

The Bust of Pope Leo

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The group of pilgrim travelers gathered for breakfast in the dining room of the Casa Papa Giovanni. They had thoroughly enjoyed their stay there and the experiences of the town of Assisi. (But that is an altogether different story.) Most of the group had mixed emotions about the rickety bus trip to the coast and the sea voyage back to America. There were the possibilities of unpleasantness but the anticipation of home would overcome any of the negative aspects of the trip. Belle and Jennie, however, would not be going home.

The night before, Friar Tom told them he was going to Florence and invited them to join him. He admitted to having an ulterior motive to his invitation and that was the hope that Belle would finance the hiring of a motor car for the trip which was beyond his means. The girls jumped at the chance to see the sights of that great city and avail themselves of the shopping opportunities it offered. Besides, they had fallen in love with Italy and its people and welcomed any excuse not to leave. They were well aware that war had started in Eastern Europe and now Belgium and France were involved. But Italy had managed to stay neutral to this point and seemed determined to remain so.

Belle and Jennie asked Mr. and Mrs. Long to take with them the souvenirs the girls had purchased in Assisi and they agreed to do so. They would retrieve them when they eventually returned home thereby lightening their baggage for the motor trip. So it was that as Fr, Joseph and most of the group picked up their luggage, now increased in volume and weight with souvenirs and trinkets, and made their way to the bus waiting outside the walls of the town, that the Florence bound travelers climbed into a relatively comfortable automobile and waved their farewells.

Pietro, their driver and the owner of the car, sat in the open in front of them while the three passengers occupied the enclosed section. As much of their luggage that would fit resided in a large trunk fastened to the rear of the vehicle with the remainder securely tied on top of the trunk. The ladies were astounded by the one small satchel carried by their friar friend but he

reminded them of his vow of poverty. The pastoral countryside was beautiful, alternating between valleys, wide or narrow, low hills or steep mountain passes although the mountains were not of the high craggy variety, but old, worn down and covered in vegetation. The road was rough and dusty and Pietro said that it was fortunate that it was not fall, the season of the rains when he would not have agreed to make the trip. The trade off was the dust that covered them when an occasional vehicle passed in the opposite direction for although protected from the hot sun, the sides were open to admit air, without which, the heat would have been unbearable.

Stops were made in towns for fuel, water and on one occasion to add oil to the crankcase. The travelers were hot, dusty and tired when they checked in the Grand Mediterranean Hotel on the bank of the River Arno. Friar Tom went on to the local Franciscan Friary while Belle and Jennie, checked into their rooms and immediately enjoyed much needed baths, an hour of rest, and then met for a late afternoon meal in the restaurant on the ground floor. After dinner they took a walk along the Arno and as they approached the Ponte Vecchio decided that it would be their destination for the next day. They were delighted to find a message from Friar Tom along with a letter of introduction to the curator of the Galleria dell'Accademia. He had made a two o'clock appointment for them the following day. They had told him that they wanted to see Michelangelo's David which was housed there but knew that visitors were limited and at times the wait in the hot sun outside the building could be quite long.

After they met for a leisurely breakfast the next morning they went to the Ponte Vecchio, the unique bridge over the Arno with its quaint shops. They found that most of the shops would deliver their purchases to the hotel so they could continue their day unencumbered with packages. Most of the morning was consumed there and they decided to walk to the Palazzo della Signoria. This was the original location of the famous statue of David before it was replaced by a replica and moved to the Accademia. There are also a number of lesser known statues there some of which had been replaced by replicas to preserve the priceless originals. On one side of this plaza is the ancient Medici palace, Palazzo Vecchio. This impressive building has seen many uses over the years including visits from several popes. It was then the city hall and much of it was to be made into a museum to display its opulent living quarters and treasures.

Belle and Jennie settled in at one of the sidewalk cafe's situated where they could view the entire plaza. Only one other table was occupied as it was a little early for lunch. It was good to be able to rest their feet in such a glorious place. They had ordered a light lunch and iced tea when two German officers appeared from around the nearby corner, hesitated a moment and seated themselves at the adjacent table. The senior of the two looked over and offered a smile and a "Good morning ladies" in English tainted with his German accent. The junior officer followed with his own greeting and the girls responded in similar manner, of course without the accent. The older officer asked if they were in this delightful city on holiday and the usual conversation continued covering the charm of the place and the pleasant if somewhat hot weather.

The officer who had taken the lead in the conversation introduced himself as Colonel Fredrich von Lossner of Saxony. The other man identified himself as Oberleutnant Hienrich Muller, and added, either to impress the ladies or in the interest of typical German accuracy, that the other was actually Colonel *Baron* Fredrich von Lossner. Being both impressed and accurately informed, Belle stated that they were Belle Fenton and Jennie Royce and in the interest of accuracy, Jennie added, "And we are just plain folks from Ohio." The Colonel smiled and said, "And ladies of wit as well as great charm." Jennie commented that they wanted to see a bit of Europe before the Europeans destroyed it with their wars of aggression. The lieutenant frowned and was obviously offended but the Colonel took it in stride and replied that the Kaiser was only attempting to reunite Europe back to the days of the Holy Roman Empire, a former unity that had been lost. Belle noted that the Empire would be neither Holy nor Roman and that it certainly appeared to be a war of aggression. She added that Americans do not engage in aggressive war. Colonel Lossner countered, still in a pleasant tone that America's civil war was one which forcibly restored the union and that their war with Mexico did indeed add parts of the Southwest including California to the American nation to the detriment of Mexico under the name Manifest Destiny. Belle with a smile of her own replied, "Touché."

The Colonel then said, "But we should not tarnish this beautiful day and even more beautiful setting with talk of war and political ideas. What are you plans for the rest of your holiday?" Belle told him that they were going to the Accademia to see the statue of David that afternoon and the colonel said that the wait may be long and the sun was hot. Jennie, anxious to let him, or more especially the lieutenant, know that they were somewhat special, informed

them that they would not need to wait in the hot sun because they had an appointment with the curator. At this revelation the two officers looked at each other in a way that was most curious. Colonel Lossner slowly said, "You will meet with signore Belevanti?" When the girls affirmed that indeed they would, the two men spoke lowly in German for a time and the Colonel, now very serious and in a guarded tone, said, "You could do me a very important personal service and I assure you that it is not in any way military in nature. It is in fact, a service of benefit to the Galleria dell'Accademia and the state of Italy." The girls asked what it was; not at all sure they wanted to do anything for these Germans. "I need to give some information to signore Belevanti and it can not be known that we are in contact. It would be best if you knew no more of the details or of the purpose, at least at this time. I am afraid there is a great need for secrecy but there is nothing of a sinister nature in this. As a point of fact I can only assure you that the purpose of all this is to correct a past wrong." Belle was inclined to believe him and asked, "What would you have us do?"

The lieutenant took a small note pad from an inner pocket and wrote something on it. He carefully removed the page from the pad and passed it to the Colonel who read it and nodded. The Colonel said, "You will give this note to signore Belevanti and no one else. Please tell him who gave it to you. It matters none if you read it. It will mean nothing to you but a great deal to the curator. But we can not be seen giving the note to you as I am sure that we are being watched." At that, he motioned to the waiter who, when he arrived, was instructed that under the colonel's dish were a note and a generous tip. He was to pick it up, keeping the note concealed, and take it into the restaurant. He should then return to the table of the ladies and pass the note to them with their bill. Belle would indicate that she had the note and they would depart. The waiter, being Italian, was amused to be involved in what he took to be a romantic deception of some sort and all proceeded according to the hastily conceived plan.

When the note was cleverly transferred to Belle's hand bag when she extracted money to pay her bill, The two officers stood up to leave and offered a "Good Day, Ladies." But before they could move on, a sharp CRACK echoed through the plaza and a bullet tore through the umbrella above the colonel's head, spending itself below the window in the stone face of the restaurant. Oberleutnant Muller dropped to the ground for protection and the ladies slid off their chairs and under the table. The colonel flinched but hardly moved. Several of the polizia who were constantly patrolling the

plaza were soon there to ascertain if anyone was hit and from where the shot originated. An inspector soon arrived and once he determined the no one had been struck he took their names and any information they could give which was none. The colonel volunteered that the shooter must have been high in the building on the other side of the plaza but he was sure he was by now far away. The inspector told the officers that they must have many enemies there and the culprit may have been a Frenchman or such. He should be very careful. As the police left, and the Germans prepared to do the same, Belle called out to the Colonel in genuine concern, "Your enemies could have killed you.". He replied with a smile, "It was no enemy, but a friend and if he intended to kill me I would be dead. No, I have been warned." And with that the two officers disappeared down the street from which they first appeared.

Both girls were upset over the turn of events and the proprietor of the café offered assistance and brandies the latter of which were gratefully accepted. They rested and composed themselves until it was time to start their short walk to the Galleria dell'Accademia. They found the entrance to which they had been directed and presented the letter of introduction to the attendant. They were then ushered to the curator's office where they were warmly greeted by signore Belevanti who said that any friends of the Franciscan Friars were a friend of his. After the normal small talk, Belle told him she had a message for him and that it was not from the Friars. When she gave him the note, he was visibly surprised and asked from whom it came, Belle told him it was from Colonel Fredrich von Lossner, to which he said in an attitude of wonder, "So the Baron actually did it!" Belle and Jennie were still very much perplexed in spite of the fact that they had read the note which only gave the name and location of a warehouse and the added information, "Crate marked Blue leather desk chair". The curator said, "I don't know how all this came to be but I am deeply in debt to you and the Baron." He summoned one of his assistants and instructed him to give the ladies a complete tour of the museum and be sure they left with brochures and photographs of all the exhibits at no charge to them. He then added that he must excuse himself and attend to very important matters. With the note in hand he rushed from the office.

Belle and Jennie, in spite of their continued bewilderment enjoyed their guided tour. David was well worth the trip and they were amazed at the size and beauty of the work of the genius Michelangelo. The details, though in one aspect a little embarrassing, were astounding and the thought that this work of art was created from a single huge block of marble was almost

unbelievable. The tour consumed the rest of the afternoon and included many other sculptures and paintings which in themselves were noteworthy. They even inspected the museum workshops and areas where artifacts were waiting to be refurbished and placed on display. After a brief rest, the two took their leave and walked back to their hotel, but not without a stop at the sidewalk café of their earlier adventure where the manager insisted in providing their evening meal, without charge, of course. Exhausted in mind and body they retired to their rooms for long and deep sleeps.

They met for breakfast intending to visit the Duomo, or more correctly The Basilica di Santa Maria del Fiore dating from the year 1296. But before they could finish their meal the inspector, the same who they had met the day before, appeared at their table and asked permission to sit. He began by saying that he has had a busy day and night and as a matter of fact, had no sleep at all. When they inquired what kept him up all night he said it was "... that business with the warehouse raid and the recovery of the bust of Pope Leo X". He added, "But of course, you haven't read the Italian newspapers this morning." ... and further explained that a bust of the Pope which had been done by Michelangelo was stolen from the Accademia many years ago and was believed to be in the hands of a private collector in either Austria or Germany. Furthermore on yesterday afternoon, the curator of the museum appeared at the main police office with the information that this valuable sculpture had been smuggled back into Italy and was in a crate in one of our warehouses. He continued, "We conducted a search last night and indeed, it was there and now is back in its rightful home. But that is not why I wished to speak to you, rather, it is about your friend, the Colonel."

Belle had now made the connection that the inspector had not, but let him continue. "The waiter at the café had the impression that there was something, if I may be so bold to say, romantic in your association with the Colonel and if there was, you may have more to tell me." Belle responded, "There was no romance at all but I still may have more to tell you." The inspector seemed relieved if not a little surprised and said, "If there was no personal attachment to Colonel Lossner it is good, for I am afraid that when he was about to take the early train to Venice this morning, I assume on his way home, his enemies were more accurate than they were yesterday and shot him dead. We are still looking for his aid, Hienrich Muller, but I doubt we will find him." Belle and Jennie both were shocked and saddened but Belle choked out, "I'm afraid it wasn't his enemy that killed him but a friend, as his recompense for being an honest man.

Belle then related the story of the note for the curator and the inspector now realized that it was Baron Fredrich von Lossner who arranged to smuggle the bust out of Germany and through the happenstance of the girl's visit was able to notify the curator. He had rescued the bust from one of his countrymen, "his friends" or possibly from someone in his own family. They must have suspected him of taking the bust but had no proof. Thus, the warning shot. But when the police found the bust, it was proof enough and the Baron was executed for his deed. The inspector now had the solution to both of his crimes and as far as he was concerned could close both cases, or, more properly combine the two and close the one single case.

Belle and Jennie did visit the Duome and with it, the beautiful Giotto's Campanile, the Duome's bell tower and the baptistery, Battistero di San Giovanni. Along with that there was more shopping which included the purchase of some additional luggage in which to carry all they bought. When they returned to the hotel, there was another message from Friar Tom who wanted to meet them for supper. They joined him at the restaurant at eight that evening.

Friar Tom said that while they were doing nothing but shopping and sight-seeing he had been quite busy with Franciscan business and needed to take the train to Rome the next morning. "Would they like to join him?" He said they could spend a few days in Roma before going to Naples to depart for America. The girls laughed and said they would tell him of their "uneventful" visit to Florence when they were on the train the next day.