

...to die again and renew his strength, exaltation, vitality. There was a subdued clamour on the street. A hurrying of feet back upon his thoughts, an assembly of all the villages, with a strange suppression of voice.

"Well," he said to himself, putting down his glass with a weariness of over-exertion asserting itself. "I must leave it to-morrow. I must make Maso take the wine tubs and give me an hour or two, if no more. Fine head he has! If the Passion Play were given here he would be the Christ—the long, pale, ascetic face, Nazarene beard, only too short. Cropping the hair so very close spoils him. To-morrow he shall sit for me. I must get the head in before the design is stale."

There was a tramp of feet coming nearer—quite an unusual sound. The evening had closed in suddenly—it was too dark to see far down the road but a lurid light touched the houses and was reflected from the glass windows of the room opposite, throwing round spots of flame on to the white paper with the rough sketch.

Claude moved to the window to look out. Some women below were crying; little children, clinging to their skirts, seemed affected by a strange fear. Torches in the distance awayed with the movement of marching along. "What an effect!" said Claude to himself, making a mental note of the scene.

"Here they come—Antonia! Tonina! Ninotta!" shouted the women below. "Your brother-in-law is at hand! See, the Misericordians are in the road—Maso will be here before the bed is laid open or a pillow ready!"

There seemed to be no reply, but Claude could see by the faint light of an olive oil lamp of classic shape that the room opposite his own was being made ready; he did not guess for what. But the tramp came nearer—sixteen men all marching in one swinging step made a sound that echoed against those houses and sent dread into the heart. With curiosity very like anxiety Claude watched till they halted just beneath his window.

"Too narrow—the staircase?" said the captain. "Try the window," proposed one of them. "Nay," said the captain; "the case is far too small!" "He will not endure the agony of being touched."

The hood of the litter was lifted off and the crowd pressed as near as the band of Misericordians around it would permit them to come. Looking down, Claude could see over their shoulders who it was that lay suffering in the litter.

It was the very man he had in his thoughts and wished to compel to give him time and sympathy in his great work.

placed when they lifted him from where he fell. Ah! had you seen him, caro signore? Ah! you had seen him—It was touching! It was very terrible—he could not endure; to be carried; so in the palace, on the vine branches (the leaves were in heaps on the ground) they laid him his poor blood staining them—then leaves so green—oh, it was pitiful, pitiful!"

"I wonder they did not take him to the hospital," said Claude; "there, at any rate, he would get surgical attention."

"He wanted to be left where he was but that could not be. So the Misericordians brought him home—he does not know—he is unconscious, they say—and will never wake again in this world."

Angela's tears broke up her sentences. The Misericordians were gone; the tramp and they did not almost lost in the distance, though the light of their torches appeared from time to time as they reached corners of the descending zigzag road.

Claude watched them for some time from the wall of the garden under the cypresses. Then he went back to his room. The road was quiet now and dark. The room opposite seemed full of light. It was a poor place—so very bare. Claude could see the bed and the sufferer, a table with the white cloth on it, and some pine leaves and a crucifix and candles in brass candlesticks.

Sounds of lamentation—in women's voices—came from the window from time to time. Claude could not bear to listen nor to watch, but a terrible fascination held him. His soul seemed caught up into the mysterious land where the experience of pain opens the way to thought and emotion hitherto unknown. He wanted to tear himself away, and get to bed, and presently he passed into the other room, and tried to sleep as usual, but it was of no use.

It was a wonderful night. He never quite understood or remembered what passed—whether sleeping and dreaming or waking and watching, he witnessed certain events. The stillness of the night was broken by the tinkling of a little bell, and a few men and women, half dressed, hurried into the street; all knew the meaning of the sound—a priest on his way to give the last sacraments to the dying.

Maso, then, was not dead. Not dead, but dying; not unconscious, but in agony. The voice of the priest praying and the responses of the people kneeling below in the street sounded wild and strange. Claude heard them, and did not understand.

But what Claude could see in that bare room filled his heart with such a pity that if sincere desire—even though too incoherent for words—be prayer, he prayed—prayed as he had never had occasion to pray before—for relief from pain for that unselfish sufferer.

his eyes might with the anguish of joyful tears. "Caro signore mio," he said, at length. "You have it, you have learned it—how? When? Who shall say? Like Cascaete, you have painted with your soul, with your heart, with the genius, inspiration of grace! I know nothing of the art of painting. I am a poor creature, but I am free. It is sublime! That life in death (pointing to the Crucifixion), that fortitude, yet fear—pointing to the Christ of the passion—ah, me! I feel my heart melting. The light overcomes itself in that joyful face. It is a dream that only your good angel could reveal! Such a countenance—at once so human and divine! Not of this earth—ah, no! caro signore. Who in this sad world could ever be dignified with the light divine, except our blessed Lord himself?"

"Surely some of His friends," murmured Claude, as though dreaming. When Brother Paul had left, Claude was pointing to the last four days related, and he seemed to be very ill, though really was only the exhaustion of the body, which had been so severely treated by his emotional soul.

Marletta was alarmed, and fetched Brother Paul in to see him as he lay on his little bed in a darkened room. He did not know what to think of himself, he felt so ill, and all the world seemed so distant, so unimportant. "I shall die!" he asked Brother Paul, who came daily to see him.

"Caro mio, but you have died—died to your old self. You have reached the land of the happy few who have eyes to see, ears to hear, and a heart to understand."

"I am so tired!" said Claude, wearily. "You must come into the air and sunshine. Come into the garden. You have been too much alone. Come to the convent. Get back to your work and put to good use the genius with which you pleased the good God to endow you."

"Yes," said Claude, "I must go to work again. If one could but put on the car as what one knows ought to be there, it would not be so hard."

"Pazienza!" said Brother Paul, with a kindly smile that reached the young painter's tired soul. It was so full of confidence, hope, and sympathy. CHAPTER VII. Before many days had passed Claude had changed his quarters and was painting in the chapter-room. Sympathetic companionship was thus given him, and like the painters of old, he lived in very great simplicity, and earned his bread and lodging with his brush.

Each member of the little community had a special devotion or idea, and was thankful to the painter for any sketch he could give them, if only it embodied their aspiration. In the early spring a bitter disappointment and a great satisfaction came to him simultaneously. He sent his great picture of the Passion to London, together with the studies made in the vineyard and the streets.

"Ah, yes," said the great men (of the Gethsemane picture), "a very promising picture, but there should have been more attention to details. This is not the Holy Land; far too verdant! Still it is promising. But the studies—the studies are excellent!"

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young man! Dear friend of my heart, the treasure has been given to you! Claude looked up and again saw the selfish face of the poor brother.

"If I have it," he murmured low, "it is from you I gained it." "No, no," replied Brother Paul, "not me; it is from the good God Himself. There are many gifts, but in all the same spirit!"

When Claude returned to Rome to complete his studies his career was virtually determined. A strange contentment filled him. He went back to England, and met with a moderate success. But life in ordinary society hindered his work, so he established himself in a quiet suburb of Paris, and set to work on things that suited him—pictures for which, as Brother Paul had phrased it, he had a vocation.

And the great public responded to his touch, so that in a few years he was known as the best modern painter of religious subjects. Students flocked to him, and a little community sprang up around him. But Claude could not be a mere professor. He would give any help he could, but he must be free to devote his time and energy to his own work.

"I thought the time was past for this sort of thing," said an American, who had seen the sights of the art world. "Art for art's sake," is the doctrine of the day, not art for dogma, history or imagination. I see you lean to the traditions of the past, not the realism of the day."

"Do I?" said Claude, amused at his visitor's arrogance. "I have always tried to do my best to represent with absolute fidelity whatever comes to my brush."

"You do? Well, you're not singular. I once bought the most costly religious work that has been in the market for many a year, bought it and paid six thousand francs, and that was realistic, if you please—a fine Crucifixion, with a body that you could swear you could lift from the cross. Yes, I bought that, and gave it to a church that had been robbed—yes, air, robbed of its art treasures. You may have heard of it; it's down by Florence, and the story is given in Murray. That's my card. It was I who gave the picture, Joshua E. Montgomery. If ever you're down that way you might look it up and see what realism can do for religion."

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