

## ***Carpe diem***

(a coda to Mudita)

by mazaher

December 7th, 2012

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It was the night of our return from Paris, December 3rd, 1900; a momentous trip if ever there was one.

Mrs. Hudson, whom I had telegraphed of our late arrival, had left out a plate of cold venison and a bottle of claret for us. Watson and I were starved. We attacked the meat in silence, and in true military fashion made short work of it.

By then, we were warm and pleasantly full, but we both needed a bath to scrape off the grime of travel. Watson, bless him, gave me precedence.

When I emerged from the bathroom, wrapped in my robe (and nothing else: it doesn't hurt to be bold, sometimes) he passed me in the opposite direction with a promising half-smile under his trimmed mustache.

I found that he had prepared a glass of brandy for me to while away the wait. I listened intently to the faint sound of him washing himself in the same water which had so recently held my body. I was finding the idea unexpectedly erotic. The thought that the bath would be no better than lukewarm sobered me. I resolved that I would take care of warming him up properly myself, very soon.

Meanwhile I sat, my gaze lost in the flame of the wax candle alight on the table. It rose steady in the still air of the room, burning evenly without drippings, flicker, smoke or smell. The oval next to the wick was blue with lack of oxygen, the bright spear of light above burned hot and eager and hopeful.

It was then that I knew I was happy, and I had been for quite a while.

I've been sometimes termed reckless: however I'm not so reckless as to question my luck. I am a sharp, but soiled instrument, yet his love makes me shine with pristine brightness. I'll seize the day, the hour, and every minute fate allows me with my lover. For as long as the candle burns.

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GEORGES DUMESNIL DE LA TOUR  
*La Madeleine aux deux flammes*, c. 1640?  
(Metropolitan Museum, New York)

