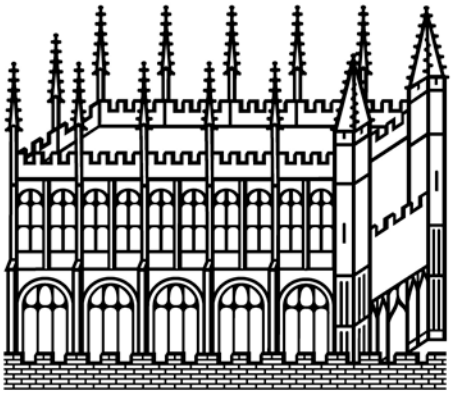

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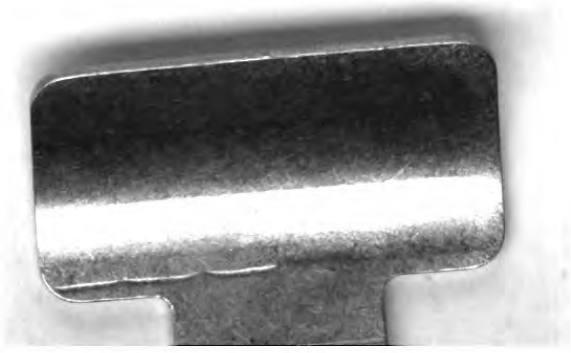

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CAVALLERIA RUSTICANA

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CAVALLERIA RUSTICANA
AND OTHER STORIES

by

GIOVANNI VERGA

TRANSLATED AND WITH AN INTRODUCTION BY

D. H. LAWRENCE

LONDON

JONATHAN CAPE 30 BEDFORD SQUARE

FIRST PUBLISHED 1928
FIRST ISSUED IN THE TRAVELLERS' LIBRARY 1932

JONATHAN CAPE LTD. 30 BEDFORD SQUARE LONDON
& 91 WELLINGTON STREET WEST, TORONTO
JONATHAN CAPE & HARRISON SMITH INC.
139 EAST 46TH STREET NEW YORK

PRINTED AND BOUND IN GREAT BRITAIN
BY THE GARDEN CITY PRESS LIMITED
LETCHWORTH HERTS & LONDON
PAPER MADE BY JOHN DICKINSON & CO.
LIMITED

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TRANSLATOR'S PREFACE

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Cavalleria Rusticana is in many ways the most interesting of the Verga books. The volume of short stories under this title appeared in 1880, when the author was forty years old, and when he had just 'retired' from the world.

The Verga family owned land around Vizzini, a biggish village in southern Sicily; and here, in and around Vizzini, the tragedies of Turiddu and La Lupa and Jeli take place. But it was only in middle life that the drama of peasant passion really made an impression on Giovanni Verga. His earlier imagination, naturally, went out into the great world.

The family of the future author lived chiefly at Catania, the seaport of east Sicily, under Etna. And Catania was really Verga's home town, just as Vizzini was his home village.

But as a young man of twenty he already wanted to depart into the bigger world of 'the Continent,' as the Sicilians called the mainland of Italy. It was the Italy of 1860, the Italy of Garibaldi, and the new era. Verga seems to have taken little interest in politics. He had no doubt the southern idea of himself as a gentleman and an aristocrat, beyond politics. And he had the ancient southern thirst for show, for lustre, for glory, a desire to figure grandly among the first

society of the world. His nature was proud and unmixable. At the same time, he had the southern passionate yearning for tenderness and generosity. And so he ventured into the world, without much money; and, in true southern fashion, he was dazzled. To the end of his days he was dazzled by elegant ladies in elegant equipages: one sees it, amusingly, in all his books.

He was a handsome man, by instinct haughty and reserved: because, partly, he was passionate and emotional, and did not choose to give himself away. A true provincial, he had to try to enter the *beau monde*. He lived by journalism, more or less: certainly the Vizzini lands would not keep him in affluence. But still, in his comparative poverty, he must enter the *beau monde*.

He did so: and apparently, with a certain success. And for nearly twenty years he lived in Milan, in Florence, in Naples, writing, and imagining he was fulfilling his thirst for glory by having love-affairs with elegant ladies: most elegant ladies, as he assures us.

To this period belong the curiously unequal novels of the city world: *Eva*, *Tigre Reale*, *Eros*. They are interesting, alive, bitter, somewhat unhealthy, smelling of the 'seventies and of the Paris of the Goncourts, and, in some curious way, abortive. The man had not found himself. He

was in his wrong element, fooling himself and being fooled by show, in a true Italian fashion.

Then, towards the age of forty, came the recoil, and the *Cavalleria Rusticana* volume is the first book of the recoil. It was a recoil away from the *beau monde* and the 'Continent,' back to Sicily, to Catania, to the peasants. Verga never married: but he was deeply attached to his own family. He lived in Catania, with his sister. His brother, or brother-in-law, who had looked after the Vizzini property, was ill. So for the first time in his life Giovanni Verga had to undertake the responsibility for the family estate and fortune. He had to go to Vizzini and more or less manage the farm-work – at least keep an eye on it. He said he hated the job, that he had no capacity for business, and so on. But we may be sure he managed very well. And certainly from this experience he gained his real fortune, his genuine sympathy with peasant life, instead of his spurious sympathy with elegant ladies. His great books all followed *Cavalleria Rusticana*: and *Mastro-Don Gesualdo* and the *Novelle Rusticane* (Little Novels of Sicily) and most of the sketches have their scenes laid in or around Vizzini.

So that *Cavalleria Rusticana* marks a turning-point in the man's life. Verga still looks back to the city elegance, and makes such a sour face

over it, it is really funny. The sketch he calls *Fantasticheria* (Caprice) and the last story in the book, *Il Come, il Quando, et il Perché* (The How, When, and Wherefore) both deal with the elegant little lady herself. The sketch *Caprice* we may take as autobiographical – the story not entirely so. But we have enough data to go on.

The elegant little lady is the same, pretty, spoilt, impulsive, emotional, but without passion. The lover, Polidori, is only half-sketched. But evidently he is a passionate man who *thinks* he can play at love and then is mortified to his very soul because he finds it is only a game. The tone of mortification is amusingly evident both in the sketch and in the story. Verga is profoundly and everlastingly offended with the little lady, with all little ladies, for not taking him absolutely seriously as an amorous male, when all the time he doesn't quite take himself seriously, and doesn't take the little lady seriously at all.

Nevertheless, the moment of sheer roused passion is serious in the man: and apparently not so in the woman. Each time the moment comes, it involves the whole nature of the man and does not involve the whole nature of the woman: she still clings to her social safeguards. It is the difference between a passionate nature and an emotional nature. But then the man goes out

deliberately to make love to the emotional elegant woman who is truly social and not passionate. So he has only himself to blame if his passionate nose is out of joint.

It is most obviously out of joint. His little picture of the elegant little lady jingling her scent-bottle and gazing in nervous anxiety for the train from Catania which will carry her away from Aci-Trezza and her too-intense lover, back to her light, gay, secure world on the mainland is one of the most amusingly biting things in the literature of love. How glad she must have been to get away from him! And how bored she must have been by his preaching the virtues of the humble poor, holding them up before her to make her feel small. We may be sure she didn't feel small, only nervous and irritable. For apparently she had no deep warmth or generosity of nature.

So Verga recoiled to the humble poor, as we see in his 'Caprice' sketch. Like a southerner, what he did he did wholesale. Floods of savage and tragic pity he poured upon the humble fisher-folk of Aci-Trezza, whether they asked for it or not; – partly to spite the elegant little lady. And this particular flood spreads over the whole of his long novel concerning the fisherfolk of Aci-Trezza: *I Malavoglia*. It is a great novel, in spite of the pity: but always in spite of it.

In *Cavalleria Rusticana*, however, Verga had not yet come to the point of letting loose his pity. He is still too much and too profoundly offended, as a passionate male. He recoils savagely away from the sophistications of the city life of elegant little ladies, to the peasants in their most crude and simple, almost brute-like aspect.

When one reads, one after the other, the stories of Turiddu, La Lupa, Jeli, Brothpot, Rosso Malpelo, one after the other, stories of crude killing, it seems almost too much, too crude, too violent, too much a question of mere brutes.

As a matter of fact, the judgment is unjust. Turiddu is not a brute: neither is Alfio. Both are men of sensitive and even honourable nature. Turiddu knows he is wrong, and would even let himself be killed, he says, but for the thought of his old mother. The elegant Maria and her Erminia are never so sensitive and direct in expressing themselves; nor so frankly warm-hearted.

As for Jeli, who could call him a brute? or Nanni? or Brothpot? They are perhaps not brutal enough. They are too gentle and forbearing, too delicately naïve. And so grosser natures trespass on them unpardonably; and the revenge flashes out.

His contemporaries abused Verga for being a

realist of the Zola school. The charge is unjust. The base of the charge against Zola is that he made his people too often merely physical-functional arrangements, physically and materially functioning without any 'higher' nature. The charge against Zola is often justifiable. It is completely justifiable against the earlier D'Annunzio. In fact, the Italian tends on the one hand to be this creature of physical-functional activity and nothing else, spasmodically sensual and materialist; hence the violent Italian outcry against the portrayal of such creatures, and D'Annunzio's speedy transition to neurotic Virgins of the Rocks and ultra-refinements.

But Verga's people are always people in the purest sense of the word. They are not intellectual, but then neither was Hector nor Ulysses intellectual. Verga, in his recoil, mistrusted everything that smelled of sophistication. He had a passion for the most naïve, the most unsophisticated manifestation of human nature. He was not seeking the brute, the animal man, the so-called cave-man. Far from it. He knew already too well that the brute and the cave-man lie quite near under the skin of the ordinary successful man of the world. There you have the predatory cave-man of vulgar imagination, thinly hidden under expensive cloth.

What Verga's soul yearned for was the purely naïve human being, in contrast to the sophisticated. It seems as if Sicily, in some way, under all her amazing forms of sophistication and corruption, still preserves some flower of pure human candour: the same thing that fascinated Theocritus. Theocritus was an Alexandrine courtier, singing from all his 'musk and insolence' of the pure idyllic Sicilian shepherds. Verga is the Theocritus of the nineteenth century, born among the Sicilian shepherds, and speaking of them in prose more sadly than Theocritus, yet with some of the same eternal Sicilian dawn-freshness in his vision. It is almost bitter to think that Rosso Malpelo must often have looked along the coast and seen the rocks that the Cyclops flung at Ulysses; and that Jeli must some time or other have looked to the yellow temple-ruins of Girgenti.

Verga was fascinated, after his mortification in the *beau monde*, by pure naïveté and by the spontaneous passion of life, that spurts beyond all convention or even law. Yet as we read, one after the other, of these betrayed husbands killing the co-respondents, it seems a little mechanical. Alfio, Jeli, Brothpot, Gramigna ending their life in prison: it seems a bit futile and hopeless, mechanical again.

The fault is partly Verga's own, the fault of

his own obsession. He felt himself in some way deeply mortified, insulted in his ultimate sexual or male self, and he enacted over and over again the drama of revenge. We think to ourselves, ah, how stupid of Alfio, of Jeli, of Brothpot, to have to go killing a man and getting themselves shut up in prison for life, merely because the man had committed adultery with their wives. Was it worth it? Was the wife worth one year of prison, to a man, let alone a lifetime?

We ask the question with our reason, and with our reason we answer No! Not for a moment was any of these women worth it. Nowadays we have learnt more sense, and we let her go her way. So the stories are too old-fashioned.

And again, it was not for love of their wives that Jeli and Alfio and Brothpot killed the other man. It was because people talked. It was because of the fiction of 'honour.' – We have got beyond all that.

We are so much more reasonable. All our life is so much more reasoned and reasonable. *Nous avons changé tout cela.*

And yet, as the years go by, one wonders if mankind is so radically changed. One wonders whether reason, sweet reason, has really changed us, or merely delayed or diverted our reactions. Are Alfio and Jeli and Gramigna utterly out of

date, a thing superseded for ever? Or are they eternal?

Is man a sweet and reasonable creature? Or is he, basically, a passional phenomenon? Is man a phenomenon on the face of the earth, or a rational consciousness? Is human behaviour to be reasonable, throughout the future, reasoned and rational? – or will it always display itself in strange and violent phenomena?

Judging from all experience, past and present, one can only decide that human behaviour is ultimately one of the natural phenomena, beyond all reason. Part of the phenomenon, for the time being, is human reason, the control of reason, and the power of the Word. But the Word and the reason are themselves only part of the coruscating phenomenon of human existence; they are, so to speak, one rosy shower from the rocket, which gives way almost instantly to the red shower of ruin or the green shower of despair.

Man is a phenomenon on the face of the earth. But the phenomena have their laws. One of the laws of the phenomenon called a human being is that, hurt this being mortally at its sexual root, and it will recoil ultimately into some form of killing. The recoil may be prompt, or delay by years or even by generations. But it will come. We may take it as a law.

We may take it as another law that the very deepest quick of a man's nature is his own pride and self-respect. The human being, weird phenomenon, may be patient for years and years under insult, insult to his very quick, his pride in his own natural being. But at last, oh phenomenon, killing will come of it. All bloody revolutions are the result of the long, slow, accumulated insult to the quick of pride in the mass of men.

A third law is that the naïve or innocent core in a man is always his vital core, and infinitely more important than his intellect or his reason. It is only from his core of unconscious naïveté that the human being is ultimately a responsible and dependable being. Break this human core of naïveté – and the evil of the world all the time tries to break it, in Jeli, in Rosso Malpelo, in Brothpot, in all these Verga characters – and you get either a violent reaction, or, as is usual nowadays, a merely rational creature whose core of spontaneous life is dead. Now the rational creature, who is merely rational, by some cruel trick of fate remains rational only for one or two generations at best. Then he is quite mad. It is one of the terrible qualities of the reason that it has no life of its own, and unless continually kept nourished or modified by the naïve life in man and woman, it becomes a purely parasitic and destructive

thing. Make any human being a really rational being, and you have made him a parasitic and destructive force. Make any people mainly rational in their life, and their inner activity will be the activity of destruction. The more the populations of the world become only rational in their consciousness, the swifter they bring about their destruction pure and simple.

Verga, like every great artist, had sensed this. What he bewails really, as the tragedy of tragedies, in this book, is the ugly trespass of the sophisticated greedy ones upon the naïve life of the true human being: the death of the naïve, pure being – or his lifelong imprisonment – and the triumph or the killing of the sophisticated greedy ones.

This is the tragedy of tragedies in all time, but particularly in our epoch: the killing off of the naïve innocent life in all of us, by which alone we can continue to live, and the ugly triumph of the sophisticated greedy.

It may be urged that Verga commits the Tolstoyan fallacy, of repudiating the educated world and exalting the peasant. But this is not the case. Verga is very much the gentleman, exclusively so, to the end of his days. He did not dream of putting on a peasant's smock, or following the plough. What Tolstoi somewhat perversely worshipped in the peasants was poverty itself, and

humility, and what Tolstoi somewhat perversely hated was instinctive pride or spontaneous passion. Tolstoi has a perverse pleasure in making the later Vronsky abject and pitiable: because Tolstoi so meanly envied the healthy passionate male in the young Vronsky. Tolstoi cut off his own nose to spite his face. He envied the reckless passionate male with a carking envy, because he must have felt himself in some way wanting in comparison. So he exalts the peasant: not because the peasant may be a more natural and spontaneous creature than the city man or the guardsman, but just because the peasant is poverty-stricken and humble. This is malice, the envy of weakness and deformity.

We know now that the peasant is no better than anybody else; no better than a prince or a selfish young army officer or a governor or a merchant. In fact, in the mass, the peasant is worse than any of these. The peasant mass is the ugliest of all human masses, most greedily-selfish and brutal of all. Which Tolstoi, leaning down from the gold bar of heaven, will have had opportunity to observe. If we have to trust to a *mass*, then better trust the upper or middle-class mass, all masses being odious.

But Verga by no means exalts the peasants as a class: nor does he believe in their poverty and humility. Verga's peasants are certainly not

Christ-like, whatever else they are. They are most normally ugly and low, the bulk of them. And individuals are sensitive and simple.

Verga turns to the peasants only to seek for a certain something which, as a healthy artist, he worshipped. Even Tolstoi, as a healthy artist, worshipped it the same. It was only as a moralist and a personal being that Tolstoi was perverse. As a true artist, he worshipped, as Verga did, every manifestation of pure, spontaneous, passionate life, life kindled to vividness. As a perverse moralist with a sense of some subtle deficiency in himself, Tolstoi tries to insult and to damp out the vividness of life. Imagine any great artist making the vulgar social condemnation of Anna and Vronsky figure as divine punishment! Where now is the society that turned its back on Vronsky and Anna? Where is it? And what is its condemnation worth, to-day?

Verga turned to the peasants to find, *in individuals*, the vivid spontaneity of sensitive passionate life, non-moral and non-didactic. He found it always *defeated*. He found the vulgar and the greedy always destroying the sensitive and the passionate. The vulgar and the greedy are themselves usually peasants: Verga was far too sane to put an aureole round the whole class. Still more are the women greedy and egoistic. But even so,

Turiddu and Jeli and Rosso Malpelo and Nanni and Gramigna and Brothpot are not humble. They have no saint-like, self-sacrificial qualities. They are only naïve, passionate, and natural. They are 'defeated' not because there is any glory or sanctification in defeat; there is no martyrdom about it. They are defeated because they are too unsuspicious, not sufficiently armed and ready to do battle with the greedy and the sophisticated. When they do strike, they destroy themselves too. So the real tragedy is that they are not sufficiently conscious and developed to defend their own naïve sensitiveness against the inroads of the greedy and the vulgar. The greedy and the vulgar win all the time: which, alas, is only too true, in Sicily as everywhere else. But Giovanni Verga certainly doesn't help them, by preaching humility. He does show them the knife of revenge at their throat.

And these stories, instead of being out of date, just because the manners depicted are more or less obsolete, even in Sicily, which is a good deal Americanized and 'cleaned up,' as the reformers would say; instead of being out of date, they are dynamically perhaps the most up-to-date of stories. The Tchekovian after-influenza effect of inertia and will-lessness is wearing off, all over Europe. We realize we've had about enough of

being null. And if Tchekov represents the human being driven into an extremity of self-consciousness and faintly-wriggling inertia, Verga represents him as waking suddenly from inaction into the stroke of revenge. We shall see which of the two visions is more deeply true to life.

Cavalleria Rusticana and *La Lupa* have always been hailed as masterpieces of brevity and gems of literary form. Masterpieces they are, but one is now a little sceptical of their form. After the enormous diffusiveness of Victor Hugo, it was perhaps necessary to make the artist more self-critical and self-effacing. But any wholesale creed in art is dangerous. Hugo's romanticism, which consisted in letting himself go, in an orgy of effusive self-conceit, was not much worse than the next creed the French invented for the artist, of self-effacement. Self-effacement is quite as self-conscious, and perhaps even more conceited than letting oneself go. Maupassant's self-effacement becomes more blatant than Hugo's self-effusion. As for the perfection of form achieved – Mérimée achieved the highest, in his dull stories like *Mateo Falcone* and *L'Enlèvement de la Redoute*. But they are hopelessly literary, fabricated. So is most of Maupassant. And if *Madame Bovary* has form, it is a pretty flat form.

But Verga was caught up by the grand idea of self-effacement in art. Anything more confused, more silly, really, than the pages prefacing the excellent story *Gramigna's Lover* would be hard to find, from the pen of a great writer. The moment Verga starts talking theories, our interest wilts immediately. The theories were none of his own: just borrowed from the literary smarties of Paris. And poor Verga looks a sad sight in Paris ready-mades. And when he starts putting his theories into practice, and effacing himself, one is far more aware of his interference than when he just goes ahead. Naturally! Because self-effacement is, of course, self-conscious, and any form of emotional self-consciousness hinders a first-rate artist: though it may help the second-rate.

Therefore in *Cavalleria Rusticana* and in *La Lupa* we are just a bit too much aware of the author and his scissors. He has clipped too much away. The transitions are too abrupt. All is over in a gasp: whereas a story like *La Lupa* covers at least several years of time.

As a matter of fact, we need more looseness. We need an apparent formlessness, definite form is mechanical. We need more easy transition from mood to mood and from deed to deed. A great deal of the meaning of life and of art lies in the apparently dull spaces, the pauses, the unimpor-

tant passages. They are truly passages, the places of passing over.

So that Verga's deliberate missing-out of transition passages is, it seems to me, often a defect. And for this reason a story like *La Lupa* loses a great deal of its life. It may be a masterpiece of concision, but it is hardly a masterpiece of narration. It is so short, our acquaintance with Nanni and Maricchia is so fleeting, we forget them almost at once. *Jeli* makes a far more profound impression, so does *Rosso Malpelo*. These seem to me the finest stories in the book, and among the finest stories ever written. Rosso Malpelo is an extreme of the human consciousness, subtle and appalling as anything done by the Russians, and at the same time substantial, not introspective vapours. You will never forget him.

And it needed a deeper genius to write *Rosso Malpelo* than to write *Cavalleria Rusticana* or *La Lupa*. But the literary smarties, being so smart, have always praised the latter two above all others.

This business of missing out transition passages is quite deliberate on Verga's part. It is perhaps most evident in this volume, because it is here that Verga practises it for the first time. It was a new dodge, and he handled it badly. The sliding-over of the change from Jeli's boyhood to his young manhood is surely too deliberately confusing!

But Verga had a double motive. First was the Frenchy idea of self-effacement, which, however, didn't go very deep, as Verga was too much of a true Southerner to know quite what it meant. But the second motive was more dynamic. It was connected with Verga's whole recoil from the sophisticated world, and it effected a revolution in his style. Instinctively he had come to hate the tyranny of a persistently logical sequence, or even a persistently chronological sequence. Time and the syllogism both seemed to represent the sophisticated falsehood and a sort of bullying, to him.

He tells us himself how he came across his new style:

'I had published several of my first novels. They went well: I was preparing others. One day, I don't know how, there came into my hands a sort of broadside, a halfpenny sheet, sufficiently ungrammatical and disconnected, in which a sea-captain succinctly relates all the vicissitudes through which his sailing-ship has passed. Seaman's language, short, without an unnecessary phrase. It struck me, and I read it again; it was what I was looking for, without definitely knowing it. Sometimes, you know, just a sign, an indication is enough. It is a revelation. . . .'

This passage explains all we need to know about Verga's style, which is perhaps at its most

extreme in this volume. He was trying to follow the workings of the unsophisticated mind, and trying to reproduce the pattern.

Now the emotional mind, if we may be allowed to say so, is not logical. It is a psychological fact, that when we are thinking emotionally or passionately, thinking and feeling at the same time, we do not think rationally: and therefore, and therefore, and therefore. Instead, the mind makes curious swoops and circles. It touches the point of pain or interest, then sweeps away again in a cycle, coils round and approaches again the point of pain or interest. There is a curious spiral rhythm, and the mind approaches again and again the point of concern, repeats itself, goes back, destroys the time-sequence entirely, so that time ceases to exist, as the mind stoops to the quarry, then leaves it without striking, soars, hovers, turns, swoops, stoops again, still does not strike, yet is nearer, nearer, reels away again, wheels off into the air, even forgets, quite forgets, yet again turns, bends, circles slowly, swoops and stoops again, until at last there is the closing-in, and the clutch of a decision or a resolve.

This activity of the mind is strictly timeless, and illogical. Afterwards you can deduce the logical sequence and the time sequence, as historians do from the past. But in the happen-

ing, the logical and the time sequence do not exist.

Verga tried to convey this in his style. It gives at first the sense of jumble and incoherence. The beginning of the story *Brothpot* is a good example of this breathless muddle of the peasant mind. When one is used to it, it is amusing, and a new movement in deliberate consciousness: though the humorists have used the form before. But at first it may be annoying. Once he starts definitely narrating, however, Verga drops the 'muddled' method, and seeks only to be concise, often too concise, too abrupt in the transition. And in the matter of punctuation he is, perhaps deliberately, a puzzle, aiming at the same muddled swift effect of the emotional mind in its movements. He is doing, as a great artist, what men like James Joyce do only out of contrariness and desire for a sensation. The emotional mind, however apparently muddled, has its own rhythm, its own commas and colons and full-stops. They are not always as we should expect them, but they are there, indicating that other rhythm.

Everybody knows, of course, that Verga made a dramatized version of *Cavalleria Rusticana*, and that this dramatized version is the libretto of the ever-popular little opera of the same name. So that Mascagni's rather feeble music has

gone to immortalize a man like Verga, whose only *popular* claim to fame is that he wrote the aforesaid libretto. – But that is fame's fault, not Verga's.

CAVALLERIA RUSTICANA

CAVALLERIA[1] RUSTICANA

*

TURIDDU[2] MACCA, son of old Mother Nunzia, when he came home from being a soldier, went swaggering about the village square every Sunday, showing himself off in his *bersagliere's*[3] uniform with the red fez cap, till you'd have thought it was the fortune-teller himself come to set up his stall with the cage of canaries. The girls going to Mass with their noses meekly inside their kerchiefs stole such looks at him, and the youngsters buzzed round him like flies. And he'd brought home a pipe with the king on horseback on the bowl, simply life-like, and when he struck a match on his trousers behind, he lifted his leg up as if he was going to give you a kick.

But for all that, Lola, Farmer Angelo's daughter, never showed a sign of herself, neither at Mass nor on her balcony; for the simple reason that she'd gone and got herself engaged to a fellow from Licodia, a carter who took contracts, and had four handsome Sortino mules of his own in his stable.

When Turiddu first got to hear of it, oh, the

[1] Pronounce with the accent on the *i*: Cavaller-*ee*-a. It means Rustic Chivalry.

[2] Turiddu = Salvatore.

[3] The *Bersaglieri* are a famous Italian regiment of sharpshooters who wear black cocks'-plumes for full dress, and the red fez with hanging tassel for undress.

devil! he raved and swore! – he'd rip his guts out for him, he'd rip 'em out for him, that Licodia fellow! – But he never did a thing, except go and sing every slighting song he could think of under the beauty's window.

'Has Mother Nunzia's Turiddu got nothing else to do but sing songs like a forlorn sparrow, every mortal night?' said the neighbours.

However, he ran into Lola at last, as she was coming back from her little pilgrimage to Our Lady of Peril; and she, when she saw him, never turned a hair, as if it was nothing to do with *her*

'It's rare to set eyes on you!' he said to her.

'Hello, Turiddu! They told me you'd come back on the first of this month.'

'They told me more than that!' he replied. Is it right as you're marrying Alfio, as contracts for carting?'

'God willing, I am,' replied Lola, twisting the corners of her kerchief at her chin.

'There's a lot o' God willing about it! You suit your own fancy! And it was God willing as I should come home from as far as I did, to hear this nice bit of news, was it, Lola?'

The poor man tried to keep a good face, but his voice had gone husky; and he walked on at the heels of the girl, the tassel of his fez cap swinging melancholy to and fro, on his shoulders. And to

tell the truth, she was sorry to see him with such a long face; but she hadn't the heart to cheer him up with false promises.

'Look here, Turiddu,' she said at last to him, 'let me go on and join the others. What do you think folks'll say if they see me with you?'

'You're right!' replied Turiddu. 'Now you're going to marry that chap Alfio, as has got four mules of his own in his stable, it'd never do to set folks talking! Not like my poor old mother, as had to sell our bay mule and the bit of a vineyard, while I was away soldiering. – Ah well, the time's gone by when Bertha sat a-spinning! – And you've forgotten how we used to talk together at the window in the yard, and how you gave me that handkerchief before I went away – God knows how many tears I cried in it, going that far off, I'd almost forgotten even the name of where I came from. – Well, good-bye, then, Lola. *It showered a while, and then left off, and all was over between us!*'

And so Miss Lola married the carter; and the Sunday after, there she sat on her balcony, with her hands spread on her stomach to show all the great gold rings her husband had given her. Turiddu kept going back and forth, back and forth up the narrow street, his pipe in his mouth and his hands in his pockets, to show he didn't care, and ogling all the girls. But it gnawed him

inside himself to think that Lola's husband should have all that gold, and that she pretended not to notice him, when he passed.

'I'll show that bitch summat, afore I've done!' he muttered to himself.

Across from Alfio's house lived Farmer Cola, the wine-grower, who was as rich as a pig, so they said, and who had a daughter on his hands. Turiddu so managed it that he got Farmer Cola to take him on, helping in the vines, and then he started hanging round the house, saying nice things to the girl.

'Why don't you go and say all those sweet nothings to Mrs. Lola, over the road?' Santa replied to him.

'Mrs. Lola thinks she's somebody. Mrs. Lola's married My Lord Tom-noddy, she has!'

'And I'm not good enough for a Lord Tom-noddy, am I?'

'You're worth twenty Lolas. And I know somebody as wouldn't look at Mrs. Lola, nor at the saint she's named after, if you was by. Mrs. Lola's not fit to bring you your shoes, she's not.'

'Ah là! it's sour grapes, as the fox said when he couldn't reach – '

'No, he didn't! He said: "Ah, but *you're* sweet, my little gooseberry!" '

'Eh! Keep your hands to yourself, Turiddu!

'Are you afraid I shall eat you?'

'I'm neither afraid of you nor your Maker.'

'Eh! your mother was a Licodia woman, we know it! You've got a temper right enough. Oh! I could eat you with my eyes!'

'Eat me with your eyes, then; we shall make no crumbs! But while you're at it, lift me that bundle of kindling.'

'I'd lift the whole house up for you, that I would.'

She, to hide her blushes, threw a stick at him which she'd got in her hand, and for a wonder missed him.

'Let's look sharp! We shall bind no kindling with nothing but talk.'

'If I was rich, I should look for a wife like you, Miss Santa.'

'Eh well! I shan't marry my Lord Tom-noddy, like Mrs. Lola, but I shan't come empty-handed neither, when the Lord sends me the right man.'

'Oh ay! we know you're rich enough, we know that.'

'If you know it, then hurry up; my Dad'll be here directly, and I don't want him to catch me in the yard.'

Her father began by making a wry face, but the girl pretended not to notice. The tassel of the *bersagliere's* cap had touched her heart, swing-

ing in front of her eyes all the time. When her father put Turiddu out of the door, she opened the window to him, and stood there chattering to him all the evening, till the whole neighbourhood was talking about nothing else.

'I'm crazy about you,' Turiddu said. 'I can neither eat nor sleep.'

'You say so – '

'I wish I was Victor Emmanuel's son, so I could marry you.'

'You say so – '

'Oh, Madonna, I could eat you like bread!'

'You say so – '

'Ah, I tell you it's true!'

'Eh, mother, mother!'

Night after night Lola listened, hidden behind a pot of sweet basil in her window, and going hot and cold by turns. One day she called to him:

'So that's how it is, Turiddu? Old friends don't speak to one another any more!'

'Why!' sighed the youth. 'It's a lucky chap as can get a word with you.'

'If you want to speak to me, you know where I live,' replied Lola.

Turiddu went so often to speak to her, that Santa was bound to notice it, and she slammed the window in his face. The neighbours nodded to one another, with a smile, when the *bersagliere*

went by. Lola's husband was away, going round from fair to fair, with his mules.

'I mean to go to confession on Sunday. I dreamed of black grapes [1] last night,' said Lola.

'Oh, not yet, not yet!' Turiddu pleaded.

'Yes. Now it's getting near Easter, my husband will want to know why I've not been to confession.'

'Ah!' murmured Farmer Cola's Santa, waiting on her knees for her turn in front of the confessional, where Lola was having a great washing of her sins: 'It's not Rome I'd send you to for a penance, it isn't, my word it isn't!'

Master Alfio came home with his mules, and a good load of cash, and brought a fine new dress as a present to his wife, for the festival.

'You do well to bring her presents,' his neighbour Santa said to him. 'She's been adorning your house for you, while you've been away.'

Master Alfio was one of those carters who go swaggering beside their horse with their cap over their ear; so when he heard his wife spoken of in that way, he went white as if he'd been stabbed.

'By God, though!' he exclaimed. 'If you've seen more than there was to see, I won't leave you your eyes to cry with, neither you nor the rest of your folks.'

[1] A very unlucky dream, in Italy.

'I'm not the crying sort,' replied Santa. 'I didn't cry even when I saw with my own eyes Mother Nunzia's Turiddu creeping into your wife's house at night.'

'All right!' replied Alfio. 'I'm much obliged!'

Now that the cat had come back, Turiddu no longer hung round the little street in the daytime, but whiled away his chagrin at the inn, with his friends; and on the Saturday evening before Easter they had a dish of sausages on the table. When Master Alfio came in, Turiddu knew in an instant, from the way he fixed his eyes on him, what he'd come for, and he put his fork down on his plate.

'Did you want me for anything, Alfio?' he said.

'Nothing particular, Turiddu. It's quite a while since I've seen you, and I thought I'd have a word with you – you know what about.'

At first Turiddu had offered him his glass, but he put it aside with his hand. Then Turiddu rose, and said:

'Right you are, Alfio!'

The carter threw his arms round his neck.

'Shall you come to the cactus grove at Canziria [1] to-morrow morning, and we can talk about that bit of business of ours, boy?'

[1] This property was acquired by Mastro-don Gesualdo.

'Wait for me on the high-road at sunrise, and we'll go together.'

With these words, they exchanged the kiss of challenge; and Turiddu nipped the carter's ear between his teeth, thus promising solemnly not to fail him.

His friends had all quietly abandoned the sausages, and they walked with Turiddu home. Mother Nunzia, poor thing, sat up waiting for him till late every evening.

'Mother,' Turiddu said to her, 'you remember when I went for a soldier, you thought I should never come back? Now kiss me like you did then, because I'm going off in the morning, a long way.'

Before daybreak he took his clasp-knife, which he had hidden under the hay when he was taken off as a conscript to the army, and then he set out for the cactus grove at Canziria.

'Oh Jesu-Maria! where are you going in such a fury?' whimpered Lola in dismay, as her husband was getting ready to go out.

'I'm not going far,' replied Master Alfio. 'And better for you if I never came back.'

Lola, in her night-dress, kneeled praying at the foot of the bed, pressing to her lips the rosary which Fra Bernardino had brought from the Holy Land, and repeating all the *Ave Marias* there were to repeat.

'You see, Alfio,' Turiddu began, after he had walked for some distance along the road beside his silent companion, who had his cap pulled down over his eyes, 'as true as God's above, I know I'm in the wrong, and I would let myself be killed. But my old mother got up before I started out, pretending she had to see to the fowls, and I could tell she knew. So as sure as God's above, I'm going to kill you like a dog, so the poor old woman shan't have to cry her eyes out.'

'All right, then,' replied Alfio, pulling off his sleeved waistcoat. 'Now we shall strike hard, both of us.'

They were both good fighters with the knife. Alfio struck the first thrust, and Turiddu was quick enough to catch it on his arm. When he gave it back, he gave a good one, aiming at the groin.

'Ah! Turiddu. Do you really mean to kill me?'

'Yes, I told you! Since I saw my old woman with the fowls, I can't get her out of my eyes.'

'Then open your eyes, then!' Alfio shouted at him; 'I'll give you more than you asked for.'

And as the carter stood on guard, doubled up so as to keep his left hand over his wound, which hurt him, his elbow almost brushing the ground, suddenly he seized a handful of dust and threw it full in his enemy's eyes.

'Ah!' screamed Turiddu, blinded. 'I'm done!'

He tried to save himself by jumping desperately backwards, but Alfio caught him up with another stab in the stomach, and a third in the throat.

' – and three! That's for the house which you adorned for me! And now your mother can mind her fowls – '

Turiddu reeled about for a moment or two here and there among the cactuses, then fell like a stone. The blood gurgled frothing from his throat, he couldn't even gasp: Oh, Mother!

LA LUPA[1]

*

She was tall, and thin; but she had the firm, vigorous bosom of a brown woman, though she was no longer young. Her face was pale, as though she had the malaria always on her, and in her pallor two great dark eyes, and fresh, red lips, that seemed to eat you.

In the village they called her *la Lupa*, because she had never had enough – of anything. The women crossed themselves when they saw her go by, alone like a roving she-dog, with that ranging, suspicious motion of a hungry wolf. She bled their sons and their husbands dry in a twinkling, with those red lips of hers, and she had merely to look at them with her great evil eyes, to have them running after her skirts, even if they'd been kneeling at the altar of Saint Agrippina. Fortunately, *la Lupa* never entered the church, neither at Easter nor at Christmas, nor to hear Mass, nor to confess. – Fra Angiolino, of Santa Maria di Jesu, who had been a true servant of God, had lost his soul because of her.

Maricchia, poor thing, was a good girl and a nice girl, and she wept in secret because she was *la Lupa's* daughter, and nobody would take her in marriage, although she had her marriage-chest

[1] *La Lupa* means the *she-wolf*, and also *the prostitute, the enticer.*

full of linen, and her piece of fertile land in the sun, as good as any other girl in the village.

Then one day *la Lupa* fell in love with a handsome lad who'd just come back from serving as a soldier, and was cutting the hay alongside her in the closes belonging to the lawyer: but really what you'd call falling in love, feeling your body burn under your stuff bodice, and suffering, when you stared into his eyes, the thirst that you suffer in the hot hours of June, away in the burning plains. But he went on mowing quietly, with his nose bent over his swathe, and he said to her: 'Why, what's wrong with you, Mrs. Pina?' – In the immense fields, where only the grasshoppers crackled into flight, when the sun beat down like lead, *la Lupa* gathered armful after armful together, tied sheaf after sheaf, without ever wearying, without straightening her back for a moment, without putting her lips to the flask, so that she could keep at Nanni's heels, as he mowed and mowed, and asked her from time to time: 'Why, what do you want, Mrs. Pina?'

One evening she told him, while the men were dozing in the stackyard, tired from the long day, and the dogs were howling away in the vast, dark, open country: 'You! I want you! Thou'rt handsome as the day, and sweet as honey to me. I want thee, lad!'

'Ah! I'd rather have your daughter, who's a filly,' replied Nanni, laughing.

La Lupa clutched her hands in her hair, and tore her temples, without saying a word, and went away, and was seen no more in the yard. But in October she saw Nanni again, when they were getting the oil out of the olives, because he worked next her house, and the screeching of the oil-press didn't let her sleep at night.

'Take the sack of olives,' she said to her daughter, 'and come with me.'

Nanni was throwing the olives under the millstone with the shovel, in the dark chamber like a cave, where the olives were ground and pressed, and he kept shouting *Ohee!* to the mule, so it shouldn't stop.

'Do you want my daughter Maricchia?' Mrs. Pina asked him.

'What are you giving your daughter Maricchia?' replied Nanni.

'She has what her father left, and I'll give her my house into the bargain; it's enough for me if you'll leave me a corner in the kitchen, where I can spread myself a bit of a straw mattress to sleep on.'

'All right! If it's like that, we can talk about it at Christmas,' said Nanni.

Nanni was all greasy and grimy with the oil

and the olives set to ferment, and Maricchia didn't want him at any price; but her mother seized her by the hair, at home in front of the fire-place, and said to her between her teeth:

'If thou doesn't take him, I'll lay thee out!'

*

La Lupa was almost ill, and the folks were saying that the devil turns hermit when he gets old. She no longer went roving round; she no longer sat in the doorway, with those eyes of one possessed. Her son-in-law, when she fixed on him those eyes of hers, would start laughing, and draw out from his breast the bit of Madonna's dress,[1] to cross himself. Maricchia stayed at home nursing the children, and her mother went to the fields, to work with the men, just like a man, weeding, hoeing, tending the cattle, pruning the vines, whether in the north-east wind or the east winds of January, or in the hot, stifling African wind of August, when the mules let their heads hang in dead weight, and the men slept face downwards under the wall, on the north side. *Between vesper bell and the night-bell's sound, when*

[1] When the dress of the Madonna in the church is renewed, the old dress is divided in tiny fragments among the parishioners; the fragment is sewn in a tiny heart-shaped or locket-shaped sack, and worn round the neck on a cord, hidden in the breast, to ward off evil.

no good woman goes roving round, Mrs. Pina was the only soul to be seen wandering through the countryside, on the ever-burning stones of the little roads, through the parched stubble of the immense fields, which lost themselves in the sultry haze of the distance, far off, far off, towards misty Etna, where the sky weighed down upon the horizon, in the afternoon heat.

'Wake up!' said *la Lupa* to Nanni, who was asleep in the ditch, under the dusty hedge, with his arms round his head. 'Wake up! I've brought thee some wine to cool thy throat.'

Nanni opened his eyes wide like a disturbed child, half-awake, seeing her erect above him, pale, with her arrogant bosom, and her eyes black as coals, and he stretched out his hand gropingly, to keep her off.

'No! No good woman goes roving round between vespers and night,' sobbed Nanni, pressing his face down again in the dry grass of the ditch-bottom, away from her, clutching his hair with his hands. 'Go away! Go away! Don't you come into the stackyard again!'

She did indeed go away, *la Lupa*, but fastening up again the coils of her superb black hair, staring straight in front of her, as she stepped over the hot stubble, with eyes black as coals.

And she came back into the stackyard time

and again, and Nanni no longer said anything; and when she was late coming, in the hour between evensong and night, he went to the top of the white, deserted little road to look for her, with sweat on his forehead; – and afterwards, he clutched his hair in his hand, and repeated the same thing every time: 'Go away! Go away! Don't you come into the stackyard again!'

Maricchia wept night and day; and she glared at her mother with eyes that burned with tears and jealousy; like a young she-wolf herself now, when she saw her coming in from the fields, every time silent and pallid.

'Vile woman!' she said to her. 'Vile, vile mother!'

'Be quiet!'

'Thief! Thief that you are!'

'Be quiet!'

'I'll go to the Sergeant, I will.'

'Then go!'

And she did go, finally, with her child in her arms, went fearless and without shedding a tear, like a madwoman, because now she also was in love with that husband of hers, whom they'd forced her to accept, greasy and grimy from the olives set to ferment.

The Sergeant went for Nanni, and threatened him with gaol and the gallows. Nanni began to

sob and to tear his hair; he denied nothing, he didn't try to excuse himself. – 'It's the temptation,' he said. 'It's the temptation of hell!' and he threw himself at the feet of the Sergeant, begging to be sent to gaol.

'For pity's sake, Sergeant, get me out of this hell! Have me hung, or send me to prison; but don't let me see her again, never, never!'

'No!' replied *la Lupa* to the Sergeant. 'I kept myself a corner in the kitchen, to sleep in, when I gave her my house for her dowry. The house is mine. I won't be turned out.'

A little while later, Nanni got a kick in the chest from a mule, and was likely to die; but the parish priest wouldn't bring the Host to him, unless *la Lupa* left the house. *La Lupa* departed, and then her son-in-law could prepare himself to depart also, like a good Christian; he confessed, and took the communion with such evident signs of repentance and contrition that all the neighbours and the busybodies wept round the bed of the dying man.

And better for him if he had died that time, before the devil came back to tempt him and to get a grip on his body and his soul, when he was well.

'Leave me alone!' he said to *la Lupa*. 'For God's sake, leave me in peace! I've been face to

face with death. Poor Maricchia is only driven wild. Now all the place knows about it. If I never see you again, it's better for you and for me.'

And he would have liked to tear his eyes out so as not to see again those eyes of *la Lupa*, which, when they fixed themselves upon his, made him lose both body and soul. He didn't know what to do, to get free from the spell she put on him. He paid for Masses for the souls in Purgatory, and he went for help to the priest and to the Sergeant. At Easter he went to confession, and he publicly performed the penance of crawling on his belly and licking the stones of the sacred threshold before the church for a length of six feet.

After that, when *la Lupa* came back to tempt him:

'Hark here!' he said. 'Don't you come again into the stackyard; because if you keep on coming after me, as sure as God's above I'll kill you.

'Kill me, then,' replied *la Lupa*. 'It doesn't matter to me; I'm not going to live without thee.'

He, when he perceived her in the distance, amid the fields of green young wheat, he left off hoeing the vines, and went to take the axe from the elm-tree. *La Lupa* saw him advancing towards her, pale and wild-eyed, with the axe glitter-

ing in the sun, but she did not hesitate in her step, nor lower her eyes, but kept on her way to meet him, with her hands full of red poppies, and consuming him with her black eyes.

'Ah! Curse your soul!' stammered Nanni.

CAPRICE

*

ONCE, when the train was passing near Aci-Trezza,[1] and you were looking out of the carriage window, you exclaimed: 'I'd like to stay a month here!'

We came back, and we stayed, not a month, but forty-eight hours; the natives, who stared at your huge trunks in such astonishment, must have thought you were going to stay a year or two. On the morning of the third day, tired of seeing the same eternal green and blue, and of counting the carts that went down the road, you were at the station again, impatiently fidgeting with the chain of your scent-bottle, as you stretched your neck looking for a train which seemed as if it never would appear.

In those forty-eight hours we did everything there is to be done in Aci-Trezza: we walked in the dust of the road, and we clambered on the rocks; under pretext of learning to row, you made blisters on your hands beneath your gloves, and they had to be kissed; we passed a most romantic night on the sea, throwing out the nets chiefly

[1] Aci-Trezza is a fishing village on the Sicilian coast north of Catania. Here Verga laid the scene of his first big Sicilian novel: *I Malavoglia*, for which this 'caprice' is a kind of sketch. Other stories in this volume are set in southern Sicily, at Vizzini, where the Verga family owned land; and where *Mastro-don Gesualdo* is set.

in order to do something that would seem to the boatmen worth the risk of getting rheumatism; and dawn surprised us at the top of the tall lonely rock in the sea, a pallid, modest dawn which I can still see when I close my eyes, hollowed with wide violet grooves on a sea of heavy green; caught like a caress on that cluster of mean houses which slept as if curled up in sleep on the shore; and on top of the rock, on the transparent depths of the sky, your little figure was sharply printed, with the cunning lines your dressmaker gave it, and the fine and elegant profile which was your own. – You wore a grey dress which seemed made on purpose to tone with the colours of the dawn. – A beautiful picture, indeed! and one could tell you knew it yourself, from the way you posed yourself inside your shawl, and smiled with wide, heavy, tired eyes at the strange spectacle, and at the double strangeness of finding yourself present at it. What thoughts came into your little head while you watched the rising sun? Perhaps you were asking him, in what other hemisphere he would find you, within a month? But all you said, ingenuously, was: 'I don't understand how anyone can live here all their life.'

Yet, you see, it's easier than it seems. You've not got to have an income of four thousand pounds a year, in the first place; and, to make up for that,

you've got to feel your share of the hardships and misery that exist between those huge rocks set in the depths of blue, which made you clap your hands with admiration. That's all it needs for those poor devils who dozed while they waited for us in the boat, to find, in their tumble-down, picturesque houses which from the distance looked to you sea-sick, like everything else, all that you go to so much trouble to seek, in Paris, in Nice, in Naples.

It's a curious thing; but perhaps it is just as well it should be so – for you, and for all the others like you. That heap of wretched houses is inhabited by fishermen, 'sea-folk,' they say, as others say 'gentlefolk': men whose skin is harder than the bread they eat, when they've got any to eat, for the sea is not always kind, as it was when it kissed your gloves. . . . On its black days, when it fumes and growls, all you can do is to stand on the beach and look at it, with your arms folded, or to lie stretched out on your stomach, which perhaps is better when you've had no dinner; those days when there's a crowd round the door of the inn, but very few pennies ring on the zinc of the bar; and the children who swarm in the village, as if want were a good fertilizer, screech and squabble as though the devil was in them.

From time to time, typhoid, cholera, bad sea-

sons, storms come and sweep away a good deal of the bunch who, you would think, would ask nothing better than to be swept away, and to disappear; nevertheless, they multiply again in the same place, always; it would be hard to say how, or why.

Did you ever chance, after an autumn rain, to upset an army of ants as you were thoughtlessly tracing the name of your last partner at the dance on the sand of the avenue? One or two of the poor little creatures would remain stuck to the ferrule of your umbrella, twisting in the last gasp; but all the others, after five minutes of panic and helter-skelter, would have gone back to clutch desperately again at their little brown heap.

You would never go back, it is true; neither should I; but to understand such persistency, which has its heroic aspect also, one has to make oneself tiny, tiny, close the whole horizon between two clods, and look through the microscope at the little things that make little hearts beat. Would you like to have a look too, through this lens? – you who watch life through the wrong end of the telescope? The spectacle will seem strange to you, but perhaps it will amuse you.

We have been most intimate, you and I, do you remember? and you once asked me to dedicate

some work of mine to you. But why? *A quoi bon?* as you say. What can anything I write matter to the people who know you? and to those who don't know you, what do you matter?

For all that, I was reminded of your caprice the other day when I saw again that poor woman whom you used to give money to under pretext of buying her oranges that were set in a row on the little bench outside the door. Now the little bench has gone, they have cut down the medlar tree in the courtyard, and the house has a new window. Only the woman herself has not changed, she has merely moved a little further along, and squatted on the heap of stones that barricades the old 'station' of the national guards, to stretch out her hand from there to the passing carters. And I, strolling round with my cigar in my mouth, remembered that even she, poor as she is, had seen you go by all white and proud.

Don't be angry that I should be reminded of you in such a way and in such a connection. Besides the pleasant memories you have left me, there are a hundred others, vague, confused, discordant, gathered here and there, one no longer knows where. Perhaps some of them are memories of dreams dreamed open-eyed; and in the muddle which they made in my mind, while I was going down that mean little street where so

many pleasant and painful things have happened, the scrap of a shawl of that chilly, miserable woman squatting there, cast a gloom over me, I couldn't tell you, and made me think of you, you, surfeited with everything, even with the homage which the fashionable newspapers lay at your feet, often quoting you at the head of the society columns – tired, by now, also of the whimsical desire to see your name on the pages of a book.

By the time I write the book, probably you'll have forgotten all about your whim. All the same, the memories I send you, though foreign to you in every sense, you who are intoxicated with flowers and feasts, will come to you like a delicious fresh breeze, into the hot nights of your eternal carnival. On that day when you come back here, if ever you do come back, and we sit side by side again, kicking the stones with our feet and fancies with our minds, perhaps we shall talk of other intoxications which life holds elsewhere.

You may imagine, if you will, that my thoughts dwell so persistently on that out-of-the-way corner of the world just because you have set foot in it – or so that I can get the glitter out of my eyes, which follows you everywhere, glitter of jewels or of fevers; – or because I have sought you in vain in all the places which fashion makes pleasant.

See then how you always occupy the first place, here as at the theatre!

Do you remember, too, that old man who held the tiller of our boat? You owe him so much tribute, he prevented you ten times at least from wetting your beautiful blue stockings. Now he is dead, away there in the city hospital, poor devil, in a great white ward, between white sheets, chewing white bread, served by the white hands of the Sisters of Mercy, who had no other fault but that of not being able to understand the petty woes which the poor old fellow mumbled in his semi-barbarous dialect.

But if he'd been allowed to want anything, he would have wished to die in that corner by the fire, where his couch had stood for so many years, 'under his own roof'; so much so that when they carried him away he cried with a whimpering noise, as old people do. He had lived all his life between those four walls, facing that beautiful and treacherous sea with which he had to fight every day to get his living out of it, without leaving it his bones; nevertheless, in those moments when he was quietly enjoying his own spell of sunshine, squatted on the boat's stretcher, with his arms round his knees, he wouldn't have turned his head to look at you, and you could seek in vain, in those absent eyes of his, for even the proudest

reflection of your beauty; not like when so many haughty heads bow to make way for you, in the glittering *salons*, and you see yourself mirrored in the envious eyes of your best women-friends.

Life is rich, as you see, in its inexhaustible variety; and you can enjoy without a qualm that portion of wealth which has fallen to you, do as you like with it. That girl, for example, who was peeping behind the pots of sweet basil, when the rustling of your skirts made a revolution down the mean little street, if she chanced to see another well-known face at the window opposite she would smile as if she too were dressed in silk. Who knows what poor little joys she was dreaming of as she leaned at that window-sill behind the sweet-scented basil, her eyes intent upon the house opposite, with its trailing vine? And the smile in her eyes would not have died out in bitter tears, away there in the big town far from the stones which knew her and had seen her born, if her grandfather had not died in the hospital, and her father had not been drowned, and all her family scattered by a gust of wind which had come down on them – a cruel gust of wind, which had carried away one of her brothers even to the prisons of Pantelleria [1]: 'in trouble,' as they say down there.

Those that died were better off; one of them at

[1] Pantelleria is a small island to which convicts are sent.

sea at Lissa, in the war; he was the biggest, the one who seemed to you a David in bronze, standing erect with his harpoon in his fist, rudely lit up by the flame of the torch. Big and strong as he was, even he flushed red in the face, if you fixed your burning eyes on him; all the same, he died like a good sailor, on the spar of the forestay, fast to the shrouds, lifting his cap high and saluting the flag for the last time, with his wild, male, islander's shout. The other one, the man who was afraid to touch your foot, that day on the islet, when he had to free you from the cord of the rabbit-snare which you had got yourself tangled up in, like the careless creature you are, he was lost on a black winter night, alone, among the huge waves, when between his boat and the shore on which his folk were looking for him, running back and forth like mad people, there were seventy miles of darkness and of storm. You would never have imagined that the man who let himself be intimidated by the masterpiece of your shoemaker, would have been capable of fighting his death with such desperate and sombre courage.

Better off are those that are dead, and don't have to eat 'the King's bread,' like that poor fellow kept there on Pantelleria, or that other bread which the sister eats, and who don't have to go around like the woman with the oranges,

living on what God sends; which is little enough, at Aci-Trezza. The dead, anyhow, want for nothing! As the landlady's son said, the last time he went to the hospital to ask about the old man, and to take him covertly a few of those stuffed snails which are so good to suck when you haven't any teeth, and he found the bed empty, with the blankets smooth and straight, and he slyly contrived to get out into the court-yard and take his stand outside a door stuck all over with rags of paper notices, where he could peep through the keyhole into a great empty place, cold and sonorous even in summer, and see the end of a long marble table, over which was thrown a sheet, heavy and rigid. And saying to himself that those in there didn't want for anything, he began to suck the snails one by one, to pass the time away, for they were no use to anybody now. You, pressing your blue-fox muff to your breast, you will be glad to remember that you gave the poor old man five pounds.

Now there are left behind those little ragamuffins who escorted you like jackals and set siege to the oranges; they are left to buzz round the beggar-woman, pulling and feeling in her skirts as if she must have bread in her pockets, picking up cabbage-stalks, orange-peel, cigar-stumps, all those things which are thrown away

but which still must have some value or other, since there are always poor people who live on them; even live on them so well that those sturdy, hungry beggar-brats will grow up in the mud and dust of the street, till they are big and strong as their father and their grandfather, and they will people Aci-Trezza with more beggar-brats, who will joyfully hang on to life as long as they can, like their old grandfather, without wanting more than to hang on; and if they would like to do anything different from what he did, it would be to close their eyes there where they opened them, in the hands of the village doctor who comes every day on his donkey, like Jesus, to help the good people who are going.

'After all, the ideal of the oyster!' you will say.

Exactly the ideal of the oyster; and we have no other reason for finding it ridiculous than that we didn't happen to be born oysters ourselves. On the other hand, the tenacious attachment of those poor people to the rock on which fortune has left them, while sowing princes here and duchesses there, this courageous resignation to a life of hardship, this religion of the family, which reflects on to the occupation followed, on to the house, and on to the stonès which surround it, seem to me – perhaps for a quarter of an hour –

most serious and most worthy of respect. It seems to me that the restlessness of a wandering mind would soothe itself to sleep gratefully in the peace of those meek, simple feelings which go on from generation to generation calm and unchanged. – It seems to me I might see you pass by, at the quick trot of your horses, to the jingling of their harness, and I might salute you quietly.

Perhaps because I have tried too hard to see my way amid the turmoil which surrounds you and follows you, I now fancy I can read a fatal necessity in the tenacious affections of the weak, in the instinct which small things have to cling together in order to resist the tempests of life, and so I have tried to decipher the modest and obscure drama which must have thrown into confusion the plebeian actors whom we knew together. A drama which perhaps I will one day relate to you, and whose whole point seems to me to lie in this: – that when one of those little beings, either more weak, or more incautious, or more egoistic than the others, tries to detach himself from the group, in order to follow the allure of the unknown, or out of desire to better himself, or out of curiosity to know the world, then the world of sharks, such as it is, swallows him, and his kin along with him. And from this point of

view you will see that the drama[1] is not lacking in interest. For the oyster, the most interesting argument must be that which treats of the insinuations of the crab, or of the knife of the diver who prises it from the rock.

[1] The drama of these fisher-folk of Aci-Trezza Verga wrote in *I Malavoglia*. But this was before the great Sicilian emigration to America, and the return flow of wealth which altered the whole economic situation of the island. This was an unexpected move on the part of the oyster, and Verga was not yet prepared for it.

JELI THE HERDSMAN

*

JELI, the boy who herded the horses, was thirteen years old when he first knew Don Alfonso, the young squire; but he was so little, he didn't come up to the belly of Whitey, the old mare who carried the bell of the herd. He was always to be seen about the countryside, on the hills or in the plain, wherever his creatures were at pasture, standing erect and motionless on some bank, or squatting on a big stone. His friend Don Alfonso, while he was in the country at holiday-time, came to join him every mortal day that dawned at Tebidi, and shared with him his bit of chocolate, and the barley bread of the herd-boy, and the fruit they stole in the neighbourhood. At first Jeli called the young squire *Excellency*, as they do in Sicily, but after the two of them had had a real good scrap, and had fought it out, their friendship was solidly established. Jeli taught his friend how to climb right up to the magpies' nests, at the top of the walnut trees taller than the belfry at Licodia, and how to hit a sparrow in flight, with a stone, and how to mount in one leap on to the bare back of his half-wild horses, seizing by the mane the first one that came galloping along, without letting yourself be frightened by the angry neighings of the unbroken colts, or by their wild rearing. Ah! the splendid scampers over the mown fields, with

mane flying in the wind! the lovely days of April, when the wind piled waves in the green grass, and the mares neighed in the pasture; the beautiful noons of summer, in which the countryside, gone pallid, was all silent, under the dim sky, and the grasshoppers crackled between the clods as if the stubble were bursting into fire; the lovely sky of winter between bare almond boughs, which shuddered in the north-east wind, and the stony lane that rang frozen under the hoofs of the horses, and the larks which sang on high, in the warmth, amid the blue! the fine summer evenings which rose up slowly, slowly, like mist; the scent of the hay in which you buried your elbows, and the melancholy humming of the insects of evening, and those two notes of Jeli's pipe, always the same: Yoo! yoo! yoo! making you think of far-off things, of the Feast of St. John, of Christmas night, of the ringing of bells at dawn, of all those wonderful things gone by, which seem sad, so far off, making you look up into the sky, with your eyes wet, so that all the stars kindling above seemed to be raining down on your heart, and swamping it.

Jeli, for his part, didn't suffer from this melancholy; he sat squatting on the bank, with his cheeks puffed out, absolutely intent on playing yoo! yoo! yoo! Then he gathered the herd to-

gether again with a wild yelling and flinging of stones, and drove them into the stabling-place, away there beyond the *Hill of the Cross*.

Panting, he ran up the steep slope, across the valley, and shouted sometimes to his friend Alfonso: 'Call the dog! Hi! call the dog!' – or else: 'Throw me a good stone at the bay, he's playing the lord, and dawdling as slow as he can, taking his time over every bush in the valley!' – or else: 'To-morrow morning bring me a good thick needle, one of those from Mrs. Lia.'

For he could do anything he liked with a needle, and he had a little hoard of rags in his canvas sack, to patch up his breeches or his jacket-sleeves when necessary; also he could weave braids and cords of horse-hair, and he washed his own handkerchief, that he wore round his neck when it was cold, washed it with the chalky earth from the valley-bed. Altogether, provided he had his own sack over his shoulder, he stood in need of nobody, whether he was away in the woods of Resecone, or lost in the depths of the plain of Caltagirone. Mrs. Lia would say: 'You see Jeli the herd-boy? he's always been alone in the land, as if his own mares had foaled him, and that's why he's so handy, and can cross himself with both hands.'

As a matter of fact, Jeli really had need of no-

body, yet all the hands at the farmstead[1] would willingly do anything for him, for he was an obliging lad, and there was always something to be got from him. Mrs. Lia cooked his bread for him, out of neighbourly love, and he paid her back with pretty little wicker baskets, in which she could put her eggs, or with cane winders, for her spinning, and other bits of things. – 'We're like his own horses,' said Mrs. Lia, 'that scratch one another's necks.'

At Tebidi they had all known him from a child, from the time when you couldn't see him, among the horses' tails, as the creatures were feeding on the Litterman's Pastures; and he had grown up, as you may say, under their eyes, although nobody ever noticed him, and he was always gone, straying here and there with his herd. 'Heaven had sent him like rain, and earth had taken him up,' as the proverb says; he really was one of those who have neither parents nor home. His mother was in service at Vizzini, and only saw him once a year, when he went with the colts

[1] A *fattoria*, or farmstead, in Sicily, is usually a poorish house with great barns and corn-chambers and wine-press, a great establishment, but not a home. The owner does not live there. The place is run by a *fattore*, a factor, who supervises the work of the land, and a *fattoressa*, or factoress, often not connected with the factor, who has all the keys and the domestic charge of all the hands.

to the fair on St. John's Day; and the day she died, they sent to fetch him, one Saturday evening, and on the Monday Jeli came back to his horses, so that the peasant who had taken his place with the herd didn't even lose his day's work on the fields; but the poor lad had come back so upset, that at times he let the colts get into the wheat. – 'Hey there, Jeli!' Farmer Agrippino yelled at him from the yard; 'do you want to try a dance with the horse-whip?' – Jeli set off running after the scattered colts, and drove them little by little towards the hill; but always in front of his eyes he saw his mother, with her face tied up in a white handkerchief, never to speak to him again.

His father herded the cows at Ragoleti, beyond Licodia, 'where the malaria was so thick you could mow it,' as the peasants of the neighbourhood said; but in malaria country the pasture is good, and cows don't take the fever. Jeli therefore remained out with his herd all the year round, either at Don Ferrando, or in the Commenda closes, or in the Jacitano valley, and the huntsmen or the wayfarers who took the by-tracks could always catch sight of him, somewhere or other, like a dog with no master. He didn't mind, for he was used to be with his horses, that fed in front of him moving on step by step, snatching at the clover, and with the birds that swept round him

in flocks, all the while the sun was making its slow journey through the day, so slowly, till the shadows grew long, and then disappeared; he had time to watch the clouds pile up little by little, and to imagine mountains and valleys; he knew how the wind blows when it is going to snow. Everything had its own look and its own meaning, and there was always something to see and something to hear, all the hours of the day. And so towards evening, when the herd-boy sat down to play on his pipe of elderwood, the black mare drew near, carelessly chewing her clover, and then stood still to look at him, with her big, pensive eyes.

Where he did feel a little melancholy was in the sandy wastes of Passanitello, where never a bush nor shrub rises up, and in the hot months never a bird flies past. The horses gathered together in a ring, with their heads dropped, to make a shadow for one another, and in the long days of the summer threshing-time that great silent light rained down changeless and stifling for sixteen hours.

However, where the feed was plenty and the horses liked to linger, the boy busied himself with some little thing or other; he made cane cages for grasshoppers, and pipes with carving on them, and rush baskets; he could rig up a bit of a shelter with four branches, when the north-wind drove

long files of ravens down the valley, or when the cicalas rubbed their wings in the sun which burned the stubble; he roasted acorns from the oak-wood in the embers of sumach twigs, and fancied he was eating roast chestnuts, or over the same fire he toasted his big slices of bread, when the mould began to grow hairy on it, since when he was at Passanitello in the winter the roads were so bad that sometimes a fortnight would go by without his seeing a living soul on the waste.

Don Alfonso, whose parents kept him in cotton-wool, envied his friend Jeli the canvas sack in which he had all his possessions, his bread, his onions, his little flask of wine, the kerchief for the cold, the store of rags for mending, with the thick needles and the thread, the tin box with the flint and tinder; he envied him, moreover, the superb speckled mare, flea-bitten roan as they're called, the creature with a tuft of hair erect on her forehead, and with wicked eyes, who swelled out her nostrils like a surly mastiff when anyone wanted to mount her. But she let Jeli ride her and scratch her ears, which she wouldn't let anybody else touch, and she went sniffing round him, to hear what he had to say. – 'Don't meddle with the speckled roan,' Jeli recommended him; 'she's not wicked, but she doesn't know you.'

After Scordu the Bucchierese had taken away

the Calabrian mare which he'd bought at St. John's fair, with the agreement that she was to stay with the herd till grape-harvest, the dark-bay colt, being left an orphan, wouldn't be pacified, but went scouring away to the tops of the hills, with long lamentable neighings, his chin lifted to the wind. Jeli ran after him, calling him with loud cries, and the colt stopped to listen, his neck tense and his ears uneasy, lashing his flanks with his tail. – 'It's because they've taken his mother away, and he doesn't know what to do with himself,' observed the herd-boy. 'Now I shall have to keep my eye on him, for he's capable of falling over the precipice. Like me, when my mother died and left me, I couldn't see where I was going.'

Then, after the colt had begun to sniff at the clover, and to take a mouthful in spite of himself: 'You see! bit by bit he begins to forget it all!'

'– But he will be sold just the same! Horses are made to be sold; like lambs are born for the butcher, and clouds bring rain. Only the birds have nothing to do but sing and fly around all day long.'

His ideas did not come to him clear and in order, one after the other, for he'd rarely had anyone to talk to, and for that reason he was in no hurry to root out and disentangle what was in his

mind, but was used to let it all lie till it budded and peeped forth little by little, like the buds of the trees under the sun. – 'Even the birds,' he added, 'have to find their own food, and when there's snow on the ground, they die.'

Then he thought for a while. – 'You are like the birds; only when winter comes, you can stay by the fire without bothering.'

Don Alfonso, however, replied that he too had to go to school, to learn. Then Jeli opened his eyes wide, and listened with all his ears if the young squire began to read, watching the book and the youth suspiciously, and motionlessly listening, with that slight blinking of the eyelids which indicates intensity of attention in those creatures which come nearest to man. He liked poetry, that caressed his ears with the harmony of an incomprehensible song, and sometimes he knotted his brows and sharpened his chin, and it seemed as if a great working was going on in his inside; then he nodded his head, yes, yes, smiling a knowing smile, and scratching his head. But when the young squire would begin to write, to show what he could do, Jeli would have stood for days to watch him, and all at once he shot a suspicious glance. He couldn't persuade himself that you could repeat on paper those words he had said, or that Don Alfonso had said, and even

those things which he had never let out of his mouth, so he ended up with smiling that knowing smile.

Every new idea that tapped at his head, to enter, roused his suspicions, and it seemed as if he sniffed at it with the savage mistrust of his speckled roan. However, he showed no surprise at anything in the world; you could have told him that in town horses rode in carriages, and he would have remained imperturbable, with that mask of oriental indifference which is the dignity of the Sicilian peasant. It seemed as if he entrenched himself in his own ignorance, as if it were the strength of poverty. Every time he was short of an argument he repeated: 'Nay, I know nothing about it. I'm poor, I am' – with that obstinate smile which wanted to be crafty.

He had asked his friend Alfonso to write the name of Mara on a bit of paper he had found, heaven knows where, for he picked up everything he saw on the ground, and he had put it with his bunch of rags. One day, after having been silent for a time, looking absorbedly here and there, he said to his friend in utmost seriousness:

'I've got a sweetheart.'

Alfonso, although he knew how to read, opened his eyes wider.

'Yes!' repeated Jeli. 'Mara, the daughter of

Farmer Agrippino who was here; and now he's at Marineo, that great building on the plain, which you can see from the Litterman's Pastures, up there.'

'So you're going to get married, are you?'

'Yes, when I'm big, and I get four pounds a year wages. Mara doesn't know yet.'

'Why haven't you told her?'

Jeli shook his head, and fell into a muse. Then he turned out his roll of rags and unfolded the paper which his friend had written for him.

'It's right, though, that it says Mara; Don Gesualdo the field-overseer read it, and so did Brother Cola the Franciscan, when he came down to get some beans.'

'Anybody who knows how to read,' he observed later, 'is like one who keeps words in his flint-and-steel box, and can carry them round in his pocket, and even send them where he wants to.'

'But now, what are you going to do with that bit of paper, you who don't know how to read?' Don Alfonso asked him.

Jeli shrugged his shoulders, but continued to fold his written leaflet carefully in his roll of rags.

He had known Mara since she was a baby, and they had begun by fighting with one another as hard as they could, one day when they had met down the valley, picking blackberries in the bram-

ble hedges. The girl, who knew she was 'in her own rights,' had seized Jeli by the collar, as if he were a thief. For a while they pummelled one another on the back, one for you and one for me, like the cooper on the rings of the barrel, but when they were tired they began to calm down gradually, though still holding each other by the hair.

'What's your name?' Mara asked him.

And as Jeli, still the wilder of the two, didn't say who he was:

'I am Mara, daughter of Farmer Agrippino, who works all these fields here.'

Then Jeli gave it up entirely, and the little girl began to pick up again the blackberries which she had dropped in the fight, peeping from time to time at her adversary, out of curiosity.

'On the other side the bridge, in the garden hedges,' added the little girl, 'there's lots of big blackberries, and only the hens eat them.'

Jeli meanwhile was withdrawing silently and softly, and Mara, after she had followed him with her eyes as far as she could in the oak-grove, turned and took to her heels also, towards the house.

But from that day onwards they began to be familiar with one another. Mara would go and sit on the parapet of the little bridge, to spin her

tow, and Jeli gradually, little by little urged the herd towards the sides of the Bandit's Hill. At first he kept away from her, ranging around, looking at her from the distance with furtive looks, then little by little he drew near, with the cautious approach of a dog which is used to having stones hurled at it. When at last they were near to one another, they remained long hours without saying a word, Jeli observing attentively the intricate work of the stockings which her mother had put round Mara's neck, or she watching him cut fine zigzags on an almond-stick. Then they departed one in this direction, the other in that, without saying a word, and the little girl, the moment she came in sight of the house, started to run, making her petticoats fly up over her little red legs.

When the prickly pears were ripe, however, they penetrated into the depths of the cactus grove, and there they stayed the livelong day, peeling the cactus fruit. They wandered together under the century-old walnut trees, and Jeli beat down so many walnuts that they fell like hail; and the little girl ran here and there with shouts of delight, gathering up more than she could carry; and then she made off, silently and softly, holding the two corners of her apron stretched out, and waddling like a little old woman.

During the winter Mara did not dare to put

her nose out of doors, for the hard cold. Sometimes, towards evening, you would see the smoke of the little fires of sumach wood which Jeli lit for himself on the Litterman's Pastures, or on the Hill of Macca, so that he shouldn't freeze stiff, like those tits which morning found behind a stone, or in the shelter of a furrow. Even the horses were glad to wave their tails a bit round the fire, and pressed up close to one another, to keep warmer.

But with March the larks came back to the pasture, the sparrows to the roof, and nests and leaves to the hedges. Mara started going for walks again with Jeli, in the new grass, among the flowering blackthorn bushes, under the trees which still were bare but which were beginning to dot themselves with green. Jeli penetrated into the thorn-brake like a bloodhound, to find the thrushes' nests, and the birds looked at him in dismay, with their peppercorn eyes; the two children often carried in the bosom of their shirts little rabbits that had only just come out into the world, and were almost naked, but which had already the long, uneasy ears. They scoured the fields, following the bunch of horses, and passed into the mown places, behind the men with the scythes, keeping pace step by step with the horses, pausing every time a mare stopped to

snatch a mouthful of grass. At evening, back again at the little bridge, they separated in opposite directions, without a word of farewell.

So they passed the summer. Meanwhile the sun began to draw behind the Hill of the Cross, and the robins flew after him towards the mountains, as twilight came on, following him in the cactus grove. The grasshoppers and the cicalas were heard no more, and in that hour a great sadness spread through the air.

It was at this time that Jeli's father, the cowherd, appeared at Jeli's tumble-down hut. He had got the malaria at Ragoleti, and couldn't even sit up on the ass that had brought him. Jeli lit the fire, as quick as he could, and ran to 'the houses' to get a few eggs. 'Better spread a bit of bedding by the fire,' his father said to him. 'I feel the fever coming back on me.'

The attacks of fever were so violent that Master Menu, buried under his great cloak, the woollen saddle-bags, and Jeli's sack, trembled like the leaves in November, in front of that grand blaze of brushwood which showed his face as deathly-white as a dead man's. The peasants from the farmstead came to ask him: 'How do you feel, neighbour Menu?' The poor fellow only gave a thin whine, like a sucking pup, in answer. – 'It's the sort of malaria as kills you better than if you

were shot,' said his friends, as they warmed their hands at the fire.

They actually sent for the doctor, but it was money thrown away, for the illness was so familiar and obvious that even a child would have known how to cure it, and if the fevers hadn't been the sort that kill you anyhow, with the usual sulphate it would have been better in no time. Master Menu spent the eyes out of his head, buying sulphate, but he might as well have thrown it down the well. – 'Take a good tea of *eccalibbiso*, which won't cost you anything,' suggested Farmer Agrippino, 'and if it doesn't do you any good, at least you won't ruin yourself spending your money.' So he took the eucalyptus tea also, but the fever came back just the same, and even worse.

Jeli helped his parent as best he could. Every morning, before he went off with the colts, he left him the tea ready in the jug, the bundle of brushwood by the hearth, eggs in the hot ashes, and every evening he came home early, with more wood for the night, and the little flask of wine, and some bit of mutton which he'd even scoured as far as Licodia to get. The poor lad did everything carefully, like a good housewife, and his father, watching with tired eyes the boy's activities about the one room of the hut, smiled from

time to time, thinking the lad would be able to look after himself, when he was left with no one.

On the days when the fever abated for an hour or so, Master Menu got up, reeling, his face tied up tight in a kerchief, and sat in the doorway to wait for Jeli, while the sun was still hot. As Jeli let drop the bundle of faggots by the door, and went to set the eggs and the little flask on the table, his father said to him: – 'Put the *eccalibbiso* on to boil for to-night' – or else: 'Remember that Aunt Agatha has got your mother's gold,[1] and is keeping it for you, when I am gone.' Jeli nodded assent.

'It's no good!' Farmer Agrippino repeated every time he came to see how Master Menu was getting on with the fever. 'Your blood is full of pest.'

Master Menu listened without blinking, his face whiter than his stocking-cap.

After a while he got up no more. Jeli cried when he wasn't strong enough to help his father turn over in bed; and gradually Master Menu was so that he didn't even speak any more. The last words he said to his son were:

[1] The gold ear-rings and such jewellery as a woman brought with her for her dowry, and which the husband bought for her also, from time to time, in those days when there were no savings banks, and the peasants stored their money in the woman's 'gold,' the jewellery.

'When I'm dead you must go to him who owns the cows at Ragoleti, and make him give you the three guineas and the twelve bushels of wheat which is due from May to now.'

'No,' replied Jeli. 'It is only two guineas and a quarter, because it's more than a month since you left the cows, and we must reckon fair with the master.'

'It's right!' agreed Master Menu, half-closing his eyes.

'Now I'm all alone in the world like a strayed colt, that the wolves will eat!' thought Jeli, when they had carried away his father to the cemetery at Licodia.

Mara had to come as well, to see the house of the dead man, drawn by the acute curiosity which fearful things arouse. – 'You see how I'm left?' Jeli said to her, and the little girl drew back, terrified lest he should make her enter the house where the dead man had been.

Jeli went to draw his father's money, then he set off with the herd for Passanitello, where the grass was already high on the land left fallow, and feed was plenty; so that the colts remained a long time at pasture there. – And so Jeli grew up, and even Mara would have grown, he thought to himself often when he was playing on his pipe; and when he came back to Tebidi, after such a long

time, slowly driving the mares before him, along the little lanes that were slippery with the overflow of old Cosimo's spring, he kept straining his eyes for the little bridge in the valley, and for the hut in the vale of the Jacitano, and the roof of the 'big houses' where the pigeons were always fluttering. But just at that time the squire had turned out Farmer Agrippino, and all Mara's family were busy with the removal. Jeli found the girl at the door of the courtyard, keeping her eye on her own things as they were loaded on to the cart, and he saw she was taller and prettier. Now the empty room seemed darker and more smoked than ever. The table, the bed, the chest of drawers, and the pictures of the Virgin and of St. John, even the nails from which the seed-pumpkins had hung, had left their mark upon the walls where they had been for so many years. – 'We are going away,' Mara said to him as she saw him looking. 'We are going down to Marineo, where that great big building is, on the plain.'

Jeli started in to help Farmer Agrippino and Mrs. Lia load the cart, and when there was nothing else to carry out of the room, he went to sit with Mara on the wall of the watering-trough.

'Even houses,' he said to her, when he had seen the last basket piled on to the wagon, 'even

houses don't seem the same any more, when you take the things out of them.'

'At Marineo,' replied Mara, 'we shall have a better room, my mother says, as big as the store-room for the cheeses.'

'Now you'll be gone, I shan't want to come here any more; it'll seem to me like winter again, to see the door shut.'

'At Marineo, though, there'll be other people as well, red-haired Pudda, and the squire's daughter; it'll be jolly; there'll be more than eighty harvesters [1] come for the reaping, with bagpipes, and they'll dance in the yard.'

Farmer Agrippino and his wife had set off with the cart, Mara ran behind gleefully, carrying the basket with the pigeons. Jeli wanted to go with her as far as the little bridge, and as the cart was disappearing around the valley bend, he called: 'Mara! Oh! Mara!'

'What do you want?' she said.

He didn't know what he wanted.

'You, what are you going to do, all alone here?' the girl asked him then.

'I shall stop with the colts.'

[1] For harvest, the reapers still come over to Sicily from the mainland of Calabria, with women for binding, and they camp at the farmsteads during the hot midsummer of Sicilian corn-harvest, and the men play on the goat-skin bagpipes.

Mara went skipping away, and he remained fixed, as long as he could hear the noise of the cart as it jolted on the stones. The sun touched the high rocks of the Hill of the Cross, the grey puffs of the olive-trees fumed upon the twilight, and in the vast open country, far spreading, was heard not a sound save the bell of Whitey, in the ever-deepening silence.

Mara, having found a lot of new people at Marineo, in the busy season of the grape-harvest, forgot all about him; but Jeli thought constantly of her, since he had nothing else to do, in the long days he spent watching the tails of his creatures. Now he had no excuse for slipping down the valley, across the little bridge, and no one saw him any more at the farmstead. And so it was that for a time he knew nothing about Mara's engagement to be married; for in the meantime much water had flowed and flowed under the little bridge. He only saw the girl again the day of St. John's Feast, when he went to the fair with the colts for sale: a feast that was turned to poison for him, and took the bread out of his mouth, owing to an accident which happened to one of the master's colts, God help us!

On the day of the fair the factor was waiting for the colts since dawn, going up and down in his well-blacked boots behind the rear of the

horses and the mules, that stood in rows on either side of the high-road. The fair was nearly over, and still there was no sign of Jeli, around the bend in the road. On the parched slopes of the *Calvary* and the Windmill Hill there were still left a few bunches of sheep, huddled together in an enclosure, with their noses to the ground and their eyes dead, and a few yoke of long-haired oxen, the sort that are sold to pay the rent of the land, waiting motionless under the burning sun. Away below, towards the valley, the bell of St. John's was ringing for the High Mass, to the accompaniment of a long crackling of firework squibs. Then the fair-ground seemed to shake, as there rang out a cry which continued among the awnings of the hucksters who had spread out their wares on the Cocks' Steps, and descended through the streets of the village, and seemed to return again to the valley where the church lay: *Viva San Giovanni!* Long live Saint John!

'Of all the devils,' squealed the factor. 'That assassin of a Jeli will make me lose the fair!'

The sheep lifted their noses astonished, and began to bleat all together, and even the oxen moved a few slow paces, looking around with their great intent eyes.

The factor was in such a rage because that day he was due to pay the rent of the big closes, 'as St.

John [1] arrives beneath the elm-tree,' said the contract, and to complete the payment he had made an assignment upon the sale of the colts. Meanwhile, of colts, horses and mules there were as many as ever the Lord had made, all brushed and shining, and trimmed up with gay-coloured tufts, and little tassels, and small bells, all switching their sides with their tails to switch away their boredom, and turning their heads after every one who passed by, as if really they were waiting for some charitable soul to come and buy them.

'He'll have gone to sleep somewhere, that assassin!' the factor kept on shouting; 'and there he leaves me saddled with those colts!'

On the contrary, however, Jeli had walked all through the night, so that the colts should arrive fresh, and should take up a good stand when they got to the fair-ground; and he had reached the Raven's Levels before the *Three Kings* were set, for they were still shining above Mount Arthur, that has its arms folded. There was a continual stream of carts and people on horseback passing along the road, all going to the feast; and so the youth kept his eyes sharp open, so that the colts, frightened by all this unaccustomed traffic, shouldn't break away and scatter, but keep to-

[1] Meaning the image of the saint which was carried round on his feast day.

gether along the border of the highway, behind Whitey, who walked peacefully ahead, the bell tinkling at her neck. From time to time, when the road ran along the tops of the hills, you could hear far away the bell of St. John, so that even in the darkness and the silence of the country you felt the festival, and all along the road, away in the distance, as far as ever there were people on foot or on horseback going to Vizzini, you could hear the continual cry: *Viva San Giovanni!* Long live Saint John! – and the rockets shot up straight and shining, behind the hills of Canziria, like the shooting-stars of August.

'It's like Christmas night!' Jeli kept saying to the boy who was helping him drive the herd. 'All the farmsteads are lit up and festivating; you can see fires sometimes all over the country.'

The boy was dozing, slowly, slowly putting one leg before the other, and he made no reply; but Jeli felt all his blood quiver when he heard that bell, he couldn't keep still, it was as if every one of those rockets that slid silent and shining on to the darkness from behind the hill, had blossomed out of his own soul.

'Mara will have gone to the Feast of St. John as well,' he said, 'because she goes every year.'

And without caring that Alfio, the boy, never made any reply, he continued:

'Don't you know? Mara's grown that tall, she's bigger than her mother who made her, and when I saw her again, I couldn't believe she was the same as I used to go getting prickly pears with, and beating the walnuts down.'

And he began to sing at the top of his voice all the songs he knew.

'Oh, Alfio, are you asleep?' he called, when he had finished. 'Watch that Whitey keeps behind you, don't forget.'

'No, I'm not asleep,' replied Alfio, in a hoarse voice.

'Can you see *la puddara*, the Venus star, winking away yonder, over Granvilla, as if she was shooting out rockets for Saint Domenica as well? It'll not be long before day comes; so we's'll get to the fair in time to take a good stand. Hi! – my little black beauty! tha sh'lt ha'e a new halter, wi' red tassels, for the fair; an' thee an' all, Starface.'

So he kept on speaking to the colts, to hearten them with the sound of his voice, in the dark. But it grieved him that the Black and Starface should go to the fair to be sold.

'When they're sold, they'll go off with their new master, and we shall see them no more in the herd; like Mara, after she went to Marineo.'

'Her father's well-off at Marineo; when I went to see them they set bread and cheese in front of

me, and wine, and everything you could wish for, because he's almost like a factor there; he's got the keys of everything, and I could have eaten the whole place up if I'd had a mind. Mara, she hardly knew me, it was that long since we'd seen one another, and she shouted all of a sudden: "Why, look! there's Jeli as keeps the horses, him from Tebidi!" It's like when you come back from a long way off, you've only got to see the top of a mountain and that's enough for you to know again in an instant the country where you were brought up. Mrs. Lia didn't want me to say *thee* and *thou* to Mara any more, now that her daughter is grown up, because the folks at the farm wouldn't understand how it was, and they talk so easy. But Mara only laughed and went as red as if she'd just been putting the bread in the oven; she pulled the table forward, and spread the cloth, not like the same girl. – "Thou'st not forgotten Tebidi altogether then?" I asked her as soon as Mrs. Lia had gone out to tap a new barrel of wine. – "No, no, I can remember," she said to me; "at Tebidi there was the farm-bell in a little belfry that looked like the handle of the salt-cellar, and you rang it from the platform, and there were two stone cats on the top of the garden gateway." – I could feel it all inside me, as she said it. Mara looked me up and down as if she was fair surprised, and

she kept saying: "Thou'st grown so tall!" – and then she began to laugh, and gave me a clout on the side of the head, here –'

And that was how Jeli, the herdsman of the horses, came to lose his daily bread, for just at that moment there was a carriage, which they'd not heard before, and just as it got down to the level it started to trot, with a lot of whip-cracking, and jingling of bells, as if the devil was driving in it. The colts, terrified, scattered in a flash, like an earthquake, and it took some calling and some shouting, and some Hi! Hi! Hi! on Jeli's part and the boy's, before they could gather them again around Whitey, who was trotting away scared, even she, with the bell round her neck. As soon as Jeli had counted his creatures, he saw that Starface was missing, and he clutched his hands in his hair, for just there the road ran along the top of the ravine, and in this ravine it was that Starface broke his back, a colt that was worth twelve guineas like twelve angels of Paradise! Weeping and shouting, he ran calling the colt: Ahoo! ahoo! ahoo! for there was no sign of it. Starface replied at last, from the bottom of the ravine, with a painful whinny, almost as if he could speak, poor brute!

'Oh, Mother! Oh, Mother!' Jeli and the boy kept crying. 'Oh, what's happened? Oh, Mother!'

The passers-by who were going to the fair, and heard all this crying in the dark, stopped to ask what they had lost; and when they knew, they went on their way again.

Starface lay there where he had fallen, his hoofs in the air, and as Jeli was feeling him all over, weeping and speaking to him as if he could make him understand, the poor beast lifted his neck painfully and turned his head towards the youth, and then you could hear the panting of convulsive pain.

'There'll be something broken!' whimpered Jeli, desperate because he could see nothing in the dark; and the colt, helpless as a stone, let his head fall again with the weight of it. Alfio, who had remained on the road in charge of the herd, was the first to calm himself, and he got his bread out of his sack. Now the sky was all pallid, and the mountains around seemed as if they were coming into being one by one, dark and tall. From the turn of the road you began to make out the village, with the Hill of Calvary and the Windmill Hill printed upon the dawn, but still dimly, scattered with the whitish scars of the sheep, and as the oxen feeding on the top of the hill, in the blueness, moved from place to place, it seemed as if the profile of the mountain itself stirred and swarmed and was alive. The bell was

heard no more from away below, travellers had become more rare, and those few that did pass by were in a hurry to get to the fair. Poor Jeli did not know which Saint to turn to, in that solitude; the lad Alfio was no good, just by himself; for which reason Alfio was silently and meekly nibbling his hunk of bread.

At last they saw the factor coming on horseback, swearing and raving in the distance and running forward, as he saw the horses standing on the road, so that young Alfio took to his heels up the hill. But Jeli did not move from the side of Starface. The factor left his mule on the road and scrambled down the declivity, to try to help the colt to rise, pulling it by the tail. – 'Leave him alone!' said Jeli, white in the face, as if he too had broken his back. 'Leave him alone! Can't you see he can't move, poor creature!'

And in truth, at every movement and every effort they forced him to, Starface had a rattling in the throat, as if he were human. The factor started kicking and clouting Jeli, and dragged all the angels and the saints of Paradise around by the feet. Then Alfio, a little reassured, came back to the road, so as not to leave the horses with nobody, and he took care to put the blame off himself, saying: 'It's not my fault! I was going on in front with Whitey.'

'We can do nothing here,' said the factor at last, after he was sure he was only wasting his time. 'There's nothing to do here but take the skin while it's good.'

Jeli began to tremble like a leaf when he saw the factor go and unfasten the gun from the mule's saddle. – 'Get out of here, you good-for-naught!' the factor yelled at him. 'I don't know how to keep myself from laying you out alongside that colt there, who was worth such a lot more than you are, for all the baptizing you've had.'

Starface, not being able to move, turned his head with great staring eyes, as though he understood everything, and his hair rose in successive waves along his ribs, as if shivers of cold ran beneath. And so the factor killed the star-faced colt upon the spot where he lay, to get at least the skin, and Jeli seemed to feel within his own body the dull noise which the shot, fired at close quarters, made within the living flesh of the animal.

'Now if you want my advice,' the factor flung at him, 'you'll not show your face again before the master, asking for wages due to you, because he'd give 'em you hotter than you fancy.'

The factor went off together with Alfio, and with the colts, who didn't so much as turn to see where Starface was, but went along pulling at the

grass of the roadside. Starface was left alone in the ravine, waiting for them to come and skin him, and his eyes were still staring wide, and his four hoofs were stretched out at last, for only now had he been able to stretch them. As for Jeli, since he had seen how the factor could take aim at the colt that turned its head with such pain and terror, and how he'd had the heart to shoot, now no longer wept, but sat on a stone, staring with a hard face at Starface, till the men came for the skin.

Now he could walk round and please himself, enjoying the feast, or standing in the square all day long to see the gentry in the café, just as he liked, since he no longer had either bread or roof, and must seek another master, if anyone would have him, after the disaster of Starface.

And that's how things are in this world: while Jeli went with his sack over his shoulder and his stick in his hand, looking for another master, the band played gaily in the square, with feathers in their hats, amid a crowd of white stocking-caps[1] thick as flies, and the gentry sat enjoying it in the café. Everybody was dressed up for the feast, as the animals for the fair, and in a corner of the

[1] The peasants of Southern Sicily wore the white knitted stocking-cap, and only the gentry wore hats. But after the Garibaldi revolution, the peasants assumed the hat.

square there was a woman in short skirts and flesh-coloured stockings, so that you'd think she had bare legs, and she beat on the big box, in front of a great sheet painted with a scene of the torture of Christians, blood flowing in torrents, and in the crowd that stood gaping open-mouthed stood also Farmer Cola, whom Jeli had known when he was at Passanitello, and he said he'd find him a place, because Master Isidoro Macca was looking for a swineherd. – 'But don't you say anything about Starface,' Farmer Cola suggested. 'A misfortune like that might happen to anybody. But it's better not to mention it.'

They went round looking for Master Macca, who was at the dance, so while Farmer Cola went in to play ambassador, Jeli waited outside on the road, among the crowd that stood staring through the doorway of the shop. In the bare room was a swarm of people jumping and enjoying themselves, all red in the face and gasping, making an enormous threshing of heavy boots on the brick floor, so that they drowned even the *ron-ron* of the big bass, and hardly was one piece finished, costing every one a farthing, than they lifted their finger to show that they wanted another; and the fellow who played the big bass made a cross on the wall with a piece of charcoal to keep the reckoning up to the last piece, and

then they began over again. – 'Those in there are spending without giving it a thought,' Jeli was saying to himself. 'Which means they've got a pocketful, and aren't tight put like me, for lack of a master; they sweat and wear themselves out jumping about for their own pleasure, as if they were paid by the day for it!' – Farmer Cola came back to say that Master Macca didn't need anybody. Then Jeli turned his back and went off slowly.

Mara lived out towards Sant' Antonio, where the houses clamber up the steep slope, facing the valley of the Canziria, all green with prickly-pear cactus, and with the mill-wheels foaming at the bottom in the torrent; but Jeli hadn't the courage to go out there, now that they wouldn't have him even to mind the pigs, so he wandered aimlessly among the crowd that hustled and shoved him heedlessly, and felt himself more alone than when he was away with the colts in the wastes of Passanitello, and he wanted to cry. At last he was met in the square by Farmer Agrippino, who was going around with his arms dangling, enjoying the feast, and who shouted after him: 'Hi! Jeli! Hey!' – and took him home with him. Mara was in grand get-up, with long ear-rings swinging against her cheeks, and she stood there in the doorway with her hands spread on her stomach

and loaded with rings, waiting for twilight, to go and see the fireworks.

'Oh!' Mara said to him. 'Have you come as well for the Feast of St. John?'

Jeli didn't want to go in, because he wasn't dressed up, but Farmer Agrippino pushed him by the shoulders, saying this wasn't the first time they'd seen him, and that they knew he came to the fair with his master's colts. Mrs. Lia poured him out a full glass of wine, and they made him go with them to see the illuminations, along with the neighbours and their wives.

When they came into the square, Jeli stood open-mouthed with wonder; the whole square seemed like a sea of fire, like when you're burning-off the stubble, because of the great number of squibs which the devout were letting off under the eyes of the saint, who for his part stood all black under the little awning of silver, there in the entrance to the Rosary Walk, to enjoy it all. His devotees came and went through the flames like so many devils, and there was even a woman with her dress undone, her hair wild, her eyes starting out of her head, lighting squibs along with the rest, and a priest in his black gown, without his hat, who seemed like one possessed, he was so worked up with devotion to the saint.

'That young fellow there is the son of Farmer

Neri, the factor of the Salonia lands, and he's spent more than ten shillings in fireworks!' said Mrs. Lia, pointing to a youth who was going round the square with two gushing rocket-squibs in his hands, like two candles, so that all the women were wild about him, and screamed to him: *Viva San Giovanni!* Long live Saint John!

'His father's rich, he's got more than twenty head of cattle,' added Farmer Agrippino.

Mara added also that he had carried the big banner, in the procession, and he held it straight as a die, he was such a strong, fine fellow.

The son of Farmer Neri seemed as if he heard them, and he lighted his fiery squibs for Mara, dancing around her; and after the squibs were over he joined her party and took them all to the dance, to the Cosmorama, where you saw the old world and the new, paying for them all, even for Jeli, who followed behind the train like a dog without a master, to see the son of Farmer Neri dance with Mara, who wheeled round and curtsied like a dove on the roof, and who held out the corner of her apron so prettily, while the son of Farmer Neri leaped like a colt, so that Mrs. Lia wept like a child for sheer pleasure, and Farmer Agrippino kept nodding his head as if to say, Yes, things are going very well.

At last, when they were tired, they wandered

about, 'promenading,' dragged along by the crowd as if they were in the midst of a torrent, to see the illuminated transparencies, where they were cutting off St. John's head, so that it would have melted a very Turk to see it, and the saint kicked like a wild goat under the butcher's knife. Quite near, the band was playing, under a wooden stand like a great umbrella, all lit up with lights, and there was such a crowd in the square that never had so many people been seen at the fair.

Mara walked around on the arm of Farmer Neri's son, like a young lady, and spoke in his ear, and laughed as if she was enjoying herself thoroughly. Jeli was absolutely tired out, and sat down to sleep on the causeway, until the first explosions of the fireworks woke him. At that moment Mara was still at the side of Farmer Neri's son, leaning on him with her fingers clasped upon his shoulder, and in the light of the coloured fires she seemed now all white, and now all red. When the last rockets rushed in a crowd into the sky, Farmer Neri's son, green in the face, turned to her and gave her a kiss.

Jeli said nothing, but at that moment all the feast, which he had enjoyed so much till now, turned into poison for him, and he began to think of his own troubles again, after having forgotten them: how he was without a job, and didn't know

what to do, nor where to go, having neither bread nor roof, and the dogs could eat him as they would Starface, who was left down there in the ravine, skinned to the very eyes.

Meanwhile people were still prancing about all around him, in the darkness which had come on. Mara and her girl friends skipped and danced and sang down the stony little street, on the way home.

'Good night! Good night!' the friends kept saying as they left them on the way.

Mara said Good night! as if she were singing it, her voice was so happy, and Farmer Neri's son seemed as if he really wouldn't ever let her go, while Farmer Agrippino and Mrs. Lia were quarrelling about opening the house door. No one took any notice of Jeli, only Farmer Agrippino remembered him, and asked him:

'Now where shall you go?'

'I don't know,' said Jeli.

'To-morrow come for me, and I'll help you look for a place. For to-night, go back into the square where we were listening to the band; you'll find a place on some bench, and you must be used to sleeping in the open.'

Jeli was used to that, but what hurt him was that Mara never said a word to him, and left him standing on the doorstep as if he was a beggar;

so the next day, when he came for Farmer Agrippino, the moment he was alone with the girl he said to her:

'Oh, Miss Mara! you do forget your old friends!'

'Oh, is it you, Jeli?' said Mara. 'No, I didn't forget you. But I was that tired, after the fireworks.'

'But you like him, though, don't you – Farmer Neri's son?' he asked, turning his stick round and round in his hand.

'What *are* you talking about!' replied Miss Mara roughly. 'My mother's in there and she'll hear every word.'

Farmer Agrippino found him a place as shepherd at Salonia, where Farmer Neri was factor, but as Jeli was new to the job he had to accept a big drop in his wages.

Now he looked after his sheep, and learned how to make cheese, and ricotta,[1] and caciocavallo,[2] and every other fruit of the flock; but amid all the talk and gossip that went on at evening in the courtyard, among all the herdsmen and peasants, while the women were shelling broad-

[1] *Ricotta* is a sweet curd made by stirring warm goat's milk or sheep's milk with bruised fig-leaves, and straining.

[2] *Caciocavallo* is a small full-cream cheese made in a little pouch, and eaten fresh.

beans for the soup, if the son of Farmer Neri, the one who was marrying Farmer Agrippino's Mara, happened to join in the talk, then Jeli said no more, hardly dared to open his mouth. Once when the field-tenant was teasing him, saying that Mara had given him the go-by, after everybody had said that they'd be husband and wife one day, Jeli, who was watching the pot in which he was heating the milk, replied, as he slowly and carefully stirred in the rennet:

'Mara's got a lot better-looking since she's grown up; she's like a young lady now.'

However, as he was patient and a worker, he soon learned everything that had to do with his job, better than many born to it, and since he was used to being with animals, he loved his sheep as he had loved his colts, and then the 'sïckness' wasn't so bad at Salonia, and the flock prospered so that it was a pleasure to Farmer Neri every time he came to the farmstead, so that at the year's end he persuaded the master to raise Jeli's wages, till the youth now got almost as much as he had when he herded the horses. It was money well spent, too, for Jeli didn't stop to count the miles if he was looking for better pasture for his animals, and if the sheep were bringing forth young, or if they were sick, he carried them to grass in the saddle-bags on the ass, and he put the lambs

on his own shoulder, where they bleated into his face with their noses out of the sack, and sucked his ears. In the famous snow of St. Lucy's night, the snow fell nearly four feet deep in the Dead Lake at Salonia, and when day came there was nothing else to be seen for miles and miles around, in all the country; – and as for the sheep, not so much as their ears would have been left if Jeli hadn't got up three or four times in the night to chase them around in the enclosure, so that the poor creatures shook the snow off their backs, and escaped being buried as so many of the neighbours' flocks were – according to what Farmer Agrippino said when he came to have a look at a little field of broad-beans which he had at Salonia, and he said moreover that about that other tale of Farmer Neri's son going to marry his daughter Mara, there was nothing in it, Mara had got quite different intentions.

'They said they were going to get married at Christmas,' said Jeli.

'Not a bit of it; they're not going to get married to anybody; all a lot of envious talk of people who want to meddle in other people's affairs,' replied Farmer Agrippino.

However, the man who was boss of the fields, who knew all about it, having heard the talk in the square when he went to the village on Sunday,

told the real facts of the case, after Farmer Agrippino had gone: the marriage was off, because Farmer Neri's son had got to know that Mara was carrying on with Don Alfonso, the young squire, who had known Mara since she was a little thing, and Farmer Neri said that he wanted his son to be respected as his father was respected, and he was having no horns in his house save those of his own oxen.

Jeli was there and heard it all, sitting in a circle with the others at the morning meal, and at that moment slicing the bread. He said nothing, but his appetite left him for that day.

While he led his sheep to pasture, he thought again of Mara as she was when she was a little girl, when they were together all day long, and went to the Vale of the Jacitano, or to the Hill of the Cross, and she would stand with her chin in the air watching him as he climbed for the nests at the tops of the trees; and he thought too of Don Alfonso, who used to come out to him from the villa not far off, and they would lie on their stomachs on the grass, stirring up the grasshoppers' nests with a straw. All these things he kept carefully recalling for hours on end, seated on the edge of the ditch with his knees between his arms, seeing in his mind the high walnut-trees of Tebidi, the thickets in the valley, the slopes of the

hill-sides green with sumach trees, the grey olive-trees which rose one upon another like mist in the valley, the red roofs of the buildings, and the belfry 'that looked like the handle of the salt-cellar' among the orange-trees of the garden. Here the country spread in front of him naked and desert, blotched by the dried-up grass, fuming silently in the distant heat-haze.

In spring, just when the pods of the broad-beans were beginning to bend their heads, Mara came to Salonia with her father and mother, and the lad and the donkey, to gather beans, and they came to the farmstead to sleep all together for the two or three days that the bean-gathering would last. Therefore Jeli saw the girl morning and evening, and often they sat side by side on the low wall of the sheep-pens, chatting together, while the lad counted the sheep. 'I could think I was back at Tebidi,' said Mara, ' when we were little, and we used to sit on the bridge of the narrow road.'

Jeli remembered it all well enough, though he said nothing, having always been a sensible lad of few words.

The bean-gathering over, the evening before her departure Mara came to say good-bye to the youth, just when he was making the ricotta, and was busy catching the whey in the ladle. – 'I'll say

good-bye to thee now,' she said. 'To-morrow we're going back to Vizzini.'

'How have the beans turned out?'

'Badly! The pest has taken them all this year.'

'They depend on the rain, and there was hardly any,' said Jeli. 'We had to kill the lambs, there was nothing for them to eat; on all the Salonia there hasn't been three inches of grass.'

'But it makes no difference to you. You have your wages the same, good year or bad.'

'Yes, it's true,' he said. 'But for all that I don't like handing the poor things over to the butcher.'

'Do you remember when you came for the Feast of St. John, and you were without work?'

'Yes, I remember.'

'It was my father who got you a place then, with Farmer Neri.'

'And you, why haven't you married Farmer Neri's son?'

'Because it wasn't God's will. – My father's been unlucky,' she continued after a pause. 'Since we've been at Marineo everything has turned out badly. The beans, the wheat, that bit of vineyard that we have up there. Then my brother has gone for a soldier, and we've lost a mule worth twenty guineas.'

'I know,' replied Jeli. 'The bay mule.'

'Now we've lost so much, who'd want to marry me?'

Mara was breaking to bits a sprig of blackthorn, as she spoke, her chin down on her breast, her eyes lowered, her elbow occasionally nudging Jeli's elbow, without her heeding. But Jeli also said nothing, his eyes fixed on the churn; and she resumed:

'At Tebidi they used to say we should be husband and wife, do you remember?'

'Yes,' said Jeli, and he put the ladle down on the side of the churn. 'But I'm nothing but a poor shepherd, and I can't expect to get a farmer's daughter like you.'

Mara was silent for a moment, then she said:

'If you care for me, I'd have you willingly.'

'Really?'

'Really!'

'And Farmer Agrippino, what would he say?'

'My father says you know your job now, and you're not one of those that spend their wages as soon as they get them, but turn one penny into two, and you eat less, so as to save bread, and so you'll have sheep of your own one day, and will be rich.'

'If it's like that,' said Jeli, 'I'll take you willingly, as you say.'

'Hey!' Mara said to him when the darkness

had fallen, and the sheep little by little were settling down to quiet. 'If you'd like a kiss now I'll give you one, now we're going to be husband and wife.'

Jeli took it in silence, and then, not knowing what to say, he added:

'I've always cared for you, even when you wanted to leave me for Farmer Neri's son; but I hadn't the heart to ask you about the other chap.'

'Don't you see! we were destined for one another,' concluded Mara.

Farmer Agrippino actually said yes, and Mrs. Lia began to put together as quick as she could a new jacket, and a pair of velvet breeches for her son-in-law. Mara was pretty, and fresh as a rose, looking like the Paschal lamb in her little white head-shawl, and with that amber necklace that made her throat look whiter; so that when Jeli walked the street at her side, he was as stiff as a poker, dressed up in new cloth and velvet, and didn't dare to wipe his nose with the red silk handkerchief, for fear folks should stare at him; and the neighbours and all the others who knew about Don Alfonso laughed in his face. When Mara said *I will*, and the priest, with a great sign of the Cross, gave her to Jeli as a wife, Jeli took her home, and it seemed to him they had given

him all the gold of the Madonna, and all the lands his eyes had ever seen.

'Now that we are man and wife,' he said to her when they got home, and he was sitting opposite her and making himself as little as he could, 'now that we are man and wife, I can say it to you: it doesn't seem to me real as you could ever want me, when you could have had so many others better than me . . . when you're that pretty and taking, like you are!'

The poor devil didn't know what else to say, and hardly could contain himself, in his new clothes, he was so overjoyed to see Mara going round the house, arranging everything and touching everything, making herself the mistress of the place. He could scarcely tear himself away from the door, to return to Salonia; when Monday had come, he kept dawdling about, arranging the saddle-bags on the donkey's pack-saddle, then his cloak, then the waxed umbrella. 'You ought to come to Salonia with me,' he said to his wife, who stood watching him from the threshold. 'You ought to come along with me!' – But the woman only began to laugh, and said she wasn't made for minding sheep, and there was nothing for her to go to Salonia for.

It was a fact, Mara was not made for minding sheep, nor was she used to the north wind of

January, when your hands stiffen on your stick, and it feels as if your finger-nails were coming out, nor to the furious downpours of rain, when you're wet to the bone, nor to the suffocating dust of the roads, when the sheep walk under the burning sun, nor to the hard biscuit and the mouldy bread, nor to the long, silent, lonely days, when in all the burnt-up country you see nothing except, at rare intervals, in the distance, some peasant blackened by the sun, silently driving his ass in front of him along the white and endless road. At least Jeli knew that Mara was warm under the bed-quilt, or that she was spinning in front of the fire, gossiping in a group with the neighbours, or sunning herself on the balcony, while he was coming back from the pasture weary and thirsty, or wet through with rain, or when the wind drove the snow into the hut and put out the brushwood fire. Every month Mara went to draw his wages from the master, and she was short of nothing, neither eggs in the hen-house, nor oil in the lamp, nor wine in the flask. And just twice a month Jeli came to her, and she stood on the verandah to look for him, with her distaff in her hand; and after he had tied the donkey in the stable, and taken off his pack-saddle, put him some feed in the manger, and packed the wood under the shed in the yard, or put whatever else

he had brought in the kitchen, Mara helped him to hang his cloak on the nail, to take off his goat-skin leggings, in front of the fire, and poured him some wine, set the soup or the macaroni to boil, and laid the table, going about it all softly and intently, like a good housewife, at the same time telling him all her news, about the eggs she had set under the hen, what cloth she had on her loom, about the calf they were raising, all without forgetting a thing of what she was doing. When Jeli was in his own house, he felt grander than the Pope.

But on Saint Barbara's night he came home unexpectedly, when all the lights were out in the little street, and the town clock was striking midnight. He came because the mare which the master had left out at pasture had turned sick all of a sudden, and he plainly saw that she'd have to go to the vet at once, and he'd had some work to get her as far as the village, what with the rain that fell in torrents, and the roads where you sank up to your knees. Then in spite of his loud knocking and calling to Mara at the door, he had to wait half an hour under the rain that poured off the roof, till the water simply ran from his heels. His wife opened for him at last, and began to abuse him worse than if it was she who'd had to be scouring the country in that weather.

'Why, what's a-matter wi' you?' he asked her.

'You've frightened me to death, at this time of night! What sort of time do you think this is, to come? To-morrow I shall be bad.'

'Go back to bed. I'll light the fire.'

'No. I've got to get some wood in.'

'I'll do it.'

'No, you won't.'

When Mara returned with the wood in her arms, Jeli said:

'Why did you open the yard door? Was there no wood in the kitchen?'

'No! I had to get it from the shed.'

She let him kiss her, but coldly, turning her face away from him.

'His wife lets him soak outside the door, when she's got the cuckoo inside with her,' said the neighbours.

But Jeli saw nothing, he was such a clown, and the others took care not to tell him, for it was evident he didn't mind, seeing he'd taken on the woman for what she was worth, after Farmer Neri's son had dropped her because of the talk about Don Alfonso. Jeli for his part lived happy and contented, in spite of all the things they said about him, and got as fat as a pig, 'because though horns are thin, yet they keep the house fat.'

But at last one day the lad who helped with the

flock told him to his face, when they were squabbling about the pieces of cheese which had had slices stolen from them: 'Now that Don Alfonso has taken your wife from you, you think you're his brother-in-law, and you show off as if you were a crowned king, with that horn you've got on your head.'

The factor and the field-boss expected to see blood flow at these words; but Jeli only stupidly went on with what he was doing, as if he hadn't heard, or as if it wasn't his business, with such an ox face that horns really would have suited him.

Now Easter was at hand, so the factor sent all the farm-hands to confess, hoping that for fear of God they wouldn't steal any more. Jeli went as well, and when he came out of church he looked for the lad who had said those things to him, and when he found him he threw his arm round his shoulder and said to him: 'The father-confessor told me to forgive you; but I'm not angry with you for what you said; and if you won't snip pieces off the cheese any more, I don't care about what you said to me that time in a rage.'

It was from that moment that they nicknamed him The Golden Horn, and the name stuck to him and to all his family, even after he had washed the horn in blood.

Mara also went to confession, and came away from the church wrapped tight in her mantle, and with her eyes to the ground, so that she looked a very Saint Mary Magdalene. Jeli, who was waiting for her on the balcony, taciturn, saw her coming like that, obviously with the Communion bread inside her, and he turned pale as death, looking at her from head to foot, as if he had never seen her before, or as if they had given him another Mara; and while she spread the cloth and put the soup-plates on the table, quiet and cleanly as usual, he hardly dared lift his eyes to her.

However, after he'd thought about it for a long time, he asked her:

'Is it true that you're carrying on with Don Alfonso?'

Mara fixed him with her coal-black eyes and crossed herself. – 'Why do you want to make me sin this day of all others?' she cried.

'I didn't believe it, because we were always together with Don Alfonso, when we were children, and there wasn't a day he didn't come to Tebidi, when he was staying in the country at the villa. And besides he's rich, with shovelfuls of money, so if he wanted women he could get married, and he'd not run short of nothing, neither to wear nor to eat.'

But Mara began to get in a rage, and started abusing him to such a pitch that the poor wretch didn't dare lift his nose from his plate.

At length, so that the good food they were eating shouldn't turn into poison, Mara began to talk of something else, and asked him if he had remembered to hoe that bit of flax which they'd sown on the bean-field.

'Yes,' said Jeli. 'The flax will do well.'

'If it does,' said Mara. 'I'll make you two new shirts this winter that'll keep you warm.'

In short, Jeli didn't understand what 'horns' means, and he didn't know what jealousy was, every new idea had such hard work to enter into his head, and this one especially was such a big novelty that it was fearful hard work to take it in, especially when he saw his Mara before him, so beautiful and white, and clean, and he knew she had wanted him herself, and he'd thought of her for years and years, since he was a little lad, so that the day they'd told him she was going to marry somebody else he'd not had the heart to eat nor to drink, all the day – and then when he thought of Don Alfonso, with whom he'd been together so much, and who always brought him sweets and white bread, he could see him as plain as if he were there, in his new little suit and curled hair, his smooth, pale face like a girl's; and though

afterwards he hadn't seen him any more, himself being a poor shepherd, all the year round out in the country, yet he still kept him in his heart the same. But the first time Jeli saw Don Alfonso again, to his own sorrow, after so many years, he felt his inside boil within him; and now he had a fine curly beard, like his hair, and a velvet jacket, and a gold chain on his waistcoat. Nevertheless, he recognized Jeli, and clapped him on the shoulder when he spoke to him. He had come with the owner of the farmstead, along with a bunch of friends, for a jaunt into the country at shearing-time; and Mara turned up as well, under pretext that she was pregnant and she longed for fresh ricotta.

It was a lovely hot day out in the fresh blond fields, where the hedges were in flower, and the vines were sending out long green threads, the sheep jumping and bleating with pleasure at being free from all that wool, and in the kitchen the women were making a big fire to cook all the stuff the master had brought for dinner. The gentlemen who were waiting for the dinner gathered meanwhile in the shadow of the dark carob-trees, calling for bagpipes and tom-tom drums, and then they danced with the women of the farmstead, all at their ease. Jeli, all the time he was shearing the sheep, felt something inside

him like a thorn, he didn't know what it was, like a nail, like scissors clipping him up fine in his inside, like a poison. The master had ordered them to cut the throats of two kids, and of a yearling sheep, and to kill chickens and a turkey. You could tell he wanted to do things on a grand scale, without counting the cost, so that he would look big in the eyes of his friends, and while all those creatures squealed with pain, and the kids screamed under the knife, Jeli felt his knees trembling, and in waves it seemed to him as if the wool he was shearing and the grass in which the sheep were jumping flamed red into blood.

'Don't you go!' he said to Mara, as Don Alfonso called to her to come and dance with the rest. 'Don't you go, Mara!'

'Why not?'

'I don't want you to. Don't you go!'

'Can't you hear them calling me?'

He gave her no intelligible answer, as he bent over the sheep he was shearing. Mara shrugged her shoulders, and went off to dance. She was flushed and excited, her black eyes like two stars, and she laughed and showed her white teeth, and all the gold she was wearing shook and glittered against her cheeks and bosom till she seemed a very Madonna, nothing less. Jeli had risen erect from his stooping, holding the long scissors in his

hand, and deadly-white in the face, as white as once he had seen his father, the cowherd, when he trembled with fever by the fire in the hut. All at once, seeing Don Alfonso with his curly beard, his velvet jacket and the gold chain on his waistcoat, taking Mara by the hand to lead her to the dance, only then, when he saw him touch her, did he leap on him and cut his throat in one stroke, just like killing a kid.

Later, when they were taking him before the judge, bound, and overcome, without having proffered the least resistance:

'Why!' he said. 'Didn't I have to kill him? . . . If he'd taken Mara from me! . . .'

ROSSO MALPELO

or

THE RED-HEADED BRAT

*

They called him Malpelo, which means 'evil-haired,' because he had red hair:[1] and he had red hair because he was a bad, malicious boy, with every promise of growing up into a first-rate rascal. And so all the men at the red-sand pit called him Malpelo, till even his mother had well-nigh forgotten his baptismal name, hearing him always called by the other.

For the rest, she only saw him on Saturday evenings, when he came home with the few pence of his week's earnings; and seeing that he was *malpelo*, there was always the risk that he'd kept back a few of the same pennies; so that, to make doubt sure, his elder sister always received him with clouts and abuse.

However, the owner of the pit had confirmed what he said, that the wages were so much, and no more; and too much at that, in all conscience, for a little brat whom nobody else would have had around, whom everybody avoided like a mangy dog, giving him the taste of their boot when they found him in reach.

[1] Red hair was very unpopular in Southern Italy, Judas having been red-haired, according to tradition. *Malpelo*, evil-haired, has something of the same force as 'misbegotten.'

He was in truth an ugly chip, surly, snarling, and wild. At midday, while all the other workmen of the pit were sitting together eating their soup, and having a bit of talk, he would go off to squat in some corner, with his basket between his legs, to gnaw there alone his supply of bread, after the manner of animals of his sort; and the others called out something jeering to him, or threw stones at him, till the boss sent him back to work with a kick. All the same, he grew fat between the kicks, and he let them work him like the grey donkey, without daring to complain. He was always ragged and dirty with red sand, since his sister had got married, and had other things to think of; at the same time he was as well known as the dandelion is, by everybody in Monserrato and Carvana, so much so that the pit where he worked was called Malpelo's pit, which annoyed the owner considerably. Altogether they kept him out of pure charity, and because his father, Master Misciu, had been killed in the pit.

He had been killed in this way: one Saturday he wanted to stay behind to finish a job he was doing as piece-work, which was a pillar of solid sand they had left long ago to keep up the roof of the pit, and now was no longer needed, and which, he had estimated roughly with the master, would contain some thirty-five or forty loads of

sand. But there was Master Misciu digging away for three days, and the thing even then wasn't finished, but would take another half-day on Monday. It had turned out a mean piece of work and only a poor owl like Master Misciu would have let himself be taken in to such an extent by the master; but it was for that very reason they called him Dummy Misciu, he was the jackass for all the hard work in the sand-pit. He, poor devil, let them talk, and was satisfied to earn his bread with his two hands, instead of turning his fists against his companions and starting trouble. Malpelo used to make an ugly little face, as if all those frauds and insults fell on his shoulders, and little as he was, his eyes darted such looks as made the men say to him: 'Get out! *You*'ll never die in your bed, like your father.'

However, neither did his father die in his bed, good-natured creature as he was. Uncle Mommu, with the lame hip, had said that he wouldn't have tackled that pillar not for twenty guineas, it was so dangerous; but then, on the other hand, everything is risky in a pit, and if you were going to stop to think of danger, you'd better go and be a lawyer, and have done with it.

So on the Saturday evening Master Misciu was still scraping away at his pillar, after the *Ave Maria* bell had rung long ago, and all his fellow-

workmen had lit their pipes and gone off home, telling him to wear his guts out for love of the boss if he liked, and advising him to mind he didn't get trapped, like a rat. He, who was used to jokes, took no notice, replying only with the *Ah! Ah!* of his heavy, full-length strokes with the pick; but inside he said: 'That's for the bread! That's for the wine! That's for the new frock for Nunziata!' – and so he went on keeping count of how he would spend the money for his 'stint' – his job.

Outside the pit the sky was swarming with stars, and down there the lantern smoked and swung like a comet; and the great red pillar, disembowelled by the strokes of the pick, twisted and bent forward as if it had belly-ache and were also saying *Oh dear! Oh!* Malpelo kept clearing away the dirt, and he put the empty sack and the wine-flask and the mattock safely aside. His father, who was fond of him, poor little chap, kept saying: 'Go back!' or 'Look out! Look out! Watch if any little stones or coarse sand fall from the top!' All at once he said no more, and Malpelo, who had turned to put the irons back in the basket, heard a deep and suffocated noise, like the sand makes when it comes down all at once; and the light went out.

In the evening when they came in a great hurry

to fetch the engineer who directed the work in the pit, he happened to be at the theatre, and he wouldn't have changed his seat in the stalls for a throne, for he was devoted to the play. Rossi was playing Hamlet, and there was a splendid audience. Outside the door all the poverty-stricken women-folk of Monserrato were gathered, screaming and beating their breasts for the great misfortune which had happened to Mrs. Santa, she alone, poor thing, saying nothing, her teeth chattering as if it were icy January. When they told the engineer that the accident had happened about four hours ago, he asked them what was the good of coming for him, four hours after? Nevertheless, he set off, with ladders and torches, taking two hours more, which made it six, and then the lame man said it would take a week to clear the pit of all the stuff that had fallen.

Talk about forty loads of sand! Sand had come down like a mountain, all fine and burnt small by the lava,[1] so that you could knead it with your hands, and it would take double of lime. You could go on filling cart-loads for weeks. A fine thing for Dummy Misciu!

The engineer went back to see Ophelia buried;

[1] This story is placed on the sea-coast near Aci-Trezza, where the lava flowed down to the sea from Etna, and burned the sands, and buried them: and buried Sicilian Naxos, a little way north.

and the other miners shrugged their shoulders, and went home one by one. Amid all the dispute and the chatter they took no heed of a childish voice, which no longer sounded human, and which cried wildly: 'Dig for him! Dig here, quick, quick!' – 'Ha!' said the lame old man. 'It's Malpelo! Where has Malpelo sprung from? If you hadn't been Malpelo, you wouldn't have escaped either! No, my boy!' The others began to laugh, and somebody said he had his own devil to look after him, another said he had as many lives as a cat. Malpelo answered nothing, neither did he cry, but away there in the hole he was at it digging out the sand with his finger-nails, so that nobody knew he was there: only when they drew near with the light they saw him, his face distorted, his eyes glassy, his mouth foaming, so that they were afraid; his finger-nails were torn, and hung bloody and ragged from his hands. Then when they wanted to take him away, there was a terrible scene; since he could no more scratch, he bit like a mad dog, and they had to seize him by the hair and drag him, to get him away alive.

Nevertheless, he came back to the pit after a few days, when his mother came crying, bringing him by the hand; since you can't always find bread lying about, ready to eat. Now, moreover,

they couldn't keep him away from that gallery in the pit, and he dug away furiously, as if every basket of sand he removed were lifted from his father's breast. Sometimes, as he was working with the pick, he suddenly stopped still, with the pick in the air, his face grim and his eyes wild, and it seemed as if he were listening to something which his familiar demon was whispering in his ears, from beyond the mountain of fallen sand. Those days he was more gloomy and wicked than usual, so that he hardly ate anything, and threw his bread to the dog, as if it were not good food. The dog liked him, because dogs only care for the hand that gives them bread. But on the grey donkey, poor creature, so crooked and thin, was vented all the force of Malpelo's wickedness; he beat it mercilessly, with the handle of his pick, muttering: 'So you'll croak all the sooner!'

After the death of his father it was as if the devil had entered into him, he worked like those ferocious buffaloes which you have to manage by the ring in their nose. Knowing that he was *malpelo*, he set himself out to be as bad as he could, and if any accident happened, if a miner lost the wedges, or if a donkey broke its leg, or if a piece of the gangway fell in, they always knew he had done it; and he for his part took all their ill-treatment without a word, exactly like the donkeys

which curve their backs under the blows, and then go on in their own way again. With the other lads, again, he was downright cruel, and it seemed as if he wanted to avenge himself upon those weaker than himself, for all the ills he imagined had been done to him and to his father. Certainly he took a strange pleasure in recalling one by one all the injuries and exactions that had been put upon his father, and the way they had let him die. And when he was alone, he would mutter: 'They're just the same with me! and they called my father Dummy because he didn't do the same to them!' Another time, when the boss was going by, the boy followed him with a sinister look: 'He did it, for thirty-five loads!' – And again, looking after the lame old man: 'Him as well! and he laughed into the bargain! I heard him, that night!'

By a refinement of malignity he seemed to have taken under his protection a poor lad who had come to work a short while back at the pit, a boy who had injured his thigh in a fall from a bridge, and was no longer able to be a bricklayer's labourer. This poor youth hobbled as he carried his basket of sand on his shoulder, till you'd think he was dancing a tarantella, which set all the men in the pit laughing, so that they nicknamed him Frog; nevertheless, working underground there,

frog though he was, he earned his daily bread; and Malpelo even gave him some of his, for the pleasure of being able to tyrannize over him, the men said.

To tell the truth, he tormented him in a hundred ways. Now he beat him without reason or pity, and if Frog didn't defend himself, he hit him harder, with greater rage, saying to him: 'Oh, you dummy! You dummy! If you haven't got the spunk to defend yourself from me, when I don't hate you, how do you think you're going to let the other lot jump on your face!'

Or if Frog was wiping away the blood from his nose and mouth: 'Now if it hurts you when somebody hits you, you'll learn how to hit 'em yourself!' – When he drove a loaded ass up the steep incline from the underground works, and saw it digging in its hoof-toes, loaded beyond its strength, curved up under the weight, panting, its eye dead, then he beat it mercilessly with the handle of his pick, and the blows sounded dry upon the shins and the exposed ribs. Sometimes the animal bent itself double under the beating, but, put forth its strength as it might, it could not take another step, and fell on its knees, and there was one of them that had fallen so many times, it had two raw places on its legs: and then Malpelo confided to Frog: 'A donkey gets thrashed

because it can't do any thrashing itself; if it could beat us, it would trample us under its feet and tear the flesh off us.'

Or again: 'If you have to hit, watch it you hit as hard as you can; and then them as you're hitting will know you're one better than they are, and so you'll have less to put up with.'

When he was working with the pick or the mattock he went at it with fury, as if he had a grudge against the sand, and he struck and hacked with shut teeth, going *Ah! ah!* at each blow, as his father had done. – 'Sand is treacherous,' he said to Frog, in an undertone; 'it's like all the rest, if you're weaker than it is, it tramples on your face, but if you're stronger than it, or if you go for it a lot of you together, like that lame fellow does, then you can beat it. My father always beat it, and he never beat anything else besides the sand, and so they called him Dummy, and then the sand caught him unawares and ate him up, because it was stronger than he.'

Every time Frog had a heavy job on hand, and whimpered like a girl, Malpelo punched him in the back and shouted: 'Shut up, you baby!' – and if Frog didn't leave off, then Malpelo lent him a hand, saying with a certain pride: 'Here, let me do it! I'm stronger than you are.' – Or another time he gave him his half an onion, and chewed

his own bread dry, shrugging his shoulders and adding: 'I'm used to it.'

He was used to everything, he was: knocks on the head, kicks, blows with the mattock-handle, or with the saddle-strap; used to being insulted and played tricks on by everybody, used to sleeping on the stones, with his arms and back feeling broken by fourteen hours' work on end; even he was used to fasting, when the boss, who owned the pit, punished him by stopping his bread or his soup. He used to say that the boss had never stopped his rations of ill-treatment. However, he never complained, but he avenged himself on the sly, unawares, with one of his tricks that made you think the devil really had put a tail on him; and therefore the punishment always fell on him, even when he was not guilty; since if he wasn't guilty this time, he might just as well have been; and he never justified himself, for what would have been the use! And sometimes, when Frog was terrified and wept and begged him to tell the truth and exculpate himself, he repeated: 'What's the good? I'm *malpelo*!' – and nobody could have said whether that perpetual ducking of his head and shoulders came from defiant pride or from desperate resignation, and you couldn't even tell whether his nature was driven by savagery or by timidity. What is certain is that even

his mother had never received a caress from him, and hence she never gave him one.

On Saturday evenings, as soon as he turned up at home with his ugly little face daubed with freckles and with red sand, wearing clothes that hung from him in rags all over, his sister seized the broom-handle if he dared show himself in the doorway in that state, for it would have frightened away her young man if he had seen the sort of brat he was going to have foisted off on him for a brother-in-law; the mother was always at one neighbour's house or another, so he went off to curl himself up on his rough sack like a sick dog. And so on Sundays, when all the other lads of the place put on a clean shirt to go to Mass, or to play in the yard, he seemed to have no other pleasure but to go slinking through the gardens and the paths among the olives, hunting and stoning the poor lizards, which had never done anything to him, or else foraging in the hedges of prickly-pear cactus. But in truth, to join in the foolery and stone-throwing of the other boys didn't amuse him.

Master Misciu's widow was in despair at having such a bad character for a son, for everybody called him that, and he was verily reduced to the state of those dogs which, always having to flee from kicks and stones on every hand, at last put

their tails between their legs and scuttle away from the first living soul they see, and become ravenous, hairless, and savage as wolves. At least underground, in the sand-pit, ugly and ragged and half-naked as he was, they didn't make fun of him, and he seemed made on purpose for his job, even to the colour of his hair and to his sly cat's eyes that blinked if they saw the sun. There are donkeys like that, that work in the pit for years and years without ever going out, for in those underground workings where the pit-shaft is vertical, they let them down on a rope, and they stay down all the rest of their lives. They are old donkeys, it is true, bought for ten or twelve shillings, ready to be taken off to the Beach to be strangled; but they are still good for the work they have to do down underground; and Malpelo, certainly, was worth more than they, and if he came out of the pit on Saturday evenings it was because he had hands to get up the rope with, and he had to take his mother his week's pay.

Certainly he'd have preferred to be a bricklayer's labourer, like Frog, to work singing upon the bridges up in the blue sky, with the sun on your back; or a carter, like neighbour Jaspar, who came to fetch the sand from the pit, swaying half-asleep on the shafts of the cart, with pipe in mouth, going all day long upon the fine country

roads; or, better still, he'd have liked to be a peasant who passes all his life in the fields among the greenness, under the dark carob-trees, with the blue sea in the background, and the singing of birds above your head. But this had been his father's trade, and to this trade he was born. And thinking about it all, he showed Frog the pillar that had come down on his father, and which still yielded fine, burnt sand that the carter came to fetch, with his pipe in his mouth, and swaying on the shafts of the cart, and he said that when they had finished digging it away they would find the body of his father, which should be wearing fustian breeches as good as new. Frog was frightened, but *he* wasn't. He told how he had been always there, since he was a child, and had always seen that black hole which went away underground, where his father used to lead him by the hand. Then he spread his arms to right and left, and explained how the intricate labyrinths of the underground workings spread beneath their feet everywhere in every direction right up to the distant black and desolate waste of the lava-flow, whose naked black-grey cinder-rock was sullied with dry scrub of broom; and that many men had been swallowed up in the workings, either crushed, or lost in the darkness, and that they walked for years, and are still walking, try-

ing to find the ventilation shaft by which they had got in, and unable to hear the desperate calling of their children, who search for them in vain.

But one day, in filling the baskets, they came upon one of Master Misciu's shoes, and the boy was seized with such a trembling that they had to haul him up to the open air by the ropes, just like a dying donkey. But still they could not find either the good-as-new breeches, nor the remains of Master Misciu, although the old miners declared that that must be the exact place where the column had come down on him; and one workman, new to the job, remarked curiously how capricious the sand was, that it should have thrown the Dummy about so, his shoe in one direction and his feet in another.

After the finding of that shoe, Malpelo was seized with such a terror of seeing the naked foot of his father appear also among the sand, that he wouldn't give another stroke of the pick; so they gave him a taste of the pick-handle on his head. He went to work in another part of the gallery, and refused to go back to the old place. Two or three days later they did actually discover the corpse of Master Misciu, wearing the breeches and stretched out face downwards as if he had been embalmed. Uncle Mommu observed that he must have been a long while dying, because

the pillar had bent in a curve over him, and had shut him in alive; you could even see still how Master Dummy had instinctively tried to get out by digging in the sand, and he had his hands torn and his finger-nails broken – 'just like his son Malpelo!' repeated the lame man. – 'He was digging inside here while his son was digging outside.' But they said nothing to the boy, knowing him to be malign and vengeful.

The carter carted away the corpse from the workings, as he carted away the fallen sand and the dead donkeys, except that this time, over and above the stink of the carcass, you had to remember that the carcass was 'baptized flesh'; and the widow cut down the breeches and the shirt to fit Malpelo, who was thus for the first time dressed as good as new, and the shoes were put aside to keep until he was big enough, since you can't cut shoes down, and the sister's young man didn't want a dead man's shoes. When Malpelo stroked those good-as-new fustian breeches upon his legs, it seemed to him they were as soft and smooth as the hands of his father, when they used to stroke the son's hair, rough and red though it was. The shoes he kept hung upon a nail, upon the rough sack, as if they had been the Pope's slippers, and on Sundays he took them down and polished them, and tried them on; then he put them on

the floor, side by side, and sat contemplating them by the hour, his chin in his hands and his elbows on his knees, hunting up heaven knows what ideas in his weird little brain.

He had some queer ideas, had Malpelo! Since they had handed over to him also his father's pick and mattock, he used them, although they were too heavy for his age; and when they had asked him if he wanted to sell them, they were willing to pay the price of new ones for them, he said No! his father had made the handles so smooth and shiny with his own hands, and he wouldn't be able to make others more smooth and shiny, not if he used them for a hundred years, and then another hundred on top of that.

About that time, the grey donkey had died at last of hard work and old age, and the carter had carted him away to throw him in the distant *sciara*.[1] – 'That's how they are,' grumbled Malpelo. 'Things they can't use any more, they throw 'em as far away as they can.' – He went to pay a visit to the corpse of the Grey One at the bottom of the lava crack, and he forced Frog to go with him, though he didn't want to; but Malpelo told him that in this world you've got to look all things in the face, fair or ugly; and he stood

[1] The *sciara* is the desert waste of grey-black lava-rock, where the lava once flowed in a stream to the sea.

there with the greedy curiosity of a wastrel watching the dogs which came running from all the farmsteads in the neighbourhood, to fight over the flesh of the Grey One. The dogs made off, yelping, when the boys appeared, and they circled ravenously on the bank across the gap, but the red-headed brat would not let Frog drive them off with stones.

'You see that black bitch,' he said, 'who's not a bit frightened of your stones? She's not frightened because she's more hungry than the others. See her ribs?' – But now the grey donkey suffered no more, but lay still with his four legs stretched out, and let the dogs enjoy themselves clearing out his deep eye-sockets and stripping bare his white bones, and all the teeth that tore his entrails could no longer make him arch up his spine as did the merest blow with the mattock-handle which they used to give him to put a bit of force into him when he was going up the steep gangway. And that's how things are! Oh, the Grey One had had blows from the pick and slashes on the withers, and even he, when he was bent under the load and hadn't breath to go on, would look back with glances from his big eyes that seemed to say as they were beating him: 'No more! no more!' – But now the dogs could eat his eyes; and his stripped mouth, nothing but teeth, grinned

henceforward at all beatings and slashes on the withers. And it would have been better if he had never been born.

The lava-bed spread melancholy and desert as far as the eye could see, and rose and sank in peaks and precipices, black and wrinkled, without a grasshopper chirping upon it, or a bird flying over. You could hear nothing, not even the blows of the picks of the men at work underneath. And all the time, Malpelo kept repeating that below there it was all hollowed out in galleries, everywhere, towards the mountain and towards the valley; so that once, a miner who had gone in with his hair black, had come out with his hair all white, and another one, whose torch had gone out, had called for help in vain, no one could hear him. He alone heard his own shouts, said the boy, and though he had a heart harder than the *sciara*, at this thought he shuddered. – 'The boss often sends me a long way in, where the others daren't go. But I am Malpelo, and if I don't come back, nobody will look for me.'

However, on fine summer nights the stars shone bright even over the *sciara*, and the country round was just as black as it was, but Malpelo was tired with his long day's work, and lay down on his sack with his face to the sky, to enjoy the peace and the glitter of the upper deeps; for that

reason he hated moonlit nights, when the sea swarmed and sparkled, and the country showed up vaguely here and there: then the *sciara* seemed even more naked and desolate. – 'For us who've got to live underground,' Malpelo thought to himself, 'it ought to be always dark and everywhere dark.' – The owl hooted above the lava-bed, and flew hovering around; then he thought: 'Even the owl smells the dead that are in the underground here, and is desperate because she can't get at them.'

Frog was afraid of owls and bats; but the red-head abused him, because anybody who's got to live alone has no business to be frightened of anything, and even the grey donkey was not afraid of the dogs that stripped his bones, now that his flesh no longer felt the pain of being eaten. – 'You were used to working on the roofs like the cats,' he said to him. 'But now it's different. Now that you've got to live underground, like the rats, you don't have to be frightened of rats, neither of bats, which are only old rats with wings, and rats like to live where there are dead people.'

Frog, however, took a real pleasure in explaining to him what the stars were doing up above; and he told him that away up there was Paradise, where the dead go who have been good and not

vexed their parents. 'Who told you?' asked Malpelo, and Frog said his mother had told him.

Malpelo scratched his head, with a cunning smile, and made the face of a malicious brat who knows a thing or two. 'Your mother tells you that, because you ought to wear skirts instead of breeches.'

Then after he had thought awhile:

'My father was good and hurt nobody, although they called him *Dummy*. But you see, he's down below there, and they've even found the tools and the shoes, and the breeches I've got on.'

Some time afterwards, Frog, who had been ailing a long while, fell really ill, so that at evening they had to carry him out of the pit on the back of a donkey, stretched between the baskets, trembling with fever like a wet chicken. One of the workmen said that that lad *would never have made old bones* at that job, and if you were going to work in a mine without going to pieces, you'd got to be born to it. When Malpelo heard that, he felt proud that he was born to it, and that he kept so strong and well. He helped Frog through the days, and cheered him up as best he could, shouting at him and punching him. But once when he punched him on the back, Frog had a mouthful of blood, and then Malpelo, terrified, looked everywhere in his mouth and in his nose,

to see what he'd done to him, and swore that he couldn't have hurt him so much, with that little punch, and to show him, he gave himself hard blows on the chest and the back, with a stone; and a workman who was present fetched him a great kick between the shoulders, a kick which resounded like a drum, yet Malpelo never moved, and only when the miner had gone did he add: 'You see? It didn't hurt me! And he hit me a lot harder than I hit you. I'm sure he did.'

Meanwhile Frog got no better, and continued to spit blood and have fever every day. Then Malpelo stole some pennies from his own week's pay, to buy him wine and hot soup, and he gave him his good-as-new breeches because they'd keep him covered. But Frog still coughed, and every time it seemed as if he would suffocate, and in the evenings there was no getting the fever down, neither with sacks, nor covering him with straw, nor laying him before a blaze of twigs. Malpelo stood silent and motionless, leaning forward over him, his hands on his knees, staring at him with concentrated eyes, as if he wanted to make his portrait, and when he heard him moan faintly, and saw his worn-out face and his deadened eyes, just like the grey donkey when he panted, spent, under a load, climbing the gangway, he muttered to the sick boy: 'It's better if you peg out quick!

If you've got to suffer like that, it's better if you croak.' – And the boss said Malpelo was quite capable of knocking the lad on the head, and they'd better keep an eye on him.

At last one Monday Frog didn't come to the pit, and the boss washed his hands of him, because in the state he was in he was more trouble than he was worth. Malpelo found out where he lived, and on Saturday he went to see him. Poor Frog was almost gone, and his mother wept and despaired as if her son had earned her ten shillings a week.

This Malpelo could not understand at all, and he asked Frog why his mother carried on like that, when for two months he hadn't earned even what he ate? But poor Frog made no response, and seemed to be counting the beams on the ceiling. Then the red-head racked his brains and came to the conclusion that Frog's mother carried on in that way because her son had always been weak and ailing, and she'd kept him like one of those brats who never are weaned. Not like him, who was strong and healthy, and was *malpelo*, and his mother had never wept for him because she'd never been afraid of losing him.

A short while after they said at the pit that Frog was dead, and Malpelo thought that now the owl hooted for him too, in the night, and he went

again to visit the stripped bones of the Grey One, in the ravine where he used to go along with Frog. Now there was nothing left of the Grey One but the scattered bones, and Frog would be the same, and his mother would have dried her eyes, since even Malpelo's mother had dried hers when Master Misciu was dead, and now she was married again, and had gone to live at Cifali; also the sister was married, and the old house was shut. From that time on, if he was beaten, his folks cared nothing, and he didn't either, and when he'd be like the Grey One or like Frog, he'd feel nothing any more.

About that time there came to work in the pit a man whom they had never seen before, and he kept himself hidden as much as he could; the other workmen said among themselves that he'd escaped from prison, and that if he was caught they'd shut him up again for years and years. Malpelo learned on that occasion that prison was a place where they put thieves and rascals like himself, and kept them always shut up and watched.

From that time he felt an unhealthy curiosity about that man who had tried prison and escaped. After a few weeks, however, the fugitive declared flatly and plainly that he was sick of that mole's life, and he'd rather be in prison all his life,

because prison was paradise in comparison, and he'd rather walk back there on his own feet. – 'Then why don't all the men who work in the pit get themselves put in prison?' asked Malpelo. 'Because they're not *malpelo* like you,' replied the lame man. 'But don't you fret, you'll go there, and you'll leave your bones there.'

However, Malpelo left his bones in the pit, like his father, only in a different way. It happened that they had to explore a passage which they maintained was a communication with the big shaft on the left, towards the valley, and if that was so, it would save a good half of the work of getting the sand out of the mine. But if it was not true, there was danger of getting lost and never finding the way back. Therefore no father of a family would make the venture, and not for all the money in the world would they let their own flesh-and-blood run such a risk.

But Malpelo had nobody who would take all the money in the world for his skin, even if his skin had been worth all the money in the world; his mother was married again and gone to live at Cifali, and his sister was married as well. The house-door was shut, and he owned nothing but his father's shoes, hung on a nail; hence they always gave him the most dangerous work to do, and the most risky undertakings were allotted to

him, and if he took no care of himself, the others certainly took no care of him. When they sent him to explore that passage, he remembered the miner who had got lost, years and years ago, and who still walks on and on in the dark, calling for help, without anybody being able to hear him; – but he said nothing. Anyhow, what would have been the good? He took his father's tools, pick, mattock, lantern, the sack with bread, the flask of wine, and he set off; nor was anything more ever known of him.

And so were lost even the bones of Malpelo, and the lads of the pit lower their voices when they speak of him in the workings, terrified lest he should appear before them, with his red hair and his wicked grey eyes.

GRAMIGNA'S LOVER

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DEAR FARINA,[1] I'm sending you here not a story, but the outlines of a story. So it will have at least the merit of being brief, and of being true – a human document, as they say nowadays; interesting, perhaps, for you and for all those who would study the great book of the heart. I'll tell it you just as I picked it up in the lanes among the fields, more or less in the same simple and picturesque words of the people who told it me, and you, I am sure, will prefer to stand face to face with the naked, honest fact rather than have to look for it between the lines of the book, or to see it through the author's lens. The simple human fact will always set us thinking; it will always have the virtue of *having really happened*, the virtue of real tears, of fevers and sensations which have really passed through the flesh. The mysterious process by which the passions knot themselves together, interweave, ripen, develop in their own way underground, in their own tortuous windings that often seem contradictory, this will still constitute for a long time to come the attractive power of that psychological phenomenon which we call the theme of a story, and which modern analysis seeks to follow with scientific exactitude. I shall only tell

[1] Farina was a literary man, and a friend of Verga.

you the beginning and the end of the story I am sending you to-day, but for you that will be enough, and perhaps one day it will be enough for everybody.

Nowadays we work out differently the artistic process to which we owe so many glorious works of art, we are more particular about trifles, and more intimate; we are willing to sacrifice the grand effect of the catastrophe, or of the psychological crisis, which was visioned forth with almost divine intuition by the great artists of the past, to the logical development, and hence we are necessarily less startling, less dramatic, but not less fatal; we are more modest, if not more humble; but the conquests in psychological truth made by us will be not less useful to the art of the future. Shall we never arrive at such perfection in the study of the passions, that it will be useless to prosecute further that study of the inner man? The science of the human heart, which will be the fruit of the new art, will it not develop to such a degree and to such an extent all the resources of the imagination that the novels and stories of the future will merely record *the various facts* of the case?

But in the meantime I believe that the triumph of the novel, that most complete and most human of all works of art, will be reached when the affinity and the cohesion of all its parts will be so complete

that the process of the creation will remain a mystery, a mystery as great as that of the development of the human passions; and that the harmony of its form will be so perfect, the sincerity of its content so evident, its method and its *raison d'être* so necessary, that the hand of the artist will remain absolutely invisible, and the novel will have the effect of real happening, and the work of art will seem *to have made itself*, to have matured and come forth spontaneously like a natural event, without preserving any point of contact with its author; so that it may not show in any of its living forms any imprint of the mind in which it was conceived, any shadow of the eye which visioned it, any trace of the lips that murmured the first words, like the *fiat* of the Creator; let it stand by itself, in the single fact that it is as it must be and has to be, palpitating with life and immutable as a bronze statue, whose creator has had the divine courage to eclipse himself and to disappear in his immortal work.

Several years ago, down there along the Simoneto, they were in pursuit of a brigand, a fellow called Gramigna, if I'm not mistaken; a name accursed as the grass [1] which bears it, and

[1] Gramigna is the dog-grass, or twitch, whose bent root runs along underground, and is dug out and dried, the underground runner only, for fodder, by the poorest peasants.

which had left the terror of its fame behind it from one end of the province to the other. Carabiniers, soldiers, and mounted militia followed him for two months, without ever succeeding in setting their claws in him: he was alone, but he was worth ten men, and the ill weed threatened to take root. Add to this that harvest time was approaching, the hay was already spread in the fields, the ears of wheat were already nodding yes! to the reapers who had the sickle already in their hand, yet none the less there was not a proprietor who dared poke his nose over the hedges of his own land, for fear of seeing Gramigna crouching between the furrows, his gun between his legs, ready to blow the head off the first man who came prying into his affairs. Hence the complaints were general. Then the Prefect summoned all the officers of the police, of the carabiniers, and of the mounted militia, and addressed a few words to them that made them prick up their ears. The next day there was a general upheaval: patrols, small bands of armed men, outposts everywhere, in every ditch and behind every dry-stone wall; they drove him before them like an accursed beast across all the province, by day and by night, on foot, on horseback, by telegraph. Gramigna slipped through their hands, and replied with bullets if they got too close on his heels. In

the open country, in the villages, in the farmsteads, under the bough-shelter of the inns, in the clubs and meeting-places, nothing was spoken of but him, Gramigna, and of that ferocious hunt, of that desperate flight; the horses of the carabiniers fell dead tired; the militiamen threw themselves down exhausted in every stable; the patrol slept standing; only he, Gramigna, was never tired, never slept, always fled, scrambled down the precipices, slid through the corn, ran on all-fours through the cactus thicket, extricated himself like a wolf down the dry beds of the streams. The principal theme of conversation in the clubs, and on the village door-steps, was the devouring thirst which the pursued man must suffer, in the immense plain dried up under the June sun. The idlers widened their eyes when they spoke of it.

Peppa, one of the handsomest girls of Licodia, was at that time going to marry Neighbour Finu, 'Tallow-candle' as they called him, who had his own bit of land and a bay mule in his stable, and was a tall lad, handsome as the sun, who could carry the banner of Saint Margaret as if he were a pillar, without bending his loins.

Peppa's mother wept with satisfaction at her daughter's good fortune, and spent her time turning over the bride's trousseau in the chest,

'all white goods, and four of each,' good enough for a queen, and ear-rings that hung to her shoulders, and golden rings for all the ten fingers of her hands; she had as much gold as St. Margaret herself, and they were going to get married just on St. Margaret's day, that fell in June, after the hay-harvest. Tallow-candle left his mule at Peppa's door every evening as he returned from the fields, and went in to say to her that the crops were wonderful, if Gramigna didn't set fire to them, and that the little corn-chamber that opened its gate-door opposite the bed would never be big enough for all the grain this harvest, and that it seemed to him a thousand years, till he could take his bride home, seated behind him on the bay mule.

But one fine day Peppa said to him: 'You can leave your mule out of it; I'm not going to get married.'

Poor Tallow-candle was thunderstruck, and the old woman began to tear her hair as she heard her daughter turning down the best match in the village.

'It's Gramigna I care for,' the girl said to her mother, 'and I don't want to marry anybody but him.'

'Ah!' The mother rushed round the house, screaming, with her grey hair flying loose like a

very witch. 'Ah! that fiend has even got in here to bewitch my girl for me.'

'No,' replied Peppa, her eyes fixed and hard as steel. 'No, he's not been here.'

'Where have you seen him?'

'I've not seen him. I've heard about him. Hark, though! I can feel him here, till it burns me.'

It caused a great talk in the village, though they tried to keep it dark. The goodwives who had envied Peppa the prosperous cornfields, the bay mule, and the fine lad who carried St. Margaret's banner without bending his loins, went round telling all kinds of ugly stories, that Gramigna came to her at night in the kitchen, and that they had seen him hidden under the bed. The poor mother had lit a lamp to the souls in Purgatory, and even the priest had been to Peppa's house, to touch her heart with his stole, and drive out that devil of a Gramigna who had taken possession of it. Through it all she insisted that she had not so much as set eyes on the fellow; but that she saw him at nights in her dreams, and in the morning she got up with her lips parched as if she were feeling in her own body all the thirst he must be suffering.

Then the old woman shut her up in the house, so that she should hear no more talk about Gram-

igna, and she covered up all the cracks in the house-door with pictures of the saints. Peppa listened behind the blessed pictures to all that was said outside in the street, and she went white and red, as if the devil were blowing all hell in her face.

At last she heard say that they had tracked down Gramigna to the cactus thickets at Palagonia. – 'They've been firing for two hours!' the goodwives said. 'There's one carabinier dead, and more than three of the militia wounded. But they fired such showers of bullets on him that this time they've found a pool of blood, where he was.'

Then Peppa crossed herself before the old woman's bed-head, and escaped out of the window.

Gramigna was among the prickly-pear cactuses of Palagonia, nor had they been able to dislodge him from that cover for rabbits, torn, wounded though he was, pale with two days' fasting, parched with fever, and his gun levelled: as he saw her coming, resolute, through the thickets of the cactus, in the dim gleam of dawn, he hesitated a moment, whether to fire or not. – 'What do you want?' he asked her. 'What have you come here for?'

'I've come to stay with you,' she said to him, looking at him steadily. 'Are you Gramigna?'

'Yes, I am Gramigna. If you've come to get those twenty guineas blood-money, you've made a mistake.'

'No, I've come to stay with you,' she replied.

'Go back!' he said. 'You can't stay with me, and I don't want anybody staying with me. If you've come after money you've mistaken your man, I tell you, I've got nothing, see you! It's two days since I even had a bit of bread.'

'I can't go back home now,' she said. 'The road is full of soldiers.'

'Clear out! What do I care! Everybody must look out for their own skin.'

While she was turning away from him, like a dog driven off with kicks, Gramigna called to her. – 'Listen! Go and fetch me a bottle of water from the stream down there. If you want to stay with me, you've got to risk your skin.'

Peppa went without a word, and when Gramigna heard the firing he began to laugh bitingly, saying to himself: 'That was meant for me!' – But when he saw her coming back, a little later, with the flask under her arm, herself pale and bleeding, he first threw himself on her and snatched the bottle, and then when he had drunk till he was out of breath, he asked her:

'You got away, then? How did you manage?'

'The soldiers were on the other side, and the cactuses were thick this side.'

'They've made a hole in you, though. Is it bleeding under your clothes?'

'Yes.'

'Where are you wounded?'

'In the shoulder.'

'That doesn't matter. You can walk.'

Thus he gave her permission to stay with him. She followed him, her clothes torn, her body burning with the fever of her wound, shoeless, and she went to get him a flask of water or a hunk of bread, and when she came back empty-handed, in the thick of the firing, her lover, devoured by hunger and by thirst, beat her. At last, one night when the moon was shining on the cactus grove, Gramigna said to her: 'They are coming!' and he made her lie down flat, at the bottom of the cleft in the rock, and then he fled to another place. Among the cactus clumps continual firing was heard, and the darkness flushed here and there with brief flames. All at once Peppa heard a noise of feet near her and she looked up to see Gramigna returning, dragging a broken leg, and leaning against the broad stems of the cactus to load his gun. 'It's all up!' he said to her. 'They'll get me now' – and what froze her blood more than anything was the glitter in his eyes that made him

look like a madman. Then when he fell on the dry branches like a bundle of wood, the militiamen were on him in a heap.

Next day they dragged him through the streets of the village on a cart, all torn and blood-stained. The people who pressed forward to see him began to laugh when they saw how little he was, pale and ugly like a figure in a Punch-and-Judy show. And it was for him that Peppa had left Neighbour Fino, the 'Tallow-candle'! Poor Tallow-candle, he went and hid himself as if the shame was his, and Peppa was led away between the soldiers, handcuffed, as if she were another robber, she who had as much gold as Saint Margaret herself. Peppa's poor old mother had to sell 'all the white goods' of the trousseau, and the golden ear-rings, and the rings for the ten fingers, to pay the lawyers to get off her child; then she had to take her back into the house, poor, sick, disgraced, and herself as ugly now as Gramigna, and with Gramigna's child at her breast. But when they gave her back her daughter, at the end of the trial, the poor old woman repeated her *Ave Maria*, there in the darkening twilight of the naked barracks, among all the carabiniers, and it was as if they had given her a treasure, poor old thing, for this was all she had, and she wept like a fountain with relief. Peppa, on the contrary, seemed as if she had no more

tears, and she said nothing, nor was she ever seen in the village, in spite of the fact that the two women had to go and earn their bread labouring. People said that Peppa had learned her trade out in the thickets, and that she went stealing at night. The truth was, she stayed lurking shut up in the kitchen like a wild beast, and she only came forth when her old woman was dead, worn out with hard work, and the house had to be sold.

'You see!' said Tallow-candle, who still cared for her. 'I could knock my head against the stones when I think of all the misery you've brought on yourself and on everybody else.'

'It's true,' replied Peppa. 'I know it! It was the will of God.'

After she had sold the house and the few bits of furniture that remained to her, she left the village, in the night, as she had returned to it, without once turning back to look at the roof, under which she had slept for so many years; she went to fulfil the will of God in the city, along with her boy, settling near the prison where Gramigna was shut up. She could see nothing but the iron gratings of the windows, on the great mute façade, and the sentinels drove her off, if she stood to gaze searchingly for some sign of him. At last they told her he'd been gone from there for some time,

that they'd taken him away over the sea, handcuffed and with the basket round his neck. She didn't say anything. She didn't change her quarters, because she didn't know where to go, and had nobody to go to. She eked out a living doing small jobs for the soldiers and the keepers of the prison, as if she too had been a part of that great, gloomy, silent building; and then she felt for the carabiniers who had taken Gramigna from her, in the cactus thicket, and who had broken his leg with a bullet, a sort of respectful tenderness, a sort of brute admiration of brute force. On feast days, when she saw them with their scarlet tuft of feathers sticking up in front of their hats, and with glittering epaulettes, all standing erect and square in their dress uniforms of dark-blue with the scarlet stripes, she devoured them with her eyes, and she was always about the barracks, sweeping out the big general rooms, and polishing boots, till they called her 'the carabinier's shoe-rag.' Only when she saw them fasten on their weapons after nightfall, and set off two by two, their trousers turned up, the revolver on their stomach; or when they mounted on horseback, under the street-lamp that made their rifles glitter, and she heard the tread of horses lose itself in the distance, and the clink of sabres; then every time she turned pale, and as she shut the stable door she shuddered;

and when her youngster was playing about with the other urchins on the level ground in front of the prison, running between the legs of the soldiers, and the other brats shouted after him: 'Gramigna's kid! Gramigna's kid!' she got in a rage, and ran after them, throwing stones at them.

WAR OF SAINTS

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ALL at once, while Saint Rocco was going peacefully down his own street, under the baldachino, with the dogs in leash and a great number of lighted candles all around him, and the band playing, the procession following, the throng of devotees pressing behind, all at once there was an uproar, a helter-skelter, a devils' kitchen; priests bolting with their cassocks flying, trumpets and clarionets brandished, women screaming, blood in torrents and thwacks of cudgels falling like ripe pears right under the nose of blessed Saint Rocco himself. The magistrate, the mayor, the carabiniers rushed to the scene, broken bones were carried to the hospital, the most riotous spirits went to prison for the night, the saint went back to his church at a run rather than at the solemn pace of a procession, and it all ended like a Punch-and-Judy comedy.

And all this because of the envy and jealousy of the people of the Saint Pascal parish. That year the devotees of Saint Rocco had spent the very eyes out of their head to do the thing on a grand scale; they had hired the city band, they had let off more than two thousand firework cannons, and there even was a new banner, all embroidered with gold, weighing over a hundred pounds, so they said, and waving over the thick

of the crowd it seemed a very 'foam of gold.' All of which must have riled the Saint Pascal people considerably, till at last one of them lost patience, and, pale as a dead man, he began to yell: *Viva San Pasquale! Long live Saint Pascal!* – which was too much for the Saint Rocco devotees, and cudgels began to smack.

For truly, to go and say *Long live Saint Pascal!* in the very face of Saint Rocco himself was simply asking for it; it's like coming and spitting in a person's house, or like somebody amusing himself by pinching the woman whom you've got on your arm. Under such circumstances neither Christs nor devils count, and you even trample underfoot the bit of respect you've got for the very saints who, after all, are all relations of one another. If it's in church, the seats and benches start flying, in procession, the candle-ends whizz like bats, and at home at table, it's the soup-plates that fly.

'Of all the devils!' yelled Neighbour Nino, all bruised and torn. 'I'd just like to see anybody who'll shout *Long live Saint Pascal!* I'd just like to see him!'

'I will!' yelled Turi the 'tanner,' in fury, the very lad who was going to be Nino's brother-in-law, and who was beside himself with a blow he'd got in the fray, that had half-blinded him. 'Long live Saint Pascal, for ever!'

'For the love of God! For the love of God!' screamed his sister Saridda, rushing between her brother and her young man, for the three of them had been walking lovingly and pleasantly together till that moment.

Neighbour Nino, the engaged young man, shouted in derision: 'Long live my boots! Long live Saint Shoe-leather!'

'What!' yelled Turi, foaming at the mouth, his eye swelling up livid like a young pumpkin. 'Hell to Saint Rocco, you and your boots! Take that!'

So they began dealing each other blows that would have felled an ox, until their friends succeeded in separating them with blows and kicks. Saridda had got worked up as well; she screamed *Long live Saint Pascal!* and for two pins the engaged couple would have started slapping each other's faces as if they were already man and wife.

On these occasions parents and children go for each other, and wives leave their husbands, if by misfortune a person of the Saint Rocco parish has married one from Saint Pascal.

'I don't want ever to hear the name of that fellow again,' Saridda held forth, her fists on her hips, when the neighbours asked her how it was the engagement was broken off. 'Not if they

offered me him dressed in gold and silver all over, you understand!'

'Saridda can go mouldy, as far as I'm concerned,' said Neighbour Nino on his side, while they were washing the blood off his face at the inn. 'A lot of beggars and cowardly tripe, in that tannery parish! I must have been drunk before I ever went to look for a girl there.'

'Since that's what it comes to!' the mayor had concluded, 'and you can't carry a saint to the square without a lot of fighting, till it's an absolute swinery, we'll have no more feasts, nor double holidays, and if they start out with one candle, I'll show 'em candles! I'll have 'em all in prison.'

The affair had grown to such dimensions, really, because the bishop of the diocese had granted the priests of Saint Pascal the privilege of wearing the lilac bishop's gown. The Saint Rocco people, whose priests hadn't been granted the lilac gown, had gone even to Rome, to kick up a dust at the feet of the Holy Father, with documents in hand, on official paper, and all the rest; but it had been in vain, because their adversaries of the lower parish, whom everybody could remember barefoot and poverty-stricken, had got as rich as pigs with the new tanning industry, and we all know that in this world justice is bought and sold like the soul of Judas.

For the feast of Saint Pascal they were expecting the delegate from Monsignore, who was a man of consequence, and had two silver buckles weighing half a pound each, on his shoes, and who had seen the bishop, and was coming to bring the lilac gown to the canons; therefore they also had hired the city band, to go and meet Monsignore's delegate three miles out of the village, and it was said that in the evening there would be fireworks in the square, with '*Viva San Pasquale*' blazing in great box letters.

The inhabitants of the upper quarter of Saint Rocco were therefore in a great ferment, and some of the more excitable of them started peeling cudgels of pear-wood or of cherry, as big as fence-posts, and muttering:

'If there's going to be music, you've got to bring the baton.'

The bishop's delegate ran a great risk of issuing from his triumphal entry with his head cracked. But the reverend gentleman slyly left the band to wait for him outside the village, whilst he climbed up by the short cuts on foot, and so arrived quietly and stealthily at the priest's house, where he called a meeting of the heads of the two parties.

When those gentlemen found themselves face to face with one another, after such a long time that they'd been at outs, they began to look one

another in the white of the eye, as if they felt a great desire to tear each other's eyes out, and it needed all the authority of the reverend gentleman, who had put on his new cloth cloak for the occasion, to get the ice-cream and other refreshments served without disturbance.

'This is all right!' said the mayor approvingly, with his nose in his glass. 'When they want me for peace's sake, they'll always find me ready.'

The delegate said that he had indeed come as a reconciliator, with the olive-twig in his mouth, like Noah's dove; and doing it zealously he went round distributing smiles and hand-shakes, and he kept saying: 'You gentlemen will do me the favour of taking chocolate with me in the vestry, on the day of the festivities.'

'Let us leave out the festivities,' said the assistant-magistrate. 'If we don't, there'll be more trouble.'

'There'll be more trouble if this impudence goes on, and a man isn't allowed to amuse himself as he pleases, spending his own money,' exclaimed Bruno the wainwright.

'I wash my hands of it. The government orders are precise. If you hold festivities, I shall send for the carabiniers. I want order.'

'I will be responsible for order,' replied the mayor sententiously, knocking on the ground

with his umbrella, and staring around at the company.

'Bravo! As if everybody wasn't aware that you and your brother-in-law Bruno are hand-and-glove,' snapped back the assistant-magistrate.

'And you go contrary out of spite, because of that fine for the washing which you've never got over.'

'Gentlemen! Gentlemen!' the delegate kept pleading. 'This will get us nowhere.'

'We'll make a revolution, we will!' shouted Bruno, throwing up his fists in the air.

Luckily the priest had put the glasses and cups aside, quietly and unobserved, and the verger had dashed off to dismiss the band, which, having learned of the arrival of the delegate, was rushing up to welcome him, puffing into the cornets and the clarionets.

'This'll get us nowhere!' muttered the delegate, annoyed because the harvest was already ripe, where he came from, and he looked like losing a lot of time between neighbour Bruno and the assistant-magistrate, who were daggers-drawn. 'What's all this about a fine for the washing?'

'The usual brazen impudence! Now you can't hang a pocket-handkerchief in the window to dry, without their jumping on you and fining you!

The wife of the assistant-magistrate, trusting to her husband's being in office – for up till now there's always been a bit of respect showed to the authorities – used to dry her week's washing on the little terrace – you know, her bit of a wash! But now, with the new law, it's a mortal sin, and even dogs and fowls are forbidden, and all the other animals which, if I may say so, have always kept the streets clean up to now; and the first time it rains, it's heaven help us if we're not going sunk up to the eyes in all the filth. But the real fact of the matter is that Bruno, who is the assessor, has got a grudge against the assistant-magistrate for giving a decision against him, once.'

The delegate, in order to reconcile these warring spirits, remained shut up like an owl in the confession-box from morning till night, and all the women wanted to be confessed by the bishop's representative, who had plenary absolution for every sort of sin, as if he had been Monsignore in person.

'Father!' said Saridda, her nose against the grating of the confession-box. 'Neighbour Nino causes me to sin, every Sunday, in church.'

'In what way, my daughter?'

'He was supposed to be going to marry me, before there was all this row in the place, but now it's broken off he goes and stands near the high

altar to look at me and make game of me with his pals, all the time during Holy Mass.'

Then, when the reverend gentleman tried to touch the heart of Neighbour Nino:

'It's her who turns her back on me every time she sees me, as if I was a beggar,' replied the peasant.

But as a matter of fact, if Miss Saridda was crossing the square on a Sunday, it was he who pretended to be absolutely taken up with the sergeant, or some other consequential person, and wouldn't so much as notice her. Saridda was up to the eyes in work, making little lanterns of coloured paper, and she arrayed them all there on the window-sill in his face, pretending she was setting them out to dry. Once when they were both taking part in a baptism, they didn't so much as nod to one another, as if they had never seen one another before, and Saridda flirted instead with the man who had stood godfather to the girl-child.

'Godfather for working your guts out!' sneered Nino. 'Godfather to a girl! When a woman's born, even the rafters of the roof give way.'

And Saridda, pretending to be talking to the midwife: 'Things aren't always bad when they seem bad. Sometimes when you think you've lost your treasure on earth, you come to thank God for

it. God and Saint Pascal; and before you can really know a person, you've got to eat seven pecks of salt' – or else: 'You've got to take the good with the bad, nothing's worse than fretting for things that aren't worth it. When one Pope dies, they make another.'

Or else: 'Babies are born as fate makes them, and the same with marriage; you'd far better marry a man as really cares for you and hasn't got any other designs on you, even if he's got no money, nor land, nor mules, nor anything.'

In the square a drum sounded: the middle drum.

'The mayor says there'll be festivities,' buzzed the crowd.

'I'll fight it till the end of time! I'll spend the shirt off my back, and make myself as poor as Job, but that five-shilling fine I'm not going to pay, no! not if I have to leave the lawsuit in my will.'

'Oh, blazing hell! what sort of a festival do they think they'll make if we're all going to starve this year!' cried Nino.

Since the month of March not a drop of rain had fallen, and the sickly yellow crops, which crackled like tinder, 'were dying of thirst.' Bruno the cartwright, however, declared that when Saint Pascal had been round in procession, it would rain

for sure. But what did he care about rain, if he was a wagon-builder, and all the other tannery fellows of his party the same! . . . But they did indeed carry round Saint Pascal in procession, to east and to west, and they stood him on the hill facing the land, to bless the fields, one sultry, overcast day in May; one of those days when the peasants tear their hair before their 'burnt' fields, and the ears of corn bend down as if really they were dying.

'Saint Pascal!' shouted Nino, spitting into the air and running like a madman through his crops. 'You've ruined me, Saint Pascal! You've left me nothing but my sickle to cut my throat with.'

In the upper quarter of the village there was desolation, one of those long years when the famine begins in June, and the women stand in the doorways unkempt and idle, staring fixedly in front of them. When Miss Saridda heard that Neighbour Nino's mule was being sold in the square, to pay the rent of his land, which had yielded nothing, she felt her anger evaporate in an instant, and sent her brother Turi in all haste and anxiety with the bit of money which she had laid aside, to help him.

Nino was in a corner of the square, his eyes abstracted and his hands in his pockets, while they

were selling his mule, in all its gay little tassels and its new halter.

'I want nothing from you,' he replied surlily. 'I've still got arms to work with, please God! A nice saint, that Saint Pascal, what?'

Turi turned away so as not to start a row, and went off. But the truth was, folks were exasperated, now that Saint Pascal had been carried in procession to east and to west, with this grand result. Worst of all was that many from the San Rocco quarter had brought themselves to the point of accompanying the procession, beating themselves like donkeys, and wearing the crown of thorns, for love of their crops. So that now they were saying all the insulting things possible, and had come to such a pitch that the bishop's delegate had had to clear out on foot and without any music, as he had come.

The assistant-magistrate, to get a smack back at the wainwright, telegraphed that the populace was roused and public safety in danger; so that one fine day they woke up to learn that the militia had arrived during the night, and anybody who wanted could go and see them in the stable-yard.

But others said: 'They have come because of the cholera. Down in the city people are dying like flies.'

The apothecary put the padlock on his shop,

and the doctor fled the first, so that they shouldn't fell him like an ox, later.

'It won't be anything,' said the few remaining inhabitants of the village, those who had not been able to flee away into the country. 'Blessed Saint Rocco will guard his own village, and the first person we find straying round at night, we'll put an end to him.' [1]

And even the people of the lower quarter had climbed up barefoot to the church of Saint Rocco. Nevertheless, a little while, and then the dead began to fall like those big drops which announce a thunderstorm, and of one dead man the people said he was a pig, and had killed himself gorging a bellyful of prickly pears, of another they said he had come in from the country after dark. In fact, the cholera had come, and come badly, in spite of the soldiers, and right under Saint Rocco's nose, and notwithstanding that an old woman who lived in an odour of sanctity had dreamed that Saint Rocco came to her and said:

'Be not afraid of the cholera, for I will take charge of it, and I am not like that useless fellow, Saint Pascal.'

[1] Cholera was supposed to be carried on the night air, and therefore caught and spread by anyone who walked out after dark. Evil persons were supposed deliberately to walk out at night to spread infection.

Nino and Turi had not met since that affair about the mule; but as soon as the peasant heard that sister and brother were both ill, he hurried to their house, and found Saridda black in the face and hardly recognizable, at the back of the wretched room, next her brother, who, fortunately, was getting better, but who was tearing his hair, not knowing what to do.

'Ah, Saint Rocco!' Nino began to cry; 'I never expected this! Oh, Saridda, don't you know me? It's Nino, whom you used to go out with.'

But Saridda looked at him with eyes so sunken that you needed a lantern to discover them, and Nino had two fountains at his own eyes. – 'Ah, Saint Rocco!' he said. 'This is a worse turn than Saint Pascal ever did me.'

However, Saridda got better, and while she sat in the doorway, her face tied up in a kerchief, and yellow as beeswax, she kept saying to him:

'Saint Rocco has done me a miracle, and you must come with me to carry a candle for his festival.'

Nino, his heart swollen, nodded assent: but meanwhile he too had taken the sickness, and was likely to die. Then Saridda scratched her face, and said she wanted to die with him, and she would cut off her hair and put it in the coffin with him, so

that no one should see her face again while she lived.

'No, no!' replied Nino, from his wasted face. 'Your hair will grow again; but the one who won't see you again will be me, for I shall be dead.'

'A nice miracle Saint Rocco has done for you!' said Turi to him, to console him.

And when they both were convalescent, Nino and Turi, and they stood leaning against the wall, warming themselves in the sun, a long-faced pair, they threw Saint Rocco and Saint Pascal at each other all the time, mockingly.

Once Bruno the wainwright went by, coming home from the country now the cholera was over, and he said:

'We want to make a great festival to thank Saint Pascal for having saved us from the cholera. From now on there'll be no more agitators nor opposition, now that that assistant-magistrate is dead, and has left the lawsuit in his will.'

'Yes, you can make a feast for those who've died,' sneered Nino.

'And what about you? Did Saint Rocco keep you alive, eh?'

'Will you drop it!' Saridda broke in; 'or the cholera will have to come again to make peace!'

BROTHPOT

*

It is as if we were at the Cosmorama, when it's the village feast, and we put our eye to the peep-glass to see the famous characters pass one after the other, Garibaldi and then Victor Emmanuel; so now comes 'Brothpot,' for he too is a famous character, and he looks very well among the rest of the mad folks who have had their wits in their heels instead of their heads, and have done everything that a Christian body shouldn't do, if he wants to eat his bread in blessed peace.

Now if we have to examine the conscience of all the good folks who have got themselves talked about in the farmyard during the gossiping hour after midday meal; and if we must do as the factor does every Saturday evening, when he says to one: 'How much is due to you for your day-work?' – and to another: 'What have you done this week?' – we can't pass by 'Brothpot' without having it out with him, what he's been up to, and a nasty piece of work it is, and folks gave him that pretty nickname because of that ugly business, you know what I mean.

We all know that jealousy is a defect everybody suffers from; it makes the young cocks tear one another's feathers out, before they get their crests, and makes mules let out kicks in the stable. But when a person has never had that vice

and has always bowed his head in blessed peace, Saint Isidore defend us! then you don't see why he should go off his head all of a sudden, like a bull in the month of June, and do absolutely mad things, like somebody in a blind frenzy with toothache, for such things are just like your teeth, which cost you a martyrdom enough to drive you mad while they're coming, and then afterwards don't hurt you any more, and are good to chew your food with, and he had chewed his food so well that he'd laid on a paunch, like a gentleman, and looked a very priest; for which reason people called him 'Brothpot,' because his wife Venera kept a full pot going for him, with Don Liborio.

He had wanted to marry Venera at any cost, though she hadn't a thing to bless herself with, and his only capital was his two arms, with which he earned his bread. In vain did his mother, poor thing, keep telling him: 'You leave that Venera alone, she's not your sort; she wears her shawl half-way back on her head, and she shows her feet when she goes down the street.' Old people know better than we do, and we should listen to them for our own good.

But he couldn't forget that little shoe and those bold eyes which hunted for a husband from under her head-shawl; therefore he took her without hearing anything against her, and his mother had

to leave the house where she'd lived for thirty years, because mother-in-law and daughter-in-law together in one house are like two wild mules at the same manger. The daughter-in-law, with that plaintive little mouth of hers, said so much and behaved in such a way that at last the poor, grumbling old woman had to clear out and go to die in a hovel; and there was a row between the husband and wife every time the month's rent for the hovel had to be paid. And then when the son ran breathless, hearing that they'd brought the *Viaticum* to the little old woman, he couldn't receive her blessing, nor even get the last word from the dying mouth, for the lips were already glued together by death, and the face was all changed, in the corner of the wretched house where twilight was falling, and only the eyes remained alive, that seemed to want to say so many things to him. – 'Eh? Eh?'

Those who don't respect their parents bring on themselves their own misfortune, and come to a bad end.

The poor old woman had died in bitterness because her son's wife had turned out such a bad piece of goods; and God had been good to take her from this world, to remove her to the other world with all she'd got on her stomach against her daughter-in-law, knowing how the creature

had made her son's heart bleed. And as soon as the daughter-in-law was mistress in her own house, with nobody to bridle her, she had carried on in such a fashion that nowadays folks never called her husband anything but by that ugly nickname, and when the thing came to his ears, and he ventured to complain to his wife: – 'Why? do you mean to say you believe it?' she said to him; and he didn't believe it, pleased as punch not to.

He was such a poor-spirited chap, and except in this respect, he did no harm whatsoever to anybody. If you'd have shown him the thing with his own eyes, he'd have said it wasn't true. Either because of his mother's curse Venera had gone out of his heart and he cared for her no more; or else because he was away working in the country all the year round, and only saw her on Saturday nights, she had become disagreeable and unloving towards her husband, and he had ceased to like her; and when we don't like a thing any more, we think nobody else will want it either, and we don't care who has it; and altogether, jealousy was a thing that never entered his head, not if you drove it in with a peg, and for a hundred years he'd have gone himself to fetch the doctor, who was Don Liborio, every time his wife wanted him fetched.

Don Liborio was also his partner, they went halves in a piece of land; they had some thirty sheep in common; they rented pasture-land in their joint names, and Don Liborio gave his own name as guarantee, when they went before the notary. 'Brothpot' brought him the first beans and the first peas, chopped his wood for the kitchen, and trod out his grapes for him in the wine-press; and for his own part he lacked for nothing, neither corn in the bin, nor oil in the jar, nor wine in the barrel; his wife, white and red like an apple, sported new shoes and silk kerchiefs; Don Liborio didn't charge for his visits, and had stood godfather to one of the babies. In short, they were one household, and he called Don Liborio '*Signor compare*,'[1] and he worked conscientiously – you couldn't say a word against 'Brothpot' in this respect – to make the company of the '*Signor compare*' and himself flourish, which had its advantages for him too, and so they were pleased all round, for sometimes the devil's not as black as he's painted.

And then this peace of angels was turned into a turmoil of devils all at once, in one day, in one

[1] *Compare* is the French *compère*, and is used as a term of address, like 'Friend' – or more properly, 'Cousin, coz!' in old English. *Signor compare* is therefore *Monsieur le compère*, or in Shakespearian style, 'Sir Cousin!'

moment, when the other peasants who were working on the arable land sat talking in the shade, at evening, not knowing that 'Brothpot' was on the other side of the hedge, and the talk chanced to turn on him and his wife and the life they led. He had thrown himself down to sleep, and no one knew he was there, which shows that folks are right when they say: 'When you eat, shut the door, and when you're going to talk, look around first.'

This time it really seems as if the devil had given 'Brothpot' a nudge while he was asleep, and whispered in his ear all the nasty things they were saying of him, and which went into his brain like a nail. – 'And that booby "Brothpot," ' they were saying, 'who dances round Don Liborio! and eats and drinks from his dirty leavings, and gets fat as a pig on it!'

He got up as if a mad dog had bitten him, and started off full speed towards the village in a blind fury, the very grass and stones blood-red in his eyes. In the doorway of his house he met Don Liborio, who was just quietly leaving, fanning himself with his straw hat. – 'Hark here! *Signor compare*!' he said to him, 'if I see you in my house again, as sure as God's above, you'll pay for it!'

Don Liborio gazed at him as if he were speaking Turkish, and thought his brain must have

turned with the heat, for really you couldn't imagine 'Brothpot' taking it into his head to be jealous all of a sudden, after he'd kept his eyes shut all that time, and was the best-natured fellow and husband in the world.

'Why, what's amiss to-day, *Compare*?' he asked him.

'What! Why, if I see you again in my house, as true as God's above, you'll pay for it!'

Don Liborio shrugged his shoulders, and went off with a laugh. The other went wildly into the house, and repeated to his wife: 'If I see the *Signor compare* here again, as true as God's above, he'll pay for it!'

Venera stuck her fists on her hips and began to go for him, saying insulting things to him. He kept nodding his head, yes! yes! leaning against the wall like an ox that's got the fly, and wouldn't listen to reason. The children started crying, seeing such an unusual state of affairs. At last his wife took the door-bar and drove him out of the house to get rid of him, and said she was mistress in her own house to do as she pleased and fancied.

'Brothpot' could no longer work on his own land; his mind dwelt always on the same thing, and he had such a sour face you couldn't recognize him. Before the dark fell, on the Saturday evening, he stuck the mattock in the earth and went

off without drawing his week's pay. When he came home with no money, and two hours earlier than usual into the bargain, his wife started abusing him again, and wanted to send him to the square, to buy salted anchovies, because she felt a pricking in her throat. But he wouldn't leave the kitchen, sat there with the baby on his knee, and the poor little thing whimpered and daren't move, her father frightened her so with that face. Venera had got the devil on her back that evening, and the black hen, which was perching on the ladder, kept on cluck-clucking as if something bad was going to happen.

Don Liborio usually called after he'd been his round, before he went to the café to play a game of cards; and that evening Venera said she wanted him to feel her pulse, for she'd felt feverish all day with that tickling in her throat. 'Brothpot' remained quite still, sitting where he was. But as he heard in the little street the slow step of the doctor, who was coming very leisurely, tired a little with visiting his patients, puffing with the heat, and fanning himself with his straw hat, 'Brothpot' got the bar with which his wife had driven him out of the house when he was in her way, and he took his stand behind the door. Unfortunately Venera never noticed him, because at that moment she'd gone into the kitchen to

put an armful of kindling under the boiling pot. The moment Don Liborio set foot in the room, his partner lifted the bar and brought it down with such force just on the back of his neck, that it killed him like an ox, without any need either of doctor or druggist.

And so it was that 'Brothpot' went to end his days in prison.

*

SIGNOR POLIDORI and Signora Rinaldi loved one another – or they thought they loved one another – which on occasion amounts to exactly the same thing; and honestly, if ever love exists on earth, these two were made for one another; Polidori rejoiced in an income of two thousand pounds a year, and the worst possible reputation as a *mauvais sujet*, while Signora Rinaldi was a charming, emotional little thing whose husband slaved his life away so that she should live as if she too possessed an income of two thousand a year. However, not the very slightest breath of scandal had as yet wafted her way, although all the friends of Polidori had passed in review before the proud beauty, with a flower in their button-holes. Now at last the proud beauty had fallen – chance, fate, the will of God, or the will of the devil had plucked her by the skirts.

When we say 'fallen,' we only mean that she had let fall upon Polidori that first languid look, soft and lost, which makes the knees of the serpent tremble as it lies on the watch under the tree of seduction. Headlong downfalls are rare, and they often frighten away the Serpent altogether. Before Signora Rinaldi came down from one bough to another, she wanted to see where she was putting her foot, and she had a thousand

coquettish little ways of pretending she wanted to flee to the highest tips of the tree. For about a month she had been perched upon the bough of epistolary correspondence, a tremulous and dangerous little branch shaken by all the perfumed zephyrs of the sky. – They had begun with the excuse of a book they wanted to borrow or to return, or of a date they wanted to make sure of, and all the rest of it – and the fair one would have liked to remain on that bough for quite a time, twittering gracefully, for women always twitter to a marvel, thus cradled between heaven and earth; Polidori, who had run rather dry, soon became arid, laconic, categorical, most disappointing. The poor little thing closed her eyes and her wings and let herself slip a few twigs lower.

'I didn't read your letter; I'm not going to read it!' she said to him when they met at the last ball of the season, as they were following the file of couples. 'If you don't want to be what I thought you would be, then let me be what I wish to be myself.'

Polidori looked at her with great gravity, twisting his moustache, but frowning a little. The other dancers, who had no reason for loitering talking in the doorway, pushed them towards the ball-room. The woman blushed as if she

had been caught in a private tête-à-tête with him.

Polidori – the serpent – noted that fugitive flush. – 'You know I will obey you in everything,' he replied simply.

The diamond cross on her bosom sparkled suddenly, swelling up in triumph. All that evening Signora Rinaldi danced like a madwoman, passing from one partner to another, drawing after her a swarm of adorers whose eyes were intoxicated with the game, glittering like the gems that clustered on her panting bosom. Then all at once, coming up face to face with her own reflection in one of the great mirrors, she became serious and wouldn't dance any more. She told them all she was tired; and mechanically she looked round for her husband. Of course he was nowhere to be seen! During those ten minutes while she sat weakly upon the sofa, indifferent to the fact that her dress was bunched up unbecomingly, strange fancies passed before her eyes, along with the couples dancing the waltz. Only Polidori was not dancing, nor was he anywhere in sight. 'What sort of a man was he, really?' At last she discovered him sitting in a deserted drawing-room, tête-à-tête with a head of hair that certainly wouldn't have much to say to him, and smiling like a man to whom even smiles are

now indifferent. – She would rather have surprised him with the loveliest woman at the dance, she swore to herself she would. – Polidori took no caution. He rose, eager as usual, and offered her his arm.

And of course, precisely at that moment her husband had to appear on the scene, looking for her. Then, abruptly, as she was adjusting her low-cut dress at the back, with a light shrug of the shoulders she said in a low tone to Polidori, so low that the rustle of the silk almost covered the sound of her voice:

'Very well; to-morrow at nine, in the Park.'

Polidori bowed low and let her pass, radiant and excited, upon the arm of her husband.

Never had a spring morning seemed so mysteriously lovely to Signora Rinaldi, even when she was away in her delightful villa, 'La Brianza,' and never had she looked with such a dreamy eye through the crystal glass of her *coupé*, as when the carriage was rapidly crossing the Piazza Cavour. The sunlight bathed the avenues of the park, fell warm and gilded upon the grass that was just putting forth new green; the sky was of a deep blue. These impressions, all unknown to her, were reflected in her big dark eyes, which were gazing into the distance, she herself did not know

where to, nor at what, as she leaned her hand and her white brow on the cushion. From time to time a shiver made her shrug her shoulders, a shiver of tiredness or of cold.

Hardly had the carriage stopped at the park gates, than she shuddered, and drew back sharply, as if her husband had suddenly looked in at the window. She still hesitated before she got out, letting her hand rest on the handle, thinking vaguely of the new aspect her husband had taken on, in her own mind; then she set foot to earth and lowered her veil; a thick, black, closely-spotted veil, through which her eyes took on a feverish look, and her features a ghostly rigidity. The carriage went away at a walk, noiselessly, as a discreet and well-educated carriage should do.

The park, too, seemed to have wakened before its hour, and to be surprised at starting its day so soon. Men in shirt-sleeves were washing it and combing it, making its morning toilet. The few people one met looked as if it was the first time they had ever been there at that hour, and now it was only by doctor's orders; they dared to stare curiously at the veil of this early-walking woman and to guess at the perfume on the handkerchief hidden in the muff she pressed so hard on her breast. An old man who was dragging himself slowly along, come forth for the March sun,

stopped, leaning on his shaky stick, to look after her when she had passed, and sadly he shook his head.

Signora Rinaldi came to a halt on the edge of the pool, glancing with cautious glances to right and left, evidently seeking something or somebody. The fresh murmur of the water and the slight humming of the horse-chestnut trees isolated her completely; then she raised her veil a little, and drew from her glove a note smaller than a playing-card. For two or three minutes the water continued to run from the pool, and the trees to vibrate unheeded. The woman's eyes were dazed, avid, moist with dreams.

All at once a hasty step made her lift her head, and the blood swept to her cheeks, as if the burning eyes of the new-comer had touched her face with a kiss. Polidori was going to raise his hat, when she stopped him with an imperceptible look, and passed him by quite near, without noticing him.

She walked on with her head bent, listening to the squeak of the sand under her little boots, not looking ahead. From time to time she put her handkerchief to her mouth, in order to get her breath, as if her heart were greedily consuming all the air around her. The little slow stream accompanied her softly, murmuring under its breath,

putting to sleep her last fears, the shade of the cedar-trees and the silence of the deserted avenue penetrated her vaguely with subtle voluptuousness.

When she stopped in front of the leopard-cage, her breast suddenly stifled and her knees trembled violently, for at her side Polidori had also stopped, and was looking attentively at the superb animal in the cage, with as much curiosity as would have been shown by a peasant straying into that place, and he said to her in a low voice: 'Thanks!'

She did not reply, became very red, and clutched very hard the iron of the railing against which she was leaning her forehead. The sensation was pleasing on her bare hands. Who would have thought that that simple word, uttered by stealth, away there in that lonely place, would have vibrated so deliciously! No! really! It was enough to make you lose your head. She felt herself blushing to the nape of her neck, which he, standing behind her, could see softly flush; a wave of disconnected, tumultuous words rushed to her head, and intoxicated her; she spoke of the ball which she had enjoyed so much; of her husband who had departed at dawn, when she had not even closed her eyes. – 'But I'm not tired! The fresh air does one good, such a lot of good! one feels oneself revive, don't you think?'

'Yes, really!' said Polidori, looking full into her face, but she dared not look up from the ground.

'When I am at Brianza I shall get up every day with the sun. In town we lead impossible lives. But I suppose you gentlemen prefer it.'

She spoke hurriedly, in a voice rather too high and shrill, smiling often and meaninglessly; she was unconsciously grateful that he did not presume to interrupt her, did not presume to mingle his voice with hers. At length Polidori said to her: 'But why wouldn't you receive me at your home?'

She looked into his eyes for the first time since they had been there, surprised, painfully surprised. Up till then, in all that they had done or said the sin had only vaguely glimmered in the atmosphere, or in their intentions, with an exquisite delicacy which her refined senses savoured deliciously, as the leopard stretched out at their feet enjoyed the warm ray of the sun, blinking his large golden pupils, with the same unconscious and voluptuous stretching of the membrane. Recalled so rudely to reality, she pressed her hands and her lips together with a painful expression; her eyes were almost veiled over, following into space the broken charm; and then she turned a bewildered look on him. All Polidori's experience could not help him to discover what she saw

in his face. – 'Ah!' she said at length, in a changed voice. 'It would have been more prudent!'

'You are cruel!' murmured Polidori.

'No!' she replied, raising her head, flushed a little, speaking in a firm tone of voice. 'I am not like all the other ladies, I am not prudent! . . . When I am going to break my neck, I want to enjoy the horror of the precipice below me! All the worse for you, if you don't understand!'

Then he forcibly took possession of her hand, devouring all her palpitating beauty with a thirsty gaze, and stammered:

'Will you? . . . will you?'

She did not reply, and made an effort to withdraw her hand.

Polidori implored her favour in wild, delirious words. He begged of her one thing, made her one prayer, always the same, in changing tones of voice which sought out the woman in the most intimate fibres of all her being; she felt the passion, she felt herself enveloped and devoured, overcome by a mortal and delicious languor; and she tried to free herself, pale, lost, her lips trembling, looking up and down the avenue with eyes wild with terror, writhing under that possessive clasp, trying with all her might, with both her feverish hands, to free herself from that other hand that seemed to burn beneath the glove.

At last, vanquished, beside herself, she stammered:

'Yes! Yes! Yes!' and fled before the approach of some one whose step she could hear on the gravel.

As she left the park she was so overwrought that she almost threw herself under the horses of a carriage. She had had a clandestine meeting! She had made an assignation! And she repeated mechanically to herself: 'That's what it was! That's what it was!' She felt herself filled and intoxicated by the word, and her blanched lips worked without uttering any sound, vaguely savouring her guilt.

She hurried staggering to the first carriage she met, and was driven to her friend Erminia, as if in search of help. Her friend, seeing her face looking so strange, ran to the door of the sitting-room towards her. – 'What's the matter with you?'

'Nothing! Nothing!'

'How lovely you're looking! What is it?'

She, instead of replying, threw herself on her friend's breast and gave her two wild kisses.

Signora Erminia was used to the extravagancies of her dear Maria. They began to look at photographs they had already looked at a hundred times before, and at the flowers which had been standing in their pots on the terrace a month already.

At that moment, by a coincidence, Polidori drove by in his friend Guidetti's phaeton, and he saluted Signora Erminia in the same way as he might have saluted Maria, if he had discovered her cowering among the shrubs, pressing her hands on her breast, that seemed as if it were going to explode. It was a trifling event, but one of those trifles that penetrate deep into the being of a woman, like the point of a needle. So, when she got home, Signora Rinaldi wrote Polidori a long, calm and dignified letter, in which she prayed him to renounce that assignation, the promise of which he had wrung from her in a moment of aberration, a moment which now she remembered with confusion and shame, to her punishment. The contradiction in her feelings was so sincere, that her 'moment of aberration,' after a bare hour had elapsed, seemed infinitely far removed, and if a certain vividness vibrated still between the lines of her letter, it was merely the lament for dreams which faded away so promptly. She made an appeal to his honour and delicacy, to allow her to forget her error and to retain her own self-esteem.

Polidori more or less expected this letter; Signora Rinaldi was too green not to repent ten times before she had really any reason for repenting at all; he did a thing which proved how much that

green little woman had reawakened in him a strong, sharp feeling that had all the freshness of first passions; he sent her back her letter, with this brief reply:

'I love you with all the respect and tenderness which your innocence must inspire. I send you back the letter you wrote me, because I am not worthy of keeping it, and I dare not destroy it. But the imprudence you have committed in writing such a letter is the best proof of the esteem in which you must hold a man of sincere feeling.'

'My husband!' exclaimed Maria, in a strange tone of voice. 'My husband is the happiest of men! The bank-rate rises and falls just to please him, the silk-worms have done well, orders rain in from every side. There's a fifty-per-cent. net profit.'

Erminia stared at her open-mouthed.

'Look here, child, you are feverish. We'll make some tea.'

Two days later, to cure the fever which Erminia had discovered she'd got, she said to her friend:

'I'm going out to the Brianza villa with Rinaldi. Fresh air and oxygen, and quiet, and birds singing, and family life. . . . What a pity we've no children to mind!'

Out there under the thick trees, looking across the wide open country, she felt a curious irritation against that peace which slowly invaded her, against her will, from outside. She often went towards sunset on to the picturesque rocky heights, to ruin her shoes, and to turn her head deliberately with sentimentalities borrowed from novels. Polidori had had the good taste to efface himself gracefully, remaining in Milan without doing anything conventional or theatrical, like a man who can even be courteous in letting himself be forgotten. – Neither could she have said whether she really thought any more about him; but she felt vague yearnings which kept her company in the solitude, folding her softly and persistently in a dangerous inertia, and speaking for her in the solemn silence which surrounded her, and bored her. She relieved herself by writing long letters to her friend Erminia, praising the unknown charms of the country, the tinkling of the Ave Maria bell from the valley, the sunrise upon the mountains; keeping count of the eggs which the housekeeper brought in, and of the wine which would be barrelled this year.

'Tell me about your books and your riding on horseback,' replied Erminia. 'Tell your husband he is not to let you go to the hen-house, or else he must go with you.'

And one fine day, after a spell of silence, Erminia set out, feeling a little anxious, to go and see her dear Maria.

'Did I frighten you?' said the latter. 'Did you think me a forlorn soul on the way to extinction?'

'No! But I thought you were bored. This is a veritable Thebaïd; you could only go to God or the devil here. Come with me, to Villa d'Este. You will let me steal her from you, won't you, Rinaldi?'

'Why, yes. I want her to be gay and have a good time.'

At Villa d'Este there was indeed everything to make her gay: music, dances, regattas, trips on the steamer, excursions in the surroundings of the lake, a crowd of people, exquisite toilets, and Polidori, who was the soul of all the amusements.

Signora Rinaldi didn't know he was there; and Polidori, if he could have foreseen her arrival, would have done her the service of absenting himself from Villa d'Este. But as it was he had accepted certain responsibilities in the organizing of the regatta, and could not depart until this had taken place, without making his departure too conspicuous. He explained all this to Signora Rinaldi, briefly and delicately, the first time he met her in the large drawing-room, making her

in some way veiled excuses, and so sliding back towards the past, with clever ease. When she had overcome the first moments of agitation, Maria felt herself not only boldly recovering her former attitude, but, by a strange reaction, found her heart moved with mad surges of irony against his self-contained reserve. He said he would be leaving immediately after the regatta, because he had promised to join some friends in Piedmont for a great hunt, but truly he regretted leaving so many lovely ladies at Villa d'Este.

'Really!' said Signora Rinaldi, with an odd little laugh. 'Which one do you like best?'

'Why – all of them,' Polidori replied quietly. 'Your friend Erminia, for example.'

Exactly! And she had never thought of it! her friend Erminia was exactly the one above all the rest to turn the gentlemen's heads, with her *piquant* face, and her mocking spirit; caring nothing for the homage to which she was naturally accustomed, being a Marchesa[1] into the bargain – one of those Marchesas who wear their coronet so proudly, that every mortal man would be only too happy to let himself be smitten dead in order to receive one flower from her.

[1] *Marchese* would be literally translated *Marquis*, and *Marchesa Marchioness*. But the title is not so important in Italy, about equivalent to Baronet.

She and her friend Erminia were always together, on the lake, up the mountain, in the drawing-room, under the trees. And now Maria watched her as if she saw her for the first time; studied her, imitated her, and sometimes envied her some trifle or other. Without wishing to, she had discovered that her Erminia, with all her queenly airs, was just a bit of a flirt, that sort of flirting that doesn't mean anything, but in the flame of which nevertheless all the men singe their wings. It was really serious! One couldn't take a step without coming across Polidori, the handsome Polidori, who was courted like a king by all those ladies, and who, without seeming to notice it, was compromising Erminia horribly – the worst of it was that Erminia herself didn't notice it either, though not everybody was going to shut their eyes to the way she laughed at him. Signora Rinaldi thought to herself that if it had not been such an extremely delicate point, she would have made her friend listen to her own laughter, and notice how false it rang.

However, she forced herself to conceal even the pain which all this skirmishing cost her, because she was so fond of Erminia, of course – she cared nothing about Polidori – he was a man, and was playing his own game, anyhow! – and apparently he was one who soon found other conso-

lation. But Erminia had everything to lose in such a game, with a husband like hers, who was so fond of her, and really an ideal husband. Whatever talisman could that fellow Polidori possess, to eclipse in the heart of a beautiful, intelligent, much-courted woman like Erminia a man like the Marchese Gandolfi! Some things are beyond explanation.

Not for anything in the world would she have had a living soul find out what was happening, and she would have liked to shut all her friends' eyes as she shut her own, but honestly, it was enough to make you lose your patience.

'My dear child, it seems as if I didn't know myself any more,' said Erminia to her, laughingly, calmly, as if she were not speaking of herself. 'What's wrong? Sometimes it seems to me I must have offended you without knowing it.'

Ah dear! that poor Erminia, how she deceived herself! – she had done nothing except worry her friend, who saw her thoughtlessly entangling herself in that affair, or rather letting herself get entangled, for that Polidori seemed to spread his net here and there with diabolical cleverness. The things he must have done, that man, to have become such a master-hand! he really must be an out-and-out bad lot.

'Dear Maria,' Erminia said to her one fine day,

with a fine, close kiss, 'it seems to me that that Polidori trots through your thoughts a little oftener than he should. Look out! he's a dangerous individual, for a child like you!'

'Me?' she replied, completely taken aback. 'Me?' – and she could not find another word to say, under the sharp scrutiny of Erminia's eyes.

'All the better! All the better! You gave me a great scare. It's all right then.'

– For a child like me! thought Maria. – Erminia doesn't show me a very great respect, I must say! Some things are really *too* much! –

Signora Rinaldi was adamant to all elegant courtiers, to the *beaux* who hung round at the regular hours, in the walks or during the musical evenings, in fact to all conquistadors in suède gloves. Once when Polidori ventured to make some remark in his own defence, she burst out in a shrill laugh right in his face.

'Oh! Oh!'

He seemed to go pale, even he, at last. Since the rest of the ladies were always buzzing round him like bees, the fault lay with the ladies who spoiled him – then she added:

'Only don't get found out, or I shall be perfectly wretched.'

'On whose account?'

'On yours, on my own . . . and on the other person's – on everybody's account.'

This time he did not let her sarcasm disconcert him, and replied calmly:

'I only mind on your account.'

She would have liked to burst out in his face with another cruel and biting burst of laughter, but the smile died on her lips as she saw the expression which those two words gave to all his features.

'You may insult me,' he replied, 'but you have no right to doubt the feeling which you have roused in my heart.'

Maria dropped her head, beaten.

'Haven't I blindly respected your will, in everything? Have I ever asked you for an explanation? Haven't I foreseen your desires? and haven't I succeeded in giving the impression of having forgotten that which no man on earth could forget from you? And if I have suffered on your account, is there anybody in the world who can say they've seen me suffer?'

He spoke in a calm voice, with a quiet earnestness which gave his reasonable words an irresistible eloquence.

'You! . . .' stammered Maria.

'I!' replied Polidori, 'who love you still, though I never would have told it you.'

She had stopped in her walk, pulling leaves from the shrubs, but now she hurried a few steps away from him, poor child. Polidori did not take a single step in pursuit.

Signora Rinaldi had become all at once melancholy and dreamy. She remained for long hours with her book open at the same page, or with her fingers straying over the keys of the piano, or with her embroidery forgotten in her lap, contemplating the water, the mountains, or the stars. The mirror of the lake gave back all the undefined fumings of her thoughts, and she took an exquisitely voluptuous pleasure in feeling them return and take place again within herself. And so she avoided all gay parties, and preferred to go alone in a boat on the lake, when the mountains threw large green shadows on the water, or when the sunset wistfully expired with lovely stripes of amaranth; then she drew the curtain between herself and the boatmen, and reclining upon the cushions, she enjoyed the sensation of feeling herself cradled on the abyss, almost submerging herself, dipping her hand in the water, feeling her whole self gradually invaded by a mysterious chill; she liked to gaze up deep into the fathomless dark, beyond the stars, and to imagine what it was that was lit up by some tiny point of light

that trembled far off in the dark, on the slope of the mountain. She sought out the grassy walks, the mysterious silence of the woods, or watched the lake when the sun shone on it as on a mirror, or she went out when all the windows of the hotel were shut, and the dew glittered on the grass of the lawns, and the shadows were deep under the huge trees, and the crunching of the gravel under her own feet whispered mysterious messages in her ear; she often went to read or to walk on the banks of the pool, in the remote avenues of the Champs Élysées, when the moon softly trod the lake and kissed her white hands, or when the windows of the drawing-room set big squares of cold light upon the darkness of the avenue, and the music from within sent arcane fancies straying under the great and silent, sleeping shadows outside. Beyond those mysterious shadows, behind these shining windows, the dimmed movement of the festival, thus veiled, took on a fusion of colours, lines and sounds that made it fascinating, something between the Bacchanal and the dance of winged spirits; and then, breathing in sheer giddiness, she stood there with her forehead against the window-glass, the roots of her hair all lightly stirring.

One evening, unexpectedly, she appeared in the middle of a ball like a fascinating vision, more

pale and lovely than ever, and with something in her eyes and upon her mouth which had never been seen there before. The crowd opened almost startled before her; Erminia went to kiss her; a crowd of elegant young men pressed around her to extract the promise of a waltz or a quadrille; she remained motionless for an instant, with the same smile on her lips and those eyes shining like the fireflies of the night outside, seeking something, and when she perceived Polidori, she threw him her handkerchief.

'God save the Queen!' exclaimed Polidori, bending one knee.

'I'll rob you of your partner, shall I?' she said to her dear Erminia. 'I feel I want a waltz terribly, to-night.'

Polidori was one of those dancers whom women strive for with one another, with smiles and taps of the fan on the fingers – when the smile has had too much effect. He had strength and grace, rush and softness at the same time; no one knew as he did how to sweep you away to the foaming spheres of rose-coloured intoxication, with a swoop of his hip, reposing you upon his right arm as upon a cushion of velvet. They said that he alone possessed the exquisite understanding of Strauss, which makes you lose your breath and your head, and that he alone could put into his arm, his

muscles, in all his body the real impetuosity and abandon and ecstasy. – 'I don't want to dance any more! – I don't want you to dance with anybody else!' Maria said to him, as she stood panting, her cheeks red and her eyes a little veiled. And that was all for that evening.

Ah, how triumphant she felt, how her heart danced in her breast as that envied cavalier led her through the admiring crowd! and as she wrapped herself tight in her black shawl, outside in the park, where the noise of the dance came faintly, and fancies arose, straying, formless, but thirsty still. She felt herself a prey to some delicious dream when following on the waltz came a nocturne of Mendelssohn, a nocturne which stroked her on the hair and brow, and between her shoulders, like a fresh and perfumed hand. All at once a dark form came between her and the light which fell from the windows upon the avenue; her dream rose up unexpectedly before her like a shadow. She rose, startled, dismayed, in a tumult, stammering a few disconnected words that meant to say no! no! and she fled back to refuge in the ball-room, hiding in all the noise and the light – the light which made her blink, dazzled, and the noise which gratefully deafened her, left her numbed and smiling, a little stiff and pensive. Erminia caressed her as if she were a

pretty little thing; the other ladies said in one voice that she was really a dear – so surrounded by the most elegant of adventure-hunters, her back to the wall, like a fawn defending itself with its back to a rock, you might almost have said that in her eyes trembled the tears of defeat.

Polidori was the last to assail her, he being the huntsman destined by fate to give her the *coup de grâce*, and he seemed moved to pity of the victim, for he spoke to her with a perfectly grave face about the rain and the weather, and limited himself to courting her for a few moments by asking her with the greatest interest questions of the smallest importance: if she had been for her row on the water, if on the following day she would take her usual morning walk towards the Champs Élysées. She looked into his face without replying at all. He insisted no further.

Erminia had gone to the piano, and everybody was listening attentively to her; Maria had eyes only for her even when she fixed her gaze vaguely in the dream of the unknown, because it was she, Erminia, who evoked the dream in her and fascinated her; the whole room, glittering and hot, trembled with harmony. It was that fatal moment when the heart violently dilates within the breast, and overcomes the reason.

Maria quivered from head to foot, lying abandoned in an arm-chair, with her hand to her brow, and Polidori murmured over her head burning words which made the little curls on her white neck tremble like animate things. The poor little thing saw nothing any more, neither the glittering room, nor the excited throng, nor the bright and penetrating eyes of Erminia, and she abandoned herself to what she believed was her destiny, having no strength left, her eye gone glassy, like a dying woman.

'Yes! Yes!' she murmured on her breath.

Polidori went softly away, to allow her to collect herself, and went to smoke his cigarette in the billiard-room.

The breeze from the lake made the flames of the candles on her mantelpiece flutter the whole night long, for she lay and looked at herself for hours, in the looking-glass, without ever seeing herself, her eyes fixed and burning with fever.

Signor Polidori had already been walking for some time in the deserted avenue at an early hour that reminded him of going out shooting; he took no further heed of the enchanting landscape than to pierce it with long, impatient glances. From time to time he stopped to listen, and lifted his head just like a greyhound. At last he heard the

light and timid tread of some elegant wild creature. Maria came forward, and the moment she perceived Polidori, although she knew he would be there, she stopped dead, dismayed, motionless as a statue. Her fine Arab profile seemed to cut her close veil. Polidori, bareheaded, bowed deeply, without daring to touch her hand, nor to offer her a single word.

She, panting, confused, felt by instinct how embarrassing the silence was. – 'I am tired!' she murmured, in a broken voice. Emotion suffocated her.

So saying, she continued to advance along the avenue which wound its way up the mountain, and he went beside her, without saying anything, both of them overcome by a strong emotion. Thus they arrived at a sort of funeral monument, where Maria stopped all at once, leaning her shoulders against the rock, her face in her hands. At last she burst into tears. Then he took her hands, and softly pressed his lips to them, like a slave. When he felt that at last the trembling of those poor little hands was subsiding, he said to her softly, but with ineffable tenderness in his voice:

'Why are you afraid of me?'

'You don't despise me now?' said Maria. 'You don't, do you?'

He clasped his hands in a gesture of ardent passion, and exclaimed:

'I? Despise you? I?'

Maria raised her unhappy face and looked at him with big eyes, and with the tears still on her cheeks she murmured a confusion of senseless words: – 'It is the first time! – I swear to you! – I swear to you, Signore!'

'Oh!' burst out Polidori. 'Why say that to me? – to me, who love you? – who love you so much!'

Those words quivered like something alive inside her; for a moment she pressed them under her hands deep into her breast, shutting her eyes; but instantly they flamed in her face, as if they had circulated through her blood in a flash, and had set fire to all her veins. – 'No! No!' she repeated. 'I have been wrong, I have been very wrong! I've been foolish. Believe me, Signore! I am not guilty; I have only been foolish; I am really only a child, they all say so, even my own friends.' – The poor little thing tried to smile, looking around wildly. 'I can't bear it if you despise me!'

'Maria!' cried Polidori.

She shuddered, and drew back suddenly, terrified at the sound of her own name. Polidori, leaning before her humbly, tenderly, lovingly, said to her:

'How lovely you are! and how lovely life is, while it holds such moments!'

Maria passed her hands over her eyes and hair, confused, dazed, and sank down upon herself as she repeated almost mechanically: 'If you knew how awful it was, coming down the avenue! that avenue that I walk in every day! I would never have thought it could be like that! Truly! I never would have thought it!' – And she smiled, to gain courage, not daring to look at him, sunk back against the rock which supported her, pulling her gloves up her arms, which still were quivering a little, and she kept on babbling like a child which sings down the street at night because it is frightened . . . 'I have been unfortunate! yes, I know I'm a crazy creature. I have mad yearnings for that other world, which probably is nothing but a dream-world, and a dream of sick people even at that! Sometimes I feel I am stifled in the continual reasonableness of this world we live in; I want more air, I want to go high up, to breathe where it is more pure and blue. It's not my fault if I can't think it is only I who am mad, if I can't just accept life as it is, if I don't understand the things that matter so much to the other people. No! it's not my fault. I've done what I could. I am several centuries behind the times. I ought to have been born in the time of the knight-errants.'

– Her faint smile had a melancholy sweetness, and she let herself go without knowing it to the spell which she herself was helping to create. – 'Happy you, who can live as you please!'

'I want to live at your feet.'

'All your life?' she asked, laughing.

'All my life.'

'Don't you think you'd get tired?' she answered gaily. – 'You must often get tired,' Maria repeated, with a look which she tried to make bold and sure.

Polidori found her delicious in her embarrassment; only the embarrassment lasted a little too long.

Before coming to that rendezvous, even as she was passing through the door, Maria had experienced all the pungent emotions which arise from curiosity concerning the unknown, from the attraction of wickedness, and from the spell of that excitement which ran in her veins with mysterious and irresistible thrills; with such a confusion of emotions and ideas, impulses and terror, that she had been driven to plunge into the unknown against her will, in a sort of somnambulism, without knowing precisely what she was about to do. If Polidori had stretched out his arms to her, the first moment he saw her, probably she would have beaten her head desperately

against the rock upon which she now rested in soft abandon. Now, encouraged by seeing at her feet that much-contested and envied man, she felt a delicious sensation from the contact of the velvety moss against her shoulders, caressing her as the tender and fervent words he was saying caressed her ear, and she felt herself softly pervaded by it all, as by a delightful languor. He was so gentle, so respectful, and so good to her! he didn't so much as touch the tips of her fingers, and was content with breathing upon her the ardent breath of that passion which kept him prostrate before her as before an idol. And all without a suggestion of wrong, lovely, lovely! Then little by little Polidori had taken her hand, and she, without noticing, had let him have it. He, too, was sincerely and deeply moved at that moment, and sought for her eyes with a thirsty and intoxicated gaze. Without seeing him, she felt the flame of his eyes, and dared not lift her own, and the smile died on her lips; she had not the strength to draw back her hands, in spite of several efforts, for each time the sound of his voice lulled her mind and her conscience softly upon its sweetness, and carried her into an anguish of ecstasy; Polidori could never finish gazing upon her as she sat in that attitude, abandoned upon herself, her arms hanging inert, her face lowered and her breast

panting; and at last he exclaimed in a burst of passion, throwing out his arms to her convulsively:

'You're so beautiful, Maria, and I love you so much!'

She drew herself up at once, serious and rigid, as if she heard those words said to her for the first time.

'You know I love you! that I've loved you a long time!' he repeated.

She did not reply; curving all her body backwards, her head lowered, watching suspiciously, frowning, moving her hands mechanically, as if she wanted to fight something off, her lips pressed close and pale. All at once, raising her eyes to his convulsed face, and meeting his eyes, she uttered a stifled cry, and drew back right to the entrance of that sort of sepulchral monument, white with terror, defending herself with outstretched arms from that passion which overwhelmed her now that she saw what it was, looking him in the face for the first time, stammering:

'Signore! . . . Signore! . . .'

He repeated, beside himself, pleading, imploring her spell-bound in a delirium of love:

'Maria! Maria!'

'No!' she repeated, lost. 'No!'

Polidori stopped all at once, and passed his

hand two or three times over his eyes and brow in desperation. Then he said in a hoarse voice:

'You never loved me, Maria?'

'No! No! Let me go!' she repeated, when Polidori had already drawn away. 'Signore! . . . Signore! . . .'

Polidori was overcome in spite of himself by the powerful emotion of that instant, and trembled as much as she, poor ingenuous thing.

'Listen! We've done wrong,' she repeated, in a convulsed voice. 'We've been wrong! – I swear to you, I swear to you – we have done wrong.' And she felt herself fainting.

At that moment, unexpectedly, they heard a voice among the shrubs, and the footsteps of some one approaching hesitated a little way off, and stopped.

'Maria!' called a voice that was so changed that neither of the two recognized it. 'Maria!'

Polidori, from moment to moment reassuming his former self, took Maria sharply by the arm and pushed her into the avenue from whence the voice had come, and in an instant had himself disappeared in the windings of the burial-place. When Maria got to the avenue she found herself face to face with Erminia, who also was pale, and trying in vain to hide her anxiety, wanting to explain something, assuming an air of indiffer-

ence. Maria looked at her with big eyes whose expression was very strange.

'What do you want?' she said simply, in a dull voice, after a few moments of silence that seemed an eternity.

'Oh, Maria!' cried Erminia, throwing her arms round her neck.

And that was all. They went back side by side, without saying a word, and with heads bent. When they were in sight of the hotel, they both at once assumed a conventional manner.

'Lucia told me you had gone down into the garden,' said Erminia, 'and so I thought I'd take an early walk as well, giving myself the excuse of coming to meet you.'

'Thanks!' replied Maria simply.

'But it's getting too late to walk – the sun is already hot.'

Maria indeed had got a touch of sunstroke, and was dazed and numbed. She was thoroughly shaken and upset. Sometimes she mechanically clutched her hands, as if to regain herself, or as if seeking something, some touch of the past, and she closed her eyes. When she met curious glances, and all glances seemed curious to her, even those of her friend, she flushed red. She remained lurking in her apartment as much as possible, and thus many thought she had left.

The mere sight of Erminia made her frown darkly, and gave something almost sinister to her expression. She was, however, sufficiently a woman of the world to know how to hide her feelings more or less, no matter what they were. Erminia, who was not deceived by her, felt really hurt.

'I'm always your good friend Erminia, you know that,' she said to her, whenever she got a chance, taking her two hands affectionately. 'I am always your friend Erminia, the same as ever, as I have always been.'

Maria smiled from her lips only, kind but abstracted.

'You are wrong, you know!' repeated Erminia. 'You are mistaken! – you are mistaken if you think I don't like you better than before.'

Indeed she took almost a maternal care of Maria, a care which often annoyed the object of it, who almost seemed to see in it a discreet and loving *surveillance*. One day Erminia found her just beginning a letter, and asked her if her husband had written; the question came so inopportunely that Maria almost blushed, as if she had been on the point of having to tell a lie.

'No. My husband doesn't spoil me so much. He's too busy.'

'Yes, he *is* too busy,' replied Erminia, without

heeding the irony of the reply. 'He is seriously busy. Swamped in business, poor man!'

'What are you talking about? if business is his passion, his only passion?'

'Do you mean it?' asked Erminia, fixing her sharp eyes on her friend's face.

'Why, yes,' replied Maria, with a small smile that pulled down the corners of her mouth; then she added, as if correctively: 'But I've no reason to be jealous. My husband doesn't gamble, doesn't go to the club, he's not a sportsman, he doesn't care for horses, and he reads nothing but the Stock Exchange lists – nothing, I assure you.'

'It is true: he only loves you.'

Maria nodded with a little artificial smile; she didn't say anything for a while; then, bitterly:

'You are right. I'm an ungrateful creature even!'

'No! you're not an ungrateful creature; you're a spoilt little woman whose head has been turned, and you see some things wrong, and others you don't see at all. Your husband's only mistake is that he hasn't opened your eyes to the great fondness he feels for you.'

'Luckily he's commissioned you to tell me.'

'Yes, because I'm fond of you too, I am! Truly I am. Shall we leave to-morrow?'

'Oh-h!'

'You'd be sorry?'

'No; only the suddenness of it surprises me a little; it's like they do in the comedy, for the girl who has just started a *romance*.'

'Excuse me, then. I suggested you should come along with me. . . . But if you prefer to stay. . . .'

'No, I want to come. Only I'd like to find a plausible excuse, so as not to start all the inquisitive people believing in the *romance*, when they see our luggage ordered in such a hurry.'

'The excuse is ready found, all the more as it's the real reason for going. I'm going to meet my mother-in-law, who arrives to-morrow from Florence, and you naturally come with me, so as not to be left alone at Villa d'Este.'

'Splendid! And since we're going, the sooner the better. I'd like to go with the first train.'

They did indeed leave quite early. Maria's heart almost burst as she passed in front of those closed windows, on which the shadows of the great trees were still sleeping, and as she left that avenue where she had so often wandered dreaming.

The lake, in the peaceful morning hour, had a singular charm, and each detail in the landscape seemed alive, seemed to have lived with her, and

was imprinted on the depths of her heart. As soon as she was in the train she opened the book she had brought on purpose, and hid her face and the tears in her eyes. Erminia wisely took no notice, and let her enjoy to the full the voluptuous pain of breaking off.

At the station Erminia's carriage was waiting, and she would take her friend home first. – 'Rinaldi isn't in Milan,' she had said to Maria in response to her friend's look of surprise at finding no one to meet her. 'He has gone to Rome.'

'Without writing to me! without letting me know!' murmured Maria.

'Yes, he's written. My husband will have the letter.'

But she stopped at once, frightened by the alarm which was deepening on Maria's face. – 'But sooner or later,' she said, 'you'll have to know. Rinaldi has hurried to Rome to see to his business affairs . . . you know how it is . . . when you're not on the spot they don't always go as they should. Your husband was worried. But when he gets there himself it'll be all right.'

'What has happened?' stammered Maria, all the more upset at the news because it came just when it did. 'What has happened?'

'Don't you worry; your husband is all right.

It happens that one of the men who owes him a lot of money has gone bankrupt. It's all about money.'

'Ah!' said Maria, breathing freely; and a shadow of irony came back on to her face.

Her husband seemed to be behaving in a way to justify her bitter little smile. He was so deep in his business he had no thought for anything else in the world. Several days went by without a word from him. At last there came a telegram which alarmed his partner severely, so that he set off at once for Rome.

'Oh!' Maria exclaimed, in that biting tone which had become habitual to her during the last week. 'It really must be a serious business! But then business is always serious for my husband. But it means that my place at this moment is with my husband. He doesn't tell me so; but of course he doesn't write to me out of delicacy. But since his partner has gone off to join him, I'd better go too.'

In spite of her mocking manner, she was surprised and really troubled when she saw that Erminia approved. For a moment a dark thought came into her mind and made her go pale; but immediately she began to laugh nervously again, as before.

'If my husband hadn't trained me to leave him

alone in his affairs, there might really be something alarming in it!'

'How alarming? a journey to Rome? in this fine weather, and through the loveliest country!'

'Yes, that's true. It will be almost like going for a holiday. Besides, Rome or the Brianza villa, it's all the same. Shan't you go back to Villa d'Este?'

'No.'

'Oh!'

'I'm going with my mother-in-law to Florence.'

'What a pity! . . . I mention Villa d'Este because there must be a brilliant crowd there just now. You can tell your husband's mother she's got a wonderful daughter-in-law.'

The same evening she left for Rome; but she was in an inexplicably feverish state, and her anxiety increased as she drew near the end of her journey, which seemed interminable. She found her husband so changed in that short time that at first sight of him she was frightened. Rinaldi clasped her hands with effusion; but he seemed more than surprised at her unexpected arrival. He was so upset he could do nothing but repeat: 'Why did you come? Why did you come?'

'I'd never seen my husband like that!' said Maria to Erminia, a few months later, the first

time they met after she had got back to Milan. 'I never thought the face of the man could make such an impression on one, nor that he ever could say the things he did say, nor that the sound of his voice could go through you to your very soul. I'd never seen him like that before!'

Even she was a good deal changed, poor little Maria! She had a faint line between her brows, that furrowed subtly into the white purity of her forehead, and sometimes spread like a shadow over all her face.

'Yes, it was a terrible time. I can still feel it inside me like a black knot in my chest, like a painful stitch that I'm almost fond of, it's so deeply rooted in me. It's left a mark on me for ever, and you couldn't take it out without injuring me. Ah, what a moment, when I found my husband with the pistol in his hand! What a moment! And however did I have the strength to cling to him to prevent him killing himself! – he was going to kill himself, he told me later. He hadn't the courage to tell me he couldn't buy me any more horses, nor a box at the Scala, nor jewels, nothing! and he cried like men do when they've never cried before, with tears that burn a track in your soul. Oh, how many things went through my mind in that moment when I felt beating against my heart a heart that was beating still for me, and

only for me! and against which I hid my burning face! . . . It is awfully kind of you to come and see me now I've moved up to the fourth floor. It is awfully kind of you.'

'But I must say it's not very kind of you, Maria my dear, making me these speeches of thanks. You can't ever have had a very high opinion of me!'

'No! But then what can you expect! when you've been through all that I've been through! . . . and then the worst of misfortune is that it makes one unjust. . . . Imagine what it would have been like if I'd heard that I was a widow! . . . I felt rather like that when I saw that nobody remembered that I was alone and helpless, away there in Rome . . . nobody, of all those who had professed so much friendship! I don't complain though, you know that. Because I was wrong about you, and I still love you!'

She hesitated a moment, then flung her arms round Erminia's neck impetuously.

'Forgive me! Forgive me! I was unjust to you – to everybody. I've been wrong so often!'

Erminia clasped her closely, herself deeply moved, but she did not speak.

'I was crazy!' Maria murmured after another moment's hesitation, her face pressed against Erminia's breast. 'I don't think of him any more.'

'I never did think of him,' said Erminia conclusively, laughing in her usual way, but with great sincerity of expression and voice.

Maria lifted her head sharply, and looked at her friend with two flaming eyes. 'You never thought of him? never?'

'Never.'

'Then – why, then, neither have I, I never loved him, no! No! truly! Never!'

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GAUGIN, Paul

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The confessions of genius are usually startling ; and Gaugin's *Journals* are no exception. He exults in his power to give free rein to his savage spirit, tearing the shawl from convention's shoulders with a gesture as unscrupulous as it is Rabelaisian.

GIBBS, J. Arthur

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GOBINEAU, Le Comte de

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GOSSE, Sir Edmund

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GRAHAM, Stephen

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In his own experiences as a soldier Stephen Graham has conserved the half-forgotten emotions of a nation in arms. Above all, he makes us feel the stark brutality and horror of actual war, the valour which is more than valour.

HAMILTON, Mary Agnes

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Although not a formal biography, being more concerned with the mind of the man, as revealed in his writing, than with the external incidents of his life, it sets both Carlyle and Jane Welsh before the reader in an outline that is alive and challenging.

HASTINGS, A. C. G.

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Written with great sincerity and with equal modesty, it is the record of eighteen long years spent on the confines of the Empire, a book devoid of bombast, and without the cheap expression of opinion of the average globe-trotter.

HEARN, Lafcadio

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The marvellous tales which Mr. Hearn has told in this volume illustrate the wonder-living tendency of the Japanese. The stories are of goblins, fairies and sprites, with here and there an adventure into the field of unveiled supernaturalism.

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Mr. Hearn has written many books about Japan ; he is saturated with the essence of its beauty, and in this book the light and colour and movement of that land drips from his pen in every delicately conceived and finely written sentence.

KOKORO *No.* 172

The heart, the inner meaning—that is the meaning of the Japanese word of the title. And it is the heart and inner meaning of Japan that Lafcadio Hearn recorded in the clear, musical prose of his essays.

HEMINGWAY, Ernest. Author of *A Farewell to Arms*

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HEYWARD, Du Bose

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This fascinating book gives a vivid and intimate insight into the lives of a group of American negroes, from whom Porgy stands out, rich in humour and tragedy.

HILDEBRAND, Arthur Sturges

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This book gives the real feeling of life on a small cruising yacht; the nights on deck with the sails against the sky, long fights with head winds by mountainous coasts to safety in forlorn little island ports, and constant adventure free from care.

HINDUS, Maurice

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This is a very human book. It deals with one of the most exciting periods in the history of the Russian village—a period of universal heart-searching with peasants as ever giving free vent to their thoughts and troubles. Like *Red Bread*, the scene of *Broken Earth* is laid in the author's native village.

HOULT, Norah

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HOUSMAN, Laurence

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HUDDLESTON, Sisley

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HUDSON, W. H.

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An important collection of letters from the naturalist to his friend, literary executor and fellow author, Morley Roberts, covering a period of twenty-five years.

JEWETT, Sarah Orne

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JOHNSON, Samuel

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'To Scotland however he ventured ; and he returned from it in great good humour, with his prejudices much lessened, and with very grateful feelings of the hospitality with which he was treated ; as is evident from that admirable work his *Journey to the Western Islands of Scotland*.' BOSWELL

JONES, Henry Festing

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Shortly before his death, Mr. Festing Jones chose out *Diversions in Sicily* for reprinting from among his three books of mainly Sicilian sketches and studies. These chapters, as well as any that he wrote, recapture the wisdom, charm and humour of their author.

JOYCE, James

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KALLAS, Aino

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KOMROFF, Manuel

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When Marco Polo arrived at the court of the Great Khan, Pekin had just been rebuilt. Kublai Khan was at the height of his glory. Polo rose rapidly in favour and became governor of an important district. In this way he gained first-hand knowledge of a great civilisation and described it with astounding accuracy and detail.

LAWRENCE, A. W., edited by

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In addition to the well-known stories of Bristow and Scurry, a soldier and a seaman, who were forcibly Mohammedanised and retained in the service of Mysore till their escape after ten years, extracts are given from an officer's diary of his close imprisonment at Seringapatam.

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In 1816 a French warship ran aground upon an African reef. There was no immediate danger, yet mismanagement and aimless panic developed a series of savageries perhaps unequalled in men of this civilisation. After the desertion of comrades and the wanton destruction of food and drink, follow suicide, murder and cannibalism, mutiny and calculated massacre, on a half-submerged and broken raft.

LAWRENCE, D. H.

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This volume of travel vignettes in North Italy was first published in 1916. In *Twilight in Italy* will be found all the freshness and vigour of outlook which made the author a force in literature.

LAWSON, Henry

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LESLIE, Shane

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LITHGOW, William

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LUBBOCK, Percy

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'To say that this is the best book on the subject is probably true ; but it is more to the point to say that it is the only one.' *Times Literary Supplement.*

LYND, Robert

BOOKS AND AUTHORS. Critical essays *No.* 135

Among the modern writers we have appreciations of Mr. Max Beerbohm, Mr. Arnold Bennett and Mr. H. M. Tomlinson, while Herrick, Keats, Charles Lamb and Hawthorne are a few of the classical writers who are criticised in the book

MACDONALD, The Rt. Hon. J. Ramsay

WANDERINGS AND EXCURSIONS. Essays *No.* 132

Mr. Ramsay MacDonald has been a wide traveller and reader, and has an uncommon power of bringing an individual eye—the eye of the artist—to bear upon whatever he sees.

MACHEN, Arthur

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'As a literary artist, Mr. Arthur Machen has few living equals, and that is very far indeed from being his only, or even his greatest, claim on the suffrages of English readers.' *Sunday Times*

MASEFIELD, John

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MASON, Arthur

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MAUGHAM, W. Somerset

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Intensely dramatic stories in which the stain of the East falls deeply on the lives of English men and women. On passion and its culminating tragedy he looks with unmoved detachment, ringing the changes without comment and yet with little cynicism.

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MENCKEN, H. L.

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MENCKEN, H. L.

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'What a master of the straight left in appreciation ! Everybody who wishes to see how common sense about books and authors can be made exhilarating should acquire this delightful book.' *Morning Post*

MEREZHKOVSKY, Dmitri

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Translated from the Russian by NATALIE DUDDINGTON.
With an Introduction by MARY AGNES HAMILTON *No.* 156

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MEYNELL, Alice

WAYFARING. Essays *No.* 133

'Her essays have the merit of saying just enough of the subject, and they can be read repeatedly. The surprise coming from that combined grace of manner and sanity of thought is like one's dream of what the recognition of a new truth would be.' Some of the essays so described by George Meredith are here collected in book-form for the first time.

MILES, Hamish

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Byron's poetry, the core of his legend and so often the mirror of his life, is too often left unread. This selection, which includes some examples of his prose, is designed to show not only how his verse reflects the drama of Byron's own life but also how brilliantly Byron diagnosed the evils of the post-war era in which his stirring life was spent.

MITCHISON, Naomi

CLOUD CUCKOO LAND. A Novel of Sparta *No.* 88

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MITCHISON, Naomi

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MONTAGU, Lady Mary Wortley

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In the words of Tobias Smollett: 'These *Letters* will show, as long as the English language endures, the sprightliness of her wit, the solidity of her judgment, the elegance of her taste, and the excellence of her real character. They are so bewitchingly entertaining, that we defy the most phlegmatic man on earth to read one without going through with them.'

MOORE, George

CONFESSIONS OF A YOUNG MAN *No.* 76

'Mr. Moore, true to his period and to his genius, stripped himself of everything that might stand between him and the achievement of his artistic object. He does not ask you to admire this George Moore. He merely asks you to observe him beyond good and evil as a constant plucked from the bewildering flow of eternity.' HUMBERT WOLFE

MORLEY, Christopher

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Mr. Morley is an author who is content to move among his fellows, to note, to reflect, and to write genially and urbanely; to love words for their sound as well as for their value in expression of thought.

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'Mr. Morley is a master of consequent inconsequence. His humour and irony are excellent, and his satire is only the more salient for the delicate and ingenuous fantasy in which it is set.' *Manchester Guardian*

MURRAY, D. L.

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Mr. Murray's sub-acid Tory satisfaction enlivens the historical essays, his sanity and penetration make memorable the books he discusses, while the unfailing charm of his style suffuses the reader of his miscellaneous pieces with mood and sentiment such as might be evolved from the glow of candles upon crinolines.

MURRAY, Max

THE WORLD'S BACK DOORS. Adventures. With an Introduction by HECTOR BOLITHO *No.* 61

His journey round the world was begun with about enough money to buy one meal, and continued for 66,000 miles. There are periods as a longshoreman and as a sailor, and a Chinese guard and a night watchman, and as a hobo.

MURRY, J. Middleton

THE EVOLUTION OF AN INTELLECTUAL *No.* 62

These essays were written during and immediately after the Great War. The author says that they record the painful stages by which he passed from the so-called intellectual state to the state of being what he now considers to be a reasonable man.

MURRY, J. Middleton

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These essays are an attempt to make plain some of the underlying motives of great literature. Shakespeare holds the chief place in the book. In the essays on *Tchehov* and *Russian Literature* ; on *Herman Melville* and *American Poetry* ; on *Marcel Proust*—the same fundamental pre-occupation, to discover *la vraie vie*, is shown at work.

NICHOLS, Beverley

TWENTY-FIVE. An Autobiography *No.* 147

'I have read every word of it. It has life and good nature. It is full of fun—written with an easy, vivid English.' SOMERSET MAUGHAM in *The Sunday Times*

O'FLAHERTY, Liam

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'Nothing seems to escape Mr. O'Flaherty's eye ; his brain turns all things to drama ; and his vocabulary is like a river in spate. *Spring Sowing* is a book to buy, or to borrow, or, yes, to steal.' *Bookman*

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This realistic novel of the Dublin underworld is generally conceded to be Mr. O'Flaherty's most outstanding book. It is to be produced as a film by British International Pictures, who regard it as one of the most ambitious of their efforts.

O'NEILL, Eugene

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'Mr. O'Neill is immeasurably the most interesting man of letters that America has produced since the death of Walt Whitman.' *From the Introduction*

O'SHAUGHNESSY, Edith

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'It is told with infinite tenderness, with many touches of grave or poignant humour, in a very beautiful book, which no lover of fiction should allow to pass unread. A book which sets its writer definitely in the first rank of living English novelists.' *Sunday Times*

PATER, Walter

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Walter Pater was at the same time a scholar of wide sympathies and a master of the English language. He describes with rare delicacy of feeling and insight the religious and philosophic tendencies of the Roman Empire at the time of Antoninus Pius as they affected the mind and life of the story's hero.

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PICKTHALL, Marmaduke

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In *Oriental Encounters*, Mr. Pickthall relieves his earlier manhood's discovery of Arabia and sympathetic encounters with the Eastern mind. He is one of the few travellers who really bridges the racial gulf.

POWELL, Sydney Walter

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Throwing up a position in the Civil Service in Natal because he preferred movement and freedom to monotony and security, the author started his wanderings by enlisting in an Indian Ambulance Corps in the South African War. Afterwards he wandered all over the world.

POWYS, Llewelyn

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Black Laughter is a kind of *Robinson Crusoe* of the continent of Africa. You actually share the sensations of a sensitive and artistic nature suddenly transplanted from a peaceful English village into the heart of Africa.

RANSOME, Arthur

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READE, Winwood

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'Few sketches of universal history by one single author have been written. One book that has influenced me very strongly is *The Martyrdom of Man*. This "dates," as people say nowadays, and it has a fine gloom of its own ; but it is still an extraordinarily inspiring presentation of human history as one consistent process.' H. G. WELLS *in An Outline of History*

REYNOLDS, Stephen

A POOR MAN'S HOUSE *No.* 93

Vivid and intimate pictures of a Devonshire fisherman's life. 'Compact, harmonious, without a single—I won't say false—but uncertain note, true in aim, sentiment and expression, precise and imaginative, never precious, but containing here and there an absolutely priceless phrase. . . .' JOSEPH CONRAD

RIESENBERG, Felix

SHIPMATES. Sea-faring portraits *No.* 107

A collection of intimate character-portraits of men with whom the author has sailed on many voyages. The sequence of studies blends into a fascinating panorama of living characters.

ROBERTS, Captain George

A SERIES OF UNCOMMON EVENTS *No.* 40

The Manner of his being taken by Three Pyrate Ships which, after having plundered him, and detained him 10 Days, put him aboard his own Sloop, without Provisions, Water, etc. The Hardships he endur'd for above 20 Days, 'till he arriv'd at the Island of St. Nicholas, from whence he was blown off to Sea; and after Four Days of Difficulty and Distress, was Ship-wreck'd on the Unfrequented Island of St. John.

ROBINSON, James Harvey

THE MIND IN THE MAKING. An Essay *No.* 9

'For me, I think James Harvey Robinson is going to be almost as important as was Huxley in my adolescence, and William James in later years. It is a cardinal book. I question whether in the long run people may not come to it, as making a new initiative into the world's thought and methods.' *From the Introduction by* H. G. WELLS

ROSEBERY, The Earl of

NAPOLEON: THE LAST PHASE *No.* 96

Of books and memoirs about Napoleon there is indeed no end, but of the veracious books such as this there are remarkably few. It aims to penetrate the deliberate darkness which surrounds the last act of the Napoleonic drama.

RUTHERFORD, Mark

THE AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF MARK RUTHERFORD. With an Introduction by H. W. MASSINGHAM *No.* 67

Because of its honesty, delicacy and simplicity of portraiture, this book has always had a curious grip upon the affections of its readers. An English Amiel, inheriting to his comfort an English Old Crome landscape, he freed and strengthened his own spirit as he will his reader's.

THE DELIVERANCE *No.* 68

Once read, Hale White [Mark Rutherford] is never forgotten. But he is not yet approached through the highways of English letters. To the lover of his work, nothing can be more attractive than the pure and serene atmosphere of thought in which his art moves.

RUTHERFORD, Mark

THE REVOLUTION IN TANNER'S LANE *No.* 69

'Since Bunyan, English Puritanism has produced one imaginative genius of the highest order. To my mind, our fiction contains no more perfectly drawn pictures of English life in its recurring emotional contrast of excitement and repose more valuable to the historian, or more stimulating to the imaginative reader.' H. W. MASSINGHAM

SHELVOCKE, Captain George

A PRIVATEER'S VOYAGE ROUND THE WORLD. With aspersions upon him by WILLIAM BETAGH. Edited by A. W. LAWRENCE *No.* 142

A book of 1726, well known as the source of the albatross incident and other passages in the 'Ancient Mariner'; it describes the exploits of a private ship of war on the coasts of South America, its wreck on the Crusoe island of Juan Fernandez, and the subsequent adventures of its company in various parts of the Pacific.

SITWELL, Constance

FLOWERS AND ELEPHANTS. With an Introduction by E. M. FORSTER *No.* 115

Mrs. Sitwell has known India well, and has filled her pages with many vivid little pictures, and with sounds and scents. But it is the thread on which her impressions are strung that is so fascinating, a thread so delicate and rare that the slightest clumsiness in definition would snap it.

SMITH, Pauline

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'Nothing like this has been written about South African life since Olive Schreiner and her *Story of an African Farm* took the literary world by storm.' *The Daily Telegraph*

SQUIRE, J. C.

THE GRUB STREET NIGHTS ENTERTAINMENTS *No.* 102

Stories of literary life, told with a breath of fantasy and gaily ironic humour. Each character lives, and is the more lively for its touch of caricature.

SULLIVAN, J. W. N.

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Although they deal with different aspects of various scientific ideas the papers which make up this volume do illustrate, more or less, one point of view. This book tries to show one or two of the many reasons why science may be interesting for people who are not specialists as well as for those who are.

SYMONS, Arthur

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WITHERS, Percy

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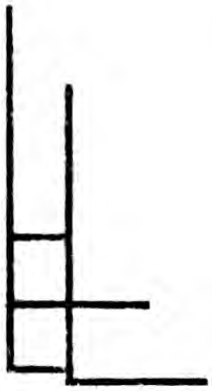

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Made and Printed in Great Britain by The Garden City Press Ltd., Letchworth and London


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