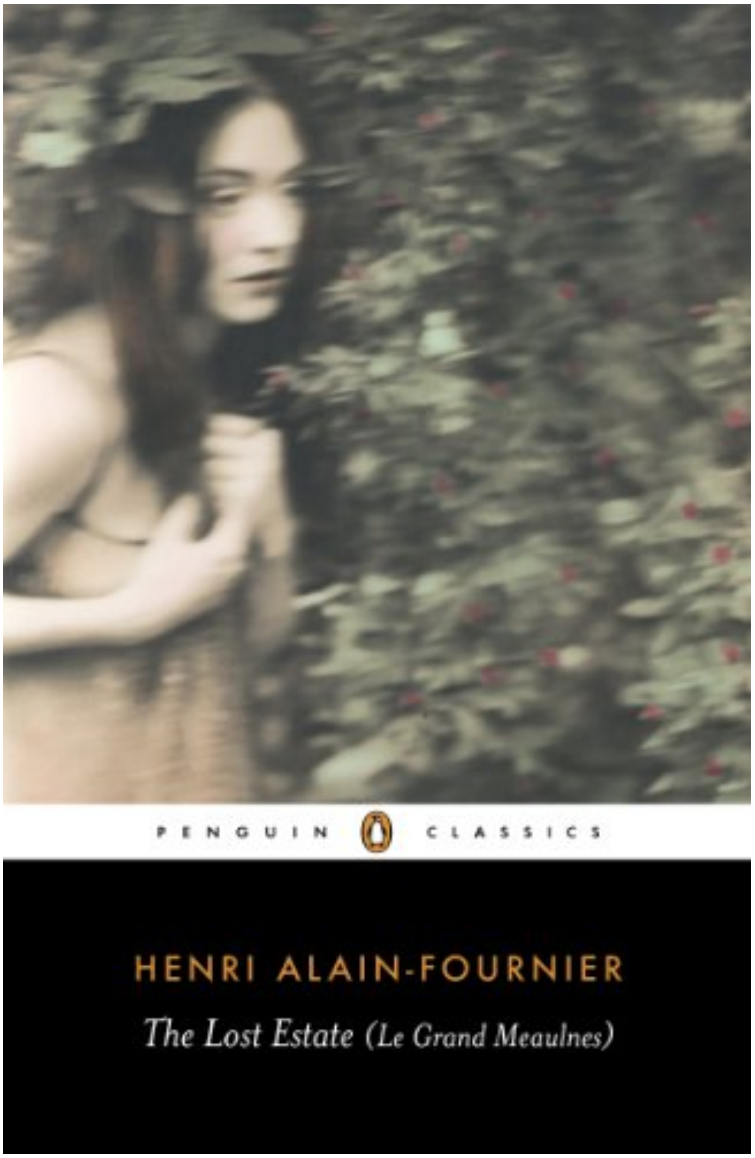
The Lost Estate (Le Grand Meaulnes)



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(Free read ebook) The Lost Estate (Le Grand Meaulnes)

Par Henri Alain-Fournier : The Lost Estate (Le Grand Meaulnes) before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised The Lost Estate (Le Grand Meaulnes):

Description :

Prsentation de l'diteurWhen Meaulnes first arrives at the local school in Sologne, everyone is captivated by his good looks, daring and charisma. But when Meaulnes disappears for several days, and returns with tales of a strange party at a mysterious house and a beautiful girl hidden within it, he has been changed forever. In his restless search for his Lost Estate and the happiness he found there, Meaulnes, observed by his loyal friend Francois, may risk losing everything he ever had. Poised between youthful admiration and adult resignation, Alain-Fourniers compelling narrator carries the reader through this evocative and unbearably poignant portrayal of desperate friendship and vanished adolescence.ExtraitChapter one: THE BOARDERHe came to our place one Sunday in November 189.I still say 'our place', even though the house

no longer belongs to us. It will soon be fifteen years since we left the neighbourhood, and we shall certainly never go back.We lived on the premises of Sainte-Agathe upper school. My father (like the other pupils, I called him 'Monsieur Seurel') was in charge of both the upper school, where they studied for the teaching certificate, and the middle school. My mother took the junior class.1A long red house, with five glazed doors shrouded in Virginia creeper, at the far end of the little town; a huge courtyard with shelters and washing places which opened at the front towards the village through a large gateway; on the north side, the road beyond a little barred gate leading to the railway station, three kilometres away; to the south and at the back, fields, gardens and meadows, with the outskirts of town beyond them ... There you have a sketch plan of the dwelling in which the most poignant and anguished days of my life were spent, the dwelling where our adventures ebbed and flowed, breaking like waves on a solitary rock...The transfer lottery a decision by a school inspector or a departmental prfet2 had brought us there. One day, towards the end of the holidays, long ago, a peasant's cart, going on ahead of our goods and chattels, set my mother and me down in front of the little rusty gate. Some kids who had been stealing peaches from the garden fled silently through gaps in the hedge. My mother, whom we called 'Millie', and who was the most methodical housewife that I have ever known, went directly into the rooms full of dusty straw and immediately announced in despair as she did at every move we made that our furniture would never fit into such a badly designed house. She came out to confide her troubles in me and, as she spoke, gently wiped my little face, blackened by the journey. Then she went back to make an inventory of all the doorways and windows that would have to be replaced if the quarters were to be made habitable ... And I, meanwhile, under a large straw hat with ribbons on it, stayed back on the gravel of this unfamiliar courtyard, waiting, ferreting around in a tentative way by the well and under the shed.At least, this is how I imagine our arrival today; because whenever I try to recapture the distant memory of that first evening, waiting in our courtyard at Sainte-Agathe, what I remember are, in fact, other times of waiting, and I see myself with both hands resting on the bars of the gate, anxiously looking out for someone coming down the main street. And if I try to visualize the first night that I had to spend in my garret, between the first-floor storerooms, what I recall are actually other nights: I am no longer alone in the room; a great, restless, friendly shadow wanders back and forth along the wall. This whole, peaceful landscape the school, Old Martin's field with its three walnut trees and the garden, filled every day from four o'clock onwards by visiting women is forever enlivened and transformed in my memory by the presence of the person who caused such an upheaval in our adolescent years and who, even after he had gone, did not leave us in peace.Yet we had already been there for ten years when Meaulnes came.I was fifteen. It was a cold Sunday in November, the first day of autumn, suggesting the winter to come. All day, Millie had been waiting for a carriage from the station that was to bring her a hat for the cold weather. In the morning, she missed Mass, and I, sitting in the choir with the other children, had looked anxiously towards the bell tower, right up to the sermon, expecting to see her come in with her new hat.In the afternoon, I had to go to Vespers by myself.'In any case,' she said, to cheer me up, brushing my child's outfit with her hand, 'even if the hat had arrived. I would certainly have had to devote Sunday to adjusting it.'In winter, that was how we often spent our Sundays. In the morning, my father would set off for some distant pond shrouded in mist, to fish for pike from a boat, and my mother, retiring until nightfall to her dark bedroom, would darn her simple clothes. She shut herself up in that way because she was afraid that someone or other, one of her friends as poor as she was, and as proud, might catch her at it. So, after Vespers, I would wait in the cold dining room, reading, until she opened the door to show me how the clothes looked on her.That particular Sunday, an event in front of the church kept me outside after the service. The children had gathered to watch a christening in the porch. On the town square, several men, dressed in their firemen's jackets, had formed columns and were stamping their feet in the cold as they listened to Boujardon, the fire chief, getting entangled in the complexities of drill...The baptismal bell stopped suddenly like a peal of festive bells that had mistaken the time and place. Boujardon and his men, their weapons slung across their backs, were jogging away with the fire-engine, and I saw them vanish round the corner followed by four silent boys whose thick soles crushed the twigs on the frosty road down which I did not dare follow them.The only life left in the village was in the Caf Daniel, where you could hear the customers' muffled voices rise and fall. As for me, hugging the wall of the great courtyard that separated our house from the village, I came to the little iron gateway, a little anxious at arriving late.It was half open and I saw at once that something unusual was afoot.At the dining-room door the nearest of the five glazed doors opening on to the courtyard a woman with grey hair was leaning forward and trying to peer through the curtains. She was small, and wearing an old-fashioned black-velvet bonnet. She had a sharp, thin face, now looking worn with anxiety. I am not sure

what premonition made me stop on the first step in front of the gate when I saw her.'Where has he gone? Oh, my God!' she was muttering. 'He was with me just now. He has already been all round the house. Perhaps he has run away.'And between each sentence she tapped three times on the window, so lightly that you could hardly hear it.No one came to open to the unknown visitor. No doubt, Millie had got her hat from the station and was shut in the red room, oblivious to everything, in front of a bed strewn with old ribbons and flattened feathers, sewing, unsewing and remaking her poor hat ... And, sure enough, when I did come into the dining room with the visitor right behind me, my mother appeared, both hands holding lengths of brass wire, with ribbons and feathers on her head, not yet quite assembled. She smiled, her blue eyes tired from working at close of day, and told me:'Look! I was waiting to show you...'Then, seeing the woman sitting in the large armchair at the back of the room, she stopped in embarrassment and quickly took off her hat which, for the remainder of what followed, she held pressed to her bosom, like a nest turned over in the crook of her right arm.The woman in the bonnet, who was hugging an umbrella and a leather handbag between her knees, began to explain, gently nodding and making a polite clicking sound with her tongue. She had fully regained her composure and even, when she started to talk about her son, acquired a superior, mysterious air that intrigued us.They had come together by car from La Fert-d'Angillon, which was fourteen kilometres from Sainte-Agathe. A widow and, as she gave us to understand, very rich she had lost the younger of her two children, Antoine, who had died one day on coming home from school, after bathing with his brother in an unhealthy pond. She had decided to give us the elder boy, Augustin, as a boarder in the upper school.At once, she began to sing the praises of this new boy she was bringing us. I no longer recognized the grey-haired woman I had seen bending over by the door a minute earlier, with the imploring, fraught look of a mother hen which has lost the wild one of her brood.The admiring account that she gave us of her son was quite surprising: he loved to please her and would sometimes walk for miles along the banks of the river, barefoot, to find moorhens' and wild ducks' eggs for her hidden among the reeds ... He also set snares for birds and a few nights ago had found a pheasant in the woods, caught by the neck.I gave Millie a look of astonishment: I would hardly dare go home if I had a tear in my smock.But my mother was not listening. In fact, she motioned to the lady to keep quiet and, carefully putting her 'nest' down on the table, got up silently as though trying to surprise someone.Above our heads, in a storeroom piled high with the scorched fireworks from the last Fourteenth of July,3 a stranger was walking backwards and forwards, with a confident step, shaking the ceiling and then moving on through the vast, murky lofts on the floor above, the sound finally fading as he reached the disused assistant teachers' rooms where we kept drying lime leaves and ripening apples.'I heard that noise just now in the downstairs rooms,' said Millie, in a low voice. 'I though it was you, Franois that you'd come home.'No one spoke. All three of us were standing, with hearts beating, when the door from the loft leading to the kitchen staircase opened and someone came down the stairs, walked across the kitchen and stood in the dark doorway of the dining room.'Is that you, Augustin?' the lady asked.He was a tall boy of around seventeen. All I could see of him at first, in the evening light, were the peasant's felt hat pushed back on his head and the black smock with a belt around it, like schoolboys wear. I could also see that he was smiling...He noticed me and, before anyone could ask him anything, said:'Are you coming into the yard?'I hesitated for a moment. Then, as Millie didn't stop me, I took my cap and went over to him. We left through the kitchen door and crossed over to the shelter, which was already in darkness. As we went along, in the last of the daylight. I examined his angular features, his straight nose and the down on his upper lip.'Look,' he said. 'I found this in your attic. Have you never looked there?'He had a little wheel of blackened wood in his hand, with a chain of tattered rockets running round it: it must have been the Catherine wheel from the Fourteenth of July fireworks.'Two of them haven't gone off, so we can still light them,' he said calmly, like someone who expected something better to turn up later.He threw his hat down, and I saw that he had a peasant's close-cropped hair. He showed me the two rockets with their bits of paper fuse that had been cut, blackened, then abandoned by the flames. He planted the stick of the firework in the sand and to my great astonishment, because we were strictly forbidden such things took a box of matches out of his pocket. Cautiously bending down, he lit the touchpaper. Then, taking my hand, he pulled me sharply back.A moment later, my mother came out on the doorstep with Meaulnes' mother, after discussing and settling his boarding fee and saw, under the shelter, two sprays of red and white stars bursting and for a second she could see me, standing in the magical light, holding the hand of the tall, newly arrived boy and not flinching...Once again, she did not dare say anything.That evening, there was a silent companion to dinner round the family table, who ate, head bowed, untroubled by the looks that the three of us turned on him.Revue de presse"I read it for the first time when I was seventeen and loved every page. I find its

depiction of a golden time and place just as poignant now as I did then." -Nick Hornby