to suffer, but nothing cleanses gold so well as it cleanses the soul. Sickness that God sends (not that some catch through their own foolishness) does these six things: 1) washes the sins that have already been committed, 2) protects one against those that were threatening, 3) tries patience, 4) keeps one humble, 5) increases one's reward, 6) makes the patient person equal to a martyr. In this way sickness is the soul's health, a salve for her wounds and a shield against receiving more—when God sees that she would if sickness did not intervene. Sickness makes a person to understand what

they are, to know themselves; like a good teacher it bears us, the better to teach us how mighty God is, how frail is the world's joy. Sickness is your goldsmith who, in the joy of heaven, gilds your crown. The greater the sickness is the busier is the goldsmith, and the longer it lasts the more he burnishes it, to be equal to a martyr's through a short-lived pain. What could be a greater grace to those who have earned the pains of hell world without end? Would not someone be thought the stupidest of people who would turn down a buffet to receive a spearwound? The prick of a needle for beheading? A beating for being hanged on hell's gallows through all eternity? God knows it, dear sisters, all the woe of this world in comparison to the least pain of hell, all is mere ball-play, all is not so much as a little dewdrop in comparison with the broad sea and all the world's waters. Whoever then may escape those same horrible woes, those hideous pains, through a sickness that passes, through any evil that we find here, can be called fortunate.

On the other hand, learn many kinds of comfort against the outer temptation that comes from human evil—for this kind that I have described is sent by God. Whoever speaks or acts against you, take note and consider that they are your file, of the sort metal-workers have, and file all your rust away and the roughness of your sin. For they destroy themselves, alas, as a file does; but they make your soul smooth and bright.⁹

Think about whoever harms you, or does you any woe, humiliation, outrage, injury, in a second way: they are God's stick. For this is what he says through St. John's mouth in the Apocalypse: *Ego quos amo arguo et castigo* (Revelation 3:19)—he beats no one except the one he loves and regards as his daughter, any more than you would beat an unknown child, even though it were very bad. But he cares nothing for the good of the one who is God's stick. For just as a father, when he has beaten his child enough and has taught it a good lesson, throws the stick into the fire since it is nothing any more, so the Father of heaven, when he has beaten his dear child for her own good with an evil man or an evil woman, throws the stick, that is, the evil person, into the fire of hell.¹⁰ For this reason he says elsewhere, *Michi vindictam, ego retribuo* (Deuteronomy 32:35)—that is, "Mine is the vengeance; I will repay," as though he says, "Do not avenge yourselves, and do not complain or curse when someone is guilty toward you, but consider at once that they are your father's stick, and that he will repay them as he does a stick." And is not a child who scratches and bites against the stick ill-disciplined? A well-bred child, when it is beaten, kisses the stick if the father commands it.¹¹ And you should do the same, my dear sisters. For so our Father commands: that you should kiss, not with the

mouth but with heartfelt love, those with whom he beats you. *Diligite inimicos vestros; benefacite his qui oderunt vos, et orate pro persequentibus et calumpniantibus vos* (Luke 6:27–28). This is God's commandment, which is much more pleasing to him than that you eat coarse bread or wear harsh clothing. "Love your enemies," he says, "and do good if you can to those who curse you. If you cannot do so otherwise, pray eagerly for those who do or say any harm against you." And the apostle reaches, "Never repay evil with evil, but always do good in return for evil, as did our Lord and all his holy saints" (1 Thessalonians 5:15). If you keep God's command in this way then you are his good child, and kiss the stick he has thrashed you with. Now, one of you may at some time say, "I will love his or her soul well but not in any way his body."¹² But this is not the thing to say. The soul and the body make but a single person, and to both of them comes a single judgment. Will you divide in two what God has joined as one? He forbids it, and says, *Quod Deus coniunxit homo non separet* (Matthew 19:6)—"Let no one be so mad as to divide the thing that God has fastened together."

Think of it again in this way: if a child stumbles over something, or hurts itself, we bear what has hurt it and the child is well-satisfied, forgets its hurt and stops crying. Therefore comfort yourselves: *Letabitur iustus cum viderit vindictam* (Psalm 57:11). On Doomsday God shall behave as though he said, "Daughter, did this person hurt you? Did they make you stumble in anger or in heart-sorrow, in shame or in any trouble? See, daughter, see how they must pay for it," he says; and there you will see them clouted with the devil's mallets so that their life will be a misery to them. You will be well-satisfied by this—for your will and God's will shall be so joined that you will desire all he ever desires, and he all that you do.

Above all other thoughts, in all your sufferings always think deeply on God's sufferings:¹³ that the ruler of the world was willing to suffer such humiliations for his servants—insults, blows, spitting, blindfolding, crowning with thorns set on his head in such a way that the bloody streams trickled down and flowed down to the earth; his sweet body bound naked to the hard pillar and beaten so much that the precious blood ran down on all sides; the poisonous drink they gave him when he thirsted on the cross, their heads wagging at him when they shouted loudly in mockery, "Look here at the one who healed others! Look how he heals and helps himself now!" (Matthew 27:39, 42). Turn back to where I spoke of how he was tormented in all his five senses, and compare all your woe, sickness and whatever else—injury by word or by deed, and everything anyone can suffer—to what he suffered, and you will easily see how little it amounts to, especially if you think that he was entirely innocent and that he did not

endure all this for himself, since he never sinned. If you suffer sorrow, you have deserved worse; and all that you suffer, all, is for yourself.¹⁴

So now, go along the difficult and laborious road toward the great feast of heaven where your glad friend awaits your coming, more gladly than the worldly fools go along the green road toward the gallows and the death of hell. It is better to go sick to heaven than healthy to hell, to mirth in misery than to sorrow in comfort (Matthew 5:30). Solomon: *Via imperium complanata est lapidibus, id est, davis afflictionibus* [*The way of the wicked is set about with stones—that is, with severe afflictions*] (Ecclesiasticus 21:11, with gloss). Certainly, nonetheless, wretched worldly people buy hell with more pain than you do heaven. Know this one thing as true: any wrongful word you suffer, a day's longing, the sickness of an hour—if someone traded with you for one of these on Doomsday, that is, for the reward that will come from them, you would not sell it for a whole world of gold. For this will be your song before our Lord: *Letati sumus pro diebus quibus nos humiliasti, annis quibus vidimus mala* (Psalm 89:15)—that is, “We are happy for the days that you brought us low with injuries caused by others, and we are happy now, Lord, for those same years in which we were sick and saw grief and sorrow.”

Every worldly ill is God's messenger. An important person's messenger must be received with dignity and an appearance of gladness, especially if he is intimate with his lord. And who was more intimate with the king of heaven while he lived here than this messenger was, who is the world's woe, who never left him until his life's end? What does this messenger tell you? He comforts you in this way: “Because God loved me, he sends me to his dear friend. My coming and my staying, though it seem bitter, brings health. Would not something whose very shadow you could not feel without pain be terrible? What would you say about that awesome thing from which it came? Know truly that all the pain of this world is merely a shadow of the pain of hell. I am the shadow,” says the messenger, who is the world's woe: “You must inevitably receive either me or that terrible pain of which I am the shadow. Whoever receives me gladly, and makes me welcome, my Lord sends her word that she is quit of the thing of which I am the shadow.” So speaks God's messenger.¹⁵ Therefore St. James says, *Omne gaudium existimate fratres cum in temptationes varias incidieritis* (1:2)—“Reckon it all joy, to fall into various of these temptations which are called ‘outer’; and St. Paul, *Omnis disciplina in presenti videtur esse non gaudii, set meritis; postmodum vero fructum, et cetera* (Hebrews 12:11)—“All the temptations we are beaten with now we think grief not happiness; but they turn afterwards to good, and to eternal joy.”

Inner temptation is of two kinds, just as outer is.¹⁶ For outer temptation is in adversity and in prosperity, that is, in the pleasure associated with sin (I say this because there is some pleasure, and some pain, that earns a great reward, such as pleasure in God's love and pain at sin).¹⁷ Now, as I say, inner temptation is of two kinds, bodily and spiritual: bodily, as in lechery, gluttony and sloth; spiritual, as in pride, envy and anger, and also covetousness. Thus inner temptations are the Seven Deadly Sins, and their foul offspring.¹⁸ Bodily temptation can be compared to a foot-wound; spiritual temptation, which is more to be feared, can be called a chest-wound, on account of its danger. Yet bodily temptations seem greater to us because they are easily sensed. Though we often do not even know that we have the others, yet they are great and terrible in God's eye, and are therefore more greatly to be feared. For the others, which one easily feels, one seeks a doctor and remedy. The spiritual hurts do not seem at all painful, nor does one remedy them with confession and penitence; and they draw us to eternal death when we least expect it.¹⁹

Holy men and women are tested most often with every kind of temptation, and for their better health; for through fighting against them, they win the joyful crown of the champion. Still, see how they complain in Jeremiah: *Persecutores nostri velociores aquilis celi: super montes persecuti sunt nos, in deserto insidiati sunt nobis* (Lamentations 4:19)—that is, “Our persecutors, swifter than eagles upon the hills, climbed after us and fought with us there; and even in the wilderness they are lying in wait to slay us.” Our persecutors are three: the devil, the world, our own flesh, as I said before. It is not easy to know at times which of these three strive against us, for each helps the other. Yet the devil naturally urges us to poison, for example to pride, to disdain, to envy and to anger, and to their poisonous offspring, who will be named after this; the flesh naturally incites us to sweetness, ease and softness; the world bids people to cover the world's wealth and honor and other such gewgaws, which trick foolish people to love a shadow.²⁰ “These enemies,” it says, “follow us on the hills and wait in the wilderness for a way to harm us.” The hill is the sublime life, where the devil's attacks are often the strongest; the wilderness is the solitary life of the anchoress' dwelling. For just as there are all kinds of wild beasts in the wilderness who will not endure the approach of people, but flee when they hear them, in the same way anchoresses, more than all other women, ought to be wild in this way. And then they will be dear to our Lord more than others, and will seem sweetest to him. For of all meat, the meat of wild game is dearest and sweetest.²¹

Through this wilderness our Lord's people went, as the book of Exo-

dus tells, toward the blessed land of Jerusalem that he had promised them. And you, my dear sisters, go by the same way toward the high Jerusalem, the kingdom that he has promised his chosen. But go very warily, for in this wilderness are many harmful beasts: the lion of pride; the serpent of poisonous envy; the unicorn of anger; the bear of deadly sloth; the fox of covetousness; the sow of gluttony; the scorpion with the tail of stinging lechery, that is, lust.²² Here now are the Seven Deadly Sins, described in order.²³

The lion of pride has very many cubs, and I will name some. *Vain-glory*,²⁴ that is, whoever thinks well of herself in anything she does or says, or thinks she has beauty or wit, good connections or a better reputation than someone else, family or authority, or more willpower. And what good is beauty to her? A gold ring in a sow's nose. Connections in religion often cause harm. All is *vain-glory*, when someone thinks highly of anything and wants to have fame for it, is well-pleased if she is praised, ill-pleased if she is not held to be all she wants. Another is *contempt*, that is, whoever thinks contemptuously of anything that she sees or hears about other people, and scorns correction or teaching from anyone lower than herself. The third cub is *hypocrisy* who makes herself out to be better than she is. The fourth is *presumption*, who takes more in hand than she can manage, or meddles in things that are none of her business, or is too trusting in God's grace or in herself, too bold with any man—who, like her, is carnal, and may be tempted. The fifth cub is called *disobedience*—not only those who do not obey, but who do so only grudgingly, or wait too long to do so: the child who does not obey its elders, the underling his prelate, the parishioner his priest, the maiden her lady, every inferior their superior. The sixth is *loquacity*. Anyone feeds this cub who is very talkative, boasts, judges others, sometimes lies, gabs, blames, scolds, flatters, causes laughter. The seventh is *blasphemy*; this cub's wet-nurse is anyone who swears great oaths, or curses bitterly, or speaks foully about God or his saints, over anything they suffer, see or hear. The eighth is *impatience*; whoever feeds this cub is not patient in the face of all injuries and ills. The ninth is *obstinacy*; and this cub is fed by whoever is stubborn in something she has undertaken to do, whether good or bad, so that no wiser advice can draw her off the wrong scent.

The tenth is *contentiousness*, that is, struggling to overcome, so that someone else may seem thrown down and vanquished, and she be master of the assembly, and swagger like a champion who has won the field. Part of this vice is upbraiding and blaming someone for all the wrong she suspects has been done by them—and the more bitterly it bites the better she likes it,

even if about something put to rights long ago. Mingled with this vice are sometimes words not only bitter but foul, stinking, shameless, and disgraceful, sometimes with great swearing; words many and proud, with cursing and slander. Included in this vice are making comparisons, between themselves or their families, of words or of deeds. This happens among nuns; and afterwards they go with these mouths, before confession has washed them, to praise God with songs, or to make their private devotions to him. But accused things! Do they not know that their songs and their prayers to God stink more foully to him and to all his saints than any decayed dog?

The eleventh cub is fed with gestures,²⁵ with looks and with signs: like carrying the head high, posturing with the neck, giving sidelong looks, looking scornful, winking with the eye, putting with the mouth, making taunting signs with the hand or the head, crossing one's legs, sitting or walking as stiffly as if tied to a stake, looking lovingly at men, talking like an innocent, and hisping on purpose. Included here are too much pride in the adornment, or in the coloring, or in the pleating of the veil, the headdress, or any other clothing; wearing belts like a young girl; plastering yourself with cosmetic ointments; foul flirting; coloring your hair, painting your face, plucking your eyebrows or shaping them upward with wet fingers.²⁶

There are many other kinds of pride, which come from wealth, from happiness, from high kindred, from fair clothing, from wit, beauty and strength; pride can grow from one's holy life and from one's pious habits. The lion of pride has many more cubs than I have named; but study these very carefully, for I pass lightly over them, and do no more than name them. But wherever I go most quickly over them, you should pause there the longest, for there I weigh down one word with ten or twelve other words.²⁷ Whoever has any of the vices that I named here, or any like them, she certainly has pride, however her dress is shaped or colored. She is a mate of the lion I have spoken of and feeds her mad cubs within her breast.

The serpent of poisonous envy has seven offspring.²⁸ *Ingratitude*: anyone who does not recognize good deeds, but thinks them of little import or forgets them altogether, breeds this offspring. I mean good deeds not only that a person does, but that God does him or has done him (either him or her)—more than she could understand if she would only consider it well. We give too little attention to this vice, but of all of them it is the one most hateful to God and most contrary to his grace. The next offspring is *rancor, sine adium*—that is, "hate or a swollen heart"; when anyone breeds it in their breast, everything they do is poisonous to God. The third offspring is *annoyance at another's good*, the fourth, *gladness at their injury*, the

fifth, *accusation*, the sixth, *backbiting*, the seventh, *upbraiding or scorning*. The eighth is *ruspicion*, that is, distrusting a man or woman without clear proof; thinking, "This appearance she puts on, she says or does it to enrage me, to mock or injure me"—and that when the other person never meant anything of the sort. Included here is false judgment, which God strongly forbade, such as thinking or saying, "She doesn't like me—she's accused me of it—look now, how they talk about me, those two (or three, or more) who are sitting together: 'She's a so-and-so, and she did it with harm in mind.' " In these thoughts we are often deceived; for what seems evil is often good, so that every day human judgment goes astray.²⁹ Included here too are renewing evil intentions and hateful lies through malice and through envy. The ninth offspring is *sowing of antagonism*, of anger and of discord. She who sows this devil's seed is cursed by God. The tenth is *wicked furtiveness*, the devil's silence, when out of envy someone will not speak to someone else—and this kind of envy is also an offspring of anger, for their young are often mingled together. Where any of these have been found, there have been the offspring or the mother, the poisonous serpent of envy.

The unicorn of anger, who carries on his nose the horn with which he stabs at anyone he can get at, has six young. The first is *quarrelsomeness* or strife. The next is *fury*: look at the eyes and face when furious anger is rising, look at her gestures, look at her behavior, hear how her mouth works—and you might judge her quite out of her wits.³⁰ The third is *humiliating abuse*, the fourth is *cursing*, the fifth is *blow*. The sixth is *wanting evil to happen* to someone, either to them, or to their friend, or to their property. The seventh offspring is *doing wrong out of anger*, or not doing good, going without food or drink, revenging herself with tears if she cannot do so otherwise, and breaking her head in fury and cursing—or in other ways harming herself both in body and soul. This is homicide, and murder of herself.³¹

The bear of heavy sloth has these cubs. *Torpor* is the first, that is, a lukewarm heart lacking in desire for anything, which should be set all on fire with love for our Lord. The next is *pusillanimity*, that is, having too poor a heart and too cowardly to undertake any high thing, in the hope of God's help and in trust of his grace, not of her strength. The third is *heaviness of heart*: she has this who does good, but does it with a dead and a heavy heart. The fourth is *illness*: those who stop doing anything. The fifth is a *complaining heart*. The sixth is *deadly sorrow* for the loss of any worldly thing, or about anything unwanted, apart from sin. The seventh is *negligence*, in saying or doing, or in foresight or hindsight, or in not taking

care of anything that she has been given to look after. The eighth is *despair*. This last bear-cub is the fiercest of them all, for it chews and devours God's sweet kindness and his great mercy and his measureless grace.³²

The fox of covetousness has these cubs: *fraud and deceit*, *thrift*, *plundering*, *extortion* and *tyrannical force*, *false witnessing* or *swearing*, *secret simony*, *tribute*, *usury*, *meanness*, *unwillingness either to give or lend*—this is a close-fisted heart, a most hateful vice to God, who gave us his whole self—sometimes *murder*. This vice is attributed to the fox for many reasons; I shall give two. There is much guile in a fox, just as there is in greed for worldly gain; secondly, the fox tears a whole flock to pieces, even though he can only greedily swallow one. In the same way the greedy person covers what many thousands could subsist on; but though he burst his heart, he cannot himself use more than one person's share. All that a man or woman wants, more than she could properly live by, each according to her condition, all is covetousness and the root of deadly sin. It is true religion that everyone according to their estate should borrow from this worthless world as little as she can, of food, clothing, possessions—of all its things. (Note that I say, "Each according to their estate," for these words are weighty. As you know, you must turn them into many very strong words, think about them for a long time, and by these same words understand many others that are implied by them. For if I had to write everything, when would I come to an end?)

The sow of gluttony has piglets with these names. *Too early* is the name of the first, the next *too fastidiously*, the third *too freely*; the fourth is called *too much*, the fifth, *too often*.³³ These piglets are more often born through drink than food. I talk about them only briefly, because I have no fear, my dear sisters, that you will feed them.

The scorpion of lechery, that is, of lustfulness, has such offspring that the very names of some of them cannot properly be mentioned by a well-mannered mouth, since the name alone might damage all well-mannered ears, and soil clean hearts. But it is all right to mention these ones, whose names are well-known, and which are themselves all too familiar to many, more's the pity: *fornication*, *adultery*, *loss of virginity* and *incest*, that is, between fleshly or spiritual relations.³⁴ This [i.e., lechery] is divided into many kinds: a foul desire for that filth, with the reason's consent; helping another toward it; knowing about it or being a witness of it; pursuing it with wooing, with tugging, or with any allurement; with lewd laughter, a whoring eye, or any light behavior; with gifts, with enticing words, or with love-talk; kissing, indecent groping, which can be a mortal sin; loving the time or place in which such things could come about, and other kinds of

opportunities which need to be avoided by the one who wishes not to fall muddily into great filth. As St. Augustine says: *Omissis occasionibus qui solent aditum aperire peccatis; potest conscientia esse incolitis*—that is, “Whoever wants to keep her conscience pure and fair must flee the occasions which habitually open the door to admit sin.”³⁵

I dare not name the unnatural offspring of this devil’s scorpion with its poisonous tail; but sorry she may be who, without a companion or with, has so fed the offspring of her lustfulness which I may not speak of for shame and dare not for fear, lest some learn more evil than they know and be tempted by it. But let her consider the accursed inventions of her own lust. For, except in wedlock, it amounts to a mortal sin in whatever way it is wakingly and willingly satisfied for the flesh’s pleasure. In youth strange things are done. Let her vomit it out completely in confession exactly as she did it, if she feels herself guilty—or else she will be doomed for satisfying that foul fire to the eternal fire of hell. The scorpion’s offspring that she bred in her bosom, let her shake it out with confession, and kill it with amendment. You who know nothing about such things, you need not wonder at or think about what I mean, but give thanks to God that you never came across such uncleanness; and have pity on those who are fallen into it.

It is clear enough why I have compared pride to a lion, envy to a serpent, and so on with all the others except for the last—that is, why lustfulness is compared to a scorpion. But see here the reason for it, clear and bright. The scorpion is a kind of snake which has a face, it is said, rather like a woman’s, and is a serpent behind; it puts on a fair appearance, flatters with the head, and stings with the tail.³⁶ This is lechery, this is the devil’s beast, which he leads to market and to every gathering and offers for sale; and it betrays many, because they do not see anything except the fair face or the fair head. The head is the beginning of the sin of lechery, and the pleasure while it lasts, which seems very sweet. The tail, that is, its end, is painful regret, and stings here with the venom of bitter penance and of amendment. And she may be called blessed who finds the tail in such a way, for the poison will go away; but if it does not give pain here, the tail and the poisonous end is the eternal torment of hell. And is he not a foolish merchant who, when he wants to buy a horse or an ox, does not care to look at anything except the head? So when the devil offers this beast, offering it for sale in return for your soul, he always hides the tail and exposes the head. But go all around it and show up the end too, how the tail stings; and flee from there quickly before you are poisoned.³⁷

So my dear sisters, these are the kinds of beasts and serpents that are in

the wilderness in which you journey with God’s people toward the land of Jerusalem, that is, the kingdom of heaven. Nor do I know of any sin that cannot be associated either with one of these seven, or with their offspring. Wavering faith in God’s teaching—is it not a kind of proud disobedience? Included here are enchantments, false charms, belief in dreams, in sneezing, and in any witchcraft. Taking communion or any other sacrament while in any state of mortal sin—is this not the species of pride that I called *presumption*, if one knows what sort of a sin it is? And if one does not know, then it is negligence, part of *accidia*, which I called sloth. When someone does not warn others of evil or good coming to them—is this not negligent sloth or poisonous envy? Tithing improperly, withholding legacies, treasure-troves or loans, or misusing them—is this not a species of covetousness and a kind of theft? Keeping the property of others beyond the proper term—is this not flagrant robbery when it could be given back, and a form of covetousness? If one does not take care of anything loaned or given one to look after as well as the owner expects it—is it not treachery or the negligence of sloth? So is the stupid command or the foolishly pledged promise; to be long unconfirmed; to make false confession or to wait too long; not to teach one’s godchild the *Our Father* or *I believe*. These and all similar things are associated with sloth, which is the fourth mother of the seven sins. To drink something or do anything through which a child will not be conceived in her, or through which a conceived child is destroyed—is this not flagrant murder arising from lust? No one could reckon all the sins separately by their different names, but in those I have mentioned all others are included; and I do not expect there to be anyone who cannot identify their own particular sin under one of the ones grouped together here.³⁸

Mention has now been made of these seven beasts and their offspring who try to destroy all travelers in the wilderness of the solitary life. The lion of pride slays all the proud, all who are of high and haughty heart; the poisonous serpent, the envious and the evil-intentioned; the angry, the unicorn; and so, one by one, the others. Before God, they lie dead; but for the enemy they are alive, and are all in his hand and serve him in his court, each in the office appropriate to themselves.³⁹

The proud are his trumpeters. They draw in the wind of worldly praise, and with every idle boast they puff it out again, as trumpeters do, making noise and loud music to declare their greatness. But if they thought hard about God’s trumpeters, about the trumpets of the angels which will blow terribly from the four corners of the world before the dreadful judg-

ment, "Arise, you dead, arise! Come to the Lord's judgment to be judged, where no proud trumpeter will be saved"³⁹—if they thought hard about this, they would soon trumpeter more quietly in the devil's service. Of these trumpeters Jeremiah says, *Onager solitarius in desiderio anime sue attrahit ventum amoris sui* [*The wild ass alone in the desire of his heart snuffs up the wind of his love*] (Jeremiah 2:24)—"drawing in the wind for love of praise," he says, as I said.

There are some jesters who can produce no other entertainment than making faces, screwing up their mouths and scowling with their eyes. Envious wretches serve in this office at the devil's court, to make their envious Lord laugh. If anyone says well or does well, they can in no way look in that direction with the right eye of a good heart, but they shut their eye on that side, and look on the left to see if there is anything to criticize; or they scowl hideously in that direction with both. When they hear about good, they flap their ears down—but the left one is always wide open in case of evil. They twist their mouths out of shape when they turn good to evil; and if it is partly evil they twist it with further criticism so that it is worse. These are augurs, their own prophets, who foretell beforehand how the hideous devils will terrify them later with their grimacing, and how they themselves will grimace and turn up their noses and make sour faces on account of their great anguish in the torment of hell. But on that account they have less cause to complain, who learn their office of making ugly faces in advance.

The angry person skirmishes with knives before the devil, and is his knife-thrower, and plays with swords, carrying them with the sharp point on his tongue. The sword and the knife are both sharp and cutting words which he throws and skirmishes with at others. And he foretells how devils will play with him with their sharp hooks, skirmish all about him, toss him like a patch of old hide from one to the other, and pierce him through and through with hell-swords, that is with keen, hideous and cutting torments.

The slothful person lies and sleeps on the devil's breast like his dear darling; and the devil lays his mouth down to his ear and whispers to him everything he wants. For so it surely is with anyone who is idle in doing good: the devil speaks eagerly, and the idle one lovingly receives his teaching. Idle and heedless is this devil-child's sleep, but on Doomsday he will start up grimly to the dreadful music of the angels' trumpets, and in the misery of hell keep eternal vigils: *Surgite, animi, mortui surgite et venite ad iudicium sabatoris* [*Arise, they say, arise you dead and come to the Savior's judgment*].⁴⁰

The covetous person is his ash-boy. He occupies himself about the

ashes, and busily sets himself to heaping together many great heaps. He blows on them and blinds himself,⁴¹ smooths them, draws mathematical figures on them, like accountants who have much adding up to do. This is the fool's whole joy, and the enemy watches this game and laughs till he bursts. Every wise person understands well that both gold and silver, and every earthly possession, is nothing but earth and ashes, which blind everyone who blows on them—that is, anyone who swells up in pride of heart because of them. And all he heaps and gathers together and keeps back more than he needs, of anything which is only ashes, will turn into toads and snakes for him in hell; and, as Isaiah says, "Both his blanket and covers will be of worms," he who would not feed nor clothe the needy with what he had: *Subter te sternetur tinea, et operimentum tuum vermis* (Isaiah 14:11).

The greedy glutton is the devil's manacle, but he always keeps close to the cellar or the kitchen. His heart is in the dishes, his thought all in the cups, his life in the barrel, his soul in the jug. He comes before his Lord bemurred and besmeared, a dish in his one hand, a bowl in his other. He says his words badly, torters like a dead drunk who is on the point of falling—see his huge belly!—and the devil laughs. God threatens these people through Isaiah, thus: *Servi mei comedent et vos esurietis, et cetera* (Isaiah 65:13)—"My people will eat, and you will hunger for ever and you will be the devil's food world without end." *Quantum glorificavit se et in deliciis fuit tantum date illi tormentum et luctum—in Apocalypsi; contra unum poculum quod miscuit miscere ei duo* (Revelation 18:7, 6): "Give the drunkard boiling brass to drink! Pour it down his wide throat so that his innards shrivel! For every one, give him two!" Such is God's judgment against gluttony and drunkenness in the Apocalypse.⁴²

The lechers at the devil's court simply have their own name; for at these great courts, those who have so lost their shame that they have no shame left at all, but strive to do as much villainy as they can, are known as lechers. The lecher at the devil's court foully befouls himself and all his companions, sinks with the filth of it, and satisfies his lord with that stinking smell better than he would with any sweet incense. How much he sinks before God was shown by the angel in *The Lives of the Fathers*, who held his nose when the proud lecher came riding by, but did not for the rotting corpse which he helped the holy hermit to bury.⁴³ So these have the most disgusting of all the offices at the devil's court, who so befoul themselves. And he shall befoul them, and torture them with endless stench in the pit of hell.

Now, my dear sisters, you have heard the first part about those we call

the seven mother-sins and about their children, and of what offices these people who have married with those seven hags fulfill at the devil's court, and why they are so greatly to be hated and shunned. You are very far from them, our Lord be thanked. But the foul breath of this last vice—that is, of lechery—stinks so far on every side, since the devil sows it and blows it everywhere, that I am somewhat afraid lest at some time it might run into the nose of your heart. Stench rises upward, and you have climbed high, where the wind of strong temptations is very great. May our Lord give you strength to stand firmly against it.⁴⁴

Someone may think she will be tempted most strongly during the first twelve months after she begins the anchoritic life, and in the next year after that.⁴⁵ And when, after many years, she feels strong temptations, she is very shocked, and afraid that God has cast her away completely. No: it is not so. For many people in religious orders, the first years are no more than ball-play. But take note of how things are by means of an example. When a wise man has newly brought a wife home, he takes note of her behavior most gently. Although he sees in her things which dissatisfy him, he lets them be, is friendly toward her, and in every way ensures that she loves him deeply in her heart. When he knows for sure that her love is truly fastened on him, then with confidence he can chastise her openly for her vices, which he previously ignored as though he did not notice them. He appears very stern, and looks his fiercest, to test if he may even now unfasten her love for him. At last, when he understands that she is entirely well-disciplined, and loves him no less whatever he does to her, but from day to day loves him more and more if she can, then he shows her that he loves her sweetly, and does all that she wants, as one whom he well knows. Then is all that woe turned to joy.⁴⁶

If Jesus Christ your spouse does the same with you, my dear sisters, do not think it strange. At the beginning it is all courtship, to draw you into love. But as soon as he understands that he has made you familiar with him, he will be less forbearing. After the testing, at the end, there follows great joy. In just the same way, when he wished to lead his people out of slavery, out of pharaoh's hand, out of Egypt, he did for them all they wanted, many wonderful miracles. He dried up the Red Sea, and made a free path for them through it; and where they had gone dry-foot, he drowned pharaoh and all their enemies. Later, in the desert, when he had led them far into the wilderness, he let them suffer great hardship: hunger, thirst, and hard work, and many great wars. At the end he gave them rest, and all prosperity and joy, all their heart's desire and body's ease and happiness: *Terram*

fluentem lacre et melle [A land flowing with milk and honey] (Leviticus 20:24). So our Lord at first spares the young and the feeble, and draws them out of this world gently and with art. As soon as he sees they are tougher, he allows wars to arise, and reaches them to fight and suffer woe. At the end, after much work, he gives them sweet rest—here, I say, in this world, before they come to heaven. And then the rest seems so good after the work! Such comfort after such discomfort seems so sweet!⁴⁷

Now in the Psalter, under the two temptations I mentioned earlier that bring forth all the rest, the outer and the inner, there are four kinds, divided thus: slight and hidden temptation; slight and open temptation; strong and hidden temptation; strong and open temptation. So much is to be understood by this: *Non timebis a timore nocturno, a sagitta volante in die, a negotio perambulante in tenebris, ab incursu et demonio meridiano [You shall not be frightened by the terror by night, by the arrow that flies in the daytime, by the trouble that walks in the dark, by the attacks of the noontide demon]* (Psalm 90:5–6). Job says these words of slight and secret temptation: *Lapidis excavant aq̄ue, et alluvione paulatim terra consumitur [Job 14:19]*—"Little drops wear through the flint they fall on frequently, and slight, secret temptations that one is not aware of make the true heart false." From the slight and open ones, of which he also says *Lucebit post eum semina [A path shall shine after him]* (Job 41:23), there is not so much to be feared. Job also laments over strong temptation that is yet hidden: *Indidisti mihi et prevaluerunt, et non erat qui adiuvarer [Job 30:13]*—that is, "My enemies have lain in wait for me with treachery and with treason, and they have overcome me, and there was no one to help me." Isaiah: *Veniet malum super te et necies ortum eius [Isaiah 47:11]*—"Woe shall come upon you, and you will not know from where." With respect to the fourth temptation, which is strong and open, the holy Job makes his complaint against his enemies, and says: *Quasi rupto muro et aperta ianua irrurrunt super me [Job 30:14]*—that is, "They have broken in on me as though the wall was broken down and the gate open."⁴⁸

The first and the third of these four temptations almost all belong under the "inner"; the second and the fourth belong under the "outer," and are almost all bodily and thus easy to sense. The other two are spiritual, directed toward spiritual vices; and they are often hidden and secret when they do most damage, and so are much the more to be feared. Many a one who does not suspect it breeds some lion's cub in her breast, some serpent's offspring which devours her soul—about which Hosea says, *Alieni comedunt robur eius et ipse nescivit [Hosea 7:9]*, that is, "Strangers have eaten away the strength of his soul, and he did not know it." For there is most to

was, how and where he went, in what dishonor, in what woe, he led his life on earth. The good Paul spoke of such mountains, and said humbly, *Dei-mur set non perimus; mortificationem Iesu in corpore nostro circumferentes, ut et uita Iesus in corporibus nostris manifestetur* (2 Corinthians 4:9-10)—“We suffer all woe,” he says, “and all shame, but that is our happiness, that we bear in our body the likeness of Jesus Christ’s death, so that it may manifest in us what his life was on earth.” God knows, those who do this prove to us their love for our Lord. “Do you love me? Show it” (John 21:15-16). [Gregory]: “For love desires to make itself known with outward deeds” —Gregorius: *Probatio dilectionis exhibitio est operis*.⁴⁰ However hard a thing may be, “True love lightens it, and softens it, and sweetens it” — *Amor omnia fatilia reddit*.⁴¹ What do men and women suffer for false love and for foul love, and would be ready to suffer more? And what is more strange than that a sure and true love, sweeter than all others, cannot master us so completely as does the love of sin?

Nevertheless, I know someone who bears a heavy coat of mail and a hair shirt, both at once, his middle, thighs and arms bound tight with iron in broad, thick bands, so that the sweat from it is an agony to bear. He fasts, keeps vigil, works, and, Christ knows, he complains that it does not hurt him at all, and often asks me to teach him something with which he can mortify his body. All that is bitter seems sweet to him for our Lord’s love. God knows it, he still cries to me in the sorriest manner, and says God forgets him because he has not sent him any great illness. God knows it, love does this, for as he often says to me, whatever injury that God could do him, even if he were to throw him into hell with the lost, he thinks that he could never love him less. If anyone suspects any such thing about him, he is more confounded than the thief caught with his loot. I also know a woman of the same sort, who endures little less. There is nothing to do but thank God for the strength that he gives them, and humbly to acknowledge our weakness. Let us love their good, and so make it our own, for as St. Gregory says, love has such power that it makes the good of others our own, without labor, as I said above (p. 151).⁴²

Now it seems to me that we have come to the seventh part, all about love, which makes the heart pure.

Part VII: Love

St. Paul witnesses that all outward hardships, all mortifications of the flesh and bodily labor, all are as nothing compared to love, which purifies and brightens the heart.¹ *Exercitio corporis ad medicum valet, pietas autem valet ad omnia* (1 Timothy 4:8)—that is, “Bodily effort is worth little, but a sweet and pure heart is good for everything.” *Si linguis hominem loquar et angelorum, et cetera, si tradidero corpus meum ita ut ardeam, et cetera, si distribuero omnes facultates meas in cibos pauperum, caritatem autem non habeam, nichil mihi prodest* (1 Corinthians 13:1, 3)—“Though I knew,” he says, “the language of men and angels, though I inflicted on my body all the torment and suffering that a body could endure, though I gave to the poor all that I had: if with these I had no love for God, and for everyone in him and for him, all would be ruined.” For as the holy abbot Moses said, all the woe and all the hardship that we suffer in the flesh, and all the good that we ever do, all such things are nothing except as tools with which to cultivate the heart.² If an axe did not cut, or a spade did not dig, or a plough did not furrow, who would care to keep them? Just as nobody loves tools for their own sake, but does for the things that can be done with them, so no fleshly suffering is to be loved, except that because of it God may look that way the sooner with his grace, and make the heart pure and clear-sighted—which no one can achieve who is involved with vice, or with the earthly love of worldly things, for this involvement so confuses the heart’s eyes that love cannot know God, nor rejoice in his sight. A pure heart, as St. Bernard says, causes two things: it makes you do all you do either for the love of God alone, or for the good of another and for his profit.³ In everything that you do have one of these two intentions, or both together; for the latter is included in the former. Always have a pure heart in this way, and do all that you will; have a confused heart, and everything goes badly for you. *Omnia munda mundi, conquinatus vero nichil est mundum: Apostolus. Item, Augustinus: Habe caritatem et fac quicquid vis, volubuntate videlicet rationis [All things are clean to the clean, but to those who are polluted, nothing is clean—the apostle. Again, Augustine: Have love and do whatever you will—that is, after the decision of the reason] (Titus 1:15).⁴ Therefore my dear sisters, over everything else, be energetic about having a pure heart. What is a pure heart? I have said it before: that is, that you wish for nothing, and love nothing except God alone—and those things, for God’s sake, which help*

you toward him. For God's sake, love them, I say, and not for themselves—like food or clothing, a man or a woman who provides for you. For, as St. Augustine says, and speaks in this way to our Lord: *Minus te amat qui preter te aliquid amat quod non propter te amat*—that is, “Lord, they love you less who love anything except you, unless they love it on account of you.”⁵ Purity of heart is the love of God alone; in this is all the strength of all religious life, the purpose of every order.⁶ *Plenitudo legis est affectio* (Romans 13:10)—“Love fulfils the law,” says St. Paul. *Quicquid precipitur in sola caritate solidatur*—“All God's commands,” as St. Gregory says, “are rooted in love.”⁷ Love alone will be laid in St. Michael's balance:⁸ those who love most will be most blessed, not those who lead the hardest lives, for love outweighs this. Love is the steward of heaven because of her great generosity, for she withholds nothing but gives all that she has, and also herself. Otherwise God would care nothing for the things that were hers.

God has earned our love in every kind of way.⁹ He has done much for us, and promised more. A great gift draws our love; but he gave us all the world in Adam our first father, and everything that is in the world he cast under our feet—beasts and birds—before we were convicted of sin. *Omnia subjecti sub pedibus eius, oves et boves universas, insuper et pecora campi, volucres celi, et pisces maris qui perambulans semitas maris [You have put all things in subjection under his feet: all sheep and oxen, and also the beasts of the field, the birds in the air and the fish in the sea which walk through the paths of the sea]* (Psalm 8:8–9). And yet everything that exists, as is said above, serves the good for the profit of their souls—and earth, sea and sun serve even the evil.¹⁰ He did even more: he gave us not only of his own, but gave his whole self. So high a gift was never given to such low wretches. *Aparto-las: Christus dilexit ecclesiam et dedit semet ipsum pro ea* (Ephesians 5:25)—“Christ,” says St. Paul, “so loved his beloved that he paid for her the price of himself.”

Pay close attention, my dear sisters, to why one ought to love him: first, as a man who woos, like a king who loved a noble poor lady of a far land. He sent his messengers on ahead, who were the patriarchs and the prophets of the Old Testament (see Matthew 21), with sealed letters. In the end he came himself, and brought the gospel like letters patent,¹¹ and wrote with his own blood salutations to his beloved, love-greetings with which to woo her and win power over her love. Hereby hangs a tale, a parable with a hidden meaning.¹²

A lady was completely surrounded by her enemies, her land all ruined, and she completely destitute, inside an earthen castle.¹³ Nevertheless, the

love of a mighty king was turned to her so passionately that by way of courtship he sent his messengers, one after the other, often many together. He sent her many beautiful presents, provisions to keep her alive, the help of his noble army to hold her castle. She received it all like one who did not care, and was so hard-hearted that he could never come any nearer to her love. What more do you want? He came himself in the end, revealed to her his beautiful face, the most beautiful to look at of all men's; he spoke so sweetly, and such happy words they could raise the dead to life again. He worked many miracles, and performed many acts of power before her eyes, revealed to her his might, told her of his kingdom, asked to make her queen of all he had. All this was no use. Is this contempt not strange? For she was never worthy to be his handmaiden. But in his graciousness love had so overcome him that in the end he said:

“Lady, you are beleaguered, and your enemies are so strong that you can in no way escape from their hands without my help. So that they do not put you to shameful death after all your grief, for the love of you I will take this fight upon myself, and rid you of those who seek your death. Yet I know it to be true that I will receive from them my death-wound—and I wish it with all my heart, to win your heart. Now then, I beseech you, for the love I show you, that you love me at least after this deed, dead, when you would not living.”

The king did everything just so: he rid her of all her enemies and was himself cruelly abused and finally killed—yet through a miracle he arose from death to life. Would not this same lady be of an evil sort of nature if she did not love him ever after over all things?

This king is Jesus, God's Son, who in just this way wooed our souls, which the devil had surrounded; and he, like a noble wooer, after many messengers and many presents, came to prove his love, and showed through chivalry that he was worthy of love, as knights were at one time accustomed to do.¹⁴ He entered the lists, and for love of his love had his shield pierced on every side in the fight, like a brave knight. His shield, which covered his Godhead, was his beloved body which was spread on the cross, broad like a shield above in his stretched arms, and narrow beneath where the one foot as many think was set upon the other.¹⁵ The fact that this shield does not have sides is to signify that his disciples, who should have stood by him and been his sides, all ran away from him and left him like strangers, as the gospel says: *Relicto eo omnes fugerunt* (Matthew 26:56). This shield is given to us against all temptations, as Jeremiah witnesses: *Dabis scutum cordis laborem tuum [You will give a shield for the heart: your labor]* (Lamentations 3:65). Not only does this shield shield us from all

harm, but it does still more: it crowns us in heaven *scuto bone voluntatis* (Psalm 5:13)—“Lord,” says David, “with the shield of your goodwill you have crowned us”; he says “the shield of goodwill,” for “Willingly he suffered all that he suffered”—*Ysaia: Oblatus est quia voluit* (Isaiah 53:7).¹⁶

“But Lord,” you say, “why? Could he not have delivered us with less pain?” Yes indeed, very easily, but he would not.¹⁷ Why not? To deprive us of every excuse for not giving him our love, which he so dearly bought. A thing little loved is easily bought. He bought us with his heart’s blood—never was a price dearer—to draw out our love toward him, that cost him so bitterly. In a shield there are three things, the wood, the leather and the painting. So it was in this shield: the wood of the cross, the leather of God’s body, the painting of the red blood that colored it so beautifully. Again, a third reason: after a brave knight’s death, his shield is hung high in church in his memory. So is this shield, that is, the crucifix, set high in church in such a place where it is soonest seen, to bring to mind Jesus Christ’s chivalry, which he performed on the cross. His beloved should see by it how he bought her love, letting his shield be pierced, his side opened to show her his heart, to show her openly how deeply he loved her, and to draw out her heart.¹⁸

One finds four main kinds of love in this world: that between good friends; between man and woman; of a woman for her child; between body and soul. The love that Jesus Christ has for his dear beloved transcends these four, surpasses them all.¹⁹

Is someone not considered a good friend who lays his pledge in Jewry to redeem his friend? God almighty pledged himself for us in Jewry and gave his precious body to redeem his beloved from the hands of the Jews. Never did a friend do such a favor for his friend.²⁰

There is often much love between a man and a woman. But though she was married to him she could still become so wicked and prostitute herself with other men for so long that he would refuse to recognize her even if she wanted to return to him. So Christ loves more; for though the soul, his spouse, prostitutes herself with the enemy in mortal sin for many years and days, his mercy is always ready for her when she wants to come home again and leave the devil. All this he says himself through Jeremiah: *Si dimiserit vir uxorem suam et cetera. Tu autem fornicata es cum multis amatoribus, tamen revertare ad me dicit dominus [If a man puts away his wife etc. For you have committed fornication with many lovers; nonetheless return to me, says the Lord]* (Jeremiah 3:1). Still he cries out, all day, “You who have done this

wickedness, turn and come again; you will be welcome to me.”²¹ *Immo et occurrit prodigo venienti* (Luke 15:20)—“Yet he runs,” it says, “at her returning, and throws his arms at once around her neck.” What could be more merciful? Hear an even happier marvel: however many deadly sins his beloved has prostituted herself with, as soon as she comes back to him, he makes her a new virgin. For as St. Augustine says, there is so great a difference between God’s coming to a woman and a man’s, that a man’s coming makes of a virgin a wife, and God makes of a wife a virgin.²² *Revertitur, inquit Iob in integrum [He gives it all back whole, says Iob]* (Job 12:23). Good works and faithful belief, these two things are virginity in the soul.

Now about the third love. If a child had such a disease that it needed a bath of blood before it could be healed, any mother who made this bath for it would love it greatly.²³ Our Lord did this for us, we who were so sick with sin and so soiled with it that nothing could heal us or cleanse us except his blood alone. For so he would have it: his love makes us a bath of it blessed be he ever! He prepared three baths for his dear beloved, to wash her in them so white and so beautiful that she would be fit for his pure embraces. The first bath is baptism; the second tears, inner and outer, if she soils herself again after the first bath; the third is Jesus Christ’s blood which sanctifies both the others, as St. John says in the Apocalypse: *Qui dilexit nos et lavit nos in sanguine suo [He who has loved us and washed us in his blood]* (Revelation 1:5). That he loves us more than any mother her child, he says himself through Isaiah: *Nunquid potest mater oblivisci filii uteri sui? Et si obliviscatur ego non obliviscar tui* (Isaiah 49:15)—“Can a mother,” he says, “forget her child? And even though she does, I can never forget you.” And he gives the reason after: *In mantibus meis descripsiste* (Isaiah 49:16)—“I have painted you on my hands,” he says. So he dics with red blood upon the cross. People put knots in their belts to remind them of something; but our Lord, so that he would never forget us, put the marks of piercing on both his hands to remember us.²⁴

Now the fourth love. The soul loves the body very much indeed. And that is seen in their parting; for dear friends are sorry when they have to part. But our Lord willingly parted his soul from his body to join ours together world without end in the joy of heaven.

Then see! Jesus Christ’s love toward his dear spouse, that is, Holy Church or the pure soul, wholly surpasses and transcends the four greatest loves found on earth. With all this love he is even now wooing her in this way:²⁵

“Your love,” he says, “is either to be wholly a gift, or it is for sale, or it

is to be taken and captured by force.²⁶ If it is to be a gift, where could you bestow it better than upon me? Am I not the fairest one? Am I not the richest king? Am I not the highest born? Am I not the wisest among the rich? Am I not the most courteous of men? Am I not the most generous one? For one says of a generous man who can keep nothing back, that his hands are pierced—as mine are.²⁷ Am I not of all things the gentlest and sweetest? So you can find all the reasons why one ought to give love in me—especially if you love chaste purity; for no one can love me unless she keeps hers.²⁸ But she is threefold: in widowhood, in wifehood, and in maidenhood the highest.²⁹

“If your love is not to be a gift, but you want someone to buy it (to buy it!), love is sold either for another love, or for something else—though love ought to be sold for love only, and not for anything else. If yours is to be sold in this way, I have bought it with love beyond all others, for of the four greatest loves, I have shown you the greatest of them all. If you say you will not put so cheap a price on it, but want even more, say what it must be, put a price on your love. You will not say so much that I will not give more. Will you have castles, kingdoms? Will you rule the world? I will go one better for you: with all this make you queen of heaven, too. You will yourself be seven times brighter than the sun, no evil will come near you, no joy will you lack. All your desire will be done in heaven and also on earth, yes, and even in hell. No heart will ever imagine happiness so great that I will not give, for your love, immeasurably, incomparably, endlessly much more: all Croesus’ wealth, who was the richest king; Absalom’s shining beauty, who as often as his hair was cut sold the clippings of hair that he cut off for two hundred shekels of weighed silver; Asahel’s swiftness, who strove with the deer in running; Samson’s strength, who slew a thousand of his enemies all at once, and alone without a companion; Caesar’s generosity; Alexander’s fame; Moses’s vigor.³⁰ Would not someone give all they had for even one of these? And all together, in comparison with my body, are not worth a needle. If you are so totally stubborn and so out of your wits that even with nothing to lose you refuse such an offer with every kind of happiness—then see! I hold here a cruel sword up over your head, to divide body and soul and plunge them both into the fire of hell, to be the devil’s whore shamefully and sorrowfully, world without end. Answer me now, and defend yourself against me if you can! Or give me your love that I long for so much, not for my, but for your own great profit.”

Look, so our Lord woos. Is she not all too hard-hearted who, faced with such a wooer, cannot turn to his love, if she thinks well on these three things: what he is, and what she is, and how great is the love of one so high

as he is toward one so low as she? Therefore the psalmist says, *Non est qui se abcondat a calore eius* (Psalm 18:7)—“There is nobody who can hide away so as to escape from loving him.” For this the true sun was lifted up on high at noon on the high cross, to spread his hot rays of love over everything; so eager he was, and is to this day, to kindle his love in his beloved’s heart. And he says in the gospel: *Ignem veni mittere in terram et quid volo nisi ut ardeat* (Luke 12:49)—“I came,” he says, “to bring fire to the earth,” that is, burning love in to the earthly heart, “and what else do I long for except that it blaze forth?” Luke warm love is loathsome to him, as he says through St. John in the Apocalypse: *Utinam frigidus esses aut calidus, set quia tepidus es incipiam te evomere de ore meo* (Revelation 3:15–16)—“I wish,” he says to his beloved, “that you were either completely cold in my love, or altogether hot; but because you are as though lukewarm between the two, neither hot nor cold, you disgust me, and I will spew you out, unless you grow hotter.”

Now you have heard, my dear sisters, how and why God is greatly to be loved. And so as to kindle yourselves well, gather wood for it with the poor woman of Sarepta, the city which means “kindling”: *En Inquit colligo duo ligna—Regum iii* (1 Kings 17:12)—“Lord,” she said to Elijah, the holy prophet, “See, I gather two pieces of wood.”³¹ These two pieces of wood signify the one upright piece of wood and the other that went across it on the dear cross. With these two pieces of wood you will kindle the fire of love in your heart. Look often toward them. Consider if you ought not to love the King of joy easily, who so spreads wide his arms toward you and bends down his head as if to be kissed.³² I say it with certainty, if the true Elijah, that is, God almighty, finds you busily gathering these two pieces of wood, he will lodge with you and multiply in you his precious grace, as Elijah did her livelihood, and lodged with her when he found her gathering the two sticks in Sarepta.

Greek fire is made of a red-haired man’s blood, and it is said that nothing can quench it except urine, sand and vinegar.³³ This Greek fire is the love of Jesus our Lord, and you must make it of a red man’s blood, that is, Jesus Christ reddened with his own blood on the dear cross—and ruddy by nature as well, as it is supposed. This blood, shed for you upon the two pieces of wood just mentioned, will make you Sareptans; that is, it will kindle you with this Greek fire, so that, as Solomon says, “No waters,” which are worldly tribulations, and no temptations, either inner or outer, “can quench this love” (Canticles 8:7). So finally, then, there is nothing else to do except to guard yourselves carefully against all that quenches it,

that is, urine and sand and vinegar as I said before. Urine is the stench of sin. Nothing good grows on sand, and it signifies idleness; idleness cools and quenches this fire. Always bestir yourselves vigorously in good works, and this will heat you up and kindle this fire against the burning fire of sin. For just as one nail can drive out another,³⁴ so the burning fire of God's love drives the burning of foul love out of the heart. The third thing is vinegar, that is, a heart soured by spite or envy. Understand these words. When the spiteful Jews offered our Lord this sour present up on the cross, he said these pitiful words: *Consumatum est* (John 19:30)—“Never before now,” he said, “was I tortured to the full”—not by the vinegar itself, but by their envious spite, which the vinegar they made him drink signified. It is rather as though a man had labored long, and, after long labor, failed to be paid his wage. Just so our Lord toiled more than thirty-two years for their love, and wanted nothing in payment for his painful labor but love. But at the end of his life, which was like the evening time when workmen are paid their day's wages, see how they rewarded him: for the nectar of honeyed love, the vinegar of sour spite and the gall of bitter envy. “O,” said our Lord then, “*Consumatum est*; all my labor on earth, all my torment on the cross, does not afflict or mortify me at all compared to this: that I have given away without return all that I have done. This vinegar that you offer me, this sour payment, completes my torment.” This vinegar of a sour heart, and of a bitter gratitude, more than anything else quenches this Greek fire, that is, the love of our Lord. And whoever bears it in her breast toward a woman or man, she is the Jews' partner: she offers God this vinegar and, so far as she is concerned, completes Jesus' torment on the cross.³⁵

People throw Greek fire on their enemies, and so overcome them. You must do the same when God raises up any strife against you in an enemy. Solomon teaches how you must turn it aside: *Si exurrierit inimicus tuus ciba illam, si stiterit potum da illi. Sic enim carbones ardentes congeres super caput eius* (Proverbs 25:21–22, quoted in Romans 12:20)—that is, “If your enemy hungers, feed him; for his thirst give him drink,” which means that if he hungers and thirsts to harm you, give him the food of your prayers that God may have mercy on him, give him the drink of tears, weep for his sins. “So,” says Solomon, “you will heap burning coals on his head,” that is, in this way you will kindle his heart to love you—for in Holy Writ the heart is to be understood when the head is mentioned. At the Judgment God will speak to you in this way: “Why did you love that man or woman?” “Sir, they loved me.” “Yes,” he will say, “you repaid only what you owed; there is not much to reward you for in this.” If you could

answer, “They did me much harm and I owed them no love, but, sir, I loved them for you”—then he owes you for that love, since it was given to him, and he will reward you for it.

Urine, as I said, which quenches Greek fire, is the stinking flesh's love which quenches the spiritual love Greek fire signifies. What flesh on earth was so sweet and so holy as Jesus Christ's flesh? And yet he himself said to his dear disciples, *Misi ego abiero parvulus non veniet ad vos* (John 16:7)—that is, “Unless I leave you, the Holy Spirit, that is my own and my Father's love, cannot come to you; but when I have gone from you, I will send him to you.” When Jesus Christ's own disciples, while they loved to have him near them in the flesh, went without the sweetness of the Holy Spirit, and could not have both at once, judge for yourselves: is not he or she mad who loves her own flesh too much, or loves anybody else in the flesh so that she yearns too greatly to see him or hear him speak? Let her never think it strange if she lacks the comfort of the Holy Spirit.

Let everyone now choose one of these two, earthly comfort or heavenly, whichever she wants to keep—because she must let go the other.³⁶ For in mingling the two she can never again have purity of heart, which is, as we said before, the strength of all religion and of every order (p. 48). Love makes her pure, peaceful and clean. Love has an authority before all others, for all she touches she turns it to herself and makes it all her own. *Quemcumque locum calcaverit per vestes, per videlicet amoris, vester erit [Whatever place your foot will tread upon—the foot, that is, of love—will be yours]* (Deuteronomy 11:24, and gloss). Many a one would pay dearly for something that made all they touched their own. And was it not said far above (p. 151) that merely because you love the good that is in someone else with the touch of your love, you make their good your own good without any further toil, as St. Gregory witnesses? See now how much good the envious lose! Stretch out your love to Jesus Christ, and you have won him. Reach for him with as much love as you sometimes have for some man. He is yours to do all that you want with. But who loves a thing and parts with it for less than it is worth? Is not God incomparably better than all that is in the world? “Charity” is holding precious a loved and valued thing. Whoever abandons God's love for any worldly thing holds him too cheap and worthless; for nobody knows how to love properly except he alone. He loves love so very much that he makes her his equal. And yet I dare say more: he makes her his master, and does all that she commands as though he has to. Can I prove this? Yes, certainly I can, by his own words. For thus he speaks to Moses, who loved him most, *In Numeri: Dimisi iuxta verbum tuum, non dicit preces [I have abandoned (vengeance) according to*

*your word; he does not say "prayers"!*³⁷ (Numbers 14:20)—"I had it in mind," he says, "to wreak my anger against this people, but you say that I must not. Your word be fulfilled."

They say that love binds. Certainly love binds our Lord, so that he cannot do anything except with love's leave. Now the proof of this, for it seems amazing. *Yris: Domine, non est qui conurgat et teneat te* (Isaiah 64:7)—"Lord, you will strike," says Isaiah; "Alas, you can well do it, there is no one who can stop you" (as though he said, "If anyone loved you properly, he could stop you and prevent you from striking"). *In Genesey ad Loti: Festina etc. Non potero ibi quicquam facere donec egressus fueris illinc* (Genesis 19:22)—that is, when our Lord wanted to submerge Sodom, where his friend Lot was, he said, "Hurry out of it, for while you are among them, I can do nothing to them." Was this not to be bound with love? What more do you want? Love is his chamberlain, his counselor, his spouse, from whom he cannot hide anything, but tells all that he thinks. *In Genesey: Num celare potero Abraham que gesturus sum* (Genesis 18:17)—"Can I," our Lord says, "hide from Abraham anything that I intend to do? No, in no way."

Now the one who speaks so and does so to all who believe and love him sincerely, he knows how to love. Just as the joy he is preparing for them is incomparable to all the world's joys, so it is untellable by worldly tongues. *Xsair: Oculus non vidit, Deus, absque te que preparasti diligentibus te; Apostolus: Oculus non vidit nec auris audivit, et cetera* [Isaiah: No eye but yours, O God, has seen what you have prepared for those who love you; the Apostle: The eye has not seen, nor has the ear heard, etc.] (Isaiah 64:4, 1 Corinthians 2:9). You have accounts of these joys written elsewhere, my dear sisters.³⁸

This love is the rule that rules the heart. *Confitebor tibi in directione id est in regulatione cordis. Exprobratio malorum, generatio que non direxit cor suum* [I will praise you in uprightness—that is, by ruling the heart. The reproach of the evil is that it is a generation that did not rule its heart] (Psalm 119:7, with gloss; Psalm 78:8). This is the lady rule; all the others serve her, and only for her sake is one commanded to love them. I regard them as of little importance, so long as this one is preciousl kept. But we will have them, briefly, in the eighth part.

Part VIII: *The Outer Rule*

I said before at the beginning (p. 49) that you should not in any way promise to keep any of the exterior rules as though under a vow. I say the same thing again; I do not write them to anyone except you only. I say this so that other anchoresses will not say that I am making them a new rule on my own authority. I do not ask them to keep them, and you can change these whenever you want for better ones. Compared with what has gone before they are of little importance (1 Timothy 4:8).¹

Enough has been said of sight, and of speech, and of the other senses. This last part now, as I promised at the beginning, is separated and divided up into seven small branches.²

One thinks less of a thing one often has. Therefore you will only take communion as often as our lay-brothers do, fifteen times in twelve months: 1) Christmas day, 2) Twelfth Night, 3) Candlemass day, 4) One Sunday halfway between then and Easter, or on Lady day if it is near a Sunday, because of its importance, 5) Easter day, 6) the third Sunday after that, 7) Holy Thursday, 8) Whitsunday, 9) Midsummer's day, 10) St. Mary Magdalene's day, 11) the Assumption, 12) the Nativity, 13) St. Michael's day, 14) All Saints' day, 15) St. Andrew's day.³ For all these times, be cleanly confessed, and undergo disciplines,⁴ but never those imposed by anyone but yourself, and go without your food for one day. If it unfortunately happens that you do not receive communion on these set days, let it be the nearest Sunday; or if the next day is near, wait until then.

From Easter until the latter of the two feasts of the Holy Cross, the one in harvest-time [i.e., September 14th], you must eat twice every day, except on Fridays [Emberdays, Rogation days and Vigils. On these days],⁵ and in Advent, you will not eat white food⁶ except when necessary. For the other half of the year fast all the time except Sundays, when you are in health and full vigor; but the rule does not bind the sick or those who have let blood.

You must not eat meat or fat, except in the case of great illness, or unless someone is very weak.⁷ Eat vegetable stew willingly, and accustom yourselves to little drink. Nevertheless, dear sisters, your food and drink have often seemed less to me than I would want you to have. Do not fast on bread and water any day unless you have leave.

Some anchoresses take their meals outside, with their guests; this is being too friendly; for to all religious orders it is most unnatural, and most of all it is opposed to the anchoritic order, which is dead to all the world. One hears often of the dead speaking with the living—but eating with the living? I have never heard of it.

Do not give any feasts, or attract any strange beggars to your gates. Even if there were no harm in it except for their immoderate noise, it would sometimes hinder heavenly thoughts. It is not appropriate for an anchoress to be generous with someone else's alms. Would one not laugh a beggar loudly to scorn who invited people to a feast? Mary and Martha were both sisters, but their lives were quite different.⁸ You anchoresses have committed yourselves to Mary's share, which our Lord himself praised: *Maria optimam partem elegit* (Luke 10:42)—“Martha, Martha!” he said, “you are much troubled. Mary has chosen better, and nothing will deprive her of her share.” Being a housewife is Martha's share; Mary's share is stillness and rest from all the world's noise, so that nothing may prevent her from hearing God's voice. And see what God said, that “nothing will deprive” you of this share. Martha has her office; leave it to her. You sit with Mary stone-still at God's feet and listen to him alone. Martha's office is to feed the poor and clothe them, like a lady of the house. Mary ought not to meddle in this. If anyone blames her, God himself always protects her, as Holy Writ witnesses: *Contra Synonem, duo debitoris, et cetera; contra Martbam, Maria optimam partem, et cetera; contra apostolos marmurantes, ut quid perditio heri? Bonum inquit opus et cetera* [In answer to Simon (the Pharisee): “If a man has two debtors” etc.; in answer to Martha: “Mary has chosen the best part” etc.; in answer to the apostles complaining “What is the purpose of this waste?” he replied “She has done me a good service”] (Luke 7:36–50; 10:38–42; Matthew 26:8–10). Likewise, no anchoress ought to take more than moderately what she needs. How then can she be generous? She has to live by alms, as moderately as she can, and not accumulate things in order to give them away. She is not a housewife but a church-anchoress; if she can spare any poor scraps, let her send them quite secretly out of her house. Under the semblance of good, sin is often hidden. And how can those rich anchoresses who cultivate land or have fixed incomes give their alms to poor neighbors secretly? Let her not wish to have a reputation as a generous anchoress, nor become greedier to have more so as to give much away; for when greediness is at the root of such accumulation, because of her bitterness all the boughs which sprout from her are bitter. To ask for something in order to give it away is not right for

an anchoress. From an anchoress' graciousness, from an anchoress' generosity, sin and shame have often come in the end.⁹

To women and children, and especially to the anchoress' maidens who come and work for you, give food to eat with cheerful charity, even if you must deprive yourself or borrow or beg for it; and invite them to sit with you.¹⁰

Let no man eat in your presence except with your director's leave either general or particular; general, as with the Friars Preachers at Minor, particular in all other cases.¹¹ Do not invite anyone else to eat or drink except, again, with his leave. It is said that leave is easily granted. I do not at all want you to be regarded as courtly anchoresses because of such invitations. But everywhere and always be careful that nobody leaves you scandalized by your lack of discipline.

From good people take all that you need.¹² But be very careful that you do not get a reputation as acquisitive anchoresses. From anyone you do not trust because of foolish looks or stupid talk take nothing at all. Need must drive you to ask for anything—yet humbly reveal to good men and women your difficulty.¹³

My dear sisters, unless need drives you and your director advises you you must not have any animal except a cat. An anchoress who has animal seems more like a housewife than Martha was; she cannot easily be Mary Martha's sister, with peace in her heart. For then she has to think of the cow's food, of the herdsman's hire; to flatter the bailiff, curse him when he impounds it, and pay the damages anyway. It is a hateful thing, Christ knows, when people in a town complain about an anchoress' animals. Now then, if anyone has to have one, see that it does not bother or harm anyone and that her thought is in no way fastened on it. An anchoress ought to have nothing which draws her heart outward.¹⁴

Do not conduct business. An anchoress fond of bargaining, that is, one who buys to sell for gain, sells her soul to the merchant of hell. Things that she makes, with her director's advice, she may sell for her needs. Holy people often used to live by their hands.

Dear daughters, do not look after other people's things in your house possessions, clothes, boxes, charters, accounts, indentures, church vestments or chalices—unless need or violence makes it necessary, or great fear. From such guarding much evil has often come about.¹⁵

Let no one sleep in your house. If some great necessity breaks you

house open, while it stays broken, have a woman of pure life to stay with you in it by day and night.¹⁶

Because men do not see you nor you them, it does not matter if your clothes are white or black, so long as they are plain, warm and well-made, the skins well-tanned; and have as many as you need for your bed and to wear. Next to your skin you must not wear linen cloth unless it is harsh and coarse flax refuse. Whoever wants can have a petticoat; whoever wants can go without.

You must sleep in a garment with a belt, tied loosely enough for you to put a hand under it. Let no one belt herself with any kind of belt next to the body, except with her confessor's leave, nor wear any iron or hair, or hedgehog-skins; let her not beat herself with them, nor with a leaded scourge, with holly or briars, nor draw blood from herself without her confessor's leave; let her not sting herself with nettles anywhere, nor beat herself in front, nor cut herself, nor impose on herself too many severe disciplines to quench temptations at one time. Against natural illnesses do not take or believe in the remedies of unnatural doctoring without your director's advice, in case it makes you worse.¹⁷

In winter let your shoes be soft, large and warm. In summer you have leave to walk and sit barefoot, or to wear light shoes. Whoever wishes may wear stockings without feet to lie down in; do not sleep in shoes, and sleep nowhere but in bed. A woman will sometimes wear breeches of haircloth very firmly knotted, the legs laced very tightly down to the feet. But always a sweet and tender heart is best. I would rather that you well endure harsh words than harsh hairclothes.

If you can go without wimples and are fully willing to, wear warm caps, and on them white or black veils. Anchoreesses sometimes sin in the way they are wimpled, no less than ladies do. But although some say that it is the natural duty of women to wear wimples—no; neither wimples nor headcloths are mentioned in Holy Writ, but only coverings. *Ald Corinthios: Mulier velet caput suum* (1 Corinthians 11:6)—“A woman,” says the apostle, “must cover her head”; he says “cover,” not “wimple.” She must cover her shame, as Eve's sinful daughter, in memory of the sin that ruined us first of all, and not turn her coverings to adornment and to pride. Again, the apostle desires women in church to cover their faces too, in case evil thoughts should result from looking at them: *Et hoc est propter angelos* [*And this is an account of the angels*] (1 Corinthians 11:10)—why then, you wimpled church anchoress, do you reveal your face to the sight of men? The apostle speaks against you who see men, if you do not hide yourself. But if

anything covers your face from men's eyes, whether it be a wall or a cloth over a well-fastened window, an anchoress may well dispense with other wimpling. The apostle speaks against you who do not do this, not again others, whose own wall hides them from every man's eyes (where we thoughts and sometimes acts are often awakened).¹⁸ It is no great wonder that someone who wants to be seen should adorn herself, but in God's eye she is more lovely who, for the love of him, is unadorned outwardly.

Have no ring, brooch or patterned belt, gloves, nor any such thing you ought not to have. In hot summer you may wear a light gown.

I would always rather you do the more coarse kinds of handiwork. Do not make purses to win friends, but only for those for whom you director gives you leave, nor caps, silk bandages or lace without leave; but cut out and sew and mend church vestments and poor people's clothes. You must not give any such things away without your confessor's leave, and more than you can accept them without telling him first.

As for other things, how often you should receive friends or family and how long keep them with you: family feeling is not proper for a anchoress. There was once a religious man, and his natural brother came to him for help, and he referred him to his third brother, who was dead and buried. The brother answered wonderingly. “No!” he said, “Is he not dead?” “And so am I,” said the holy man: “Dead in the spiritual sense. Let no fleshly friend ask me for fleshly comfort.”²⁰

Ladies in the world can make enough keepsakes and collarbands; but if you make them, do not make them to show off. Vainglory makes bitter a good virtues and all good works. None of you shall make lace with a frame either for love or for money. I do not forbid you to make narrow lace to edge surplices or albs; let no one make other kinds of edging, especially no elaborate ones, unless there is great need.²¹

Help yourselves with your own labor, as far as you can, to clothe yourselves, and feed yourselves if need be—and those who serve you.

As St. Jerome teaches, never be too long or too easily altogether idle from some kind of work.²² The enemy soon summons her to his work when she does not labor in God's work, and whispers to her at once. For while he sees her busy, he thinks this: “I will gain nothing by approaching her, she cannot pay attention to listen to my teaching.” Much fleshly temptation arises from idleness. *Iniquitas Sodome saturitas panis et acium* (Ezekiel 16:49)—that is, “The wickedness of Sodom came from idleness and: full belly.” Iron that sits still soon gets rusty; water that never moves soon sinks.²³

An anchoress must not become a schoolmaster, nor turn the anchor-house into a children's school. Her maiden can teach some other maiden for whom it would be dangerous to learn among men or among boys. But an anchoress ought to give her attention only to God—though with her director's advice she can give some instruction and guidance in learning.

You must not send letters, nor receive letters, nor write without leave.

You must have your hair cut, or, if you want, shaved, four times a year to lighten your head—or keep it trimmed if you would rather—and let blood as often, or more often if need be. If anyone can do without, I do not mind. When you are finished letting blood, you must do nothing that is difficult for three days, but talk to your maidens and amuse yourselves together with virtuous stories. You may do so whenever you feel heavy or are sad or sick because of some worldly thing—even though any worldly comfort is unworthy of an anchoress.

So look after yourselves carefully in your blood-letting, and give yourselves such a rest that you can labor the more manfully for a long time afterwards—it is a great stupidity to lose ten or twelve days on account of one.

Wash yourselves whenever it is necessary and as often as you like, and your things too. Dirt was never dear to God, though poverty and plainness are precious to him.

(Always understand that in all these matters nothing is a command or a prohibition; they are part of the outer rule, which is of little importance. For when the inner is well-kept, as I said at the beginning [pp. 48–49], these can be changed whenever any need or any reason demands it, according to the way they can best serve the lady—rule as her humble servant. Still, truly, without her the lady will prosper very badly.)²⁴

An anchoress who does not have food at hand must be careful to have two women, one who always stays at home and another who goes out when necessary. That one should be very plain, without finery—either a little maidservant or a woman of a fair age. As she goes on her way, she should go singing her prayers, and have nothing to do with men or women; let her sit and stand about as little as she can before she comes home. She should not go anywhere without permission but where she has been sent, nor eat or drink out. The other should always stay in—not go outside the gates without permission. Both should be obedient to their lady in everything, except sin. Let them not have anything unless she knows it, nor receive anything or give it without her permission. Let no man in; do not let the younger

speak to anyone without permission. She should not go out of town without a safe companion, if possible, nor sleep out. If she cannot read a book let her say her Hours with *Our Fathers* and *Hail Marys*. She should do what she is asked without grumbling, and have her ears always open to her lady. Neither of the women should carry from or bring to their lady idle stories and news. They should not sing or talk worldly talk among themselves, or laugh or play so that anyone who sees it could turn it to harm. Above all things, let them hate lying and evil words. Their hair should be cut short their head-cloths sit low. Each should sleep alone. Their capes should be fastened high, without a brooch. No one should see them uncovered or with their heads bare. Let them keep their eyes low. They should not kiss any male friend or relation, or embrace them out of friendship, wash their hair for them, stare at any man, sport or flirt. Their clothes should be of such a style, and all their attire such that it is clearly seen how they direct their lives. They should pay close attention to their appearance, so that no one can blame them inside the house or outside. In every way they should forbear to anger their lady; whenever they do, before they eat or drink they should say their *I have done wrong* on their knees in front of her, and say *My fault*, and receive the penance she lays on them, bowing low to her. Let the anchoress never upbraid them for the same fault again, however angry she may be (unless she soon does the same thing again)—but let her put it completely out of her heart. If any strife arises between the women, the anchoress should make each say *I have done wrong* to the other, kneeling on the ground; let each lift up the other and finally kiss, and let the anchoress lay on each some penance, the greater on the one most at fault. Let her know well that this is the thing dearest to God: reconciliation and concord—and most hateful to the devil, for he is always anxious to stir up some hatred. Now the deceiver sees well that when a fire is burning well, and people want to put it out, they separate the burning brands—and he sets himself to do the same. Love is Jesus Christ's fire, that he wants to blaze always in your heart; and the devil puffs to blow it out. When his blowing is to no avail, he brings out some harmful word, or some other slight with which to offend one through the other, and the fire of the Holy Spirit is quenched when the brands are separated through anger—therefore keep them firm together in love. It should be nothing to them when the enemy puffs, especially if many are joined together, and well-kindled with love. Though the anchoress lays penances on her maidservants for open faults, let them nevertheless confess themselves to the priest when they need to—but still, always with permission.

If they do not know the graces for meals, they should say in their place

an *Our Father* and a *Hail Mary* before—and after food, too, plus an *I believe*. And finally they should say, “Father, Son and Holy Spirit, almighty God; may he give our lady his grace, ever longer, ever more; and grant to her and to us both a good end; reward all who do us good, and have mercy on the souls of those who have done us good—their souls and all Christian souls.”

Between meals you should not eat, snack, nibble fruit or anything, nor drink without permission; and let the permission be easily given for everything that is not sin. At meals, no words or few, and those quietly said. Also from after the anchoress’ Compline until Prime, let nothing be done or said through which her silence may be disturbed.²⁵

No anchoress’ servant ought to ask for a set wage, only food and wages that she can subsist on, and God’s mercy. Let no one fear that God will abandon her, whatever becomes of the anchoress. If the maidsens who work outside serve the anchoress as they ought, their wage will be the high joy of heaven; whoever has an eye of hope for such a high wage will serve gladly, and easily bear all annoyance. Joy is not bought with ease and comfort.

You anchoresses ought to read this last “branch” once a week to your women until they know it. And there is a great need for you to pay them a great deal of attention, for you may be greatly benefited or greatly the worse for them. On the other hand, if they sin through your negligence, you will be called to account for it before the high judge. And therefore, since there is great need for you and there is even greater need for them, teach them earnestly to keep their rule, both for your sake and theirs—gently and lovingly, for so women’s teaching ought to be, loving and easy, seldom stern. It is right for them both to fear you and love you, and yet there ought to be more love than fear; then it will go well.²⁶ Oil and wine both must be put on wounds, according to God’s teaching—but more gentle oil than smarting wine, that is, more gentle words than reproachful ones, for from this will come the best thing, that is, love-fear. Easily and gently forgive them their faults, when they know them and promise amendment. As far as you can be generous with them in food and clothing, and other things that fleshly need asks, even though you are strict and harsh with yourself. So does the one who winds a horn properly: they put the narrow end to their own mouth, and the wide end outward; and you do the same, since you want your prayers to wind and resound well in the Lord’s ears, not only for your own, but for everyone’s salvation—as our Lord grant it may be through his grace, Amen.

When your sisters’ maids come to comfort you, come to them at the

window, before or after noon, once or twice, and go back again soon to your spiritual occupation; do not sit with them before Compline past the proper time, so that their coming is no loss to your religion, but spiritual profit. If any words are said which might hurt feelings, let them not be spread about, nor brought to another anchoress who is easily hurt. It should be said to him who looks after all of them.²⁷ Two nights are enough for anyone to stay, and let that be very seldom. Do not break silence over food for them, or for blood-letting, unless some great good or need makes it necessary. The anchoress and her maid should not play worldly games at the window, nor should they tease one another, for as St. Bernard says every such fleshly comfort is a worthless thing for every spiritual person and especially for an anchoress—it takes away spiritually, in a way that is incalculable, from surpassing happiness,²⁸ and that is a bad exchange, as I said above (p. 197).

Read from this book in your leisure time every day, much or little, hope that it will be very profitable to you, if you read it often, through God’s great grace—or else I have badly wasted my long hours. God knows I would rather set out for Rome than start it over again! If you find that you do just what you read, thank God sincerely; if you do not, pray for God’s mercy, and be busy from then on in keeping it better, according to your strength.²⁹

Father, Son and Holy Spirit, one almighty God, keep you in his care may he gladden you and comfort you, my dear sisters, and for all that you suffer and endure for him may he never give you less than himself entirely. Be he ever praised, from world to world, for ever into eternity, Amen.

(As often as you have read anything from here, greet our Lady with: *Hail Mary* on behalf of him who rolled over it. I am moderate to ask for so little.)³⁰ The End.³¹