

**THE NUN  
(L'ISOLÉE)**

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The nun (L'isolée) by René Bazin

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**RENÉ BAZIN**

**THE NUN  
(L'ISOLÉE)**



**THE NUN**

**BOOKS BY RENÉ BAZIN**

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# THE NUN

(L'ISOLÉE)

FROM THE FRENCH OF  
RENÉ BAZIN  
OF THE FRENCH ACADEMY

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# THE NUN.

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## I.

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### THE EVENING IN JUNE.

"SISTER PASCALE, your eyes are red."

"Not that I've been crying. There's a chill in the wind to-night."

"Yes, and there was hard work in the school to-day. You will be killing yourself, Sister Pascale."

A young, unsteady voice, with gaps in it caused by physical fatigue, replied:

"They are such darlings, my little girls; and yet, in a week, not one of them would think of me again—nor, perhaps, would any one in the wide world." And the speaker laughed.

A murmur of words, hardly articulate, obviously often rehearsed, seemed to surround and envelop the young Sister with their tenderness.

"Child! when will you be rational? You are trying to get us to say how much we care for you."

"Who would think this baby was twenty-three to-day?"

"Yes, this very day, the 16th of June, 1902."

"There, you see, we know all about your age!"

A pleasure in merely being together, in being quiet, in loving one another apart, visited all these hearts. And she who was in authority, raising her eyes beyond the enclosing courtyard, and beyond the sky-line of distant houses, said:

"It is good to breathe. People are fond of libelling the air of our smoky Lyons, but it does really smell of the country; don't you think it does?"

In a few moments' silence, all eyes were lifted; the sick or weary breast breathed in that joy of summer which the city had not quite absorbed or destroyed. These souls, inspired to worship and to the giving of thanks on behalf of the world, offered their gratitude in silence.

They were five women—five nuns, dressed in blue homespun, white frontlet, and black veil, within the enclosure of a school, where an alley, paved with cement and sheltered by a roof, ran the whole length of the playground. They kept for the use of their own "Community" this narrow retreat, and their habit was to gather there in their free time, when, as now, the school-children were gone. They felt more intimate there and also better screened from the curious eyes of neighbours; for the left wing of the house, towards the east, was nearly surrounded by buildings. Five women: and one only was not young. She was called Sister Justine, and had held office as Superior for five-and-twenty years: a woman built for action, square, broad-hipped, with a

large face, a kind, round nose, a skin paled by habitual privation of fresh air, eyes brown and full of cheerful life, eyelids that could open or close indeed, but knew no other trick, and had never given a subtle expression or a shade of meaning to any glance of hers. A white hair or two sprouted on her upper lip and on her chin: her few wrinkles were deep within her flesh; a silver lock of hair, now and then escaping from a frontlet carelessly put on, showed her to be aged about sixty years.

Had Sister Justine remained in her native place with her parents, working people of Colmar, she would have become what the peasants call a "godmother," a housewife dominant in her own home, and, not seldom, in a neighbour's; a managing woman, somewhat feared, but always beneficent. But at twenty she had entered the congregation of St. Hildegarde, which has its Mother-House at Clermont-Ferrand, and since then had returned once only to Alsace, on the eve of the war of 1870. In her was evident the warlike and frontier-guarding blood of her race. Quick in decision, brief in speech, never rescinding an order, clear in intelligence, ready in reply, more courageous than the average of men, she had never ceased to be the counsellor and the support of a throng that constantly shifted and changed about her. Children, parents, the random poor, with weaknesses, grievances, and sufferings of many kinds—very secret as well as very common—had confidence in her strength, well aware of her tenderness for those obscure and insignificant