

# The Late Mattia Pascal – Chapter 18 – The late Mattia Pascal

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In Italiano – [Il fu Mattia Pascal](#)

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## The Late Mattia Pascal Chapter 18 The late Mattia Pascal

In my impatience and my rage—I know not which was greater—I ceased to care whether anybody recognized me or not before or after I got there. I took just one precaution: a seat in the first class. For that matter, it was dark, and my experience with Berto reassured me: convinced as everybody was of my fateful death two years before, no one would ever dream of taking me for Mattia Pascal. I leaned out of the car-window, hoping that the sight of familiar scenes would divert my thoughts to less violent emotions; but this served only to intensify both my anger and my impatience. In the moonlight I

made out the hills back of "The Coops."

"The wretches!" I hissed. "Over there... But now!..."

In my surprise at the unexpected news from home, I had forgotten to ask Eoberto ever so many things. The farm and the mill! Had they been sold? Or were they still in the hands of a receiver? How about Batty Malagna? And Aunt Scolastica?

Was all that only two years and a half—thirty months—before? It felt more like a century! So many things had befallen me, it seemed life at Miragno must have been just as exciting. And yet, nothing much had happened, probably, except Romilda's marriage to Pomino, commonplace enough in itself, though now my sudden return from the dead might make it appear unusual! Where would I go, when I got there?

And where were they living?

Certainly not where I used to live. My humble habitation as a two-lire-a-day man would never do for Pomino, rich as the only son of a wealthy sire. Besides, Pomino, who was a sensitive fellow, would not have felt quite at home among so many reminders of me. Doubtless he had gone to live with his father in the palazzo! And imagine the widow Pescatore in those surroundings! What airs she would put on! And that poor old devil, Gerolamo Pomino First—so timid, so gentle, so retiring! Bet he's having the time of his life in the claws of that old harpy! A real run for his money! For neither the old man nor his gosling of a son would ever have the courage to kick her out! And now... the goat as usual! I take her off their hands!

Yes, there's where I would go, to the Pomino mansion; and even if they weren't there, I'd find out from the janitress or somebody...

Oh, my quiet sleepy old home sweet home! What a shock you'll get tomorrow when you hear I'm alive again!

There was a bright moon that evening; and all the public lights were off as usual. The streets were quite deserted, since at that hour almost everybody was 'at supper.

In my great excitement I was hardly aware that I had legs at all. I walked as on thin air, my feet scarcely touching the ground. I cannot describe the emotions I felt. They reduced to something like a great Homeric laughter, shaking spasmodically about my diaphragm, unable to find a way out. I am sure that had I turned it loose, it would have blown the houses over from the force of its explosion.

I was at the Pomino place in no time; but to my surprise I found no one on hand in the sort of dog kennel on the driveway where the old janitress used to live.

I knocked.

For some moments no answer came. In the meantime my eye had a chance to fall on a piece of mourning crepe, now bleached and dusty, which seemed to have hung exposed to the weather there for several months. Who had died? The widow Pescatore? Cavalier Pomino? One of the two undoubtedly! More likely the old man! In which case, I would find my two doves cooing up on the first floor in the grand suite—already settled in the "palace." I was too impatient to wait. I opened the front door and ran up the stairs, three steps at a time.

On the first landing I met the janitress coming down.

"Cavaliere Pomino?" I asked.

From the astonishment with which the old mud-turtle looked at me, I understood that the District Inspector of Education must have been dead a good long time.

"Young Mr. Pomino—Gerolamino!" I corrected, resuming my ascent.

I couldn't quite understand what the old woman was muttering to herself; I know simply that at the top of the stairs I had to halt to catch my breath. The door to the Pomino apartment was in front of me.

"They may be still at dinner!" I reflected philosophically, though in a flash. "All three eating, without the least suspicion! In a few seconds, I will have knocked on this door and their lives will be topsy-turvy! ... Look! Here in my hand rests the fate in store for them!"

I took the bell rope in my hand; and as I pulled it, I listened, my heart leaping with excitement. The house was absolutely still. In the silence I could barely hear the distant tinkle of the bell.

All the blood rushed to my head and my ears began to ring, as though that faint tinkling which had been swallowed up in the silence were clanging furiously inside my brain.

In a few seconds, I started violently. On the other side of the door I heard a voice, the voice of the widow Pescatore:

"Who's calling?"

I could not, for an instant, utter a sound. I pressed my fists to my chest to keep my heart from breaking through. Then with a husky hollow voice I answered, syllable by syllable:

"Mat-tia-Pas-cal!"

"Who?" called the voice within.

"Mattia Pascal!" I answered, deepening my voice still further.

Certainly the old witch was scared out of her wits: for I heard her patter off down the hall, as though the Devil were after her.

I could imagine what was taking place in the dining-room. The

man in the house would be sent out, Pomino, the courageous!

However, I had to ring again—gently, gently, as before.

Pomino threw the door wide open, and there I stood, erect, my shoulders back, my chest thrown forward.

He recoiled in terror. I strode upon him with a cry:

“Mattia Pascal! From the other world!”

Pomino collapsed on the floor, and sat there, his weight resting on his hands, his eyes staring with fright and bewilderment:

“Mattia! Y-y-you?”

The widow Pescatore came running out with a lamp in her hand. At sight of me she gave one long piercing scream. I slammed the door to with a kick, and caught the lamp before it could fall from her hands.

“Shut up!” I hissed into her face. “Do you really take me for a ghost?”

“Alive!” she gasped, pale as death, her hands clutching wildly at her hair.

“Alive! Alive as they make ‘em!” I answered with ferocious joy. “You swore I was dead though, didn’t you! Drowned—out there!...”

“Where did you come from? she asked in absolute terror.

“From the Flume, you witch!” I replied between my teeth. “Here’s the lamp, up close! Look at me! Who am I? Do you recognize me? Or do you still think I’m the man they found in the Flume?”

“It wasn’t you?”

“Bad ‘cess to you, she-goat! Here I am, alive! And you, Mino, what are you sprawling there for? Get up! Where’s Romilda?”

“Oh, oh, oh!” groaned Pomino, jumping to his feet. “The baby!... I’m afraid... She’s nursing!...”

“What baby?” said I.

“Our little girl!”

“Oh, the murderer! The murderer!” shrieked the Pescatore woman.

I was unable to answer, the effect of this latest piece of news was still so strong upon me.

“Your little girl? A baby, to boot? Well now that, my dear sir...”

“Mamma, go in to Romilda, please!” begged Pomino.

But it was too late. Romilda was already out in the hallway, her dressing gown unbuttoned at the top, her baby nursing, her hair awry, as though she had hurriedly risen from a bed. The moment she saw me she cried:

“Mattia!”

And she fell fainting into the arms of her husband and her mother.

They dragged her away—considerately leaving me standing there with their baby in my arms! For I had run to the rescue also.

With the lamp now gone, the hallway was almost pitch dark. But there I stood holding that frail acrid-smelling bundle from which a tiny little voice came, blubbering through unswallowed milk. Alarmed, bewildered, not knowing what to do next, I was clearly conscious only of the shriek from the woman who had once been mine, and who now—precisely, ladies and gentlemen—was mother to this child who was not mine, who was

not mine—Mine? Ah mine, she had hated in its poor little time! Mine she had never loved! So I now—no, no, a thousand times no, I would have no pity on this intruder, nor on them either! She had looked out for herself, all right! She had married again: while I... I...

But the faint whimper kept coming from the bundle on my arms... What could I do to stop it? "Hush, little one! Hush, little one! 'At's a daisy! 'At's a daisy!" And I began patting the infant on her tiny back, and tossing her gently to and fro. The bleating grew fainter and fainter and at last was still.

Pomino's voice rang through the hallway:

"Mattia! The baby!"

"Sh-h-h-h, you donkey! Don't wake her up again!"

"What are you doing with her?"

"Eating her raw! What do you suppose I'm doing with her? They chucked her at me. Now I've got her quiet. God sake, don't wake her up on me now! Where's Romilda?"

Slinking up to me, suspicious and fearful, like a dog watching its puppy in the hands of its master, Pomino answered:

"Romilda? Why?"

"Because I want to have a word with her!" I replied gruffly.

"She's fainted, you know!"

"Fainted? Nonsense! We'll bring her to!"

Pomino cringed in front of me, blocking my path:

"Oh please, Mattia! Listen... I'm afraid... How in the world!... You, here, alive! Where have you been, where have you been! Oh!... Listen: couldn't you talk with me instead?"

“No!” I thundered. “My business is with her. Who are you, anyway? You don’t count around here!”

“What do you mean, I don’t count!”

“Very simple! Your marriage is null and void on the return of the first spouse!”

“Void? And how’s that? And the baby?”

“The baby! The baby!” I muttered fiercely. “In less than two years after my death—married and with a baby! Shame on you! Hush, little one! Hush, little one! ‘At’s a daisy! Mama’s coming soon! Here, show me the way, you! Is this the room?”

The moment my nose crossed the threshold of the bedroom, the widow Pescatore advanced upon me like a ravenous hyena. I had the baby on my left arm. With my right, I gave the old woman a solid push.

“You just mind your business! Here’s your son-in-law here! If you’ve any fuss to make, make it with him! I don’t know you!”

Romilda was weeping piteously. I bent over her, holding out the baby:

“Here, Romilda, you take her! Tears? Why do you feel so bad? Because I am alive? You wanted me dead, didn’t you! Well, look at me! Look! Alive or dead?”

She tried to raise her eyes through her tears; and her voice breaking with sobs, she murmured:

“Oh, Mattia! How is this? You! What... what have you been doing?”

“What have I been doing?” I snickered. “You ask me what I have been doing! It’s clear what you’ve been doing! You’ve married again—that ninny there! And you’ve had a baby! And now, ‘Oh, Mattia, what have you been doing?’”

“Well?” groaned Pomino, his face in his hands.

“But you, you, you! Where have you been? You ran away! You played dead! You deserted your wife! You...” It was the widow Pescatore, coming at me again with her arms raised.

I seized one of her wrists, and twisted it over till she was in my power:

“Listen, old lady!” I then lectured. “You just keep out of this; for if I hear another word from you, I swear I’ll lose all pity for this dunce of a son-in-law of yours, and for that little baby there, and I’ll... I’ll invoke the law! The law, understand? You know what the law says? This marriage is null and void on the return of the first spouse! I’ve got to take Romilda back to me!...”

“My daughter... back to you? You’re crazy!” the old woman cried in terror.

But Pomino was reduced to zero:

“Mother dear! Mother dear!” he begged. “Please be quiet, please be quiet, for the love of God!”

And she let loose on him—fool, imbecile, milk-sop, ninny, coward—good for nothing but just to stand there bleating like a sheep!

I could hardly hold my sides from laughing.

“Dry up, now!” I commanded, as soon as I could catch my breath. “He can have her! He can have her! I wouldn’t be crazy enough to take on a mother-in-law like you again! Poor, poor Pomino! Mino, old boy! Forgive me if I called you an ass! But, as you hear, your mother-in-law agrees with me, and I can assure you Romilda—our wife—! thought the same of you in the old days. Yes, she used the very same words for you—fool, donkey, dunce, and I forget what else! Didn’t you, Romilda! Tell the truth! Oh now, dearie me! Don’t cry any more! Come,

come, smile for us, won't you? It's bad for the baby, you know! I'm alive, that's all, you see. And I feel like being gay! 'Cheer up!' as a drunken man said to me one night! Cheer up, Pomino! Do you think I'd really have the heart to leave your baby without a mamma? Not on your life! I already have a son without a papa. Ever think of it, Romilda? We're quits! I have a son, who is the son of Malagna; and you a daughter, who is the daughter of Pomino. Four square! One of these days we'll make them man and wife! Anyhow, you'll not feel so bad over that boy now... So let's change the subject!... How did you and your mother ever come to see me in that poor devil they found in the Flume?..."

"Oh, I did too, you know!" said Pomino, with a touch of anger. "And so did everybody else! Not just Romilda and her mother!"

"You had good eyes, I must say! Was he really so much like me as all that?"

"Your build! Your hair and whiskers! Your clothes—black... and besides, you had been gone so long!"...

"Deserting house and home, eh? As though they hadn't driven me to it... the old lady there! Ah, that woman! And yet, I was coming back, you know! Loaded with money! And then, as nice as you please—dead, drowned, in an advanced state of decomposition! Best of all—identified! Thank heaven for one thing: I've been having one good time these two years! While you people here—engagement, wedding, honeymoon, house and housekeeping, baby... The dead are dead, eh? Long life to the living!"

"And now?" groaned Pomino, on pins and needles. "What about it now? That's what's bothering me."

Romilda got up to put the baby into its cradle.

"Suppose we step into the other room," I suggested. "The little girl's asleep again. Better not wake her up! We can

talk in there!”

On the table in the dining-room the supper dishes were still lying about. Trembling, wide-eyed, deathly pale, winking two cadaverous eyelids over two white glassy balls pierced in the middle by two small round black dots, Pomino sat in a chair rubbing his forehead, and mumbling as in a dream:

“Alive!... Alive!... How can we fix it? What’s to become of us?”

“Oh, why worry about that?” I shouted impatiently. “We’ll come to that in due season, I tell you!”

Romilda made herself presentable and eventually came to join us. I sat looking at her under the bright lamp light. As beautiful as she had ever been, I thought ... even more bewitching than when I first met her!

“Let me have a look at you!” I said. “You don’t mind, do you, Mino? What’s the harm? She’s my wife, too, you know—perhaps more mine, than yours! Oh, I didn’t mean to make you blush, Romilda! See Mino squirming? But I’m not going to bite him! I’m not a ghost!”

“This is intolerable!” said Mino, livid with anger.

“He’s getting nervous,” I said, winking at Romilda. “Come now, Mino, old man, don’t worry! I’m not going to cut you out again! And this time I’ll keep my promise! Except—if you don’t mind—just one...!”

I went over to Romilda and smacked a loud kiss off her cheek.

“Mattia!” shrieked Pomino desperately.

Again I laughed aloud.

“Jealous, eh?” I said. “And of me! Now that’s hardly fair! There’s something coming to me on grounds of prior right, if for nothing else. Anyhow, Romilda, just forget it all, forget

it all... You see, in coming here... forgive me, won't you, Romilda ... in coming here, I supposed, my dear Mino, that you would be glad to have me take her off your hands. ... And the thought of doing so was not at all to my liking, I can tell you... for I wanted to get even with you... and I would like to still... but this time by stealing Romilda away from you... because I see you are in love with her and she... well, yes ... she's a dream, a dream... the way she was years ago when we first... you haven't forgotten, eh, Romilda? ... Oh, poor girl! I didn't intend to make you cry... But they were good days, those old ones, eh... gone forever now?... But never mind! You have a little girl of your own... and let's forget all about such things. Of course, I'm not going to trouble you... what do you take me for?..."

"But this marriage... it's null and void?" cried Pomino.

"What do you care?" I answered. "That may be the law of it. But who's going to invoke the law? I'm not! I won't even bother to cancel my death certificate, unless I'm forced to by money matters. I'm satisfied if people have a look at me, know I'm alive and well, and see that I'm through with this playing dead—a death, which was a real one, I assure you. You were married publicly... For a year or more you have been living publicly as man and wife. Such you will continue to be! Who's going to ask any questions about the legal status of Romilda's first marriage? That water has gone under the bridge. Romilda was my wife; now she's yours, and mother of a child of yours! A few days' gossip and everybody will drop the subject. Am I not right, you miserable twice-over mother-in-law?"

The Pescatore woman, frowning, ferocious, nodded in the affirmative. But Pomino, more and more nervous, asked:

"But you're going to settle here at Miragno?"

"Of course! And I'll come once in a while to get a cup of coffee or sip a glass of wine to your health!"

"That you won't!" snarled the widow, jumping to her feet.

"But he's joking! Can't you see?" said Romilda, keeping her eyes away from mine.

I laughed aloud as I had before.

"You see, Romilda!" I jested, "they're afraid we'll begin making love again... And it would serve them right... However... let's not be too hard on poor Mino... Since he doesn't care to have me in the house, I'll just walk up and down in the street, under your windows... What do you say? A serenade, not too often, of course..."

Pomino was now stamping up and down the room in a veritable frenzy:

"Intolerable!" he cried. "This won't do! This won't do!"

All at once he stopped and said:

"You can't get away from the fact that... with you here... alive... she won't ever be my wife!..."

"Just you pretend I'm dead!" I answered quietly.

He began stamping up and down again:

"I can pretend no such thing!"

"Well, don't then! But do you think I'm going to disturb you—unless Romilda asks me to? After all, she's the one to decide... Say, Romilda, speak up now! Which is the better looking, he or I?"

"I am thinking of the law!" said Pomino almost in a scream.

Romilda looked at him anxiously.

"Well," I remarked. "As matters stand, it seems I'm the one who has more right to find fault than anybody. I've got to see my beautiful, my charming, my quondam better half and

helpmeet living with you as your wife!"

"But Romilda—" exclaimed Pomino, "she isn't really my wife any longer!"

"Bosh!" I replied. "I came here to get even, and I let you off. I give you my wife! I guarantee not to annoy you... And still you are not satisfied! Come, Romilda, get on your things. Let's be going... the two of us... on a honeymoon! We'll have a great time... Why bother with this thing here?... He's not a man, he's a law-book. Why, he's asking me really to go and drown myself in the Flume!"

"No, I'm not asking that!" cried Pomino in utter exasperation. "But go away, at least! Leave town, live somewhere else, far away! And for heaven sake, don't let anybody see you! Because, I, here, with you alive..."

I rose and laid my hand gently on his shoulder to quiet him a little. I told him that I had already called on my brother at Oneglia, that everyone probably by this time knew, or that certainly by the next morning would know, that I had come to life again. Then I added:

"But you ask me to drop out of sight again, and live far away from here—play dead again in short! You must be joking, my dear boy! Come, brace up—yon play husband the best way you can, and stop worrying. Your marriage, come what may, is a solemn fact. Everybody will stand by you, especially since there's a little one involved. As for me, I promise, I swear, never to come near you, even for a puny little cup of coffee, even for the sweet, the exalting, the exhilarating spectacle of your blissful union, your devoted passion, your exemplary concord—all built up on my considerateness in dying! Ungrateful wretches! I'll wager not a one of you, not even you, Pomino—bosom friend of my boyhood—ever took the trouble to place a wreath, a bunch of flowers, on my grave there in the cemetery!... A good guess, eh? Tell the truth: did you?"

"You are having a good time with us, aren't you!" exclaimed Pomino, shrugging his shoulders.

"A good time? Nothing of the kind! I'm in deadly earnest. It's a question of a soul in Purgatory—no room for joking. Tell me! Did you?"

"No-o-o, I didn't... I didn't have the courage to," Pomino murmured.

"But courage enough to run off with my wife behind my back, eh, you rascal?"

"Well, how about yourself?" Mino retorted with some spirit. "You took her away from me, didn't you, in the first place, when you were alive!"

"I?" I exclaimed in injured astonishment. "There you go again? Can't you get it into your head that she didn't want you? Will you force me to repeat that she thought you were a ninny, a fool, a nincompoop? Here, Romilda, come to my rescue: you see, he's accusing me of false friendship!... However, what does it matter, after all? He's your husband, so we'll have to let it go at that. But it's not my fault... just admit that! I'll go myself tomorrow to pay a visit to that poor man, left there in the graveyard all by himself, without a flower and without a tear! Tell me, there's a stone at least on his mound?"

"Yes!" Pomino hastened to reply. "The town put one up... Poor papa, you remember..."

"Yes, I know... he delivered the funeral oration, ... If that poor man could have heard... What's the epitaph?..."

"I don't know. Lodoletta made it up..."

"The Lark himself!" I sighed. "The poet laureate of Toadville! Did you ever...! Anyhow, we can drop that subject too. Now, I should like to know how you came to marry so soon... Not long didst thou weep for me, merry widow mine! Probably not at all,

eh? But, for heaven's sake, can't you say a word to me, not one little word? Look, it's getting late... as soon as morning comes, I'll go away and it will be as if we had never known each other... Let's not waste these few hours... Come, answer me!"...

Romilda shrugged her shoulders, glanced at Pomino and smiled nervously. Lowering her eyes and staring at her hands, she then said:

"What can I answer? Of course I was sorry... I cried...!"

"And you didn't deserve it!" the widow Pescatore volunteered.

"Thanks, mother dear!" I replied. "But not so very much, eh? Just a little! Those pretty eyes of yours—they don't see very well, to be sure, when it comes to identifying people—but still, a shame to turn them red, eh?"

"We were left in a pretty fix," Romilda continued by way of extenuation. "If it hadn't been for him...!"

"It was nice of you, Mino!" I agreed. "But that rat of a Malagna... no help from him?"

"Not a cent!" the Pescatore woman said, dryly. "He did everything...!"

And she pointed to Pomino.

"Or rather, or rather..." Mino corrected... "Poor papa... you remember he was connected with the Administration... Well, he got Romilda a bit of a pension in view of the circumstances... and then, later on..."

"Later on, he consented to the wedding!"

"Oh, he never objected really! And he wanted us all here, with him... However, two months ago..."

And Mino launched out on a narrative of his father's death, of

the love the old man had for Romilda and the little girl, the tribute the whole town paid him on his passing.

I interrupted with a question about Aunt Scolastica, who had been such a favorite with old Pomino. The Pescatore woman, still mindful of the pan of dough plastered on her face by that terrible virago, hitched uncomfortably on her chair. Pomino explained that he had not seen her for two years, but that she was still alive, and so far as he knew, well.

“But what has been happening to you all this time?” he now asked. “Where have you been? What have you been doing?”

I told him all I could, avoiding people, places and dates, to show that I had not been idle those two years. And so we whiled away the hours far into the night, waiting for the morning when I should publicly declare my resurrection. We were growing weary from lack of sleep and the strenuous emotions we had been experiencing, and it was a trifle cold besides. To warm us up a little, Romilda insisted on preparing coffee for me with her own hands. As she handed the cup to me, my eyes met hers, and a faint distant smile, touched with a wistful sadness, flitted across her lips:

“Without sugar, as usual, I suppose?”

What was it she caught in my gaze? At any rate she hastily looked the other way. In the cold pale glow of the early dawn, I felt a clutch of unexpected homesickness gather at my throat. I looked at Pomino bitterly.

But there the coffee was, steaming hot before me. The fragrance of it filled my nostrils. I took up the cup and slowly began to sip the delicious drink.

“May I leave my bag with you till I know where I’m going to live?” I asked Pomino finally. “I’ll be back after it before long!”

“Why, of course, of course!” proffered Mino solicitously. “In

fact, don't bother to come and get it. I'll have a man take it to you."

"It's not so heavy!" said I, with a sly look at Romilda.

"And by the way," I asked, turning to her, "have you any of my things left, perchance?—shirts, socks, underwear?"

"No," she answered sorrowfully, with a gesture of helplessness. "I gave them all away... You understand .., after such a tragedy..."

"Who could imagine you would ever come back?" exclaimed Pomino.

But I would take my oath, that, at the very moment, Pomino, skinflint that he was, had one of my old neckties on!

"Well, never mind!" I said, ready to take my leave now. "Good bye, eh? And good luck!"

I had my eyes on Romilda, but she refused to meet my gaze. I noticed only that her hand quivered as she responded to my clasp: "Good bye! Good bye!"

Once out in the street, I again felt lost—solitary, homeless, without a place to go or a purpose to realize—though I was back in my own native village, the haunts of my boyhood.

I began to walk, however, looking anxiously at the people I kept meeting. How was that? Would not a soul recognize me? And yet, I was the very same person! The least anyone might have remarked on noticing me was my extraordinary resemblance to the late Mattia Pascal! "If he had one eye a little out of true, you could take him for Mattia outright!"

But nothing of the kind. No one recognized me, because everybody had forgotten about me, ceased thinking of me at all! My presence aroused not the slightest curiosity, let alone surprise.

And I had been thinking of an earthquake, more or less, a sensation, a stoppage of traffic, the moment I appeared on the streets! In my great disappointment I felt a humiliation, a bitterness, a spite, that I could not now express in words, but which I then expressed by cutting, by refusing to approach, people whom I, for my part, recognized perfectly well—why not, after a few months' absence merely? Yes, I could now see what dying meant. No one, not a living soul, had a thought for me. I might just as well never have existed at all!...

Twice I walked the length of the main street of Miragno without attracting a glance from anybody. Hurt to the quick, I thought for a moment of going back to Pomino's and informing him that I did not like the bargain we had made. Why not take out on his hide my irritation at the insult my home town was offering me! But Romilda would never have followed me without constraint, nor did I, for the moment, have a place to take her. I ought to have a house ready at least for the girl I was eloping with! Next I decided to go to the Town Hall and have my name scratched off the registry of deaths; but on the way there, I changed my mind and headed for the Boccamazza Library.

I found in the old place I once had held my reverend friend, Don Eligio Pellegrinotto, who did not recognize me either, on the spot. To tell the truth, Don Eligio claims that he did know me from the very first, but that he wanted to hear my name and be absolutely sure before throwing his arms around my neck in tearful welcome. "You see," says Don Eligio, "it couldn't possibly be you! Well, you couldn't expect me to let myself go with a man who merely looked like you!"

Be that as it may, my first real greeting came from him; and it was a warm one, I can tell you. He insisted on dragging me back to the village by main force, to drive from my mind the bad impression the coldness of my fellow-townsmen had made upon me.

Having expressed myself so clearly on this latter subject, it would now be surely in bad taste to describe what happened, first in Brisigo's drug-store, and later at the Union Cafe when Don Eligio, prouder than he had ever been in his life, presented me as one returning from the dead.

The news swept the town like wild-fire, and the whole population turned out to have a look at me and ply me with millions of questions.

"So it wasn't you they found in the Flume at 'The Coops'? Well, who was it then?"

I don't know how many times I was asked to answer that fool question! Yes, everybody, each in turn—as though they could not believe their eyes:

"So you're really you?"

"Who else?"

"Where'd you come from?"

"The other world!"

"What have you been doing?"

"Playing dead!"

I made up my mind not to budge from those three answers, and I left them all on pins with a curiosity that lasted for days and days.

And no better luck fell to my friend "the Lark" who came to interview me for the Compendium. To make me open up a little, he produced a copy of his journal dated some two years before—the number containing my obituary. I told him I knew the thing by heart and that the Compendium was widely read in the other world.

"In Heaven?"

“Of course not! In the other place! You’ll see for yourself some day!”

Finally he mentioned my epitaph.

“Oh yes! And thanks ever so much! I’ll drop around to the cemetery some afternoon and have a look at it!”

I will not bother to transcribe his feature of the next Sunday, which started off with a headline in big letters:

#### MATTIA PASCAL ALIVE

Among the few—besides my creditors—who did not show up to congratulate me was Batty Malagna. Nevertheless, as I was told, he had made a great fuss two years before over my cruel suicide. I quite believe it. He was as sorry then over my tragic death as he was now over my resurrection. I understand why, in both cases!

I found a home with my Aunt Scolastica, who insisted absolutely that I come to live with her. My queer adventure somehow had raised me in her estimation. I have the very room in which poor mother died, and most of my day I spend either there or here at the library with Don Eligio.

He is still very far from completing his inventory.

“With his help I have finished my strange story in about six months. He had reread every word, but will keep the secret, as though I had revealed it to him under the seal of the Confessional. We have argued a good deal about the significance of my experiences; and I have often said to him that I still can’t see what earthly good it is ever going to do anybody to know about them.

“Well, there’s this, for one thing,” says he. “Your story shows that outside the law of the land, and apart from those little happenings, painful or pleasant as they may be, which make us each what we are, life, my dear Pascal, life is

impossible.”

Whereupon I point out to him that I fail to see how that can be; for I have not regularized my life whether in relation to the law of the land or in relation to my private affairs. My wife is the wife of Pomino, and I'm not quite sure who I am myself!

In the cemetery at Miragno, on the grave of the poor chap they found in the Flume, the stone still stands with Lodoletta's epitaph:

O'erwhelmed by Evil Fortune

Here lies of his own will

MATTIA PASCAL

Scholar Book-Lover Librarian A Generous Heart—A Loyal Soul

May he rest in peace

Erected to his Memory by his Sorrowing Fellow Townsmen.

I have placed on the grave the wreath I said I would; and every now and then I visit the cemetery for the sensation of seeing myself dead and buried there. People often watch me from a distance, on such occasions; and sometimes somebody meets me at the gate and, in view of my situation, asks me:

“But say, who are you really, anyway?”

I shrug my shoulders, wink an eye, and answer:

“Why, what can I say?... I guess I'm the late Mattia Pascal!”

**In Italiano – [Il fu Mattia Pascal](#)**

**En Español – [El difunto Matias Pascal](#)**

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[\*Shakespeare Italia\*](#)