

Immortals Crowned by the French Academy: The Ink–Stain, v

Rene Bazin

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BOOK 2.

CHAPTER VIII. JOY AND MADNESS

May 1st.

These four days have seemed as if they never would end especially the last. But now it wants only two minutes of noon. In two minutes, if Lampron is not late

Rat–a–tat–tat!

"Come in."

"It is twelve o'clock, my friend; are you coming?"

It was Lampron.

For the last hour I had had my hat on my head, my stick between my legs, and had been turning over my essay with gloved hands. He laughed at me. I don't care. We walked, for the day was clear and warm. All the world was out and about. Who can stay indoors on May Day? As we neared the Chamber of Deputies, perambulators full of babies in white capes came pouring from all the neighboring streets, and made their resplendent way toward the Tuileries. Lampron was in a talkative mood. He was pleased with the hanging of his pictures, and his plan of campaign against Mademoiselle Jeanne.

"She is sure to have heard of it, Fabien, and perhaps is there already. Who can tell?"

"Oh, cease your humbug! Yes, very possibly she is there before us. I have had a feeling that she would be for these last four days."

"You don't say so!"

"I have pictured her a score of times ascending the staircase on her father's arm. We are at the foot, lost in the crowd. Her noble, clear–cut profile stands out against the Gobelin tapestries which frame it with their embroidered flowers; one would say some maiden of bygone days had come to life, and stepped down from her tapestried panel."

"Gentlemen!" said Lampron, with a sweep of his arm which took in the whole of the Place de la Concorde, "allow me to present to you the intending successor of Counsellor Mouillard, lawyer, of Bourges. Every inch of him a man of business!"

We were getting near. Crowds were on their way to the exhibition from all sides, women in spring frocks, many of the men in white waistcoats, one hand in pocket, gayly flourishing their canes with the other, as much as to say, "Look at me–well–to–do, jaunty, and out in fine weather." The turnstiles were crowded, but at last we got through. We made but one step across the gravel court, the realm of sculpture where antique gods in every posture formed a mythological circle round the modern busts in the central walk. There was no loitering here, for my heart was elsewhere. We cast a look at an old wounded Gaul, an ancestor unhonored by the crowd, and started up the staircase no Jeanne to lead the way. We came to the first room of paintings. Sylvestre beamed like a man who feels at home.

"Quick, Sylvestre, where is the sketch? Let's hurry to it."

But he dragged me with him around several rooms.

Have you ever experienced the intoxication of color which seizes the uninitiated at the door of a picture–gallery? So many staring hues impinge upon the eyes, so many ideas take confused shape and struggle together in the brain, that the eyes grow weary and the brain harassed. It hovers undecided like an insect in a meadow full of flowers. The buzzing remarks of the crowd add to the feeling of intoxication. They distract one's attention before it can settle anywhere, and carry it off to where some group is gathered before a great name, a costly frame, an enormous canvas, or an outrage on taste; twenty men on a gallows against a yellow sky, with twenty crows hovering over them, or an aged antediluvian, some mighty hunter, completely nude and with no property beyond a loaded club. One turns away, and the struggle begins again between the eye, attracted by a hundred subjects, and the brain, which would prefer to study one.

With Lampron this danger has no existence; he takes in a room at a glance. He has the sportsman's eye which, in a covey of partridges, marks its bird at a glance. He never hesitates. "That is the thing to make for," he says, "come along" and we make for it. He plants himself right in front of the picture, with both hands in his overcoat pockets, and his chin sunk in his collar; says nothing, but is quite happy developing an idea which has occurred to him on his way to it; comparing the picture before him with some former work by the same artist which he remembers. His whole soul is concentrated on the picture. And when he considers that I have understood and penetrated the meaning of the work, he gives his opinion in few words, but always the right ones, summing up a long sequence of ideas which I must have shared with him, since I see exactly as he does.

In this way we halted before the "Martyrdom of Saint Denis," by Bonnat, the two "Adorations," by Bouguereau, a landscape of Bernier's, some other landscapes, sea pieces, and portraits.

At last we left the oil paintings.

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In the open gallery, which runs around the inside of the huge oblong and looks on the court, the watercolors, engravings, and drawings slumbered, neglected. Lampron went straight to his works. I should have awarded them the medaille d'honneur; an etching of a man's head, a large engraving of the Virgin and Infant Jesus from the Salon Carre at the Louvre, and the drawing which represents

"Great Heavens! Sylvestre, she's perfectly lovely; she will make a great mistake if she does not come and see herself!"

"She will come, my dear sir; but I shall not be there to see her."

"Are you going?"

"I leave you to stalk your game; be patient, and do not forget to come and tell me the news this evening."

"I promise."

And Lampron vanished.

The drawing was hung about midway between two doorways draped with curtains, that opened into the big galleries. I leaned against the woodwork of one of them, and waited. On my left stretched a solitude seldom troubled by the few visitors who risk themselves in the realms of pen and pencil. These, too, only came to get fresh air, or to look down on the many-colored crowd moving among the white statues below.

At my right, on the contrary, the battling currents of the crowd kept passing and repassing, the provincial element easily distinguished by its jaded demeanor. Stout, exhausted matrons, breathless fathers of families, crowded the sofas, raising discouraged glances to the walls, while around them turned and tripped, untiring as at a dance, legions of Parisiennes, at ease, on their high heels, equally attentive to the pictures, their own carriage, and their neighbors' gowns.

O peaceful functionaries, you whose business it is to keep an eye upon this ferment! unless the ceaseless flux of these human phenomena lull you to a trance, what a quantity of silly speeches you must hear! I picked up twenty in as many minutes.

Suddenly there came a sound of little footsteps in the gallery. Two little girls had just come in, two sisters, doubtless, for both had the same black eyes, pink dresses, and white feathers in their hats. Hesitating, with outstretched necks, like fawns on the border of a glade, they seemed disappointed at the unexpected length of the gallery. They looked at each other and whispered. Then both smiled, and turning their backs on each other, they set off, one to the right, the other to the left, to examine the drawings which covered the walls. They made a rapid examination, with which art had obviously little to do; they were looking for something, and I thought it might be for Jeanne's portrait. And so it turned out; the one on my side soon came to a stop, pointed a finger to the wall, and gave a little cry. The other ran up; they clapped their hands.

Bravo, bravo!"

Then off they went again through the farther door.

I guessed what they were about to do.

I trembled from head to foot, and hid myself farther behind the curtains.

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Not a minute elapsed before they were back, not two this time, but three, and the third was Jeanne, whom they were pulling along between them.

They brought her up to Lampron's sketch, and curtsied neatly to her.

Jeanne bent down, smiled, and seemed pleased. Then, a doubt seizing her, she turned her head and saw me. The smile died away; she blushed, a tear seemed ready to start to her eyes. Oh, rapture! Jeanne, you are touched; Jeanne, you understand!

A deep joy surged across my soul, so deep that I never have felt its like.

Alas! at that instant some one called, "Jeanne!"

She stood up, took the two little girls by the hand, and was gone.

Far better had it been had I too fled, carrying with me that dream of delight!

But no, I leaned forward to look after them. In the doorway beyond I saw M. Charnot. A young man was with him, who spoke to Jeanne. She answered him. Three words reached me:

"It's nothing, George."

The devil! She loves another!

May 2d.

In what a state of mind did I set out this morning to face my examiners! Downhearted, worn out by a night of misery, indifferent to all that might befall me, whether for good or for evil.

I considered myself, and indeed I was, very wretched, but I never thought that I should return more wretched than I went.

It was lovely weather when at half past eleven I started for the Law School with an annotated copy of my essay under my arm, thinking more of the regrets for the past and plans for the future with which I had wrestled all night, than of the ordeal I was about to undergo. I met in the Luxembourg the little girl whom I had kissed the week before. She stopped her hoop and stood in my way, staring with wideopen eyes and a coaxing, cunning look, which meant, "I know you, I do!" I passed by without noticing. She pouted her lip, and I saw that she was thinking, "What's the matter with him?"

What was the matter? My poor little golden–locks, when you are grown a fair woman I trust you may know as little of it as you do to–day.

I went up the Rue Soufliot, and entered the stuffy courtyard on the stroke of noon.

The morning lectures were over. Beneath the arcades a few scattered students were walking up and down. I avoided them for fear of meeting a friend and having to talk. Several professors came running from their lunch, rather red in the face, at the summons of the secretary. These were my examiners.

It was time to get into costume, for the candidate, like the criminal, has his costume. The old usher, who has dressed me up I don't know how many times in his hired gowns, saw that I was downcast, and thought I must be suffering from examination fever, a peculiar malady, which is like what a young soldier feels the first time he is

under fire.

We were alone in the dark robing–room; he walked round me, brushing and encouraging me; doctors of law have a moral right to this touch of the brush.

"It will be all right, Monsieur Mouillard, never fear. No one has been refused a degree this morning."

"I am not afraid, Michu."

"When I say 'no one,' there was one refused you never heard the like. Just imagine a little to the right, please, Monsieur Mouillard imagine, I say, a candidate who knew absolutely nothing. That is nothing extraordinary. But this fellow, after the examination was over, recommended himself to mercy. 'Have compassion on me, gentlemen,' he said, 'I only wish to be a magistrate!' Capital, isn't it?"

"Yes, yes."

"You don't seem to think so. You don't look like laughing this morning."

"No, Michu, every one has his bothers, you know."

"I said to myself as I looked at you just now, Monsieur Mouillard has some bother. Button up all the way, if you please, for a doctor's essay; if–you–please. It's a heartache, then?"

"Something of the kind."

He shrugged his shoulders and went before me, struggling with an asthmatic chuckle, until we came to the room set apart for the examination.

It was the smallest and darkest of all, and borrowed its light from a street which had little enough to spare, and spared as little as it could. On the left against the wall is a raised desk for the candidate. At the end, on a platform before a bookcase, sit the six examiners in red robes, capes with three bands of ermine, and gold–laced caps. Between the candidate's desk and the door is a little enclosure for spectators, of whom there were about thirty when I entered.

My performance, which had a chance of being brilliant, was only fair.

The three first examiners had read my essay, especially M. Flamaran, who knew it well and had enjoyed its novel and audacious propositions. He pursed up his mouth preparatory to putting the first question, like an epicure sucking a ripe fruit. And when at length he opened it, amid the general silence, it was to carry the discussion at once up to such heights of abstraction that a good number of the audience, not understanding a word of it, stealthily made for the door.

Each successive answer put fresh spirit into him.

"Very good," he murmured, "very good; let us carry it a step farther. Now supposing "

And, the demon of logic at his heels, we both went off like inspired lunatics into a world of hypotheses where never man had set foot. He was examining no longer, he was inventing and intoxicating himself with deductions. No one was right or wrong. We were reasoning about chimeras, he radiant, I cool, before his gently tickled colleagues. I never realized till then what imagination a jurist's head could contain.

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Perspiring freely, he set down a white mark, having exceeded by ten minutes the recognized time for examination.

The second examiner was less enthusiastic. He made very few suppositions, and devoted all his art to convicting me of a contradiction between page seventeen and page seventy–nine. He kept repeating, "It's a serious matter, sir, very serious." But, nevertheless, he bestowed a second white mark on me. I only got half white from the third. The rest of the examination was taken up in matters extraneous to the subject of my essay, a commonplace trial of strength, in which I replied with threadbare arguments to outworn objections.

And then it ended. Two hours had passed.

I left the room while the examiners made up their minds.

A few friends came up to me.

"Congratulations, old man, I bet on six whites."

"Hallo, Larive! I never noticed you."

"I quite believe you; you didn't notice anybody, you still look bewildered. Is it the emotion inseparable from "

"I dare say."

"The candidate is requested to return to the examination room!" said the usher.

And old Michu added, in a whisper, "You have passed. I told you so. You won't forget old Michu, sir."

M. Flamaran conferred my degree with a paternal smile, and a few kind words for "this conscientious study, full of fresh ideas on a difficult subject."

I bowed to the examiners. Larive was waiting for me in the courtyard, and seized me by the arm.

"Uncle Mouillard will be pleased."

"I suppose so."

"Better pleased than you."

"That's very likely."

"He might easily be that. Upon my word I can't understand you. These two years you have been working like a gang of niggers for your degree, and now you have got it you don't seem to care a bit. You have won a smile from Flamaran and do not consider yourself a spoiled child of Fortune! What more did you want? Did you expect that Mademoiselle Charnot would come in person "

"Look here, Larive "

"To look on at your examination, and applaud your answers with her neatly gloved hands? Surely you know, my dear fellow, that that is no longer possible, and that she is going to be married."

"Going to be married?"

"Don't pretend you didn't know it."

"I have suspected as much since yesterday; I met her at the Salon, and saw a young man with her."

"Fair?"

"Yes."

"Tall?"

"Rather."

"Good-looking?"

"H'm well"

"Dufilleul, old chap, friend Dufilleul. Don't you know Dufilleul?"

"No."

"Oh, yes you do a bit of a stockjobber, great at ecarte, studied law in our year, and is always to be seen at the Opera with little Tigra of the Bouffes."

"Poor girl!"

"You pity her?"

"It's too awful."

"What is?"

"To see an unhappy child married to a rake who "

"She will not be the first."

"A gambler!"

"Yes, there is that, to be sure."

"A fool, as it seems, who, in exchange for her beauty, grace, and youth, can offer only an assortment of damaged goods! Yes, I do pity girls duped thus, deceived and sacrificed by the very purity that makes them believe in that of others."

"You've some queer notions! It's the way of the world. If the innocent victims were only to marry males of equal innocence, under the guardianship of virtuous parents, the days of this world would be numbered, my boy. I assure you that Dufilleul is a good match, handsome for one thing "

"That's worth a deal!"

"Rich."

"The deuce he is!"

"And then a name which can be divided."

"Divided?"

"With all the ease in the world. A very rare quality. At his marriage he describes himself as Monsieur du Filleul. A year later he is Baron du Filleul. At the death of his father, an old cad, he becomes Comte du Filleul. If the young wife is pretty and knows how to cajole her husband, she may even become a marquise."

"Ugh!"

"You are out of spirits, my poor fellow; I will stand you an absinthe, the only beverage that will suit the bitterness of your heart."

"No, I shall go home."

"Good–by, then. You don't take your degree cheerfully."

"Good–by."

He spun round on his heels and went down the Boulevard St. Michel.

So all is over forever between her and me, and, saddest of all, she is even more to be pitied than I. Poor girl! I loved her deeply, but I did it awkwardly, as I do everything, and missed my chance of speaking. The mute declaration which I risked, or rather which a friend risked for me, found her already engaged to this beast who has brought more skill to the task, who has made no blots at the National Library, who has dared all when he had everything to fear

I have allowed myself to be taken by her maiden witchery. All the fault, all the folly is mine. She has given me no encouragement, no sign of liking me. If she smiled at St. Germain it was because she was surprised and flattered. If she came near to tears at the Salon it was because she pitied me. I have not the shadow of a reproach to make her.

That is all I shall ever get from her a tear, a smile. That's all; never mind, I shall contrive to live on it. She has been my first love, and I shall keep her a place in my heart from which no other shall drive her. I shall now, set to work to shut this poor heart which did so wrong to open.... I thought to be happy to–night, and I am full of sorrow. Henceforward I think I shall understand Sylvestre better. Our sorrows will bring us nearer. I will go to see him at once, and will tell him so.

But first I must write to my uncle to tell him that his nephew is a Doctor of Law. All the rest, my plans, my whole future can be put off till to–morrow, or the day after, unless I get disgusted at the very thought of a future and decide to conjugate my life in the present indicative only. That is what I feel inclined to do.

May 4th.

Lampron has gone to the country to pass a fortnight in an out–of–the–way place with an old relative, where he goes into hiding when he wishes to finish an engraving.

But Madame Lampron was at home. After a little hesitation I told her all, and I am glad I did so. She found in her simple, womanly heart just the counsel that I needed. One feels that she is used to giving consolation. She

possesses the secret of that feminine deftness which is the great set–off to feminine weakness. Weak? Yes, women perhaps are weak, yet less weak than we, the strong sex, for they can raise us to our feet. She called me, "My dear Monsieur Fabien," and there was balm in the very way she said the words. I used to think she wanted refinement; she does not, she only lacks reading, and lack of reading may go with the most delicate and lofty feelings. No one ever taught her certain turns of expression which she used. "If your mother was alive," said she, "this is what she would say." And then she spoke to me of God, who alone can determinate man's trials, either by the end He ordains, or the resignation He inspires. I felt myself carried with her into the regions where our sorrows shrink into insignificance as the horizon broadens around them. And I remember she uttered this fine thought, "See how my son has suffered! It makes one believe, Monsieur Fabien, that the elect of the earth are the hardest tried, just as the stones that crown the building are more deeply cut than their fellows."

I returned from Madame Lampron's, softened, calmer, wiser.

CHAPTER IX. A VISIT FROM MY UNCLE

May 5th.

A letter from M. Mouillard breathing fire and fury. Were I not so low spirited I could laugh at it.

He would have liked me, after taking my degree at two in the afternoon, to take the train for Bourges the same evening, where my uncle, his practice, and provincial bliss awaited me. M. Mouillard's friends had had due notice, and would have come to meet me at the station. In short, I am an ungrateful wretch. At least I might have fixed the hour of my imminent arrival, for I can not want to stop in Paris with nothing there to detain me. But no, not a sign, not a word of returning; simply the announcement that I have passed. This goes beyond the bounds of mere folly and carelessness. M. Mouillard, his most elementary notions of life shaken to their foundations, concludes in these words:

"Fabien, I have long suspected it; some creature has you in bondage.
I am coming to break the bonds!

"BRUTUS MOUILLARD."

I know him well; he will be here tomorrow.

May 6th.

No uncle as yet.

May 7th.

No more uncle than yesterday.

May 8th.

Total eclipse continues. No news of M. Mouillard. This is very strange.

May 9th.

This evening at seven o'clock, just as I was going out to dine, I saw, a few yards away, a tall, broad–brimmed hat surmounting a head of lank white hair, a long neck throttled in a white neckcloth, a frock–coat flapping about a pair of attenuated legs. I lifted up my voice:

"Uncle!"

He opened his arms to me and I fell into them. His first remark was:

"I trust at least that you have not yet dined."

"No, uncle."

"To Foyot's, then!"

When you expect to meet a man in his wrath and get an invitation to dinner, you feel almost as if you had been taken in. You are heated, your arguments are at your fingers' ends, your stock of petulance is ready for immediate use; and all have to be stored in bond.

When I had recovered from my surprise, I said:

"I expected you sooner, from your letter."

"Your suppositions were correct. I have been two days here, at the Grand Hotel. I went there on account of the dining–room, for my friend Hublette (you remember Hublette at Bourges) told me: 'Mouillard, you must see that room before you retire from business.'"

"I should have gone to see you there, uncle, if I had known it."

"You would not have found me. Business before pleasure, Fabien. I had to see three barristers and five solicitors. You know that business of that kind can not wait. I saw them. Business over, I can indulge my feelings. Here I am. Does Foyot suit you?"

"Certainly, uncle."

"Come on, then nephew, quick, march! Paris, makes one feel quite young again!"

And really Uncle Mouillard did look quite young, almost as young as he looked provincial. His tall figure, and the countrified cut of his coat, made all who passed him turn to stare, accustomed as Parisians are to curiosities. He tapped the wood pavement with his stick, admired the effects of Wallace's philanthropy, stopped before the enamelled street– signs, and grew enthusiastic over the traffic in the Rue de Vaugirard.

The dinner was capital just the kind a generous uncle will give to a blameless nephew. M. Mouillard, who has a long standing affection for chambertin, ordered two bottles to begin with. He drank the whole of one and half of the other, eating in proportion, and talked unceasingly and positively at the top of his voice, as his wont was. He told me the story of two of his best actions this year, a judicial separation my uncle is very strong in judicial separations and the abduction of a minor. At first I looked out for personal allusions. But no, he told the story from pure love of his art, without omitting an interlocutory judgment, or a judgment reserved, just as he would have told the story of Helen and Paris, if he had been employed in that well–known case. Not a word about myself. I waited, yet nothing came but the successive steps in the action.

After the ice, M. Mouillard called for a cigar.

"Waiter, what cigars have you got?"

"Londres, conchas, regalias, cacadores, partagas, esceptionales. Which would you like, sir?"

"Damn the name! a big one that will take some time to smoke."

Emile displayed at the bottom of a box an object closely resembling a distaff with a straw through the middle, doubtless some relic of the last International Exhibition, abandoned by all, like the Great Eastern, on account of its dimensions. My uncle seized it, stuck it in the amber mouthpiece that is so familiar to me, lighted it, and under the pretext that you must always first get the tobacco to burn evenly, went out trailing behind him a cloud of smoke, like a gunboat at full speed.

We "did" the arcades round the Odeon, where my uncle spent an eternity thumbing the books for sale. He took them all up one after another, from the poetry of the decedents to the Veterinary Manual, gave a glance at the author's name, shrugged his shoulders, and always ended by turning to me with:

"You know that writer?"

"Why, yes, uncle."

"He must be quite a new author; I can't recall that name."

M. Mouillard forgot that it was forty–five years since he had last visited the bookstalls under the Odeon.

He thought he was a student again, loafing along the arcades after dinner, eager for novelty, careless of draughts. Little by little he lost himself in dim reveries. His cigar never left his lips. The ash grew longer and longer yet, a lovely white ash, slightly swollen at the tip, dotted with little black specks, and connected with the cigar by a thin red band which alternately glowed and faded as he drew his breath.

M. Mouillard was so lost in thought, and the ash was getting so long, that a young student of the age that knows no mercy–was struck by these twin phenomena. I saw him nudge a friend, hastily roll a cigarette, and, doffing his hat, accost my uncle.

"Might I trouble you for a light, sir!"

M. Mouillard emitted a sigh, turned slowly round, and bent two terrible eyes upon the intruder, knocked off the ash with an angry gesture, and held out the ignited end at arm's length.

"With pleasure, sir!"

Then he replaced the last book he had taken up a copy of Musset and called me.

"Come, Fabien."

Arm in arm we strolled up the Rue de Medicis along the railings of the Luxembourg.

I felt the crisis approaching. My uncle has a pet saying: "When a thing is not clear to me, I go straight to the heart of it like a ferret."

The ferret began to work.

"Now, Fabien, about these bonds I mentioned? Did I guess right?"

"Yes, uncle, I have been in bondage."

"Quite right to make a clean breast of it, my boy; but we must break your bonds."

"They are broken."

"How long ago?"

"Some days ago."

"On your honor?"

"Yes."

"That's quite right. You'd have done better to keep out of bondage. But there, you took your uncle's advice; you saw the abyss, and drew back from it. Quite right of you."

"Uncle, I will not deceive you. Your letter arrived after the event. The cause of the rupture was quite apart from that."

"And the cause was?"

"The sudden shattering of my illusions."

"Men still have illusions about these creatures?"

"She was a perfect creature, and worthy of all respect."

"Come, come!"

"I must ask you to believe me. I thought her affections free."

"And she was "

"Betrothed."

"Really now, that's very funny!"

"I did not find it funny, uncle. I suffered bitterly, I assure you."

"I dare say, I dare say. The illusions you spoke of anyhow, it's all over now?"

"Quite over."

"Well, that being the case, Fabien, I am ready to help you. Confess frankly to me. How much is required?"

"How much?"

"Yes, you want something, I dare say, to close the incident. You know what I mean, eh? to purchase what I might call the veil of oblivion. How much?"

"Why, nothing at all, uncle."

"Don't be afraid, Fabien; I've got the money with me."

"You have quite mistaken the case, uncle; there is no question of money. I must tell you again that the young lady is of the highest respectability."

My uncle stared.

"I assure you, uncle. I am speaking of Mademoiselle Jeanne Charnot."

"I dare say."

"The daughter of a member of the Institute."

"What!"

My uncle gave a jump and stood still.

"Yes, of Mademoiselle Charnot, whom I was in love with and wished to marry. Do you understand?"

He leaned against the railing and folded his arms.

"Marry! Well, I never! A woman you wanted to marry?"

"Why, yes; what's the matter?"

"To marry! How could I have imagined such a thing? Here were matters of the utmost importance going on, and I knew nothing about them. Marry! You might be announcing your betrothal to me at this moment if you'd– Still you are quite sure she is betrothed?"

"Larive told me so."

"Who's Larive?"

"A friend of mine."

"Oh, so you have only heard it through a friend?"

"Yes, uncle. Do you really think there may still be hope, that I still have a chance?"

"No, no; not the slightest. She is sure to be betrothed, very much betrothed. I tell you I am glad she is. The Mouillards do not come to Paris for their wives, Fabien we do not want a Parisienne to carry on the traditions of the family, and the practice. A Parisienne! I shudder at the thought of it. Fabien, you will leave Paris with me to–morrow. That's understood."

"Certainly not, uncle."

"Your reasons?"

"Because I can not leave my friends without saying goodbye, and because I have need to reflect before definitely binding myself to the legal profession."

"To reflect! You want to reflect before taking over a family practice, which has been destined for you since you were an infant, in view of which you have been working for five years, and which I have nursed for you, I, your

uncle, as if you had been my son?"

"Yes, uncle."

"Don't be a fool! You can reflect at Bourges quite as well as here. Your object in staying here is to see her again."

"It is not."

"To wander like a troubled spirit up and down her street. By the way, which is her street?"

"Rue de l'Universite."

My uncle took out his pocketbook and made a note, "Charnot, Rue de l'Universite." Then all his features expanded. He gave a snort, which I understood, for I had often heard it in court at Bourges, where it meant, "There is no escape now. Old Mouillard has cornered his man."

My uncle replaced his pencil in its case, and his notebook in his pocket, and merely added:

"Fabien, you're not yourself to–night. We'll talk of the matter another time. Five, six, seven, eight, nine, ten." He was counting on his fingers. "These return tickets are very convenient; I need not leave before to–morrow evening. And, what's more, you'll go with me, my boy."

M. Mouillard talked only on indifferent subjects during our brief walk from the Rue Soufflot to catch the omnibus at the Odeon. There he shook me by the hand and sprang nimbly into the first bus. A lady in black, with veil tightly drawn over a little turned up nose, seeing my uncle burst in like a bomb, and make for the seat beside her, hurriedly drew in the folds of her dress, which were spread over the seat. My uncle noticed her action, and, fearing he had been rude, bent over toward her with an affable expression. "Do not disturb yourself, Madame. I am not going all the way to Batignolles; no farther, indeed, than the Boulevards. I shall inconvenience you for a few moments only, a very few moments, Madame." I had time to remark that the lady, after giving her neighbor a glance of Juno–like disdain, turned her back upon him, and proceeded to study the straps hanging from the roof.

The brake was taken off, the conductor whistled, the three horses, their hoofs hammering the pavement, strained for an instant amid showers of sparks, and the long vehicle vanished down the Rue de Vaugirard, bearing with it Brutus and his fortunes.

CHAPTER X. A FAMILY BREACH

May 10th.

It is an awful fate to be the nephew of M. Mouillard! I always knew he was obstinate, capable alike of guile and daring, but I little imagined what his intentions were when he left me!

My refusal to start, and my prayer for a respite before embarking in his practice, drove him wild. He lost his head, and swore to drag me off, 'per fas et nefas'. He has mentally begun a new action *Mouillard v. Mouillard*, and is already tackling the brief; which is as much as to say that he is fierce, unbridled, heartless, and without remorse.

Some might have bent. I preferred to break.

We are strangers for life. I have just seen him to the landing of my staircase.

Immortals Crowned by the French Academy: The Ink–Stain, v2

He came here about a quarter of an hour ago, proud, and, I may say, swaggering, as he does over his learned friends when he has found a flaw in one of their pleadings.

"Well, nephew?"

"Well, uncle?"

"I've got some news for you."

"Indeed?"

M. Mouillard banged his hat down furiously upon my table.

"Yes, you know my maxim: when anything does not seem quite clear to me "

"You ferret it out."

"Quite so; I have always found it answer. Your business did not seem clear to me. Was Mademoiselle Charnot betrothed, or was she not? To what extent had she encouraged your attentions? You never would have told me the story correctly, and I never should have known. That being so, I put my maxim into practice, and went to see her father."

"You did that?"

"Certainly I did."

"You have been to see Monsieur Charnot?"

"In the Rue de l'Universite. Wasn't it the simplest thing to do? Besides, I was not sorry to make the acquaintance of a member of the Institute. And I must admit that he behaved very nicely to me not a bit stuck up."

"And you told him?"

"My name to begin with: Brutus Mouillard. He reflected a bit, just a moment, and recalled your appearance: a shy youth, a bachelor of arts, wearing an eyeglass."

"Was that all his description?"

"Yes, he remembered seeing you at the National Library, and once at his house. I said to him, 'That is my nephew, Monsieur Charnot.' He replied, 'I congratulate you, sir; he seems a youth of parts.' 'That he is, but his heart is very inflammable.' 'At his age, sir, who is not liable to take fire?' That was how we began. Your friend Monsieur Charnot has a pretty wit. I did not want to be behindhand with him, so I answered, 'Well, sir, it caught fire in your house.' He started with fright and looked all round the room. I was vastly amused. Then we came to explanations. I put the case before him, that you were in love with his daughter, without my consent, but with perfectly honorable intentions; that I had guessed it from your letters, from your unpardonable neglect of your duties to your family, and that I hurried hither from Bourges to take in the situation. With that I concluded, and waited for him to develop. There are occasions when you must let people develop. I could not jump down his throat with, 'Sir, would you kindly tell me whether your daughter is betrothed or not?' You follow me? He thought, no doubt, I had come to ask for his daughter's hand, and passing one hand over his forehead, he replied, 'Sir, I feel greatly flattered by your proposal, and I should certainly give it my serious attention, were it not that my daughter's hand is already sought by the son of an old schoolfellow of mine, which circumstance, as you will readily understand,

does not permit of my entertaining an offer which otherwise should have received the most mature consideration.' I had learned what I came for without risking anything. Well, I didn't conceal from him that, so far as I was concerned, I would rather you took your wife from the country than that you brought home the most charming Parisienne; and that the Mouillards from father to son had always taken their wives from Bourges. He entered perfectly into my sentiments, and we parted the best of friends. Now, my boy, the facts are ascertained: Mademoiselle Charnot is another's; you must get your mourning over and start with me to–night. To–morrow morning we shall be in Bourges, and you'll soon be laughing over your Parisian delusions, I warrant you!"

I had heard my uncle out without interrupting him, though wrath, astonishment, and my habitual respect for M. Mouillard were struggling for the mastery within me. I needed all my strength of mind to answer, with apparent calm.

"Yesterday, uncle, I had not made up my mind; today I have."

"You are coming?"

"I am not. Your action in this matter, uncle I do not know if you are aware of it has been perfectly unheard–of. I can not acknowledge your right to act thus. It puts between you and me two hundred miles of rail, and that forever. Do you understand me? You have taken the liberty of disclosing a secret which was not yours to tell; you have revealed a passion which, as it was hopeless, should not have been further mentioned, and certainly not exposed to such humiliation. You went to see Monsieur Charnot without reflecting whether you were not bringing trouble into his household; without reflecting, further, whether such conduct as yours, which may perhaps be usual among your business acquaintances, was likely to succeed with me. Perhaps you thought it would. You have merely completed an experiment, begun long ago, which proves that we do not understand life in the same way, and that it will be better for both of us if I continue to live in Paris, and you continue to live at Bourges."

"Ha! that's how you take it, young man, is it? You refuse to come? you try to bully me?"

"Yes."

"Consider carefully before you let me leave here alone. You know the amount of your fortune fourteen hundred francs a year, which means poverty in Paris."

"Yes, I do."

"Well, then, attend to what I am about to say. For years past I have been saving my practice for you that is, an honorable and lucrative position all ready for you to step into. But I am tired at length of your fads and your fancies. If you do not take up your quarters at Bourges within a fortnight from now, the Mouillard practice will change its name within three weeks!" My uncle sniffed with emotion as he looked at me, expecting to see me totter beneath his threats. I made no answer for a moment; but a thought which had been harassing me from the beginning of our interview compelled me to say:

"I have only one thing to ask you, Monsieur Mouillard."

"Further respite, I suppose? Time to reflect and fool me again? No, a hundred times no! I've had enough of you; a fortnight, not a day more!"

"No, sir; I do not ask for respite."

"So much the better, for I should refuse it. What do you want?"

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"Monsieur Mouillard, I trust that Jeanne was not present at the interview, that she heard none of it, that she was not forced to blush "

My uncle sprang to his feet, seized his gloves, which lay spread out on the table, bundled them up, flung them passionately into his hat, clapped the whole on his head, and made for the door with angry strides.

I followed him; he never looked back, never made answer to my "Good–by, uncle." But, at the sixth step, just before turning the corner, he raised his stick, gave the banisters a blow fit to break them, and went on his way downstairs exclaiming:

"Damnation!"

May 20th.

And so we have parted with an oath, my uncle and I! That is how I have broken with the only relative I possess. It is now ten days since then. I now have five left in which to mend the broken thread of the family tradition, and become a lawyer. But nothing points to such conversion. On the contrary, I feel relieved of a heavy weight, pleased to be free, to have no profession. I feel the thrill of pleasure that a fugitive from justice feels on clearing the frontier. Perhaps I was meant for a different course of life than the one I was forced to follow. As a child I was brought up to worship the Mouillard practice, with the fixed idea that this profession alone could suit me; heir apparent to a lawyer's stool born to it, brought up to it, without any idea, at any rate for a long time, that I could possibly free myself from the traditions of the law's sacred jargon.

I have quite got over that now. The courts, where I have been a frequent spectator, seem to me full of talented men who fine down and belittle their talents in the practice of law. Nothing uses up the nobler virtues more quickly than a practice at the bar. Generosity, enthusiasm, sensibility, true and ready sympathy all are taken, leaving the man, in many instances nothing but a skilful actor, who apes all the emotions while feeling none. And the comedy is none the less repugnant to me because it is played through with a solemn face, and the actors are richly recompensed.

Lampron is not like this. He has given play to all the noble qualities of his nature. I envy him. I admire his disinterestedness, his broad views of life, his faith in good in spite of evil, his belief in poetry in spite of prose, his unspoiled capacity for receiving new impressions and illusions a capacity which, amid the crowds that grow old in mind before they are old in body, keeps him still young and boyish. I think I might have been devoted to his profession, or to literature, or to anything but law.

We shall see. For the present I have taken a plunge into the unknown. My time is all my own, my freedom is absolute, and I am enjoying it.

I have hidden nothing from Lampron. As my friend he is pleased, I can see, at a resolve which keeps me in Paris; but his prudence cries out upon it.

"It is easy enough to refuse a profession," he said; "harder to find another in its place. What do you intend to do?"

"I don't know."

"My dear fellow, you seem to be trusting to luck. At sixteen that might be permissible, at twenty–four it's a mistake."

"So much the worse, for I shall make the mistake. If I have to live on little well, you've tried that before now; I shall only be following you."

"That's true; I have known want, and even now it attacks me sometimes; it's like influenza, which does not leave its victims all at once; but it is hard, I can tell you, to do without the necessities of life; as for its luxuries "

"Oh, of course, no one can do without its luxuries."

"You are incorrigible," he answered, with a laugh. Then he said no more. Lampron's silence is the only argument which struggles in my heart in favor of the Mouillard practice. Who can guess from what quarter the wind will blow?

CHAPTER XI. IN THE BEATEN PATH

June 5th.

The die is cast; I will not be a lawyer.

The tradition of the Mouillards is broken for good, Sylvestre is defeated for good, and I am free for good and quite uncertain of my future.

I have written my uncle a calm, polite, and clearly worded letter to confirm my decision. He has not answered it, nor did I expect an answer.

I expected, however, that he would be avenged by some faint regret on my part, by one of those light mists that so often arise and hang about our firmest resolutions. But no such mist has arisen.

Still, Law has had her revenge. Abandoned at Bourges, she has recaptured me at Paris, for a time. I realized that it was impossible for me to live on an income of fourteen hundred francs. The friends whom I discreetly questioned, in behalf of an unnamed acquaintance, as to the means of earning money, gave me various answers. Here is a fairly complete list of their expedients:

"If your friend is at all clever, he should write a novel."

"If he is not, there is the catalogue of the National Library: ten hours of indexing a day."

"If he has ambition, let him become a wine–merchant."

"No; 'Old Clo,' and get his hats gratis."

"If he is very plain, and has no voice, he can sing in the chorus at the opera."

"Shorthand writer in the Senate is a peaceful occupation."

"Teacher of Volapuk is the profession of the future."

"Try 'Hallo, are you there?' in the telephones."

"Wants to earn money? Advise him first not to lose any!"

The most sensible one, who guessed the name of the acquaintance I was interested in, said:

"You have been a managing clerk; go back to it."

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And as the situation chanced to be vacant, I went back to my old master. I took my old seat and den as managing clerk between the outer office and Counsellor Boule's glass cage. I correct the drafts of the inferior clerks; I see the clients and instruct them how to proceed. They often take me for the counsellor himself. I go to the courts nearly every day, and hang about chief clerks' and judges' chambers; and go to the theatre once a week with the "paper" supplied to the office.

Do I call this a profession? No, merely a stop-gap which allows me to live and wait for something to turn up. I sometimes have forebodings that I shall go on like this forever, waiting for something which will never turn up; that this temporary occupation may become only too permanent.

There is an old clerk in the office who has never had any other occupation, whose appearance is a kind of warning to me. He has a red face the effect of the office stove, I think straight, white hair, the expression when spoken to of a startled sheep-gentle, astonished, slightly flurried. His attenuated back is rounded off with a stoop between the neck and shoulders. He can hardly keep his hands from shaking. His signature is a work of art. He can stick at his desk for six hours without stirring. While we lunch at a restaurant, he consumes at the office some nondescript provisions which he brings in the morning in a paper bag. On Sundays he fishes, for a change; his rod takes the place of his pen, and his can of worms serves instead of inkstand.

He and I have already one point of resemblance. The old clerk was once crossed in love with a flowergirl, one Mademoiselle Elodie. He has told me this one tragedy of his life. In days gone by I used to think this thirty-year-old love-story dull and commonplace; to-day I understand M. Jupille; I relish him even. He and I have become sympathetic. I no longer make him move from his seat by the fire when I want to ask him a question: I go to him. On Sundays, on the quays by the Seine, I pick him out from the crowd intent upon the capture of tittlebats, because he is seated upon his handkerchief. I go up to him and we have a talk.

"Fish biting, Monsieur Jupille?"

"Hardly at all."

"Sport is not what it used to be?"

"Ah! Monsieur Mouillard, if you could have seen it thirty years ago!"

This date is always cropping up with him. Have we not all our own date, a few months, a few days, perhaps a single hour of full-hearted joy, for which half our life has been a preparation, and of which the other half must be a remembrance?

June 5th.

"Monsieur Mouillard, here is an application for leave to sign judgment in a fresh matter."

"Very well, give it me."

"To the President of the Civil Court:

"Monsieur Plumet, of 27 Rue Hauteville, in the city of Paris, by Counsellor Boule, his advocate, craves leave "

It was a proceeding against a refractory debtor, the commonest thing in the world.

"Monsieur Massinot!"

"Yes, sir."

"Who brought these papers?"

"A very pretty little woman brought them this morning while you were out, sir."

"Monsieur Massinot, whether she was pretty or not, it is no business of yours to criticise the looks of the clients."

"I did not mean to offend you, Monsieur Mouillard."

"You have not offended me, but you have no business to talk of a 'pretty client.' That epithet is not allowed in a pleading, that's all. The lady is coming back, I suppose?"

"Yes, sir."

Little Madame Plumet soon called again, tricked out from head to foot in the latest fashion. She was a little flurried on entering a room full of jocular clerks. Escorted by Massinot, both of them with their eyes fixed on the ground, she reached my office. I closed the door after her. She recognized me.

"Monsieur Mouillard! What a pleasant surprise!"

She held out her hand to me so frankly and gracefully that I gave her mine, and felt sure, from the firm, expressive way in which she clasped it, that Madame Plumet was really pleased to see me. Her ruddy cheeks and bright eyes recalled my first impression of her, the little dressmaker running from the workshop to the office, full of her love for M. Plumet and her grievances against the wicked cabinetmaker.

"What, you are back again with Counsellor Boule? I am surprised!"

"So am I, Madame Plumet, very much surprised. But such is life! How is Master Pierre progressing?"

"Not quite so well, poor darling, since I weaned him. I had to wean him, Monsieur Mouillard, because I have gone back to my old trade."

"Dressmaking?"

"Yes, on my own account this time. I have taken the flat opposite to ours, on the same floor. Plumet makes frames, while I make gowns. I have already three workgirls, and enough customers to give me a start. I do not charge them very dear to begin with.

One of my customers was a very nice young lady you know who! I have not talked to her of you, but I have often wanted to. By the way, Monsieur Mouillard, did I do my errand well?"

"What errand?"

"The important one, about the portrait at the Salon."

"Oh, yes; very well indeed. I must thank you."

"She came?"

"Yes, with her father."

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"She must have been pleased! The drawing was so pretty. Plumet, who is not much of a talker, is never tired of praising it. I tell you, he and I did not spare ourselves. He made a bit of a fuss before he would take the order; he was in a hurry such a hurry; but when he saw that I was bent on it he gave in. And it is not the first time he has given in. Plumet is a good soul, Monsieur Mouillard. When you know him better you will see what a good soul he is. Well, while he was cutting out the frame, I went to the porter's wife. What a business it was! I am glad my errand was successful!"

"It was too good of you, Madame Plumet; but it was useless, alas! she is to marry another."

"Marry another? Impossible!"

I thought Madame Plumet was about to faint. Had she heard that her son Pierre had the croup, she could not have been more upset. Her bosom heaved, she clasped her hands, and gazed at me with sorrowful compassion.

"Poor Monsieur Mouillard!"

And two tears, two real tears, coursed down Madame Plumet's cheeks. I should have liked to catch them. They were the only tears that had been shed for me by a living soul since my mother died.

I had to tell her all, every word, down to my rival's name. When she heard that it was Baron Dufilleul, her indignation knew no bounds. She exclaimed that the Baron was an awful man; that she knew all sorts of things about him! Know him? she should think so! That such a union was impossible, that it could never take place, that Plumet, she knew, would agree with her:

"Madame Plumet," I said, "we have strayed some distance from the business which brought you here. Let us return to your affairs; mine are hopeless, and you can not remedy them."

She got up trembling, her eyes red and her feelings a little hurt.

"My action? Oh, no! I can't attend to it to–day. I've no heart to talk about my business. What you've told me has made me too unhappy. Another day, Monsieur Mouillard, another day."

She left me with a look of mystery, and a pressure of the hand which seemed to say: "Rely on me!"

Poor woman!

CHAPTER XII. I GO TO ITALY

June 10th.

In the train. We have passed the fortifications. The stuccoed houses of the suburbs, the factories, taverns, and gloomy hovels in the debatable land round Paris are so many points of sunshine in the far distance. The train is going at full speed. The fields of green or gold are being unrolled like ribbons before my eyes. Now and again a metallic sound and a glimpse of columns and advertisements show that we are rushing through a station in a whirlwind of dust. A flash of light across our path is a tributary of the river. I am off, well on my way, and no one can stop me not Lampron, nor Counsellor Boule, nor yet Plum et. The dream of years is about to be realized. I am going to see Italy merely a corner of it; but what a pleasure even that is, and what unlooked–for luck!

A few days ago, Counsellor Boule called me into his office.

"Monsieur Mouillard, you speak Italian fluently, don't you?"

"Yes, sir." "Would you like a trip at a client's expense?"

"With pleasure, wherever you like."

"To Italy?"

"With very great pleasure."

"I thought so, and gave your name to the court without asking your consent. It's a commission to examine documents at Milan, to prove some copies of deeds and other papers, put in by a supposititious Italian heir to establish his rights to a rather large property. You remember the case of Zampini against Veldon and others?"

"Quite well."

"It is Zampini's copies of the deeds on which he bases his claim which you will have to compare with the originals, with the help of a clerk from the Record Office and a sworn translator. You can go by Switzerland or by the Corniche route, as you please. You will be allowed six hundred francs and a fortnight's holiday. Does that suit you?"

"I should think so!"

"Then pack up and be off. You must be at Milan by the morning of the eighteenth."

I ran to tell the news to Lampron, who was filled with surprise and not a little emotion at the mention of Italy. And here I am flying along in the Lyons express, without a regret for Paris. All my heart leaps forward toward Switzerland, where I shall be to–morrow. I have chosen this green route to take me to the land of blue skies. Up to the last moment I feared that some obstacle would arise, that the ill–luck which dogs my footsteps would keep me back, and I am quite surprised that it has let me off. True, I nearly lost the train, and the horse of cab No. 7382 must have been a retired racer to make up for the loss of time caused by M. Plumet.

Counsellor Boule sent me on a business errand an hour before I started. On my way back, just as I was crossing the Place de l'Opera in the aforesaid cab, a voice hailed me:

"Monsieur Mouillard!"

I looked first to the right and then to the left, till, on a refuge, I caught sight of M. Plumet struggling to attract my attention. I stopped the cab, and a smile of satisfaction spread over M. Plumet's countenance. He stepped off the refuge. I opened the cab–door. But a brougham passed, and the horse pushed me back into the cab with his nose. I opened the door a second time; another brougham came by; then a third; finally two serried lines of traffic cut me off from M. Plumet, who kept shouting something to me which the noise of the wheels and the crowd prevented me from hearing. I signalled my despair to M. Plumet. He rose on tiptoe. I could not hear any better.

Five minutes lost! Impossible to wait any longer! Besides, who could tell that it was not a trap to prevent my departure, though in friendly guise? I shuddered at the thought and shouted:

"Gare de Lyon, cabby, as fast as you can drive!"

My orders were obeyed. We got to the station to find the train made up and ready to start, and I was the last to take a ticket.

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I suppose M. Plumet managed to escape from his refuge.

GENEVA.

On my arrival I found, keeping order on the way outside the station, the drollest policeman that ever stepped out of a comic opera. At home we should have had to protect him against the boys; here he protects others.

Well, it shows that I am really abroad.

I have only two hours to spare in this town. What shall I see? The country; that is always beautiful, whereas many so-called "sights" are not. I will make for the shores of the lake, for the spot where the Rhone leaves it, to flow toward France. The Rhone, which is so muddy at Avignon, is clean here; deep and clear as a creek of the sea. It rushes along in a narrow blue torrent compressed between a quay and a line of houses.

The river draws me after it. We leave the town together, and I am soon in the midst of those market–gardens where the infant Topffer lost himself, and, overtaken by nightfall, fell to making his famous analysis of fear. The big pumping wheels still overtop the willows, and cast their shadows over the lettuce–fields. In the distance rise slopes of woodland, on Sundays the haunt of holiday–makers. The Rhone leaps and eddies, singing over its gravel beds. Two trout–fishers are taxing all their strength to pull a boat up stream beneath the shelter of the bank

Perhaps I was wrong in not waiting to hear what M. Plumet had to tell me. He is not the kind of man to gesticulate wildly without good reason.

ON THE LAKE.

The steamer is gaining the open water and Geneva already lies far behind. Not a ripple on the blue water that shades into deep blue behind us. Ahead the scene melts into a milky haze. A little boat, with idle sails embroidered with sunlight, vanishes into it. On the right rise the mountains of Savoy, dotted with forests, veiled in clouds which cast their shadows on the broken slopes. The contrast is happy, and I can not help admiring Leman's lovely smile at the foot of these rugged mountains.

At the bend in the banks near St. Maurice–en–Valais, the wind catches us, quite a squall. The lake becomes a sea. At the first roll an Englishwoman becomes seasick. She casts an expiring glance upon Chillon, the ancient towers of which are being lashed by the foam. Her husband does not think it worth his while to cease reading his guide–book or focusing his field–glass for so trifling a matter.

ON THE DILIGENCE

I am crossing the Simplon at daybreak, with rosepink glaciers on every side. We are trotting down the Italian slope. How I have longed for the sight of Italy! Hardly had the diligence put on the brake, and begun bowling down the mountain–side, before I discovered a change on the face of all things. The sky turned to a brighter blue. At the very first glance I seemed to see the dust of long summers on the leaves of the firs, six thousand feet above the sea, in the virgin atmosphere of the mountain–tops: and I was very near taking the creaking of my loosely fixed seat for the southern melody of the first grasshopper.

BAVENO

No one could be mistaken; this shaven, obsequious, suavely jovial innkeeper is a Neapolitan. He takes his stand in his mosaic–paved hall, and is at the service of all who wish for information about Lago Maggiore, the list of its sights; in a word, the programme of the piece.

Yes, they are scraped clean, carefully tended, pretty, all a–blowing and a–growing; but unreal. The palm trees are unhomely, the tropical plants seem to stand behind footlights. Restore them to their homes, or give me back Lake Lemman, so simply grand.

MENAGGIO.

After the sky–blue of Maggiore and the vivid green of Lugano, comes the violet–blue of Como, with its luminous landscape, its banks covered with olives, Roman ruins, and modern villas. Never have I felt the air so clear. Here for the first time I said to myself: "This is the spot where I would choose to dwell." I have even selected my house; it peeps out from a mass of pomegranates, evergreens, and citrons, on a peninsula around which the water swells with gentle murmur, and whence the view is perfect across lake, mountain, and sky.

A nightingale is singing, and I can not help reflecting that his fellows here are put to death in thousands. Yes, the reapers, famed in poems and lithographs, are desperate bird–catchers. At the season of migration they capture thousands of these weary travellers with snares or limed twigs; on Maggiore alone sixty thousand meet their end. We have but those they choose to leave us to charm our summer nights.

Perhaps they will kill my nightingale in the Carmelite garden. The idea fills me with indignation.

Then my thoughts run back to my rooms in the Rue de Rennes, and I see Madame Menin, with a dejected air, dusting my slumbering furniture; Lampron at work, his mother knitting; the old clerk growing sleepy with the heat and lifting his pen as he fancies he has got a bite; Madame Plumet amid her covey of workgirls, and M. Plumet blowing away with impatient breath the gold dust which the gum has failed to fix on the mouldings of a newly finished frame.

M. Plumet is pensive. He is burdened with a secret. I am convinced I did wrong in not waiting longer on the Place de L'Opera.

MILAN.

At last I am in Milan, an ancient city, but full of ideas and energy, my destination, and the cradle of the excellent Porfirio Zampini, suspected forger. The examination of documents does not begin till the day after to–morrow, so I am making the best of the time in seeing the sights.

There are four sights to see at Milan if you are a musician, and three if you are not: the Duomo, 'vulgo', cathedral; "The Marriage of the Virgin," by Raphael; "The Last Supper," by Leonardo; and, if it suits your tastes, a performance at La Scala.

I began with the Duomo, and on leaving it I received the news that still worries me.

But first of all I must make a confession. When I ascended through the tropical heat to the marble roof of the cathedral, I expected so much that I was disappointed. Surprise goes for so much in what we admire. Neither this mountain of marble, nor the lacework and pinnacles which adorn the enormous mass, nor the amazing number of statues, nor the sight of men smaller than flies on the Piazza del Duomo, nor the vast stretch of flat country which spreads for miles on every side of the city none of these sights kindled the spark of enthusiasm within me which has often glowed for much less. No, what pleased me was something quite different, a detail not noticed in the guide–books, I suppose.

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I had come down from the roof and was wandering in the vast nave from pillar to pillar, when I found myself beneath the lantern. I raised my eyes, but the flood of golden light compelled me to close them. The sunlight passing through the yellow glass of the windows overhead encircled the mighty vault of the lantern with a fiery crown, and played around the walls of its cage in rays which, growing fainter as they fell, flooded the floor with their expiring flames, a mysterious dayspring, a diffused glory, through which litany and sacred chant winged their way up toward the Infinite.

I left the cathedral tired out, dazed with weariness and sunlight, and fell asleep in a chair as soon as I got back to my room, on the fifth floor of the Albergo dell' Agnello.

I had been asleep for about an hour, perhaps, when I thought I heard a voice near me repeating "Illustre Signore!"

I did not wake. The voice continued with a murmur of sibilants:

"Illustrissimo Signore!"

This drew me from my sleep, for the human ear is very susceptible to superlatives.

"What is it?"

"A letter for your lordship. As it is marked 'Immediate,' I thought I might take the liberty of disturbing your lordship's slumbers."

"You did quite right, Tomaso."

"You owe me eight sous, signore, which I paid for the postage."

"There's half a franc, keep the change."

He retired calling me Monsieur le Comte; and all for two sous O fatherland of Brutus! The letter was from Lampron, who had forgotten to put a stamp on it.

"MY DEAR FRIEND:

"Madame Plumet, to whom I believe you have given no instructions so to do, is at present busying herself considerably about your affairs. I felt I ought to warn you, because she is all heart and no brains, and I have often seen before the trouble into which an overzealous friend may get one, especially if the friend be a woman.

"I fear some serious indiscretion has been committed, for the following reasons.

"Yesterday evening Monsieur Plumet came to see me, and stood pulling furiously at his beard, which I know from experience is his way of showing that the world is not going around the right way for him. By means of questions, I succeeded, after some difficulty, in dragging from him about half what he had to tell me. The only thing which he made quite clear was his distress on finding that Madame Plumet was a woman whom it was hard to silence or to convince by argument.

"It appears that she has gone back to her old trade of dress-making, and that one of her first customers God knows how she got there! was Mademoiselle Jeanne Charnot.

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"Well, last Monday Mademoiselle Jeanne was selecting a hat. She was blithe as dawn, while the dressmaker was gloomy as night.

"'Is your little boy ill, Madame Plumet?'

"'No, Mademoiselle.'

"'You look so sad.'

"Then, according to her husband's words, Madame Plumet took her courage in her two hands, and looking her pretty customer in the face, said:

"'Mademoiselle, why are you marrying?'

"'What a funny question! Why, because I am old enough; because I have had an offer; because all young girls marry, or else they go into convents, or become old maids. Well, Madame Plumet, I never have felt a religious vocation, and I never expected to become an old maid. Why do you ask such a question?'

"'Because, Mademoiselle, married life may be very happy, but it may be quite the reverse!'

"After giving expression to this excellent aphorism, Madame Plumet, unable to contain herself any longer, burst into tears.

"Mademoiselle Jeanne, who had been laughing before, was now amazed and presently grew rather anxious.

"Still, her pride kept her from asking any further questions, and Madame Plumet was too much frightened to add a word to her answer. But they will meet again the day after to-morrow, on account of the hat, as before.

"Here the story grew confused, and I understood no more of it.

"Clearly there is more behind this. Monsieur Plumet never would have gone out of his way merely to inform me that his wife had given him a taste of her tongue, nor would he have looked so upset about it. But you know the fellow's way; whenever it's important for him to make himself clear he loses what little power of speech he has, becomes worse than dumb-unintelligible. He sputtered inconsequent ejaculations at me in this fashion:

"'To think of it, to-morrow, perhaps! And you know what a business! Oh, damnation! Anyhow, that must not be! Ah! Monsieur Lampron, how women do talk!'

"And with this Monsieur Plumet left me.

"I must confess, old fellow, that I am not burning with desire to get mixed up in this mess, or to go and ask Madame Plumet for the explanation which her husband was unable to give me. I shall bide my time. If anything turns up to-morrow, they are sure to tell me, and I will write you word.

"My mother sends you her love, and begs you to wrap up warmly in the evening; she says the twilight is the winter of hot climates.

"The dear woman has been a little out of sorts for the last two

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days. Today she is keeping her bed. I trust it is nothing but a cold.

"Your affectionate friend,

"SYLVESTRE LAMPRON."

CHAPTER XIII. STARTLING NEWS FROM SYLVESTRE

MILAN, June 18th.

The examination of documents began this morning. I never thought we should have such a heap to examine, nor papers of such a length. The first sitting passed almost entirely in classifying, in examining signatures, in skirmishes of all kinds around this main body.

My colleagues and I are working in a room in the municipal Palazzo del Marino, a vast deserted building used, I believe, as a storehouse. Our leathern armchairs and the table on which the documents are arranged occupy the middle of the room. Along the walls are several cupboards, nests of registers and rats; a few pictures with their faces to the wall; some carved wood scutcheons, half a dozen flagstaves and a triumphal arch in cardboard, now taken to pieces and rotting gloomy apparatus of bygone festivals.

The persons taking part in the examination besides the three Frenchmen, are, in the first place, a little Italian judge, with a mean face, wrinkled like a winter apple, whose eyelids always seem heavy with sleep; secondly, a clerk, shining with fat, his dress, hair, and countenance expressive of restrained jollity, as he dreams voluptuous dreams of the cool drinks he means to absorb through a straw when the hour of deliverance shall sound from the frightful cuckoo clock, a relic of the French occupation, which ticks at the end of the room; thirdly, a creature whose position is difficult to determine I think he must be employed in some registry; he is here as a mere manual laborer. This third person gives me the idea of being very much interested in the fortunes of Signore Porfirio Zampini, for on each occasion, when his duties required him to bring us documents, he whispered in my ear:

"If you only knew, my lord, what a man Zampini is! what a noble heart, what a paladin!"

Take notice that this "paladin" is a macaroni–seller, strongly suspected of trying to hoodwink the French courts.

Amid the awful heat which penetrated the windows, the doors, even the sun–baked walls, we had to listen to, read, and compare documents. Gnats of a ferocious kind, hatched by thousands in the hangings of this hothouse, flew around our perspiring heads. Their buzzing got the upper hand at intervals when the clerk's voice grew weary and, diminishing in volume, threatened to fade away into snores.

The little judge rapped on the table with his paperknife and urged the reader afresh upon his wild career. My colleague from the Record Office showed no sign of weariness. Motionless, attentive, classing the smallest papers in his orderly mind, he did not even feel the gnats swooping upon the veins in his hands, stinging them, sucking them, and flying off red and distended with his blood.

I sat, both literally and metaphorically, on hot coals. Just as I came into the room, the man from the Record Office handed me a letter which had arrived at the hotel while I was out at lunch. It was a letter from Lampron, in a large, bulky envelope. Clearly something important must have happened.

My fate, perhaps, was settled, and was in the letter, while I knew it not. I tried to get it out of my inside pocket several times, for to me it was a far more interesting document than any that concerned Zampini's action. I pined to open it furtively, and read at least the first few lines. A moment would have sufficed for me to get at the point

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of this long communication. But at every attempt the judge's eyes turned slowly upon me between their half-closed lids, and made me desist. No a thousand times no! This smooth-tongued, wily Italian shall have no excuse for proving that the French, who have already such a reputation for frivolity, are a nation without a conscience, incapable of fulfilling the mission with which they are charged.

And yet... there came a moment when he turned his back and began to sort a fresh bundle with the man of records. Here was an unlooked-for opportunity. I cut open the envelope, unfolded the letter, and found eight pages! Still I began:

"MY DEAR FRIEND:

"In spite of my anxiety about my mother, and the care her illness demands (to-day it is found to be undoubted congestion of the lungs), I feel bound to tell you the story of what has happened in the Rue Hautefeuille, as it is very important "

"Excuse me, Monsieur Mou-il-ard," said the little judge, half turning toward me, "does the paper you have there happen to be number twenty-seven, which we are looking for?"

"Oh, dear, no; it's a private letter."

"A private letter? I ask pardon for interrupting you."

He gave a faint smile, closed his eyes to show his pity for such frivolity, and turned away again satisfied, while the other members of the Zampini Commission looked at me with interest.

The letter was important. So much the worse, I must finish it:

"I will try to reconstruct the scene for you, from the details which I have gathered.

"The time is a quarter to ten in the morning. There is a knock at Monsieur Plumet's door. The door opposite is opened half-way and Madame Plumet looks out. She withdraws in a hurry, 'with her heart in her mouth,' as she says; the plot she has formed is about to succeed or fail, the critical moment is at hand; the visitor is her enemy, your rival Dufilleul.

"He is full of self-confidence and comes in plump and flourishing, with light gloves, and a terrier at his heels.

"'My portrait framed, Plumet?'

"'Yes, my lord-yes, to be sure.'

"'Let's see it.'

"I have seen the famous portrait: a miniature of the newly created baron, in fresh butter, I think, done cheap by some poor girl who gains her living by coloring photographs. It is intended for Mademoiselle Tigra of the Bouffes. A delicate attention from Dufilleul, isn't it? While Jeanne in her innocence is dreaming of the words of love he has ventured to utter to her, and cherishes but one thought, one image in her heart, he is exerting his ingenuity to perpetuate the recollection of that image's adventures elsewhere.

"He is pleased with the elaborate and costly frame which Plumet has

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made for him.

"'Very nice. How much?'

"'One hundred and twenty francs.'

"'Six louis? very dear.'

"'That's my price for this kind of work, my lord; I am very busy just now, my lord.'

"'Well, let it be this once. I don't often have a picture framed; to tell the truth, I don't care for pictures.'

"Dufilleul admires and looks at himself in the vile portrait which he holds outstretched in his right hand, while his left hand feels in his purse. Monsieur Plumet looks very stiff, very unhappy, and very nervous. He evidently wants to get his customer off the premises.

"The rustling of skirts is heard on the staircase. Plumet turns pale, and glancing at the half-opened door, through which the terrier is pushing its nose, steps forward to close it. It is too late.

"Some one has noiselessly opened it, and on the threshold stands Mademoiselle Jeanne in walking-dress, looking, with bright eyes and her most charming smile, at Plumet, who steps back in a fright, and Dufilleul, who has not yet seen her.

"'Well, sir, and so I've caught you!'

"Dufilleul starts, and involuntarily clutches the portrait to his waistcoat. "'Mademoiselle No, really, you have come ?' "'To see Madame Plumet. What wrong is there in that?' "'None whatever of course not.' "'Not the least in the world, eh? Ha, ha! What a trifle flurries you. Come now, collect yourself. There is nothing to be frightened at. As I was coming upstairs, your dog put his muzzle out; I guessed he was not alone, so I left my maid with Madame Plumet, and came in at the right-hand door instead of the left. Do you think it improper?' "'Oh, no, Mademoiselle.' "'However, I am inquisitive, and I should like to see what you are hiding there.' "'It's a portrait.' "'Hand it to me.' "'With pleasure; unfortunately it's only a portrait of myself.' "'Why unfortunately? On the contrary, it flatters you the nose is not so long as the original; what do you say, Monsieur Plumet?' "'Do you think it good?' "'Very.' "'How do you like the frame?' "'It's very pretty.' "'Then I make you a present of it, Mademoiselle.' "'Why! wasn't it intended for me?' "'I mean well! to tell the truth, it wasn't; it's a wedding present, a souvenir there's nothing extraordinary in that, is there?' "'Nothing whatever. You can tell me whom it's for, I suppose?' "'Don't you think that you are pushing your curiosity too far?' "'Well, really!' "'Yes, I mean it.' "'Since you make such a secret of it, I shall ask Monsieur Plumet to tell me. Monsieur Plumet, for whom is this portrait?' "'Plumet, pale as death, fumbled at his workman's cap, like a naughty child. "'Why, you see, Mademoiselle I am only a poor framemaker.' "'Very well! I shall go to Madame Plumet, who is sure to know, and will not mind telling me. "'Madame Plumet, who must have been listening at the door, came in at that moment, trembling like a leaf, and prepared to dare all. "I beg you won't, Mademoiselle,' broke in Dufilleul; 'there is no secret. I only wanted to tease you. The portrait is for a friend of mine who lives at Fontainebleau.' "'His name?' "'Gonin he's a solicitor.' "'It was time you told me. How wretched you both looked. Another time tell me straight out, and frankly, anything you have no reason to conceal. Promise you won't act like this again.' "'I promise.' "'Then, let us make peace.' "She held out her hand to him. Before he could grasp it, Madame Plumet broke in: "'Excuse me, Mademoiselle, I can not have you deceived like this in my house. Mademoiselle, it is not true!' "'What is not true, Madame?' "'That this portrait is for Monsieur Gonin, or anybody else at Fontainebleau. "'Mademoiselle Charnot drew back in surprise. "'For whom, then?' "'An actress.' "'Take care what you are saying, Madame.' "'For

Mademoiselle Tigras of the Bouffes.' "Lies!" cried Dufilleul. "Prove it, Madame; prove your story, please!" "Look at the back," answered Madame Plumet, quietly. "Mademoiselle Jeanne, who had not put down the miniature, turned it over, read what was on the back, grew deathly pale, and handed it to her lover. "What does it say?" said Dufilleul, stooping over it. "It said: 'From Monsieur le Baron D – to Mademoiselle T –, Boulevard Haussmann. To be delivered on Thursday.'" "You can see at once, Mademoiselle, that this is not my writing. It's an abominable conspiracy. Monsieur Plumet, I call upon you to give your wife the lie. She has written what is false; confess it!" "The framemaker hid his face in his hands and made no reply. "What, Plumet, have you nothing to say for me?" "Mademoiselle Charnot was leaving the room. "Where are you going, Mademoiselle? Stay, you will soon see that they lie!" "She was already half-way across the landing when Dufilleul caught her and seized her by the hand. "Stay, Jeanne, stay!" "Let me go, sir!" "No, hear me first; this is some horrible mistake. I swear!" "At this moment a high-pitched voice was heard on the staircase. "Well, George, how much longer are you going to keep me?" "Dufilleul suddenly lost countenance and dropped Mademoiselle Charnot's hand. "The young girl bent over the banisters, and saw, at the bottom of the staircase, exactly underneath her, a woman looking up, with head thrown back and mouth still half-opened. Their eyes met. Jeanne at once turned away her gaze. "Then, turning to Madame Plumet, who leaned motionless against the wall: "Come, Madame," she said, "we must go and choose a hat." And she closed the dressmaker's door behind her. "This, my friend, is the true account of what happened in the Rue Hautefeuille. I learned the details from Madame Plumet in person, who could not contain herself for joy as she described the success of her conspiracy, and how her little hand had guided old Dame Fortune's. For, as you will doubtless have guessed, the meeting between Jeanne and her lover, so dreaded by the framemaker, had been arranged by Madame Plumet unknown to all, and the damning inscription was also in her handwriting. "I need not add that Mademoiselle Charnot, upset by the scene, had a momentary attack of faintness. However, she soon regained her usual firm and dignified demeanor, which seems to show that she is a woman of energy. "But the interest of the story does not cease here. I think the betrothal is definitely at an end. A betrothal is always a difficult thing to renew, and after the publicity which attended the rupture of this one, I do not see how they can make it up again. One thing I feel sure of is, that Mademoiselle Jeanne Charnot will never change her name to Madame Dufilleul. "Do not, however, exaggerate your own chances. They will be less than you think for some time yet. I do not believe that a young girl who has thus been wounded and deceived can forget all at once. There is even the possibility of her never forgetting of living with her sorrow, preferring certain peace of mind, and the simple joys of filial devotion, to all those dreams of married life by which so many simple-hearted girls have been cruelly taken in. "In any case do not think of returning yet, for I know you are capable of any imprudence. Stay where you are, examine your documents, and wait. "My mother and I are passing through a bitter trial. She is ill, I may say seriously ill. I would sooner bear the illness than my present anxiety. "Your friend, SYLVESTRE LAMPRON. "P. S. Just as I was about to fasten up this letter, I got a note from Madame Plumet to tell me that Monsieur and Mademoiselle Charnot have left Paris. She does not know where they have gone."

I became completely absorbed over this letter. Some passages I read a second time; and the state of agitation into which it threw me did not at once pass away. I remained for an indefinite time without a notion of what was going on around me, entirely wrapped up in the past or the future.

The Italian attendant brought me back to the present with a jerk of his elbow. He was replacing the last register in the huge drawers of the table. He and I were alone. My colleagues had left, and our first sitting had come to an end without my assistance, though before my eyes. They could not have gone far, so, somewhat ashamed of my want of attention, I put on my hat, and went to find them and apologize. The little attendant caught me by the sleeve, and gave a knowing smile at the letter which I was slipping into my pocketbook.

"E d'una donna?" he asked.

"What's that to you?"

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"I am sure of it; a letter from a man would never take so long to read; and, 'per Bacco', you were a time about it! 'Oh, le donne, illustre signore, le downe!'"

"That's enough, thank you."

I made for the door, but he threw himself nimbly in my way, grimacing, raising his eyebrows, one finger on his ribs. "Listen, my lord, I can see you are a true scholar, a man whom fame alone can tempt. I could get your lordship such beautiful manuscripts Italian, Latin, German manuscripts that never have been edited, my noble lord!"

"Stolen, too!" I replied, and pushed past him.

I went out, and in the neighboring square, amicably seated at the same table, under the awning of a caf., I found my French colleagues and the Italian judge. At a table a little apart the clerk was sucking something through a straw. And they all laughed as they saw me making my way toward them through the still scorching glare of the sun.

MILAN, June 25th.

Our mission was concluded to-day. Zampini is a mere rogue. Brought face to face with facts he could not escape from, he confessed that he had intended to "have a lark" with the French heirs by claiming to be the rightful heir himself, though he lacked two degrees of relationship to establish his claim.

We explained to him that this little "lark" was a fraudulent act which exposed him at least to the consequence of having to pay the costs of the action. He accepted our opinion in the politest manner possible. I believe he is hopelessly insolvent. He will pay the usher in macaroni, and the barrister in jests.

My colleagues, the record man and the translator, leave Milan to-morrow. I shall go with them.

CHAPTER XIV. A SURPRISING ENCOUNTER

MILAN, June 26th.

I have just had another letter from Sylvestre. My poor friend is very miserable; his mother is dead a saint if ever there was one. I was very deeply touched by the news, although I knew this lovable woman very slightly too slightly, indeed, not having been a son, or related in any way to her, but merely a passing stranger who found his way within the horizon of her heart, that narrow limit within which she spread abroad the treasures of her tenderness and wisdom. How terribly her son must feel her loss!

He described in his letter her last moments, and the calmness with which she met death, and added:

"One thing, which perhaps you will not understand, is the remorse which is mingled with my sorrow. I lived with her forty years, and have some right to be called 'a good son.' But, when I compare the proofs of affection I gave her with those she gave me, the sacrifices I made for her with those she made for me; when I think of the egoism which found its way into our common life, on which I founded my claims to merit, of the wealth of tenderness and sympathy with which she repaid a few walks on my arm, a few kind words, and of her really great forbearance in dwelling beneath the same roof with me I feel that I was ungrateful, and not worthy of the happiness I enjoyed.

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"I am tortured by the thought that it is impossible for me to repair all my neglect, to pay a debt the greatness of which I now recognize for the first time. She is gone. All is over. My prayers alone can reach her, can tell her that I loved her, that I worshipped her, that I might have been capable of doing all that I have left undone for her.

"Oh, my friend, what pleasant duties have I lost! I mean, at least, to fulfil her last wishes, and it is on account of one of them that I am writing to you.

"You know that my mother was never quite pleased at my keeping at home the portrait of her who was my first and only love. She would have preferred that my eyes did not recall so often to my heart the recollection of my long-past sorrows. I withstood her. On her death-bed she begged me to give up the picture to, those who should have had it long ago. 'So long as I was here to comfort you in the sorrows which the sight of it revived in you,' she said, 'I did not press this upon you; but soon you will be left alone, with no one to raise you when your spirits fail you. They have often begged you to give up the picture to them. The time is come for you to grant their prayers.'

"I promised.

"And now, dear friend, help me to keep my promise. I do not wish to write to them. My hand would tremble, and they would tremble when they saw my writing. Go and see them.

"They live about nine miles from Milan, on the Monza road, but beyond that town, close to the village of Desio. The villa is called Dannegianti, after its owners. It used to be hidden among poplars, and its groves were famous for their shade. You must send in your card to the old lady of the house together with mine. They will receive you. Then you must break the news to them as you think best, that, in accordance with the dying wish of Sylvestre Lampron's mother, the portrait of Rafaella is to be given in perpetuity to the Villa Dannegianti. Given, you understand.

"You may even tell them that it is on its way. I have just arranged with Plumet about packing it. He is a good workman, as you know. To-morrow all will be ready, and my home an absolute void.

"I intend to take refuge in hard work, and I count upon you to alleviate to some extent the hardships of such a method of consolation.

"SYLVESTRE LAMPRON."

When I got Lampron's letter, at ten in the morning, I went at once to see the landlord of the Albergo dell' Agnello.

"You can get me a carriage for Desio, can't you?"

"Oh, your lordship thinks of driving to Desio? That is quite right. It is much more picturesque than going by train. A little way beyond Monza. Monza, sir, is one of our richest jewels; you will see there "

"Yes," said I, repeating my Baedeker as accurately as he, "the Villa Reale, and the Iron Crown of the Emperors of the West."

"Exactly so, sir, and the cathedral built "

"By Theodolinda, Queen of the Lombards, A.D. 595, restored in the sixteenth century. I know; I only asked whether you could get me a decent carriage."

"A matchless one! At half–past three, when the heat is less intense, your lordship will find the horses harnessed. You will have plenty of time to get to Desio before sunset, and be back in time for supper."

At the appointed time I received notice. My host had more than kept his word, for the horses sped through Milan at a trot which they did not relinquish when we got into the Como road, amid the flat and fertile country which is called the garden of Italy.

After an hour and a half, including a brief halt at Monza, the coachman drew up his horses before the first house in Desio an inn.

It was a very poor inn, situated at the corner of the main street and of a road which branched off into the country. In front of it a few plane– trees, trained into an arbor, formed an arch of shade. A few feet of vine clambered about their trunks. The sun was scorching the leaves and the heavy bunches of grapes which hung here and there. The shutters were closed, and the little house seemed to have been lulled to sleep by the heat and light of the atmosphere and the buzzing of the gnats.

"Oh, go in; they'll wake up at once," said the coachman, who had divined my thoughts.

Then, without waiting for my answer, like a man familiar with the customs of the country, he took his horses down the road to the stable.

I went in. A swarm of bees and drones were buzzing like a whirlwind beneath the plane–trees; a frightened white hen ran cackling from her nest in the dust. No one appeared. I opened the door; still nobody was to be seen. Inside I found a passage, with rooms to right and left and a wooden staircase at the end. The house, having been kept well closed, was cool and fresh. As I stood on the threshold striving to accustom my eyes to the darkness of the interior, I heard the sound of voices to my right:

"Picturesque as you please, but the journey has been a failure! These people are no better than savages; introductions, distinctions, and I may say even fame, had no effect upon them!"

"Do you think they have even read your letters?" "That would be still worse, to refuse to read letters addressed to them! No, I tell you, there's no excuse."

"They have suffered great trouble, I hear, and that is some excuse for them, father."

"No, my dear, there is no possible excuse for their keeping hidden treasures of such scientific interest. I do not consider that even an Italian nobleman, were he orphan from his cradle, and thrice a widower, has any right to keep locked up from the investigation of scholars an unequalled collection of Roman coins, and a very presentable show of medallions and medals properly so–called. Are you aware that this boorish patrician has in his possession the eight types of medal of the gens Attilia?"

"Really?"

"I am certain of it, and he has the thirty–seven of the gens Cassia, one hundred and eighteen to one hundred and twenty–one of the gens Cornelia, the eleven Farsuleia, and dozens of Numitoria, Pompeia, and Scribonia, all in perfect condition, as if fresh from the die. Besides these, he has some large medals of the greatest rarity; the

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Marcus Aurelius with his son on the reverse side, Theodora bearing the globe, and above all the Annia Faustina with Heliogabalus on the reverse side, an incomparable treasure, of which there is only one other example, and that an imperfect one, in the world a marvel which I would give a day of my life to see; yes, my dear, a day of my life!"

Such talk as this, in French, in such an inn as this!

I felt a presentiment, and stepped softly to the right–hand door.

In the darkened room, lighted only by a few rays filtered between the slats of the shutters, sat a young girl. Her hat was hung upon a nail above her head; one arm rested on a wretched white wood table; her head was bent forward in mournful resignation. On the other side of the table, her father was leaning back in his chair against the whitewashed wall, with folded arms, heightened color, and every sign of extreme disgust. Both rose as I entered Jeanne first, M. Charnot after her. They were astonished at seeing me.

I was no less astounded than they.

We stood and stared at each other for some time, to make sure that we were not dreaming.

M. Charnot was the first to break the silence. He did not seem altogether pleased at my appearance, and turned to his daughter, whose face had grown very red and yet rather chilling:

"Jeanne, put your hat on; it is time to go to the station." Then he addressed me:

"We shall leave you the room to yourself, sir; and since the most extraordinary coincidence" he emphasized the words "has brought you to this damnable village, I hope you will enjoy your visit."

"Have you been here long, Monsieur?"

"Two hours, Monsieur, two mortal hours in this inn, fried by the sun, bored to death, murdered piecemeal by flies, and infuriated by the want of hospitality in this out–of–the–way hole in Lombardy."

"Yes, I noticed that the host was nowhere to be seen, and that is the reason why I came in here; I had no idea that I should have the honor of meeting you."

"Good God! I'm not complaining of him! He's asleep in his barn over there. You can wake him up; he doesn't mind showing himself; he even makes himself agreeable when he has finished his siesta."

"I only wish to ask him one question, which perhaps you could answer, Monsieur; then I need not waken him. Could you tell me the way to the Villa Dannegianti?"

M. Charnot walked up to me, looked me straight in the eyes, shrugged his shoulders, and burst out laughing.

"The Villa Dannegianti!"

"Yes, Monsieur."

"Are you going to the Villa Dannegianti?"

"Yes, Monsieur."

"Then you may as well turn round and go home again."

"Why?"

"Because there's no admission."

"But I have a letter of introduction."

"I had two, Monsieur, without counting the initials after my name, which are worth something and have opened the doors of more than one foreign collection for me; yet they denied me admission! Think of it! The porter of that insolent family denied me admission! Do you expect to succeed after that?"

"I do, Monsieur."

My words seemed to him the height of presumption.

"Come, Jeanne," he said, "let us leave this gentleman to his youthful illusions. They will soon be shattered very soon."

He gave me an ironical smile and made for the door.

At this moment Jeanne dropped her sunshade. I picked it up for her.

"Thank you, Monsieur," she said.

Of course these words were no more than ordinarily polite. She would have said the same to the first comer. Nothing in her attitude or her look displayed any emotion which might put a value on this common form of speech. But it was her voice, that music I so often dream of. Had it spoken insults, I should have found it sweet. It inspired me with the sudden resolution of detaining this fugitive apparition, of resting, if possible, another hour near her to whose side an unexpected stroke of fortune had brought me.

M. Charnot had already left the room; his rotund shadow rested on the wall of the passage. He held a travelling–bag in his hand.

"Monsieur," said I, "I am sorry that you are obliged to return already to Milan. I am quite certain of admission to the Villa Dannegianti, and it would have given me pleasure to repair a mistake which is clearly due only to the stupidity of the servants."

He stopped; the stroke had told.

"It is certainly quite possible that they never looked at my card or my letters. But allow me to ask, since my card did not reach the host, what secret you possess to enable yours to get to him?"

"No secret at all, still less any merit of my own. I am the bearer of news of great importance to the owners of the villa, news of a purely private nature. They will be obliged to see me. My first care, when I had fulfilled my mission, would have been to mention your name. You would have been able to go over the house, and inspect a collection of medals which, I have heard, is a very fine one."

"Unique, Monsieur!"

"Unfortunately you are going away, and to–morrow I have to leave Milan myself, for Paris."

"You have been some time in Italy, then?"

"Nearly a fortnight."

M. Charnot gave his daughter a meaning look, and suddenly became more friendly.

"I thought you had just come. We have not been here so long," he added; "my daughter has been a little out of sorts, and the doctor advised us to travel for change of air. Paris is not healthful in this very hot weather."

He looked hard at me to see whether his fib had taken me in. I replied, with an air of the utmost conviction, "That is putting it mildly. Paris, in July, is uninhabitable."

"That's it, Monsieur, uninhabitable; we were forced to leave it. We soon made up our minds, and, in spite of the time of the year, we turned our steps toward the home of the classics, to Italy, the museum of Europe. And you really think, then, that by means of your good offices we should have been admitted to the villa?"

"Yes, Monsieur, but owing only to the missive with which I am entrusted."

M. Charnot hesitated. He was probably thinking of the blot of ink, and certainly of M. Mouillard's visit. But he doubtless reflected that Jeanne knew nothing of the old lawyer's proceedings, that we were far from Paris, that the opportunity was not to be lost; and in the end his passion for numismatics conquered at once his resentment as a bookworm and his scruples as a father.

"There is a later train at ten minutes to eight, father," said Jeanne.

"Well, dear, do you care to try your luck again, and return to the assault of that Annia Faustina?"

"As you please, father."

We left the inn together by the by–road down the hill. I could not believe my eyes. This old man with refined features who walked on my left, leaning on his malacca cane, was M. Charnot. The same man who received me so discourteously the day after I made my blot was now relying on me to introduce him to an Italian nobleman; on me, a lawyer's clerk. I led him on with confidence, and both of us, carried away by our divers hopes, he dreaming of medals, I of the reopened horizon full of possibilities, conversed on indifferent subjects with a freedom hitherto unknown between us.

And this charming Parisienne, whose presence I divined rather than saw, whom I dared not look in the face, who stepped along by her father's side, light of foot, her eyes seeking the vault of heaven, her ear attentive though her thoughts were elsewhere, catching her Parisian sunshade in the hawthorns of Desio, was Jeanne, Jeanne of the flower– market, Jeanne whom Lampron had sketched in the woods of St. Germain! It did not seem possible.

Yet it was so, for we arrived together at the gates of the Villa Dannegianti, which is hardly a mile from the inn.

I rang the bell. The fat, idle, insolent Italian porter was beginning to refuse me admission, with the same words and gestures which he had so often used. But I explained, in my purest Tuscan, that I was not of the ordinary kind of importunate tourist. I told him that he ran a serious risk if he did not immediately hand my card and my letter Lampron's card in an envelope to the Comtesse Dannegianti.

From his stony glare I could not tell whether I had produced any impression, nor even whether he had understood. He turned on his heel with his keys in one hand and the letter in the other, and went on his way through the shady avenue, rolling his broad back from side to side, attired in a jacket which might have fitted in front, but was all too

short behind.

The shady precincts of which Lampron wrote did not seem to have been pruned. The park was cool and green. At the end of the avenue of plane– trees, alternating with secular hawthorns cut into pyramids, we could see the square mass of the villa just peeping over the immense clumps of trees. Beyond it the tops and naked trunks of a group of umbrella pines stood silhouetted against the sky.

The porter returned, solemn and impassive. He opened the gate without a word. We all passed through M. Charnot somewhat uneasy at entering under false pretenses, as I guessed from the way he suddenly drew up his head. Jeanne seemed pleased; she smoothed down a fold which the wind had raised in her frock, spread out a flounce, drew herself up, pushed back a hairpin which her fair tresses had dragged out of its place, all in quick, deft, and graceful movements, like a goldfinch preening its feathers.

We reached the terrace, and arranged that M. and Mademoiselle Charnot should wait in an alley close at hand till I received permission to visit the collections.

I entered the house, and following a lackey, crossed a large mosaic–paved hall, divided by columns of rare marbles into panels filled with mediocre frescoes on a very large scale. At the end of this hall was the Countess's room, which formed a striking contrast, being small, panelled with wood, and filled with devotional knick–knacks that gave it the look of a chapel.

As I entered, an old lady half rose from an armchair, which she could have used as a house, the chair was so large and she was so small. At first I could distinguish only two bright, anxious eyes. She looked at me like a prisoner awaiting a verdict. I began by telling her of the death of Lampron's mother. Her only answer was an attentive nod. She guessed something else was coming and stood on guard, so to speak. I went on and told her that the portrait of her daughter was on its way to her. Then she forgot everything her age, her rank, and the mournful reserve which had hitherto hedged her about. Her motherly heart alone spoke within her; a ray of light had come to brighten the incurable gloom which was killing her; she rushed toward me and fell into my arms, and I felt against my heart her poor aged body shaking with sobs. She thanked me in a flood of words which I did not catch. Then she drew back and gazed at me, seeking to read in my eyes some emotion responsive to her own, and her eyes, red and swollen and feverishly bright, questioned me more clearly than her words.

"How good are you, sir! and how generous is he! What life does he lead? Has he ever lived down the sorrow which blasted his youth here? Men forget more easily, happily for them. I had given up all hope of obtaining the portrait. Every year I sent him flowers which meant, 'Restore to us all that is left of our dead Rafaella.' Perhaps it was unkind. I did reproach myself at times for it. But I was her mother, you know; the mother of that peerless girl! And the portrait is so good, so like! He has never altered it? tell me; never retouched it? Time has not marred the lifelike coloring? I shall now have the mournful consolation I have so long desired; I shall always have before me the counterpart of my lost darling, and can gaze upon that face which none could depict save he who loved her; for, dreadful though it be to think of, the image of the best beloved will change and fade away even in a mother's heart, and at times I doubt whether my old memory is still faithful, and recalls all her grace and beauty as clearly as it used to do when the wound was fresh in my heart and my eyes were still filled with the loveliness of her. Oh, Monsieur, Monsieur! to think that I shall see that face once more!"

She left me as quickly as she had come, and went to open a door on the left, into an adjoining room, whose red hangings threw a ruddy glow upon the polished floor.

"Cristoforo!" she cried, "Cristoforo! come and see a French gentleman who brings us great news. The portrait of our Rafaella, Cristoforo, the portrait we have so long desired, is at last to be given to us!"

Immortals Crowned by the French Academy: The Ink–Stain, v2

I heard a chair move, and a slow footstep. Cristoforo appeared, with white hair and black moustache, his tall figure buttoned up in an old–fashioned frockcoat, the petrified, mummified remains of a once handsome man. He walked up to me, took both my hands and shook them ceremoniously. His face showed no traces of emotion; his eyes were dry, and he had not a word to say. Did he understand? I really do not know. He seemed to think the affair was an ordinary introduction. As I looked at him his wife's words came back to me, "Men forget sooner." She gazed at him as if she would put blood into his veins, where it had long ceased to flow.

"Cristoforo, I know this will be a great joy to you, and you will join with me in thanking Monsieur Lampron for his generosity. You, sir, will express to him all the Count's gratitude and my own, and also the sympathy we feel for him in his recent loss. Besides, we shall write to him. Is Monsieur Lampron rich?"

"I had forgotten to tell you, Madame, that my friend will accept nothing but thanks."

"Ah, that is truly noble of him, is it not, Cristoforo?"

All the answer the old Count made was to take my hands and shake them again.

I used the opportunity to put forward my request in behalf of M. Charnot. He listened attentively.

"I will give orders. You shall see everything everything."

Then, considering our interview at an end, he bowed and withdrew to his own apartments.

I looked for the Countess Dannegianti. She had sunk into her great armchair, and was weeping hot tears.

Ten minutes later, M. Charnot and Jeanne entered with me into the jealously guarded museum.

Museum was the only name to give to a collection of such artistic value, occupying, as it did, the whole of the ground floor to the right of the hall. Two rooms ran parallel to each other, filled with pictures, medals, and engravings, and were connected by a narrow gallery devoted to sculpture.

Hardly was the door opened when M. Charnot sought the famous medals with his eye. There they were in the middle of the room in two rows of cases. He was deeply moved. I thought he was about to make a raid upon them, attracted after his kind by the 'auri sacra fames', by the yellow gleam of those ancient coins, the names, family, obverse and reverse of which he knew by heart. But I little understood the enthusiast.

He drew out his handkerchief and spectacles, and while he was wiping the glasses he gave a rapid and impatient glance at the works that adorned the walls. None of them could charm the numismatist's heart. After he had enjoyed the pleasure of proving how feeble in comparison were the charms of a Titian or a Veronese, then only did M. Charnot walk step by step to the first case and bend reverently over it.

Yet the collection of paintings was unworthy of such disdain. The pictures were few, but all were signed with great names, most of them Italian, a few Dutch, Flemish, or German. I began to work systematically through them, pleased at the want of a catalogue and the small number of inscriptions on the frames. To be your own guide doubles your pleasure; you can get your impression of a picture entirely at first hand; you are filled with admiration without any one having told you that you are bound to go into ecstasies. You can work out for yourself from a picture, by induction and comparison, its subject, its school, and its author, unless it proclaims, in every stroke of the brush, "I am a Hobbema," "a Perugino," or "a Giotto."

I was somewhat distracted, however, by the voice of the old numismatist, as he peered into the cases, and constrained his daughter to share in the exuberance of his learned enthusiasm.

Immortals Crowned by the French Academy: The Ink–Stain, v2

"Jeanne, look at this; crowned head of Cleopatra, Mark Antony on the reverse; in perfect condition, isn't it? See, an Italian 'as–Iguvium Umbriae', which my friend Pousselot has sought these thirty years! Oh, my dear, this is important: Annius Verus on the reverse of Commodus, both as children, a rare example yet not as rare as Jeanne, you must engrave this gold medal in your heart, it is priceless: head of Augustus with laurel, Diana walking on the reverse. You ought to take an interest in her. Diana the fair huntress.

This collection is heavenly! Wait a minute; we shall soon come to the Annia Faustina."

Jeanne made no objection, but smiled softly upon the Cleopatra, the Umbrian 'as', and the fair huntress.

Little by little her father's enthusiasm expanded over the vast collection of treasures. He took out his pocketbook and began to make notes. Jeanne raised her eyes to the walls, took one glance, then a second, and, not being called back to the medals, stepped softly up to the picture at which I had begun.

She went quickly from one to another having evidently no more than a child's untutored taste for pictures. As I, on the contrary, was getting on very slowly, she was bound to overtake me. You may be sure I took no steps to prevent it, and so in a very short time we were both standing before the same picture, a portrait of Holbein the younger. A subject of conversation was ready to hand.

"Mademoiselle," said I, "do you like this Holbein?"

"You must admit, sir, that the old gentleman is exceedingly plain."

"Yes, but the painting is exquisite. See how powerful is the drawing of the head, how clear and deep the colors remain after more than three hundred years. What a good likeness it must have been! The subject tells his own story: he must have been a nobleman of the court of Henry VIII, a Protestant in favor with the King, wily but illiterate, and wishing from the bottom of his heart that he were back with the companions of his youth at home in his country house, hunting and drinking at his ease. It is really the study of a man's character. Look at this Rubens beside it, a mere mass of flesh scarcely held together by a spirit, a style that is exuberantly material, all color and no expression. Here you have spirituality on one side and materialism on the other, unconscious, perhaps, but unmistakable. Compare, again, with these two pictures this little drawing, doubtless by Perugino, just a sketch of an angel for an Annunciation; notice the purity of outline, the ideal atmosphere in which the painter lives and with which he impregnates his work. You see he comes of a school of poets and mystics, gifted with a second sight which enabled them to beautify this world and raise themselves above it."

I was pleased with my little lecture, and so was Jeanne. I could tell it by her surprised expression, and by the looks she cast toward her father, who was still taking notes, to see whether she might go on with her first lesson in art.

He smiled in a friendly way, which meant:

"I'm happy here, my dear, thank you; 'va piano va sano'."

This was as good as permission. We went on our way, saluting, as we passed, Tintoretto and Titian, Veronese and Andrea Solari, old Cimabue, and a few early paintings of angular virgins on golden backgrounds.

Jeanne was no longer bored.

"And is this," she would say, "another Venetian, or a Lombard, or a Florentine?"

We soon completed the round of the first room, and made our way into the gallery beyond, devoted to sculpture. The marble gods and goddesses, the lovely fragments of frieze or cornice from the excavations at Rome, Pompeii,

or Greece, had but a moderate interest for Mademoiselle Charnot. She never gave more than one glance to each statue, to some none at all.

We soon came to the end of the gallery, and the door which gave access into the second room of paintings.

Suddenly Jeanne gave an exclamation of surprise.

"What is that?" she said.

Beneath the large and lofty window, fanned on the outside by leafy branches, a wooden panel, bearing an inscription, stood upright against the wall. The words were painted in black on a white ground, and arranged with considerable skill, after the style of the classic epitaphs which the Italians still cultivate.

I drew aside the folds of a curtain:

"It is one of those memorial tablets, Mademoiselle, such as people hang up in this part of the country upon the church doors on the day of the funeral. It means:

"To thee, Rafaella Dannegianti who, aged twenty years and few months having fully experienced the sorrows and illusions of this world on January 6 like an angel longing for its heavenly home didst wing thy way to God in peace and happiness the clergy of Desio and the laborers and artificers of the noble house of Dannegianti tender these last solemn offices."

"This Rafaella, then, was the Count's daughter?"

"His only child, a girl lovely and gracious beyond rivalry."

"Oh, of course, beyond rivalry. Are not all only daughters lovely and perfect when once they are dead?" she replied with a bitter smile. "They have their legend, their cult, and usually a flattering portrait. I am surprised that Rafaella's is not here. I imagine her portrait as representing a tall girl, with long, well–arched eyebrows, and brown eyes "

"Greenish–brown."

"Green, if you prefer it; a small nose, cherry lips, and a mass of light brown hair."

"Golden brown would be more correct."

"Have you seen it, then? Is there one?"

"Yes, Mademoiselle, and it lacks no perfection that you could imagine, not even that smile of happy youth which was a falsehood ere the paint had yet dried on the canvas. Here, before this relic, which recalls it to my thoughts, I must confess that I am touched."

She looked at me in astonishment.

"Where is the portrait? Not here?"

"No, it is at Paris, in my friend Lampron's studio."

"O oh!" She blushed slightly.

Immortals Crowned by the French Academy: The Ink–Stain, v2

"Yes, Mademoiselle, it is at once a masterpiece and a sad reminder. The story is very simple, and I am sure my friend would not mind my telling it to you to you if to no other before these relics of the past.

When Lampron was a young man travelling in Italy he fell in love with this young girl, whose portrait he was painting. He loved her, perhaps without confessing it to himself, certainly without avowing it to her. Such is the way of timid and humble men of heart, men whose love is nearly always misconstrued when it ceases to be unnoticed. My friend risked the happiness of his life, fearlessly, without calculation and lost it. A day came when Rafaella Dannegianti was carried off by her parents, who shuddered at the thought of her stooping to a painter, even though he were a genius."

"So she died?"

"A year later. He never got over it. Even while I speak to you, he in his loneliness is pondering and weeping over these very lines which you have just read without a suspicion of the depth of their bitterness."

"He has known bereavement," said she; "I pity him with all my heart."

Her eyes filled with tears. She repeated the words, whose meaning was now clear to her, "A to Rafaella." Then she knelt down softly before the mournful inscription. I saw her bow her head. Jeanne was praying.

It was touching to see the young girl, whom chance had placed before this simple testimony of a sorrow now long past, deeply moved by the sad tale of love, filled with tender pity for the dead Rafaella, her fellow in youth and beauty and perhaps in destiny, finding in her heart the tender impulse to kneel without a word, as if beside the grave of a friend. The daylight's last rays streaming in through the window illumined her bowed head.

I drew back, with a touch of awe.

M. Charnot appeared.

He went up to his daughter and tapped her on the shoulder. She rose with a blush.

"What are you doing there?" he said.

Then he adjusted his glasses and read the Italian inscription.

"You really take unnecessary trouble in kneeling down to decipher a thing like that. You can see at once that it's a modern panel, and of no value. Monsieur," he added, turning to me, "I do not know what your plans are, but unless you intend to sleep at Desio, we must be off, for the night is falling."

We left the villa.

Out of doors it was still light, but with the afterglow. The sun was out of sight, but the earth was still enveloped, as it were, in a haze of luminous dust.

M. Charnot pulled out his watch.

"Seven minutes past eight. What time does the last train start, Jeanne?"

"At ten minutes to eight."

Immortals Crowned by the French Academy: The Ink–Stain, v2

"Confusion! we are stranded in Desio! The mere thought of passing the night in that inn gives me the creeps. I see no way out of it unless Monsieur Mouillard can get us one of the Count's state coaches. There isn't a carriage to be got in this infernal village!"

"There is mine, Monsieur, which luckily holds four, and is quite at your service."

"Upon my word, I am very much obliged to you. The drive by moonlight will be quite romantic."

He drew near to Jeanne and whispered in her ear:

"Are you sure you've wraps enough? a shawl, or a cape, or some kind of pelisse?"

She gave a merry nod of assent.

"Don't worry yourself, father; I am prepared for all emergencies."

At half–past eight we left Desio together, and I silently blessed the host of the Albergo dell' Agnello, who had assured me that the carriage road was "so much more picturesque." I found it so, indeed.

M. Charnot and Jeanne faced the horses. I sat opposite to M. Charnot, who was in the best of spirits after all the medals he had seen. Comfortably settled in the cushions, careless of the accidents of the road, with graphic and untiring forefinger, he undertook to describe his travels in Greece, whither he had been sent on some learned enterprise by the Minister of Education, and had carried an imagination already prepossessed and dazzled with Homeric visions. He told his story well and with detail, combining the recollections of the scholar with the impressions of an artist. The pediment of the Parthenon, the oleanders of the Ilissus, the stream "that runs in rain–time," the naked peak of Parnassus, the green slopes of Helicon, the blue gulf of Argus, the pine forest beside Alpheus, where the ancients worshipped "Death the Gentle" all of them passed in recount upon his learned lips.

I must acknowledge, to my shame, that I did not listen to all he said, but, in a favorite way I have, reserved some of my own freedom of thought, while I gave him complete freedom of speech. And I am bound to say he did not abuse it, but consented to pause at the frontiers of Thessaly. Then followed silence. I gave him room to stretch. Soon, lulled by the motion of the carriage, the stream of reminiscence ran more slowly than ran dry. M. Charnot slept.

We bowled at a good pace, without jolting, over the white road. A warm mist rose around us laden with the smell of vegetation, ripe corn, and clover from the overheated earth and the neighboring fields, which had drunk their full of sunlight. Now and again a breath of fresh air was blown to us from the mountains. As the darkness deepened the country grew to look like a vast chessboard, with dark and light squares of grass and corn land, melting at no great distance into a colorless and unbroken horizon. But as night blotted out the earth, the heaven lighted up its stars. Never have I seen them so lustrous nor in such number. Jeanne reclined with her eyes upturned toward those limitless fields of prayer and vision; and their radiance, benignly gentle, rested on her face. Was she tired or downcast, or merely dreaming? I knew not. But there was something so singularly poetic in her look and attitude that she seemed to me to epitomize in herself all the beauty of the night.

I was afraid to speak. Her father's sleep, and our consequent isolation, made me ill at ease. She, too, seemed so careless of my presence, so far away in dreamland, that I had to await opportunity, or rather her leave, to recall her from it.

Finally she broke the silence herself. A little beyond Monza she drew closer her shawl, that the night wind had ruffled, and bent over toward me:

Immortals Crowned by the French Academy: The Ink–Stain, v2

"You must excuse my father; he is rather tired this evening, for he has been on his feet since five o'clock."

"The day has been so hot, too, Mademoiselle, and the medals 'came not in single spies, but in battalions'; he has a right to sleep after the battle."

"Dear old father! You gave him a real treat, for which he will always be obliged to you."

"I trust the recollection of to–day will efface that of the blot of ink, for which I am still filled with remorse."

"Remorse is rather a serious word."

"No, Mademoiselle, I really mean remorse, for I wounded the feelings of a gentleman who has every claim on my respect. I never have dared to speak of this before. But if you would be kind enough to tell Monsieur Charnot how sorry I have been for it, you would relieve me of a burden."

I saw her eyes fixed upon me for a moment with a look of attention not previously granted to me. She seemed pleased.

"With all my heart," she said.

There was a moment's silence.

"Was this Rafaella, whose story you have told me, worthy of your friend's long regret?"

"I must believe so."

"It is a very touching story. Are you fond of Monsieur Lampron?"

"Beyond expression, Mademoiselle; he is so openhearted, so true a friend, he has the soul of the artist and the seer. I am sure you would rate him very highly if you knew him."

"But I do know him, at least by his works. Where am I to be seen now, by the way? What has become of my portrait?"

"It's at Lampron's house, in his mother's room, where Monsieur Charnot can go and see it if he likes."

"My father does not know of its existence," she said, with a glance at the slumbering man of learning.

"Has he not seen it?"

"No, he would have made so much ado about nothing. So Monsieur Lampron has kept the sketch? I thought it had been sold long ago."

"Sold! you did not think he would sell it!"

"Why not? Every artist has the right to sell his works."

"Not work of that kind."

"Just as much as any other kind."

Immortals Crowned by the French Academy: The Ink–Stain, v2

"No, he could not have done that. He would no more sell it than he would sell the portrait of Rafaella Dannegianti. They are two similar relics, two precious reminiscences."

Mademoiselle Charnot turned, without a reply, to look at the country which was flying past us in the darkness.

I could just see her profile, and the nervous movement of her eyelids.

As she made no attempt to speak, her silence emboldened me.

"Yes, Mademoiselle, two similar relics, yet sometimes in my hours of madness as to–day, for instance, here, with you near me I dare to think that I might be less unfortunate than my friend that his dream is gone forever but that mine might return to me if you were willing."

She quickly turned toward me, and in the darkness I saw her eyes fixed on mine.

Did the darkness deceive me as to the meaning of this mute response? Was I the victim of a fresh delusion? I fancied that Jeanne looked sad, that perhaps she was thinking of the oaths sworn only to be broken by her former lover, but that she was not quite displeased.

However, it lasted only for a second. When she spoke, it was in a higher key:

"Don't you think the breeze is very fresh this evening?"

A long–drawn sigh came from the back part of the carriage. M. Charnot was waking up.

He wished to prove that he had only been meditating.

"Yes, my dear, it's a charming evening," he replied; "these Italian nights certainly keep up their reputation."

Ten minutes later the carriage drew up, and M. Charnot shook hands with me before the door of his hotel.

"Many thanks, my dear young sir, for this delightful drive home! I hope we shall meet again. We are off to Florence to–morrow; is there anything I can do for you there?"

"No, thank you."

Mademoiselle Charnot gave me a slight bow. I watched her mount the first few steps of the staircase, with one hand shading her eyes from the glare of the gaslights, and the other holding up her wraps, which had come unfolded and were falling around her.