

Demetrio Pianelli

Emilio De Marchi

DEMETRIO PIANELLI

Intermediate English

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*“I will keep my innocence without yielding;
my conscience reproaches me not even for one of my days.”*

(Hiob 27,6)

Emilio De Marchi

Emilio De Marchi was born in Milan in 1851, son of a large middle class family. He spent his life in his native city. His father died in 1860, and his mother Caterina Perego devoted herself to bring up her nine children. She was a resolute woman and for Emilio became his role-model of the right woman and mother. He attended 'Beccaria' (secondary school) and later the 'Accademia Scientifico Letteraria' (the State University of that time), where he graduated in Literature. During his lifespan he taught in secondary schools, boarding-schools, while at the same time keeping an earnest interest in literature. In 1877 he founded a literary periodical called *La Vita Nuova*. He had a personal acquaintance with Fogazzaro, De Amicis and Giacosa. In 1880 Emilio married Lina Martelli, from whom he had two children, Cesarina and Marco. For five years he worked as a communal councillor.

Author of essays, poems, comedies, short stories, tales, which are mainly centred on a Milanese setting between city and countryside, in the circle of

the conservative middle-class. He gained success with his novel *Il cappello del prete* (1887). In 1890 it was followed by his masterpiece *Demetrio Pianelli*, which was considered a significant Italian novel of the nineteenth century. His other famous writings were *Arabella* (1892) and *Giacomo l'idealista* (1897). Common traits of his narration are the grey tones of landscapes, the secret grief of living, the perception of time which runs on without leaving traces. He reveals a vein of a thoughtful writer, inspired by the humble reality of human events. Besides his main novels, in those years he was also dedicated to books in children's pedagogy *L'età preziosa* (1888), *I nostri figliuoli* (1894), and works of people education such as *Lettere a un giovin signore* (1891). It is sharp his educative activism and social commitment in his convinced catholic-liberal demand of ransom for humble people.

He died in Milan in 1901, a few months after the death of his favourite daughter Cesarina.

I - Lord Cosmetic

I

Towards midday, Cesare Pianelli, assistant cashier at the post office in Milan, saw Martini the cashier come into the office with a telegram, his face now as pale as ever before.

'I must leave at once for Nervi. My wife is dying!' he exclaimed. He had been married only for a year, and his wife was seriously ill. 'Do me a favour please, be in charge of the cash flow in my absence. I'll inform the head clerk as soon as possible,' Martini requested.

'Take heart and go, do not waste time. Trust me for the cash,' Cesare replied.

He shook Pianelli's hand with tears in his eyes and left the office.

It was the Thursday before Lent. Cesare Pianelli, nearly forty, nicknamed lord Cosmetic for his smartness and his forever shining hair, remembered that at half past two he had to meet Mr Pardi at the Carini's Café.

At the beginning of that Carnival, Cesarino

Pianelli had promoted and organised the *Monsù Travet* club, to offer the employees of the post office, the city hall and private banks, the opportunity to enjoy the economy. The members were to pay an entrance fee of twenty pounds and then a five pound monthly contribution.

Cesarino met his friend Pardi at the café. He was the owner of a silk ribbon firm next to Blacksmiths Bridge. He liked his job and worked hard. He had married Palmira, a beautiful and quick-witted¹ woman, who worked in his firm.

‘Have you been waiting long?’ he asked.

‘Just a moment. I received your message this morning.’

He continued: ‘Well... as one friend to another, would you be so good as to lend me £ 2,000, please?’

‘Oh, my goodness! How can you need £ 2,000!’

‘I had a mishap² in a payment.’

‘Say that you played and lost, and amen!’

‘Who told you this!’

‘Palmira told me that you played with the tenor... I am sorry, this time I can’t really help you.’

‘Did your wife tell you also this?’

Cesarino was right. Palmira had absolutely forbidden him to borrow money, and he could not but obey. At the end Pianelli told him the truth, trying to convince his friend. He had played cards with the tenor Altamura and had lost £ 2,000. He had settled his debt from the cash funds of the club. Now it

¹ Quick-witted: smart, bright, clever.

² Mishap: misadventure, problem.

was no more a matter of a gambling debt, but a question of honour, as he had used the money of his friends.

But Pardi still refused to help.

‘Foolish man,’ Cesarino thought. ‘Instead of obeying your wife, you should forbid her to sing tender duetti with the tenor,’ he said. With indignation rather than anger, he left the café - Pardi was a little dismayed - and headed for the club between the Cathedral Square and Carlo Alberto Street. Mr Bianchi, on seeing him at the club, exclaimed: ‘Listen Cesare, Mr Cappelletti is waiting for your outstanding³ payment this afternoon before five, otherwise he has to withdraw⁴ his little orchestra from the party.’

He had to pay Mr Cappelletti, Mr Carini, the owner of Carini’s Café, and others, or else that evening the party at the club would be cancelled. It seemed to Cesarino a big plot, that all of Milan was against him, his wife Beatrice and his infant children. He left the club, crossed the portico, and instead of turning on to Carrobbio Street, his direction home, he turned at Court Palace and arrived a few minutes later at the post office. He was carried there by an instinct, a force of gravity, which carries a falling body towards its balance point. It struck four o’clock as he set foot in the cash office. Nobody was there, the counters were closed. He was alone before the two metal boxes full of money. He started to sweat, checked if the doorkeeper was

³ Outstanding: unpaid.

⁴ To withdraw: to pull out of, to cancel.

still in the hall, and locked the door slowly. His purpose was not to change the cash accounts, but only to avail of Martini's absence to provide himself temporarily for a hard necessity. He opened a box and withdrew two notes of five hundred pounds. In less than an hour Pianelli paid Mr Carini, Mr Capelletti and other creditors. He thought he would repair the disorder in a few days, for he was sure that his father-in-law from Melegnano would help him by paying the rest of Beatrice dowry⁵.

That evening the party at the club went successfully ahead. The members of the club had a good time, everybody admired in particular the beauty of Beatrice, who was wearing an elegant evening dress.

The day after Cesarino sent a telegram to Isidoro Chiesa from Melegnano, which stated:

'I urgently need £ 1,000. Bring it to me. A misfortune. Beatrice.'

Then he went to work. Unexpectedly Mr Martini was there.

'How come you are here?' Cesarino muttered.

'She died this night at four,' grievously stammered Martini.

'I came back to ask the head clerk for three days' leave.'

Pianelli was upset both for the tragedy and the risk of being discovered for the cash shortage. He had changed the money order of the builder Inganni (for some repairs in the postal offices) from

⁵ Dowry: money and/or property brought by a bride to her husband.