

The Late Mattia Pascal – Chapter 12 – Papiano gets my eye

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The Late Mattia Pascal Chapter 12 Papiano gets my eye

“The tragedy of Orestes in a puppet-theatre, Mr. Meis! Automatic dolls of new invention. At eight-thirty this evening, _via dei Prefetti_, number 54. Worth going to see, Mr. Meis!”

So the old gentleman, Anselmo Paleari wag enunciating to me from my doorway.

“The tragedy of Orestes?” I answered.

“Yes, ‘_d’apres Sophocle_,’ so this flier reads. ‘Electra,’ I

imagine. But listen, I've just thought of something. Supposing that, just at the climax, when the marionette representing Orestes is about to avenge his father's death on Aegisthos and his mother, someone should suddenly tear a hole in the paper ceiling over the stage—what would happen, do you think?"

"I give up," said I, shrugging my shoulders.

"Why, just think it out, Mr. Meis. Orestes, of course, would be quite flabbergasted by that hole in the sky."

"Why?"

"Let me finish... Orestes would be in the throes of his vengefulness, and intent on assuaging his thirst for blood; but lo, a rent in the sky! His eyes would turn up toward that, wouldn't they, and all sorts of evil influences would become apparent on the stage. He would droop and collapse. Orestes, in other words, would become Hamlet. The whole difference between the ancient theatre and the modern comes down to that I assure you, Mr. Meis—to a rent in a paper sky!"

And he went away, pattering along the hall in his slippers.

In just such a way, old Anselmo was wont to launch avalanches of thoughts from the foggy mountain tops of his moodiness. Their relevance to anything, their motivation, the connection between them, stayed up there in the clouds; for the person down below who had to dodge them it was often difficult to understand just what they meant. But this notion of Orestes thrown off his pins by a hole suddenly torn in the sky stayed with me for a long time. "Lucky marionettes," I sighed. "The make-believe heaven over their heads is rarely torn asunder; and if it is, it can be glued together again. They don't need to worry: they know neither perplexity, nor inhibition, nor scruple, nor sorrow, nor—anything. They can just sit still, enjoying their comedy, loving, respecting, admiring each other, never getting flustered, never losing their heads;

because their characters and their actions are all proportioned to the blue roof that covers them.

“And the prototype of these marionettes, my dear Mr. Anselmo, you have right here in your own house, in the person of that precious son-in-law of yours, Mr. Terenzio Papiano. Could any marionette be better satisfied than he is with the pasteboard sky snugly stretched above his head—the comfortable and tranquil dwelling-place of a Deity who bestows with lavish hand, ready to close his eyes beforehand and to raise his hand in forgiveness afterwards, sleepily repeating after every sharp deal: ‘I the Lord thy God help those who help themselves!’

“Your precious son-in-law, Mr. Terenzio Papiano, certainly helps himself, my dear Anselmo! Life for him is just one sharp turn after another. He has his finger in every pie—enterprising, jovial, enthusiastic, full of gumption and go!”

Forty years old was Papiano, tall of stature, sinewy of limb; inclined toward baldness, with a suggestion of gray in the heavy mustache he wore under his nose (a fine expressive nose with nostrils alla-quiver). Gray eyes, also—sharp, restless, as restless as his hands. He saw everything with those eyes! He touched everything with those fingers! He would be talking with me, for instance; but, in some way, I don’t know how, he would see that Adriana, busy with her cleaning away off behind him, was having difficulty in getting a piece of furniture into place again.

“Excuse me!...” he would say like a flash, and then run to his sister-in-law, and take the business out of her hands:

“Look, girl, this is the way we do it, see?”

And he would dust it off himself, shove it into place again himself, and come hurrying back to me.

Or he would notice that his brother, who suffered from attacks of epilepsy, was about to "have a spell." He would run to him, tap him on the cheeks, tweak the end of his nose, blow on his face and call, "Scipione, Scipione," till he brought the boy around again.

There's no telling what fun I should have gotten out of such a man, had I not had that blessed skeleton in my closet—a fact, this latter, of which Papiano became aware, or at least suspicious, in no time at all.

Mr. Meis this, Mr. Meis that! A veritable bombardment of adulation—yet always underneath the compliment, a line out to catch me and get me to say something definite about myself. I came to feel that every remark, every question of his, however commonplace however obvious, concealed a trap for me; and I meantime would be anxious not to show the least reserve in order not to increase his mistrust; though, I must say, my annoyance at the servile, ceremonious, harrassing, inquisition he held me subject to prevented me from concealing my real feelings very well.

My resentment came also from two secret causes within. One was this: I had never done anything wrong; I had never harmed a living soul; yet I felt compelled to be ever on my guard, as though I were an outlaw with no title whatever to being left alone. The other, I refused to admit even to myself, and my suppression of it made its action more subtly virulent inside me. I kept cursing in my own mind:

"You ass! But pack up your things and clear out! Why put up with this infernal bore?"

It was of no avail. I did not go away. I could not go away—and I knew that I never would.

The interior struggle I fought to refuse recognition of my love for Adriana, prevented me, as a logical corollary to this insincerity with myself, from considering the consequences of

my abnormal status in life in connection with that passion. So I just kept on from day to day, puzzled, perplexed, restless, irritated, fidgeting, in constant uneasiness, though preserving a smiling countenance toward other people.

On all that I had overheard that night while hiding behind my window shutters, I had secured no further light. It seemed that the bad impression Papiano had received of me, from whatever the Caporale woman told him, had vanished with our first introduction. He tormented me with his devious questioning, it is true; but certainly with no intention, disguised or otherwise, to get me out of the house. On the contrary, he was doing everything he could to keep me as a roomer. Well, what was he up to, then? Since his return Adriana had become morose and gloomy again, treating me with a cold, distant aloofness as she had at first. In the presence of others, at least, Silvia Caporale always addressed Papiano with "lei" the formal word for "you"; but he, irrepressible rogue, thee'd her and thou'd her blatantly, even calling her Rhea (_rea_) Silvia once—for a good pun. I could not grasp the true significance of his manner toward the woman—a mixture of raillery and intimacy at the same time. That drunken red-nosed slattern certainly commanded little respect from the indecorum of the life she led; but, on the other hand, she should not have been treated that way by a man wholly unrelated to her.

One evening (there was a full moon and the night was as bright as day) I perceived her from my window sitting sad and solitary on the balcony. She, Adriana, and I had met there rarely since Papiano came, and never with the same pleasure as formerly; for he inevitably joined us and did the talking for us all. With the idea that I might perhaps learn something interesting from her by catching her in that mood of dejected relaxation, I decided to have a talk with her.

As usual in going out of my room I found Papiano's brother coiled on the same trunk in the hallway. Did he spend his time there in that uncomfortable position of his own choice, or had

he been stationed there to watch me?

Signorina Caporale was weeping, when I arrived on the balcony. She refused to talk at first, on the excuse of a severe headache. But shortly she seemed to make up her mind all of a sudden, and turning straight toward me and holding out a hand, she asked:

“Are you a real friend of mine?”

“If you are kind enough to grant me such a privilege,” I answered with a bow.

“Oh no, no fine language, please, Mr. Meis! I need a friend, a real friend, just at this moment... You ought to understand; for you are alone in the world as I am... Of course, you are a man, and it’s different for a man... Oh, if you only knew, Mr. Meis, if you only knew...!”

Wherewith she bit at the handkerchief she was holding in one hand, to keep from weeping; and that remedy not proving successful she began tearing it angrily into strips:

“A woman, an ugly woman, and an old woman!” she cried. “That’s what I am! Three misfortunes that can never be helped. Why do I go on living, anyway?”

“Is it as bad as all that?” I asked, to say something. “Don’t be so downhearted, signorina. Why do you talk that way?”

“Because...” she exclaimed, but then she stopped, unable, or at least unwilling, to finish her sentence.

“Please tell me,” I encouraged. “If a friend can be of any use to you...”

She carried the tattered handkerchief to her eyes:

“It would be much better if I could die!” she groaned with a note of such complete dejection that I was deeply moved.

Never, indeed, will I forget the lines of anguish that formed around her thin ill-shaped lips as she said the words, nor the quivering of her chin under its scattering of ugly black hair.

“But I can’t even die,” she finally resumed. “Oh, no, Mr. Meis, what could you do for me? Nothing! Neither could anybody else. A few kind words perhaps, a little pity! But that’s all! I am alone in the world, and I must stay here, to be treated... well, you probably have noticed how! And they have no right to, you know! They have no right to! I’m not living on their charity...”

And at this point Signorina Caporale told me the story of the six thousand lire, I have already mentioned, and how Papiano got them away from her.

The personal troubles of this woman were interesting enough, in their way; but still this was not just what I had come to find out. Taking advantage, I confess, of the abnormal condition she was in—perhaps from a sip of wine too much at dinner—I ventured a leading question:

“But why did you ever risk giving him. the money signorina?”

“Why?” and she clenched her fists. “Because I wanted to show him!... Two mean things, one meaner than the other! I wanted him to understand that I knew what he really wanted from me! And his wife was still living, too!”

“Ah, I see...”

“And just imagine,” the woman continued, gathering spirit in her narrative. “Poor Rita...”

“That was his wife’s name?”

“Yes, Rita—Adriana’s sister... In bed for two whole years, hanging between life and death... You can imagine whether I... but anyway, they all know how I acted; and Adriana knows, too; that’s why she is so fond of me... really fond of me, poor

thing! And what is the fix I have been left in?... Why, I've even had to give up my piano which for me was... well, everything, you understand... Oh, not just because I'm a teacher! My piano was my whole life. I could write music, as a girl, there at the Conservatory. And I did a number of songs afterwards, when I had finished my course. Well, as long as I had my piano, I could still compose... oh, not for publication of course—just for myself... I would sit down and improvise ... and sometimes I would get so worked up... I don't know what it was... it was as though something were coming right out of my soul... and I couldn't stand it: I would almost faint away... I became part of my instrument and it of me, so that I could hardly feel my fingers touching the keys. It was the weeping and the sorrowing of my own heart... Why, judge for yourself... One evening a crowd gathered under my windows—I was alone at home with mother there on the second floor where we lived—and the people clapped and cheered and cheered and clapped... I was afraid!"

"But, my dear signorina," I said comfortingly, "if a piano is all you need, couldn't we hire one?... I should enjoy hearing you play, ever so much. and if you will allow me..."

"No!" she interrupted. "What could I do with it now? It's all over with me... I can bang off a popular song in the cabarets, perhaps; but that's all..."

"Did Papiano never promise to make good the money you gave him?" I ventured again, edging back toward the subject that most concerned me.

"That man?" the woman exclaimed scornfully. "Who would ever expect him to? I never asked it back from him, to begin with. But now he is talking of doing so. Oh yes, now he'll give it all back to me provided... provided I help him... That's it! He wants me to help him—no one will do but me! Do you know, he actually had the face to make the proposition to me in so many words!..."

"What proposition? How could you help him?"

"With another dirty trick he has in mind. Don't you understand... I am sure you can guess..."

"Adri... Miss Paleari..." I gasped.

"Exactly! I am to bring her around to it, you see! I..."

"Around to marrying him?"

"What else? And do you know why? Because the poor girl has, or at least ought to have, a dowry of some fifteen thousand lire—the money from her sister's dowry, that is, which he is legally bound to return to Anselmo Paleari at once—because Rita died without children, you see. I don't know what he's done with it; but he has asked for a year's time to pay it back. So now he is hoping that... sh-h-h—here comes Adriana..."

Taciturn, distracted, more distant and shy than ever, Adriana came out to join us, bowing to me with a slight nod of recognition, and putting her arm around Miss Caporale's waist. After what I had just learned, I felt a flash of anger at seeing her so submissive and compliant to the odious intrigues of the rascal who was plotting her capture; but I had little time to indulge such a wholesome emotion. Before long Papiano's

brother, moving more like a ghost than like a real man, Btole out upon the balcony.

"Here he is!" said Silvia, nudging Adriana.

The little girl half-closed her eyes, and drew up her lips in a bitter smile. Then with an angry toss of her head, she withdrew into the house:

"Good night, Mr. Meis," said she; "I must be going!"

"He's watching her," the Caporale woman whispered, with a significant nod in the boy's direction.

“But what is Miss Paleari afraid of?” I could not help asking in my increasing irritation and disgust. “Doesn’t she understand that such conduct on her part gives him a stronger hold over her? May I be frank, signorina? I have the greatest envy and admiration for people who are interested in life and play the game with gusto. If I had to choose between the bully and the person who lets himself be bullied without protest,—why, I would side with the bully!”

The Caporale woman noted the feeling with which I spoke, and she answered with just a trace of irony in her voice:

“Well, why don’t you start a rebellion?”

“I?”

“Yes, you, you!” she challenged, openly now, looking me sarcastically in the eye:

“What have I to do with all this?” I replied. “I could protest in only one way: by giving up my room and clearing out!”

“Well,” the woman rejoined with a shrewd thrust, “that may be the one thing Adriana doesn’t want!”

“She doesn’t want me to go away?”

The piano teacher twirled her bedraggled handkerchief round and round in the air, finally winding it up into a ball around her thumb:

“You never can tell!”

I shrugged my shoulders:

“Well, I... I’m going to dinner!” I exclaimed; and I left her standing there, without another word.

To strike while the iron was hot, I stopped that very evening, on going along the hallway, in front of the trunk where Scipione Papiano was coiled in his usual style:

"Excuse me," I began, "can't you find some other place to sit? You're in my way just here!"

The boy looked blankly up at me out of his sleepy eyes, but did not seem at all embarrassed;

"Did you hear what I said?" I continued, shaking him by the arm.

He sat there as stolid as a stone. However, a door opened at the end of the corridor. It was Adriana.

"I wonder, signorina," I now said; "can't you get this poor boy to understand that he might choose some other place to sit?"

"He's not well," said Adriana, trying to soften the situation.

"All the more reason for moving," I countered.

"The air is not so very good here; and besides... sitting on a trunk...! Shall I speak to your brother about it?"

"No, no," Adriana protested hurriedly, "I'll see him about it myself!"

"You understand, I am sure," I added. "I'm not so much of a king yet that I need a watchman to guard my door."

From that moment I lost all control over myself: I began to compromise Adriana's timidity overtly, forcing her hand, as it were, but at any rate, closing my eyes to consequences, recklessly surrendering to the feelings in possession of me. The poor dear little housemother! At first she did not know what to make of it, vacillating apparently between hope and fear. She could not trust me wholly as yet, divining that anger more than anything else was at the bottom of my changed behaviour; but at the same time she realized that her fear hitherto had been based on the secret and almost unconscious hope of not losing me. And now my sudden self-assertion,

strengthening the hope, prevented her from surrendering quite to the fear. This delicate and affecting perplexity of hers, this modest reserve on her part, kept me from clarifying issues entirely in my own mind, and brought me to persist more tenaciously still in the combat Papiano and I had now tacitly agreed to wage with one another.

I had expected the fellow to confront me the very next morning after my brush with his brother and have done with his usual compliments and ceremony. But no! He gave ground. He at once removed his brother from the outpost in front of my door, and even went so far as to twit Adriana about her embarrassment in my presence:

“You mustn’t judge my little sister too harshly, Mr. Meis. She’s as shy as a little nun when strangers are around!”

This unexpected retreat and the brazen unconcern of the man quite disconcerted me. What was he driving at, anyway?

One evening I saw him come home in company with an individual who entered the house striking his cane noisily on the floor, as though he were walking in felt shoes and were anxious to be sure his feet were working well.

“Where is this dear relative of mine,”-_Dôva ca l’è stô me car parent_-he began vociferating in a high-pitched Piedmontese dialect-not bothering to remove from his head the large broad-brimmed hat that was pressed down over his watery half-opened eyes, nor from his mouth a short-stemmed pipe over which he seemed bent on broiling a nose redder than that of Miss Silvia Caporale. “_Dôva ca I’ è stô me car parent_?”

“Here he is,” said Papiano waving a hand in my direction; then, turning toward me, he said: “A surprise for you, Signor Adriano! Let me introduce Mr. Francesco Meis, a relative of yours, from Turin!”

“A relative of mine?” I gasped in bewilderment.

The man, evidently half drunk, closed his eyes entirely now, raised a paw much as a bear might do and stood there waiting for me to grasp it.

I did not disturb the pose for some seconds, meantime looking at him fixedly.

“What’s the joke you are trying on me now?” I then inquired.

“A joke? Why a joke?” answered Papiano. “Mr. Francesco Meis assured me you and he...”

“Cousins,” the visitor volunteered, to help out: “_Gusin! Tut i Meis i sôma parent_! All the Meis’s belong to the same family!”

“I am sorry I have never had the pleasure of setting eyes on you before!” I protested.

“That’s one on you,” the man exclaimed. “_Oh ma côst a ca l’e bela_! That’s the very reason why I came to have a look at you!”

“Meis? From Turin?” I pretended to ponder. “But I am not from Turin!”

“How is that?” Papiano interrupted. “Didn’t I understand you to say that you lived in Turin till you were ten years old?”

“Why of course,” the stranger interposed, apparently offended that so much fuss was being made over a point so simple: “_Cusin, cusin_! What’s-his-name here...”

“Papiano–Terenzio Papiano!...”

“Yes–Terenziano! Terenziano told me your father went to America! Well, what’s that mean? It means you are the son of old Uncle Toni, _barba Antoni_, yes. sir! He went to America. And so we are cousins! _Nui soma cusin_!”

“But my father’s name was Paolo!”

“_Antoni_!”

“No, Paolo! Paolo! Paolo! Do you think you know more about that than I do?”

The man shrugged his shoulders and stretched the corners of his mouth into a broad smile, rubbing meantime a four days' growth of gray beard on his chin:

“I thought it was Antonio. But it may be as you say. I shouldn't dare contradict you—for I never knew him myself!”

The poor fellow, having the advantage over me that I well knew, might have stood his ground; but he seemed to be content so long as we were cousins. His father, he further explained, was a Francesco like himself, and a brother of the Antonio—or rather of the Paolo—who had gone off to America from Turin at a time when he, Francesco Meis Second, was still a boy—_ancor masnà_,—of seven. Having lived all his life away from home—a little job in the government service—he was not very well acquainted with the old folks whether on his father's or his mother's side; but we were cousins—of that there could be no doubt.

“But you must have known grandpa, surely!” I decided mischievously to ask.

Yes, he had known grandpa, he could not remember whether at Pavia or at Piacenza.

“Oh, really? What did he look like?”

“Look like? Why... er... I can't quite say. That was some thirty years ago. _A sôn passa trant' ani_!”

The fellow did not seem to be acting in bad faith. I took him rather for a poor devil who was drowning his soul in wine in order to escape some of the worries of poverty and loneliness. He stood there with head lowered and eyes closed, approving all the things I said to corner him. I am sure that I could

have told him we had been to school together and that I had given him a thrashing once; and he would still have remembered, so long as I admitted that we were cousins. On that point he refused to compromise. So cousins we remained.

But suddenly, on looking at Papiano and catching an expression of gloating on his face, I lost my desire for further jesting. I bade the drunken man good-afternoon with a “_Caro parente_!” fixing my eyes upon Papiano’s with the idea of convincing him that I was not to be trifled with by such as he.

“Will you be so good,” I asked, “as to tell me where you unearthed that crazy idiot?”

“Oh, I’m so sorry,” the rascal answered (I must admit he was a man of extraordinary resourcefulness). “I can see that I was not altogether happy in my...”

“On the contrary you are always most happy in your guesses!” I exclaimed.

“No, I mean... I was mistaken in thinking you might be glad to see him. But believe me, it was such a strange coincidence. You see, here is how it happened. I had to go to the tax office this morning, on a matter of business for the Marquis, my employer. While I was there I suddenly heard some one calling: ‘Mr. Meis! Mr. Meis!’ I turned around, of course, thinking it was you, and supposing you were there on some matter where my influence might be of use to you—it is always at your disposal, you understand. But no! It was this ‘crazy idiot,’ as you so well call him. And I, out of idle curiosity, went up to him and asked him if his name were really Meis, and where he came from, since I had the honor of knowing a Mr. Meis who was a guest in my home! Well, he said that you were a cousin of his and insisted on coming home with me to make your acquaintance. There you have the whole story.”

“All this happened at the Revenue office?”

“Yes. The man works there—assistant collector, or something!”

Could I believe this cock-and-bull yarn? I made up my mind to investigate it.

And it proved to be true!

But it was equally true that Papiano, with all his suspicions of me, was meeting my frontal attack upon his secret manœuvres in his home, by retreating, evading, slipping around me, to delve into my past and finally assail me from the rear. Knowing the man as I did, I had every reason to fear that with his keen scent he could not long fail to find a clue; and that, once on the right track, he would never depart from it till he stood on the bank of the Miragno mill-flume, with the bloated body of the late Mattia Pascal in front of him.

Imagine then my terror when, a few days later as I was reading in my room, there came to my ears from the corridor a voice—a voice from the other world, but one still vivid in my memory.

“Perhaps I thank God, segno, that I rid myself of her!”

The Spaniard! My Spaniard! The pudgy little man in the big beard who had hooked on to me at Monte Carlo and followed me to Nice, where we had quarrelled because I would not play partners with him as he wanted. God of Heaven! The trail at last! That devil of a Papiano had finally found it!

I jumped to my feet, grasping the edge of the table in order not to collapse in the sudden anguished horror that seized upon my heart. Stupified, my knees a-tremble, I stood there and listened, determined to run away the moment Papiano and the Spaniard (it was he—there was no mistaking his voice and his broken Spanish-Italian) got through the hallway. But... run away? In the first place, supposing Papiano, on coming in, had asked the servant whether I were at home? How would he interpret my flight, in that case? And, in the second place....

"Let's think this all the way out now."... They knew my name was Adriano Meis. But what else could the Spaniard know about me? He had seen me at Monte Carlo. Well, had I ever told him there that my name was Mattia Pascal? Perhaps! I could not remember...

I happened to be standing in front of my mirror, as though some one had set me just there on purpose. I looked at myself in the glass. Ah yes, that crooked eye of mine! That blessed cock-eye! By that he would recognize me! But how on earth had Papiano ever gotten back to my adventure in Monte Carlo? That was what surprised me more than anything else. What could I do about it, meantime? Nothing, obviously! I should have to wait for what was going to happen to happen.

And nothing happened.

Though I did not recover from my fright even after Papiano, on the evening of that very day, in explaining to me the mystery of that incomprehensible and terrifying visit, showed me clearly that he was not really on my track at all, but that Fortune simply, after the many extraordinary turns with which she had favored me, had now done me another in suddenly setting across my path again that Spaniard who very probably had forgotten that I ever existed.

From what Papiano told me of the fellow, I saw that I could hardly have missed him at Monte Carlo, since he was a gambler by profession. But how strange that I should be meeting him now in Rome, or rather that, coming to Rome, I should have hit upon one of the very houses to which he had entrance! Certainly, if I had had nothing to be afraid of, the curious coincidence would not have impressed me so strongly; how often, in fact, do we come unexpectedly upon people whom we have met elsewhere by merest chance? In any event, he had, or thought he had, very good reasons for coming to Rome and to Papiano's house. The fault was mine, or at least of that chain of circumstances which had caused me to shave off my beard and

change my name!

Some twenty years earlier, the Marquis Giglio d'Auletta—the man whom Papiano was serving as private secretary—had given his only daughter in marriage to Don Antonio Pantogada, an attache of the Spanish embassy to the Holy See. Not long after the wedding, Pantogada, along with some members of the Roman aristocracy, had been arrested in a raid made by the police one night upon a gambling house in the city. This had occasioned his recall to Madrid, where he had committed the other indiscretions, perhaps worse than this one, which had finally brought about his dismissal from the diplomatic service of his country. From that moment, the Marquis d'Auletta had not had a moment's rest from constant demands for money made upon him by his profligate son-in-law. Pantogada's wife had died four years before, leaving a daughter about fifteen years old, whom the Marquis had taken to live with him, knowing only too well the kind of environment her father would have provided for her. Pantogada had at first refused to give the girl up, but finally he had yielded under pressure of money to pay his debts. Now he was continually raising the question again, and, in fact, had come to Rome for the purpose of taking his daughter—in other words, a round sum of money—away with him. He could be sure that the Marquis would make any sacrifice rather than see his dear grand-child, Pepita, fall into her father's hands.

Papiano rose to heights of holy wrath in his denunciation of such a cowardly piece of blackmail. And I am sure he was quite sincere in it all. He had one of those ingenious contrivances for a conscience which permitted him to howl, in all honesty, at the evil others do, while still without the least discomfort allowing him to work an almost similar game upon his own father-in-law, Paleari.

However, on this occasion, the Marquis Giglio was holding out. It was evident that Pantogada would be detained in Rome for some time and hence come frequently to visit Terenzio Papiano

(with whom he got on famously). How could I help meeting him sooner or later? What could I do?

Again I consulted my looking-glass. And I saw in it the face of the late Mattia Pascal, peering at me with his crooked eye from the surface of the Miragno mill-flume, and addressing me as follows:

“What a mess you are in, Adriano Meis! Be honest, now! Tell the truth! You are afraid of Terenzio Papiano, and you would like to put the blame on me—on me again—just because when I was in Nice one day I had a little squabble with a Spaniard. Well, I was right, wasn’t I, as you very well know. And do you think you can get out of it by obliterating the last trace of me from your face? Do so, my dear Mr. Meis! Follow the advice of Miss Silvia Caporale! Call in Doctor Ambrosini and have your eye put in place again. ... Then,,, well,,, then you’ll see!,,,”

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