

Jacob

Both prophet and priest are ungodly; even in my house I have
found their wickedness, says the Lord.

—Jeremiah 23. 11

There are few who can resist the allure of this world; they extricate themselves from its grasp through observant dedication to some higher will and are, for the most part, unconcerned with the affairs of men. There are others whose scorn is itself worldly, whose strictures and condemnations are exercises in righteousness; their propriety is an accolade, disposed for the admiration of those they vilify. They are upright and virtuous and entirely without cause.

That Jacob is a being of the latter sort is self-evident. He sits, as is his custom, alone, in the corner of a popular tearoom. A clerical collar proudly adorns his throat: it is not an invitation to prayer, but a careful assertion of status; we are fortunate that he does not choose to don a biretta. A waitress approaches the table and lays down a tray, bearing a large, mottled teapot; there is a murmur of acknowledgment. Only when she addresses her patron as ‘Father’ and asks after his health does Jacob look up from his reading. He summons an expression of pained recognition, as if feebly searching for a name by which to address this woman who had served him, routinely now, for the past several weeks. The ensuing exchange is polite, if stifled – and exceptionally brief.

On turning away, the waitress mindlessly clasps the neck of her apron. Her forearm comes to rest upon a small ceramic badge, pinned to the front of the garment. It reads ‘Leah’.