



Remembrance of Things Past: Within a Budding Grove, Volume 2

Marcel Proust

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"I was falling into that heavy slumber," wrote Proust, "where are unveiled to us the return to the days of youth, the finding of past years, of lost feelings..." Readers might like to revisit a time when reading was a simpler, though perhaps no less enjoyable, pastime. The perfect opportunity to do so lies in this version of Proust's *Remembrance*.

While the idea of attempting to reduce Proust's nearly 2,300-page work to a series of graphic novels may strike one as ambitious, aficionados will want to look at this illustrated rendering. One of the chief attractions of graphic novels is, of course, the "graphic" part, and the delight of the art alone is well worth it. This would be a great introduction to Proust for those who found the sheer size of the original too intimidating.

The adaptor/illustrator, whose artistic gift is readily apparent, offers the reader pane after pane of drawings that move the story along. Ladies clad in fluttery white walk the grand promenade, under skies of pale blue that stretch over deeper blue waters, gray-green shrubbery, and custard-yellow beaches. Patches of brick and slate summon the eye to ornate buildings; deep tones of claret in carpeting and draperies give rich warmth to formal salons. Scenes are drawn with bold lines, and narrator Marcel's face, in keeping with his semi-invalid condition, is somewhat paler than those of the young ladies he courts.

Totally different are the thumbnail views Heuet includes of the impressionist paintings of Marcel's artist friend Elstir. Where the story frames are solid and straightforward (except for delicately shaded skies), the thumbnails are delicate and evocative, with color conveying detail. Viewing these tiny gems is rather like looking at the miniature portraits fashionable in centuries past: they are vivid and full of detail, and the artist's hand is sure.

Reminiscent of the old Classics Illustrated renderings of period novels, Heuet's reduction of the author's words has kept the tenor of Proust's style. This volume, Heuet's third adaptation of Proust, follows the young Marcel as he falls more than a little in love with a group of girls he observes at the Balbec seaside, where he is staying with his grandmother. Marcel only accepts Elstir's invitation to visit his studio at his grandmother's urging, but once there, learns that Elstir can introduce him to Albertine Simonet, a member of the group. Marcel falls for Albertine, Gisèle, Rosemunde, and Andrée by turns. But, more observer than doer, the hero withdraws from romance, only to watch the group depart with the end of the summer.

Proust's belief that only in memory can one truly understand what one has experienced is perhaps particularly apt to recall when indulging in a book that recaptures the simple pleasures of the graphic novels of one's youth. (July / August 2003)

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