



Four Last Things

William Palmer

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"Do you know what the last four things are? In the Christian catechism they are Death, Judgment, Heaven and Hell. But in our secular age they should perhaps be changed. I suggest - First Love, Friendship, Betrayal and Death . . . These also happen to be the staples of the novelist. Is that the sort of thing you want?"'

Thus Cornelius Marten asks the researcher who turns up one night at his house. Cornelius has forgotten his invitation to the young man. But the young woman who accompanies him seems strangely familiar. Cornelius is flattered by their attention. He had thought himself almost forgotten; his great works neglected. And Cornelius, monstrously selfish, whisky glass constantly in hand, his mind shifting between past and present, finds that his mysterious guests release memories and truths he had preferred to forget.

The stories which follow *Four Last Things* complement and explore some of the same themes: the poet who has published only one poem; a bizarre stag night; a child who is haunted by his encounter with the adult world of a religious maniac; a dreamed murder; an academic who stirs the ghost of Byron in modern Venice; the shifts and deceptions of language and memory; and in a great jazzman's last wordless hurrah, a final flowering of beauty.

This irresistibly powerful volume by the author of *The Good Republic*, Leporello and *The Contract* confirms William Palmer as one of our finest writers.

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