

Benson Edward Frederic

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MAY, 1914

I do not know whether in remote generations some trickle of Italian blood went to the making of that entity which I feel to be myself, or whether in some previous incarnation I enjoyed a Latin existence, nor do I greatly care: all that really concerns me is that the moment the train crawls out from its burrowings through the black roots of pine-scented mountains into the southern openings of the Alpine tunnels, I am conscious that I have come home. I greet the new heaven and the new earth, or, perhaps more accurately, the beloved old heaven and the beloved old earth; I hail the sun, and know that something within me has slept and dreamed and yearned while I lived up in the north, and wakes again now with the awakening of Brünnhilde...

The conviction is as unfathomable and as impervious to analysis as the springs of character, and if it is an illusion I am deceived by it as completely as by some master-trick of conjuring. It is not merely that I love for their own sakes the liquid and dustless thoroughfares of Venice, the dim cool churches and galleries that glow with the jewels of Bellini and Tintoret, the push of the gliding gondola round the corners of the narrow

canals beneath the mouldering cornices and mellow brickwork, for I should love these things wherever they happened to be, and the actual spell of Venice would be potent if Venice was situated in the United States of America or in Manchester. But right at the back of all Venetian sounds and scents and sights sits enthroned the fact that the theatre of those things is in Italy. Florence has her spell, too, when from the hills above it in the early morning you see her hundred towers pricking the mists; Rome the imperial has her spell, when at sunset you wander through the Forum and see the small blue campanulas bubbling out of the crumbling travertine, while the Coliseum glows like a furnace of molten amber, or pushing aside the leather curtain you pass into the huge hushed halls of St. Peter's; Naples has her spell, and the hill-side of Assisi hers, but all these are but the blossoms that cluster on the imperishable stem that nourishes them. Yet for all the waving of these wands, it is not Bellini nor Tintoret, nor Pope nor Emperor who gives the spells their potency, but Italy, the fact of Italy. Indeed (if in soul you are an Italian) you will find the spell not only and not so fully in the churches and forums and galleries of cities, but on empty hill-sides and in orchards, where the vine grows in garlands from tree to tree, and the purple clusters of shadowed grapes alternate with the pale sunshine of the ripened lemons. There, more than among marbles, you get close to that which the lover of Italy adores in her inviolable shrine, and if you say that such adoration is very easily explicable since lemon trees and vines are beautiful things, we will take some example that

shall be really devoid of beauty to anyone who has not Italy in his heart, but to her lover is more characteristic of her than any of her conventional manifestations.

So imagine yourself standing on a hilly road ankle-deep in dust. On one side of it is a wine-shop, in the open doorway of which sits a lean, dishevelled cat, while from the dim interior there oozes out a stale sour smell of spilt wine mingled with the odour of frying oil. A rough wooden balcony projects from the stained stucco of the house-front, and on the lip of the balcony is perched a row of petroleum tins, in which are planted half a dozen unprosperous carnations. An oblong of sharp-edged shadow stretches across the road; but you, the lover of Italy, stand in the white of the scorching sunshine, blinded by the dazzle, choked by the dust, and streaming with the heat. On the side of the road opposite the wine-shop is a boulder-built wall, buttressing the hillside; a little behind the wall stands a grey-foliaged olive-tree, and on the wall, motionless but tense as a curled spring, lies a dappled lizard. From somewhere up the road comes the jingle of bells and the sound of a cracked whip, and presently round the corner swings a dingy little victoria drawn by two thin horses decorated between their ears with a plume of a pheasant's tail feathers. The driver sits cross-legged on the box, with a red flower behind his ear, and inside are three alien English folk with puggarees and parasols and Baedekers. You step aside into the gutter to avoid the equipage, and as he passes, the driver, with a white-toothed smile, raises and flourishes his

hat and says, "Giorno, signor!" The lizard darts into a crevice from which his tail protrudes, the carriage yaws along in a cloud of dust... It all sounds marvellously ugly and uncomfortable, and yet, if you are an exiled Italian, the thought of it will bring your heart into your mouth.

It was just this, of which I have given the unvarnished but faithful jotting, that I saw this morning as I came up from my bathe, and all at once it struck me that this, after all, more than all the forums and galleries, and gleams of past splendour and glory of light and landscape, revealed Italy. But that was all there was to it, the sense of the lizard and the dust and the *trattoria*, and yet never before had my mistress worn so translucent a veil, or so nearly shown me the secret of her elusive charm. Never had I come so near to catching it; for the moment, as the Baedekers went by, I thought that by contrast I should comprehend at last what it is that makes to me the sense of home in the "dark and fierce and fickle south," as one of our Laureates so inappropriately calls it, having no more sympathy with Italy than I with Lapland. For the moment the secret was trembling in the spirit, ready to flower in the understanding... But then it passed away again in the dust or the wine-smell, and when I tried to express to Francis at lunch in beautiful language what I have here written, he thought it over impartially, and said: "It sounds like when you all but sneeze, and can't quite manage it." And there was point in that prosaic reflection: the secret remained inaccessible somewhere within me, like the sneeze.

Francis has been an exceedingly wise person in the conduct of his life. Some fifteen years ago he settled, much to the dismay of his uncle, who thought that all gentlemen were stockbrokers, that he liked Italy much better than any other country in the world, and that, of all the towns and mountains and plains of Italy, he loved best this rocky pinnacle of an island that rises sheer from the sapphire in the mouth of the Bay of Naples. Thus, having come across from Naples for the inside of a day, he telegraphed to his hotel for his luggage and stopped a month. After a brief absence in England, feverish with interviews, he proceeded to stop here for a year, and, when that year was over, to stop here permanently. He was always unwell in England and always well here; there was no material reason why he should ever return to the fogs, nor any moral reason except that the English idea of duty seems to be inextricably entwined with the necessity of doing something you dislike and are quite unfitted for. So herein he showed true wisdom, firstly, in knowing what he liked, and secondly, in doing it. For many otherwise sensible people have not the slightest idea what they like, and a large proportion of that elect remainder have not the steadfastness to do it. But Francis, with no ties that bound him to the island of England, which did not suit him at all, had the good sense to make his home in this island of Italy that did. Otherwise he most certainly would have lived anæmically in an office in the City, and have amassed money that he did not in the least want. And though it was thought very odd that he should have chosen to be cheerful

and busy here rather than occupied and miserable in London, I applaud the unworldliness of his wisdom. He settled also (which is a rarer wisdom) that he wanted to think, and, as you will see before this record of diary is out, he succeeded in so doing.

Many Mays and Junes I spent with him here, and six months ago now, while I was groping and choking in the fogs, he wrote to me, saying that the Villa Tiberiana, at which we had for years cast longing glances as at a castle in Spain, was to be let on lease. It was too big for him alone, but if I felt inclined to go shares in the rent, we might take it together. I sent an affirmative telegram, and sat stewing with anxiety till I received his favourable reply. So, when a fortnight ago I returned here, I made my return home not to Italy alone, but to my home in Italy.

The Villa Tiberiana, though not quite so imperial as it sounds, is one of the most "amiable dwellings." It stands high on the hill-side above the huddled, picturesque little town of Alatri, and is approachable only by a steep cobbled path that winds deviously between other scattered houses and plots of vineyard. Having arrived at the piazza of the town, the carriage road goes no further, and you must needs walk, while your luggage is conveyed up by strapping female porters, whom on their arrival you reward with *soldi* and refresh with wine. Whitewashed and thick-built, two-storied and flat-roofed, it crouches behind the tall rubble wall of its garden that lies in terraces below it. A great stone-pine rears its whispering umbrella in the middle of this plot, and now in the May-time of the year there is to be seen scarcely a

foot of the earth of its garden beds, so dense is the tapestry of flowers that lies embroidered over it. For here in the far south of Europe, the droughts of summer and early autumn render unpractical any horticultural legislation with a view to securing colour in your flower-beds all the year round. However much you legislated, you would never get your garden to be gay through July and August, and so, resigning yourself to emptiness then, you console yourself with an intoxication of blossom from March to June. And never was a garden so drunk with colour as is ours to-day; never have I seen so outrageous a riot. Nor is it in the garden-beds alone that rose and carnation and hollyhock and nasturtium and delphinium unpunctually but simultaneously sing and blaze together. The southern front of the house is hidden in plumbago and vines with green seed-pearl berries, and as for the long garden wall, it is literally invisible under the cloak of blue morning-glory that decks it as with a raiment from foundation to coping-stone. Every morning fresh battalions of blue trumpets deploy there as soon as the sun strikes it, and often as I have seen it thus, I cannot bring myself to believe that it is real; it is more like some amazing theatrical decoration. Beyond on the further side lies the orchard of fig and peach, and I observe with some emotion that the figs, like the lady in *Pickwick*, are swelling visibly.

Within, the house has assumed its summer toilet, which is another way of saying that it has been undressed; carpets and curtains have been banished; doors are latched back, and the

air sweeps softly from end to end of it. A sitting-room that faces south has been dismantled, and its contents put in the big studio that looks northwards, and even in the height of summer, we hope, will not get over-hot, especially since a few days ago we had the roof whitewashed and thick matting hung over its one southern window. Breakfast and dinner, now that the true May weather has begun, we have on the terrace-top of the big cistern in the garden, roofed over between the pilasters of its pergola with trellis, through which the vineleaves wriggle and wrestle. But now at noon it is too hot in the garden, and to-day I found lunch ready in the square vaulted little dining-room, with Pasqualino bringing in macaroni and vine-leaf-stoppered decanter, and Francis, who refrained from bathing this morning owing to the Martha-cares of the household, debating with Seraphina (the cook) as to whether the plumbago ought not to be pruned. It has come right into the room, and, as Seraphina most justly remarks, it is already impossible to shut the window. But since we shall not need to shut the window for some months to come, I give my vote to support Francis, and suffer the plumbago to do exactly as it likes. So we are two to one, and Seraphina takes her defeat, wreathed in smiles, and says it is not her fault if burglars come. That is a poor argument, for there are no burglars in Alatri, and, besides, there is nothing to steal except the grand piano...

Just now social duties weigh rather heavily on Francis and me, for the British colony in Alatri consider that, as we have

moved into a new house, they must behave to us as if we were new-comers, and have been paying formal visits. These civilities must be responded to, and we have had two house-warmings and are going to have a third and last to-day. The house-warmings should perhaps be described as garden-warmings, since we have tea on the terrace in great pomp, and then get cool in the house afterwards. Rather embarrassing incidents have occurred, as, for instance, when Miss Machonochie came to a garden-warming the day before yesterday. She is a red amiable Scotchwoman, with a prodigious Highland accent, which Francis, whom she has for years tried to marry, imitates to perfection. So perfect, indeed, is his mimicry of it, that when Miss Machonochie appeared and began to talk about the wee braw garden, Pasqualino, who was bringing out a fresh teapot, had to put it hurriedly down on the ground, and run back again into the kitchen, from which issued peal after peal of laughter. So overcome was he, that after a second attempt (Miss Machonochie being still full of conversation) he had to retire again, and Seraphina must serve us till Miss Machonochie went away. This she did not do for a long time, since, after just a little vermouth, she wanted no persuasion at all to sing a quantity of Scotch ditties about Bonnie Charlie and Loch Lomond, and other beautiful and interesting topics. Technically, I should say that she had one note in her voice, which she was in a great hurry to get on to and very loath to leave. This had an amazing timbre like a steam siren, and as I played her accompaniment for her, my left ear sang all

the evening afterwards. But her accent was indubitably Highland, and Mrs. Macgregor declared she could smell the heather. I was glad of that, for I was afraid that what I smelled (it being now near dinner-time) was the *fritura* that Seraphina was preparing in the kitchen.

This island-life is the busiest sort of existence, though I suppose a stockbroker would say it was the laziest, and, in consequence, these social efforts give one a sense of rush that I have never felt in London. The whole of the morning is taken up with bathing (of which more presently), and on the way up you call at the post-office for papers and letters. The letters it is impossible to answer immediately, since there is so much to do, and the pile on my table grows steadily, waiting for a wet day. After lunch you read the papers, and then, following the example of the natives, who may be supposed to know the proper way of living in their own climate, you have a good siesta. After tea, the English habit of physical exercise asserts itself, and we walk or water the garden till dinner. After dinner it is, I take it, permissible to have a little relaxation, and we either play a game or two of picquet up here in the studio, or more often stroll down to the piazza and play in the café, or attend a thrilling cinematograph show. In the country it is natural to go to bed early, and, behold, it is to-morrow almost before you knew it was to-day. When it rains, or when the weather is cold, it is possible to do some work, and Francis asserts that he does an immense quantity during the winter. I daresay that is so; I should be the last

person to quarrel with the statement, since he so amiably agrees that it is impossible to behave like that in the summer.

The mind is equally well occupied, for we always take down books to the bathing-place, and for the rest the affairs of the island, Pasqualino and his family, Seraphina and her family, the fact that Mrs. Macgregor has dismissed her cook, that Mr. Tarn has built a pergola, completely absorb the intellectual and speculative faculties. What happens outside the island seems not to matter at all. England, with its fogs and its fuss, is less real and much further away than the hazy shores of the mainland, where all that concerns us is the smoke of Vesuvius, which during the last week has been increasing in volume, and now stands up above the mountain like a huge stone-pine. The wiseacres shake their heads and prophesy an eruption, but *che sarà, sarà*— if it comes, it comes, and meantime it is a marvellous thing to see the red level rays at sunset turn the edges of the smoke-cloud into wreaths of rose-colour and crimson; the denser portions they are unable to pierce, and can but lay a wash of colour on them, through which the black shows like a thing of nightmare. In the calm weather, which we have been having, this stone-pine of smoke is reflected in the bay, and the great tree of vapour steals slowly across the water, nearer and nearer every day. The observatory reports tell us that its topmost wreaths are eight vertical miles away from the earth. Sometimes when it is quite calm here we see these tops torn by winds and blown about into fantastic foliage, but the solidity of the trunk remains untouched.

But Vesuvius is far away, twenty-five miles at the least, and here in this siren, lotus-eating island nothing across the sea really interests us. But island affairs, as I have said, are perfectly absorbing, and during this last fortnight we have been in vertiginous heights of excitement. Only yesterday occurred the *finale* of all this business, and Francis thinks with excellent reason, that he is accomplice to a felony. The person chiefly concerned was Luigi, nephew of our cook Seraphina, who till six months ago was valet, butler, major-domo, and gardener to Francis. Then, in a misguided moment, he thought to "better himself" by going as hall-boy to the Grand Hotel in Alatri. There were tips, no doubt, in the tourist season at the Grand Hotel, but there was also trouble. It happened like this.

From the day of the supposed crime the sympathy of the island generally was on the side of Luigi, in the fiery trials that awaited him. It was felt to be intolerable that a boy who had just changed into his best clothes, and had taken a carnation from one of the tables in the dining-room, and was actually going out of the hotel gate to spend the afternoon of the *festa* in the Piazza, should have been summarily ordered back by the porter, and commanded to show a fat white German gentleman, who was staying in the hotel, the way to the bathing-place at the *Palazzo a mare*, and carry his towels and bathing-dress for him, the latter of which included sandals, so that the fat white gentleman should not hurt his fat white toes on the shingle. This abominable personage had also preferred, in the unaccountable

manner of foreigners, to go all the way on foot, instead of taking a victoria, which would have conveyed him three-quarters of the distance and saved much time. But he would go on his feet, and being very fat had walked at tortoise-pace along the dusty road, under a large green umbrella, perspiring profusely, and stopping every now and then to sit down. There was Luigi standing by, carrying the sandals and the bathing-dress and the towels, while all the time the precious moments of this holiday afternoon were slipping along, and the Piazza, where Luigi should have been (having been granted a half-holiday on account of the *festa*), was full of his young friends, male and female, all in their best clothes, conversing and laughing together, and standing about and smoking an occasional cigarette, in the orthodox fashion of a holiday afternoon. Then, after this interminable walk, during which the German gentleman kept asking the baffled Luigi a series of questions in an unknown tongue, and appeared singularly annoyed when the boy was unable to answer him except in a Tower-of-Babel manner, he drew three coppers from his pocket, and after a prolonged mental struggle, presented Luigi with two of them, as a reward for his services. He then told him that he could find his way up again alone, and having undressed, swam majestically off round the promontory of rock that enclosed the bathing-beach.

An hour afterwards Luigi, defrauded of half his holiday afternoon, returned to the gaiety and companionship of the Piazza, and recounted to an indignant audience this outrageous

affair. But some time during the afternoon, Francis, looking out of his bedroom window after his siesta, thought he saw Luigi slipping across the garden of the Villa Tiberiana, and climbing down over the wall at the bottom. He says he was not sure, being still sleepy, and when he shouted Luigi's name out of his window, there came no answer.

Luigi returned to the Grand Hotel in time to get into his livery again before dinner, and on entrance was summoned into the manager's bureau, where he was confronted with his Teutonic taskmaster of the afternoon, and charged with having picked his pocket while he was bathing. A portfolio was missing, containing a note for a hundred liras, and this the German gentleman was gutturally certain he had on his person when he started off to bathe, and equally certain that he had lost when he came to dress for dinner. His certainty was partly founded on the fact that he had tipped the boy when they arrived at the *Palazzo a mare*, and to have tipped him he must have had his money in his pocket. In answer, Luigi absolutely denied the charge, and then made a dreadful mistake by suggesting that the Signor had a hole in his pocket, through which the portfolio had slipped. This was quite the most unfortunate thing he could have said, for, as the German gentleman instantly demonstrated, the hole in his pocket was undoubtedly there. But how, so he overpoweringly urged, could Luigi have known there was a hole there, unless he had been examining his pockets? And an hour later poor Luigi, with gyves upon his wrists, was ignominiously led through the Piazza,

all blazing with acetylene lights and resonant with the blare of the band, and was clapped into prison to await the formal charge.

Arrived there, he was searched, and a similar examination was made in his room at his mother's house, where he went to sleep at night, but nothing that ever so remotely resembled a German portfolio or a note for a hundred liras was found, and he still doggedly denied his guilt. Then, since nothing incriminating could be got out of him, the key was turned, while through the small high-grated window came the sound of the band in the Piazza for this *festa* night. Later, by standing on his board bed, he could see the fiery segment of the aspiring path of the rockets, as they ascended from the peak above the Piazza, and listen to the echo of their explosions flap and buffet against the cliffs of Monte Gennaro. But it was from prison that he saw and heard.

Outside in the Piazza the tragic history of his incarceration formed a fine subject for talk, and public opinion, which cheerfully supposed him guilty, found extenuating circumstances that almost amounted to innocence. The provocation of being obliged to spend the best part of a *festa* afternoon in walking down to the sea with a fat white Tedesco was really immense, and the reward of twopence for those lost hours of holiday was nothing less than an insult. What wonder if Luigi for a moment mislaid his honesty, what wonder if when so smooth-faced and ready-made a temptation came, he just yielded to it for a second? Certainly it was wrong to steal, everyone knows that — *Mamma mia*, what a rocket, what a *bellezza* of stars! — but it was also

primarily wrong to dock a jolly boy of his promised half-holiday. No wonder, when the German signor – ah, it was the same, no doubt, as was sick in Antonio's carriage the other day, and refused to pay for a new rug – no wonder, when that fat-head, that pumpkin (for who but a pumpkin would carry a hundred liras about with him?) swam away round the corner of those rocks, that Luigi's hand just paid a visit to his great pockets to see if he was as poor as that miserable tip of twopence seemed to say! Then he found the portfolio, and turned bitter with the thought of the *quattro soldi* which was all that had been given him for his loss of the half-holiday. Ah, look! Was it really a wheel like that on which Santa Caterina had been bound? How she must have spun round! What giddiness! What burning! A steadfast soul not to have consented to worship Apollo; no wonder that Holy Church made a saint of her. But what could Luigi have done with the portfolio and the note for a hundred liras? He had been searched and on him was nothing found; his room had been searched, but there was nothing there. Was it possible that he was innocent, *il povero*? Could the sick German gentleman really have lost his foolish pocket-book by natural means as he came up from his bathe? It might be worth while taking a walk there to-morrow, always keeping a peeled eye on the margin of the path. It was possible, after all, that he had lost his pocket-book all by himself, without aid from Luigi, for the hole in his pocket was admitted, and shown to the manager of the Grand Hotel. But then there was Luigi's fatal knowledge of the hole in his pocket. That was very

bad; that looked like guilt. If only the boy had held his tongue and not said that fatal thing! He only suggested that there was a hole in his pocket? No, no; he said there *was* a hole in his pocket, didn't he? What a lesson to keep the tongue still! Luigi had always a lot to learn about keeping the tongue still, for who will soon forget the dreadful things he shouted out last winter at the priest, his mother's cousin's uncle, when he had smacked his head? They were quite true, too, like the hole in the pocket... Ah, there is the great bomb. Pouf! How it echoes! So the fireworks are over! *Buona notte! Buona notte!*

All this, while lounging in the Piazza, listening to the band and watching the fireworks, I heard from the tobacconist and the barber and a few other friends. I coupled with this information that which Francis told me as we strolled up homewards again, namely, that he thought he had seen Luigi that afternoon slipping through the garden. He was not sure about it, so leaving it aside, he recalled a few facts about Luigi when he was in his service. He used to hurry over his house-work always, for he preferred his rôle of gardener to all others, and used to wander among the flower-beds, making plants comfortable, and giving this one a drop of water, and that a fresh piece of stick to lean on. Then he would make a mud pie by turning on the cistern tap, and plant verbenas in it, or in more mysterious fashion made *caches* in a hole behind loose masonry in the cistern wall. Francis has got a just appreciation of the secrecy and rapture of making *caches*, and never let Luigi know that he was aware of this

hidden treasure. But after Luigi had gone home to his mother's of an evening, he would yield to curiosity and see what the boy had put there. Sometimes there would be a matchbox, or a pilfered cigarette, or a piece of string carefully wrapped up in paper... And now poor Luigi was behind his grated window, and Seraphina, with deepest sarcasm, said that this was what he called bettering himself. He would have done better to have done worse and remained at the Villa Tiberiana in the service of the Signori.

But suddenly next day, like a change in the weather coming from a cloudless sky, a fresh train of thought was suggested by the Luigi-episode, and the mention of the lottery, and how the various incidents and personages bore on the luck of numbers. On the instant Luigi and all he had done or not done ceased to interest anybody except in so far as the events were concerned with the science and interpretation of numbers in the lottery as set forth in the amazing volume called "Smorfia." There you will find what any numeral means, so that should an earthquake occur or an eclipse, the wise speculator looks out "earthquake" or "eclipse" in "Smorfia," and at the next drawing of the National Lottery or the lottery at Naples backs the numbers to which these significations are attached. As it happened, no event of striking local interest had occurred in Alatri since, in April last, the carpenter in the Corso Agosto had unsuccessfully attempted to cut his throat with a razor, after successfully smothering his aunt. This had been the last occasion on which there was clear guidance as to the choice of numbers in the Naples lottery, and

nobody of a sporting turn of mind who had the smallest sense of the opportunities life offers had failed to back No. 17, which among other things means "aunt," and numbers which signified "razor," "throat," "blood" and "bolster." Nor had "Smorfia," the dictionary that gives this useful information, disappointed its adherents, for Carmine, Pasqualino's brother, had backed the numbers that meant "throat," "razor," "carpenter," "aunt" and "Sunday," the last being the day on which those distressing events occurred, and went to bed that night to dream of the glories which awaited him who nominated a *quinterno secco*. (This means that you back five numbers, all of which come out in the order named.) Once, so succulent tradition said, a baker at the Marina had accomplished this enviable feat, after which Alatri saw him no more, for his reward was a million francs, a marquisate and an estate in Calabria, where soon afterwards he was murdered for the sake of his million. This stimulating page of history was not wholly repeated in the case of Carmine and the carpenter's aunt, but by his judicious selection he had certainly reaped two hundred francs where he had only sowed five. The doctor also, who had attended the abortive suicide, had done very well by backing salient features of the tragedy, and astute superstition had, on the whole, been adequately rewarded.

Next day, accordingly, the Piazza seethed with excitement as to the due application of the Luigi episode to the enchanting Lorelei of the lottery. It had magnificent and well-marked features; "Smorfia" shouted with opportunities. First of all, there

was Luigi himself to be backed, and, as everyone knew, "boy" was the number 2. Next there was the German gentleman. ("Michele, turn up 'German.'") Then there was "pocket" and "hole" and "portfolio" and "bathe." All these were likely chances. Other aspects of the affair struck the serious mind. "*Festa*" was connected with it; so, too, was "prison," where now Luigi languished. Then there was "theft" and "denial." Here were abundant materials for a *quinterno secco*, when once the initial difficulty of selecting the right numbers was surmounted. And marquisates and millions hovered on the horizon, ready to move up and descend on Alatri.

Among those who were thus interested in the *affaire Luigi* from the purely lottery point of view, there was no more eager student than the boy's mother. Maria was a confirmed and steadfast gambler, of that optimistic type that feels itself amply rewarded for the expenditure of ten liras on a series of numbers that prove quite barren of reward, if at the eleventh attempt she gained five. She had been to see her son in prison, had wept a little and consoled him a little, had smuggled a packet of cigarettes into his hand, and had reminded him that the same sort of thing, though far worse, had happened to his father, with whom be peace. For at the most Luigi would get but a couple of months in prison, owing to his youth (and the cool of the cell was really not unpleasant in the hot weather), and the severity of his sentence would doubtless be much mitigated if he would only say where he had hidden the portfolio and the hundred liras. But

nothing would induce Luigi to do this; he still firmly adhered to his innocence, and repeated *ad nauseam* his unfortunate remark that there was a hole in the fat German's pocket.

Expostulation being useless, and Luigi being fairly comfortable, Maria left him, and on her way home gave very serious consideration to the features of the case which she intended to back at the lottery. She had ascertained that Luigi had his new clothes on (which was the sort of flower on which that butterfly Chance alighted), and on looking up the number of "new clothes, novelty, freshness," found that it was 8. Then, on further study of "Smorfia," she learned that the word "thief" was represented by No. 28, and following her own train of thought, discovered that No. 88 meant "liar." Here was a strange thing, especially when, with an emotional spasm, she remembered that "boy" was No. 2. Here was the whole adventure nutshelled for her. For was there not a boy (2) who put on his new clothes (8), showed himself a thief (28) and subsequently a liar (88)? 2 and 8 covered the whole thing, and almost throttled by the thread of coincidence, she hurried down to the lottery-office, aflame with the premonition of some staggering success, and invested fifteen liras in the numbers 2, 8, 28, 88.

She lingered in the Piazza a little, after laying this touching garland on the altar of luck, to receive the condolences of her friends on Luigi's wickedness, and had a kind word thrown to her by Signor Gelotti, the great lawyer, who had come over for a week's holiday to his native island. Ah, there was a man! Why,

if he got you into the witness-box, he could make you contradict yourself before you knew you had opened your mouth. Give him a couple of minutes at you, and he would make you say that the man you had described as having a black coat and a moustache had no coat at all and whiskers, and that, though you had met him at three o'clock precisely in the Piazza, you had just informed the Court that at that hour you were having a siesta in your own house. Luigi's father had at one time been in his service, and though he had left it, handcuffed, for a longer period of imprisonment than his son was threatened with, Lawyer Gelotti had always a nod and a smile for his widow, and to-day a pleasant little joke about heredity. Ah, if Lawyer Gelotti would only take up the case! He would muddle everybody up finely, and in especial that fat German fellow, who, like his beastly, swaggering, truculent race, was determined to press home his charge. But Lawyer Gelotti, as all the world knew, never held up his forefinger at a witness under a thousand liras. What a forefinger. It made you tell two more lies in order to escape from each lie that you had already told.

Three days passed, while still Luigi languished behind bars, and then a sudden thrill of excitement emanating from the offices of the lottery swept over the island. For the Naples lottery had been drawn, and the five winning numbers were issued, which in due order of their occurrence were 2, 8, 28, 4, 91. Alatri grew rosy with prospective riches, for in this *affaire Luigi* it would have been slapping the face of the Providence that looks after lotteries

not to have backed No. 2 (boy) and No. 28 (thief). At least ten dutiful folk had done that. But —*che peccato*— why did we not all back No. 8, as Luigi's mother had done, for we all knew that Luigi must have had his new clothes on, as did every boy on a *festa*? What a thing it is to use rightly the knowledge you possess! The lucky woman! She had won a *terno*, for the first three numbers she backed came out in the order she nominated. Never was such a thing seen since the days of the classical baker! Why, her *terno* would be worth three thousand liras at least, which was next door to the title of a marchioness. But No. 91 now: what does No. 91 mean? Quick, turn it up in "Smorfia"! Who has a "Smorfia"? Ernesto, the tobacconist, of course, but he is a mean man, and will not lend his "Smorfia" to any who does not buy a packet of cigarettes. Never mind, let us have both; a cigarette is always a cigarette. There! No. 91! What does No. 91 signify? *Dio*! What a lot of meanings! "The man in the moon" ... "the hairs on the tail of an elephant" ... "an empty egg-shell." ... Who ever heard the like? There is no sense in such a number! And No. 4 – what does No. 4 mean? Why, the very first meaning of all is "truth." There is a curious thing when we all thought that Luigi was telling lies! And No. 4, look you, was the fourth number that came out. It would have been simple to conjecture that No. 4 would be No. 4. Pity that we did not think of that last week. But it is easy to be wise after the event, as the bridegroom said.

The talk on the Piazza rose to ever loftier peaks of triumph as fresh beneficiaries of Luigi, who had made a few liras over

"boy" and "thief," joined the chattering groups. He had done very well for his friends, had poor Luigi, though "pocket" and "portfolio" had brought in nothing to their backers. And it was like him – already Luigi was considered directly responsible for these windfalls – it was like him to have turned up that ridiculous No. 91, with its man in the moon, and its empty egg-shell. Luigi, the gay *ragazzo*, loved that extravagant sort of joke, of which the point was that there was no point, but which made everybody laugh, as when he affixed a label, "Three liras complete," to the fringe of Donna Margherita's new shawl from Naples as she walked about the Piazza, showing it off and never guessing what so many smiles meant. But No. 4, which stood for "truth," it was strange that No. 4 should have turned up, and that nobody dreamed of supposing that Luigi was telling the truth. His mother, for all her winnings, must be finely vexed that she had not trusted her son's word, and backed "truth," instead of putting her money on "liar." Why, if she backed "truth," she would have gained a *quaterno*, and God knows how many liras! Ah, there she is! Let us go and congratulate the good soul. Her winnings will make up to her for having a son as well as a husband who was a thief.

But Luigi's mother was in a hot haste. She had put on all her best clothes, not, as was at first conjectured, because in the affluence that had come to her they had been instantly degraded into second-best, but because she was making a business call on Lawyer Gelotti. She was not one to turn her broad back on

her own son – though it is true that she had confidently selected No. 88 with its signification of "liar" – and if the satanic skill of Lawyer Gelotti could get Luigi off, that skill was going to be invoked for his defence. A hundred thanks, a hundred greetings to everybody, but she had no time for conversation just now. Lawyer Gelotti must be seen at once, if he was at home; if not, she must just sit on his doorstep and wait for him. Yes; she had heard that a thousand liras was his fee, and he should have it, if that was right and proper. There was plenty more where they came from! And this *bravura* passage pleased the Piazza; it showed the gaiety and swagger proper to a lady of property.

In due course followed the event which Alatri was quite prepared for when it knew that Lawyer Gelotti was engaged on Luigi's behalf, and that the full blast of his hurricane of interrogations would be turned on the fat German gentleman. Never was there such a tearing to shreds of apparently stout evidence; its fragments were scattered to all points of the compass like the rocket-stars which Luigi had watched from his grated window. The Tedesco was forced to allow that he had not looked in his pockets, to see if his portfolio was safe, till full three hours after he had returned from his bathe. What had he done in those three hours? He did not know? Then the Court would guess! (That was nasty!) Again he had told the manager of the hotel that he knew he had his portfolio with him when he went to bathe, because he had tipped the boy. Ah, that wonderful tip! Was it, or was it not twopence? Yes: Lawyer Gelotti thought so!

Twopence for carrying a basket of towels and a bathing costume and two elephant sandals all over the island! *Tante grazie!* But was it really his custom to carry coppers in his portfolio? Did he not usually carry pence loose in a pocket? Had he ever to his knowledge carried pennies in his portfolio? Would he swear that he had? Come, sir, do not keep the Court waiting for a simple answer! Very good! This magnificent tip did not come out of the portfolio at all, as he had previously affirmed.

Lawyer Gelotti had a tremendous lunch at this stage of the proceedings, and tackled his German afterwards with renewed vigour. Was it credible that a man so careful – let us say, so laudably careful – with his money as to make so miserly a tip, would have taken a portfolio containing a hundred liras down to the bathing-place, and left it in his clothes? And what was the number of this note? Surely this prudent, this economical citizen of Germany, a man so scrupulously careful of his money as to tip on this scale, would have taken the precaution to have registered the number of his note. Did he not usually do so? Yes. So Lawyer Gelotti suspected. But in this case, very strangely, he had not. That was odd; that was hard to account for except on the supposition that there was no such note. And this portfolio, about which it seemed really impossible to get accurate information? It was shabby, was it, and yet an hour before we had been told it was new! And who else had ever set eyes on this wonderful portfolio, this new and ragged portfolio with its note of unknown number? Nobody; of course, nobody.

There followed a most disagreeable forensic picture of the fat German gentleman, while above him, as a stained glass window looks down on Mephistopheles, Lawyer Gelotti proceeded to paint Luigi's portrait in such seraphic lines and colour that Maria, brimming with emotion, felt that sixteen years ago she had given birth to a saint and had never known it till now. Here was a boy who had lost his father – and Gelotti's voice faltered as he spoke of this egregious scamp – who from morning till night slaved to support his stricken mother, and through all the self-sacrificing days of his spotless boyhood never had suspicion or hint of sin come near him. The Court had heard how blithely and eagerly he had gone down to the *Palazzo a mare* – it was as well the Court had not heard his blithe remarks as he passed through the Piazza – on the afternoon of what should have been his holiday. What made him so gay? Gentlemen, the thought that inspired him was that by his service he might earn a franc or perhaps two francs, since it was a *festa*, to bring home to his aged parent. And what was his reward? Twopence, twopence followed by this base and unfounded and disproved and diabolical accusation. Prison had been his reward; he languished in a dungeon while all Alatri kept holiday and holy festival. As for the admission of which the prosecution had made so much, namely, that Luigi had said that the German gentleman had a hole in his pocket, how rejoiced was Lawyer Gelotti that he had done so. It was suggested that Luigi must have searched his clothes, and found there the apocryphal portfolio and the note that had no number. But it was true that

Luigi was intimately acquainted with those voluminous trousers. But how and why and when?.. And Lawyer Gelotti paused, while Luigi's friends held their breath, not having the slightest idea of the answer.

Lawyer Gelotti wiped his eyes and proceeded. This industrious saintly lad, the support of his mother's declining years, was hall-boy at the Grand Hotel. Numerous were the duties of a hall-boy, and Lawyer Gelotti would not detain them over the complete catalogue. He would only tell them that while others slept, while opulent German gentlemen dreamed about portfolios, the hall-boy was busy, helping his cousin, the valet of the first floor, to brush the clothes of those who so magnificently rewarded the services rendered them. Inside and outside were those clothes brushed: not a speck of dust remained when the supporter of his mother had done with them. They were turned inside and out, they were shaken, they were brushed again, they were neatly folded. In this way, gentlemen, and in no other came the knowledge of the hole in the pocket...

Dio mio! Who spoke of fireworks?

That evening Luigi came up to the villa to receive Francis's congratulations on his acquittal and departed through the garden. Next morning Francis, strolling about, came to the wall of the cistern, where Luigi's cache used to lurk behind the loosened masonry. The garden-bed just below it looked as if it had been lately disturbed, and with a vague idea in his mind he began digging with his stick in it. Very soon he came upon some

shredded fragments of leather buried there... I am rather afraid Francis is an accomplice.

JUNE, 1914

We have had a month of the perfect weather, days and nights of flawless and crystalline brightness, with the sun marching serene all day across the empty blue, and setting at evening unveiled by cloud or vapour into the sea, and a light wind pouring steadily as a stream from the north. But one morning there gathered a cloud on the southern horizon no bigger than a man's hand, which the weather-wise say betokens a change. On that day, too, there appeared in the paper that other cloud which presaged the wild tempest of blood and fire. Here in this secure siren isle we hardly gave a thought to it. We just had it hot at lunch and cold at dinner, and after that we thought of it no more. It seemed to have disappeared, even as the column of smoke above Vesuvius disappeared a few weeks ago.

It had been a very hot clear morning, and since, the evening before, it had been necessary to tell Pasqualino that the wages he received, the food he ate, and the room he occupied were not given him gratis by a beneficent Providence in order that he should have complete leisure to make himself smart and spend his whole time with his Caterina, he had been very busy sweeping and embellishing the house, while it was still scarcely light, in order to put into practice the fervency of his reformed intentions. He had come into my bedroom while dawn was yet grey, on tiptoe, in order not to awaken me, and taken away the step-ladder

which he needed. As a matter of fact, I was already awake, and so his falling downstairs or throwing the step-ladder downstairs a moment afterwards with a crash that would have roused the dead did not annoy but only interested me, and I wondered what he wanted the step-ladder for, and whether it was much broken. Soon the sound of muffled hammering began from the dining-room below, which showed he was very busy, and the beaming face with which he called me half an hour later was further evidence of his delighted and approving conscience. It was clear that he could hardly refrain from telling me what he had been doing, but the desire to surprise and amaze me prevailed, and he went off again with a broad grin. Soon I came downstairs, and discovered that he had woven a great wreath of flowering myrtle, gay with bows of red riband, and had nailed it up over the door into the dining-room. A cataract of whitewash and plaster had been dislodged in the fixing of it, which he was then very busy sweeping up, and he radiantly told me that he had been on the hill-side at half-past four to gather materials for his decoration. Certainly it looked very pretty, and when the plaster and whitewash was cleared away, you could not tell that any damage had been done to the fabric of the house. Soon after Caterina came in with the week's washing balanced in a basket on her head, and Pasqualino took her through to show her his wreath. She highly approved, and he kissed her in the passage. I may remark that she is sixteen and he seventeen, so there is plenty of time for him to do a little work as domestic servant before he

devotes himself to Caterina. Of all the young things in the island these two are far the fairest, and I have a great sympathy with Pasqualino when he neglects his work and goes strutting before Caterina. But I intend that he shall do his work all the same.

There is no such delicious hour in this sea-girt south as that of early morning ushering in a hot day. The air is full of a warm freshness. The vigour of sea and starlight has renewed it, and though for several weeks now no drop of rain has fallen, the earth has drunk and been refreshed by the invisible waters of the air. The stucco path that runs along the southern face of the house, still shadowed by the stone-pine, glistened with heavy dew, and the morning-glory along the garden walls, drenched with moisture, was unfolding a new galaxy of wet crumpled blossoms. Yet in spite of the freshness of the early hour, there was a certain hint of oppression in the air, and strolling along the lower terrace, I saw the cloud of which I have spoken, already forming on the southern horizon. But it looked so small, so lost, in the vast dome of blue that surrounded it, that I scarcely gave it a second thought.

Presently afterwards Francis and I set out to walk down to the bathing-place. We stopped in the Piazza to order a cab to come down to the point where the road approaches nearest to the beach from which we bathed, for the midday walk up again would clearly be intolerable in the heat that was growing greater every moment, and set out through narrow ways between the vineyards, in order to avoid the dust of the high road. The light

north wind, which for the past month had given vigour to the air, had altogether fallen, and not a breath disturbed the polished surface of the bay, where twenty miles away Naples and the hills above it were unwaveringly mirrored on the water. So clear was it that you could see individual houses there, so still that the hair-like stalks of the campanulas which frothed out of the crevices of the walls stood stiff and motionless, as if made of steel. Above us the terraced vineyards rose in tiers to the foot of the sheer cliffs of Monte Gennaro, fringed with yellow broom; below they stretched, in an unbroken staircase down to the roofs of the Marina, to which at midday comes the steamer from Naples carrying our post and a horde of tourists who daily, for the space of three or four hours, invade the place. Still downwards we went between vines and lemon orchards, and an occasional belt of olive-trees, till the bay opened before us again and the flight of steps that led to the enchanted beach of the *Palazzo a mare*.

Here on the edge of the sea the Emperor Tiberius built one of his seven island palaces, but in the course of centuries this northern shore has subsided, so that the great halls that once stood on the margin of the bay are partly submerged, and the waves wash up cubes of green and red marble from tessellated pavements that once formed the floors of the palace. Portions of the cliff-side are faced with the brickwork of its walls, from the fissures in which sprout spurge and tufts of valerian, and tumbled fragments of its foundations lie about on the beach and project into the water, in lumps twenty feet thick of compounded

stone and mortar. The modern historian has been busy lately with Tiberius, devoting to his memory pailfuls of antiquarian whitewash, and here, where tradition says there lay the scene of infamous orgies, we are told now to reconstruct a sort of Sunday-school presided over by an aged and benevolent emperor, who, fatigued with affairs of state, found here an innocent and rural retreat, where he could forget his purple, and refresh himself with the beauties of Nature. Whatever the truth of that may be, there is no doubt that he built this palace in a most delectable place, and I sincerely hope that he was as happy in it as I am every morning among its ruins.

At one end of this little bay project huge masses of the palace walls, forming the promontory round which the fat and thwarted German swam, the day that he brought Luigi down to carry his clothes and his towels and his shoes. These latter were to enable him to cross the shingly beach, which, when the feet are unaccustomed to it, is undeniably painful. Along it, and by the edge of this tideless water, are pockets and streaks of grey sand, and to-day the sea lies as motionless as if it was the surface of some sheltered lake. Not a ripple disturbs it, not a breath of wind ruffles its surface. Standing knee-deep in it and looking down, you might think, but for a certain fullness and liquid clarity in the pebbles that lie at the bottom, that there was no water there at all, so closely does its translucence approach to invisibility. But it is impossible to stand dry-skinned there for long, so hotly does the sun strike on the shoulders, and soon I fall forward in it, and

lie submerged there like a log, looking subaqueously at the bright diaper of pebbles, with a muffled thunder of waters in my ears, longing to have a hundred limbs in order to get fuller contact with this gladdest and loveliest of all the creatures of God.

But even in this hedonistic bathing one's ridiculous mind makes tasks for itself, and it has become an affair of duty with me to swim backwards and forwards twice to a certain rock that lies some three hundred yards away. There (for Luigi is not alone in this island in the matter of caches) I have what you may really call an emporium stowed away in a small seaweed-faced nook which I believe to be undiscoverable. If you know exactly where that nook is (it lies about two feet above the surface of the water), and put your hand through the seaweed at exactly the right spot, you will find a tin box containing (*i*) a box of matches, (*ii*) a handful of cigarettes, (*iii*) a thermometer. The first time that I arrive at the rock I have no truck with my cache, but only touch the rock with a finger, and swim back to the beach again. There I touch another rock with my finger (these two rocks, in fact, are like the creases at cricket, which you must touch with your bat in order to score a run), and swim back for the second time to my wicket out at sea. Then, oh then, after a cautious survey, in order to see that no one, not even Francis, can observe my movements, I take the tin box from its place, get out of the water on to the rock, and having dried my fingers on wisps of seaweed, light a cigarette and smoke it. As I smoke it, I submerge the thermometer in the sea, and when the cigarette is finished, read the temperature.

After that the thermometer has to be dried, and is put back in the box with the cigarettes and matches, and the treasure is stowed away again in its seaweed-fronted cave. Once a fortnight or so I must go through a perilous manoeuvre, for I have to bring the box back to be refilled. This entails swimming with one hand in the air holding the box like Excalibur above the sea, and it can only be done on very calm mornings, for otherwise there is danger of some ripples intruding through the hinges or edge of the lid, which does not shut very well. And all the time the risk of detection is imminent, for if Francis saw me swimming to land with a bright tin box in my hand, he would be certain to make inquiries. But so far no such heartbreaking disaster has befallen, and without detection (and I humbly trust without suspicion) the cache-box has been twice taken back to be refilled and gone on its return journey again to its romantic hiding-place. Sometimes I have been within an ace of discovery, as when, to my horror, two days ago Francis swam out to my rock, instead of going to his own, while I was in the middle of my cigarette. I had time to put the box back, but somehow it never occurred to me to throw the cigarette away. By a special dispensation of Providence, however, it was not permitted that it should occur to him as odd that I should be seated on a rock in the middle of the sea, smoking. He was accustomed to the sight, I must suppose, of my smoking on land, and the question of locality did not occur to him. But it seemed a weary, weary time before he slid off into the sea again, I airily remarking that I should sit there a little longer. Sometimes,

when Francis has been unusually communicative about private matters that concern himself alone, I wonder whether I ought to tell him about my cache. But I don't, for those who understand the true science of caches understand that if you have made a cache alone, you might just as well not have made it at all if you share your secret with anybody. You can have joint caches, of course...

This morning the thermometer registered seventy-six degrees, which gave me a feeling of personal pride in the sea and Italy generally, and I swam lazily back through the warm clinging water. The sun flamed overhead, and the line of the beach was reeling and dancing in the heat. But if you think that now my bathe was over, you are miserably mistaken; you might as well suppose that the play of *Hamlet* was finished when the ghost appeared. The swim to the rock is only the first act, the main bathe; and now begins the second or basking act, which may or may not be studious.

Some dozen bathers, English and American, for the most part, are dotted about the beach. Francis is already out of the water, and is lying on his back in a pocket of sand, with his hands across his eyes to keep the glare out, and I take my volume of "The Ring and the Book," which I have made it my task to read through, put on a hat, and, wet and cool, sit down propped up against a smooth white rock. This is so hot that I must needs hang a towel over it, and then I open my book where I last turned down the page. For ten minutes perhaps I am a model of industry, and then

insensibly my eye wanders from the dazzling white page where the words by some optical delusion seem printed in red...

The sea is still a mirror of crystal; some little way out a big steamer, high in the water, so that the screw revolves in a smother of foam, is kicking her way into Naples, and soon the dark blue lines of her wash will come creaming to land. Otherwise nothing stirs; the sun-burned figures disposed about the beach might be asleep, and on the steep hill-side behind there is no sound or movement of life. Perhaps a little draught draws downward towards the sea, for mixed with the aromatic smells of the dried seaweed on the beach there is a faint odour of the broom flower that flames on the slope. Already my book has slipped from my knee on to the pebbles, and gradually – a phenomenon to which I am getting accustomed in these noonday baskings – thought fades also, and I am only conscious, though very vividly conscious; I know vividly, acutely, that this is Italy, that here is the sea and the baking beach, and the tumbled fragments of Tiberius's palace, that a dozen yards away Francis, having sat up, is clasping his knees with his arms, and is looking seaward, but all these things are not objects of thought, but only of consciousness. They seem part of me, or I of them; the welding of the world to me gets closer and more complete every moment; I am so nearly *the same thing* as the stones on the beach, and the liquid rim of the sea; so nearly too, am I Francis, or, indeed, any other of these quiet dreaming basking figures. The line of the steamer's wash which is now on the point of breaking along the shore is so nearly

realizable as one with the sun or the sky, or me, or any visible or tangible part of the whole, for each is the expression of the Absolute...

I do not know whether this is Paganism or Pantheism, or what, but that it is true seems beyond all power of doubt; it is certain, invariable, all that varies is our power of feeling it. To me personally the sense of home that Italy gives quickens my perception and assimilation of it, and this is further fulfilled by the intimacy with external things produced by these sun-soaked and sea-pickled mornings. Here in the south one gets closer to the simple facts of the world, one is welded to sun and sea; the communications between soul and body and the external world are cleaned and fortified. It is as if the buzz and clatter of a telephone suddenly cleared away, and the voice came through unhindered. In England the distraction and complications that necessarily crowd in on one in the land where one lives and earns one's living, and is responsible for a house and is making arrangements and fitting them into the hours of the day, choke the lines of communication; here I strip them off even as I strip off my clothes to wallow in the sea and lie in the sand. The barriers of individualism, in which are situated both the sense of identity, and the loneliness which the sense of *being oneself* brings, are drawn up like the sluices of a lock, letting the pour of external things, of sun and sea and human beings into the quiet sundered pool. I begin to realize with experience that I am part of the whole creation to which I belong.

You will find something of this consciousness in all that school of thought known as mysticism; it is, indeed, the basis of mysticism, whether that mysticism is pagan or Christian. In Greek thought you will find it, expressed guardedly and tentatively, and it undoubtedly lies at the base of some of their myths. It lurks in that myth of Narcissus, the youth who, beholding his own fair image in tranquil water, was drawn in by the spirits of the stream, and became a flower on the bank of the pool where he had lost himself, becoming merged in creation. So, too, in the story of Hyacinthus, whom Apollo loved. Him, as he was playing with the discus, the sun-god inadvertently slew, and from his blood came up the flowers that bear his name. And more especially, for here we get not the instance only but the statement of the idea itself, we find it in the myth of Pan, the god of all Nature, the spirit of all that is. He was not to be found in town or market-place, nor where men congregate, but it might happen that the lonely wayfarer, as he passed through untenanted valley or over empty hill-side, might hear the sound of his magical fluting of the tune that has no beginning and no ending, for it is as young as spring and as old as Time. He might even see him seated in some vine-wreathed cave, and though the sight of him meant, even as to Narcissus or to Hyacinthus, the death of the body, who shall doubt that he to whom that vision was vouchsafed died because he had utterly fulfilled himself as an individual, and his passing was the bursting of his heart with the greatness of the joy that illuminated him? He had beheld

Nature – Nature itself with true eyes, and could no longer exist in separate individual consciousness; seeing the spirit of the All, he knew and was merged in his union with it.

Here is the pagan view of the All-embracing, All-containing God, and it is hardly necessary to point out how completely it is parallel to, even identical with, the revelations of Christian mysticism. The bridal of the soul with her Lord, as known to St. Theresa, the dissolution and bathing of the soul in love, its forsaking of itself and going wholly from itself, which is the spirit of what Thomas à Kempis tells us of the true way, are all expressions of the same spiritual attainment. To them it came in the light of Christian revelation, but it was the same thing as the Greek was striving after in terms of Pan. And in every human soul is planted this seed of mystic knowledge, which grows fast or slow, according to the soil where it is set, and the cultivation it receives. To some the knowledge of it comes only in fitful faraway flashes; others live always in its light. And the consciousness of it may come in a hundred manners: to the worshipper when he receives the mystery of his faith at the altar, to the lover when he beholds his beloved, to the artist when the lift of cloud or the "clear shining after rain" suddenly smites him personally and intimately, so that for the moment he is no longer an observer but is part of what he sees.

But to none of us does the complete realization come until the time when our individuality, as known to us here and now, breaks like the folded flower from the sheath of the body. Often

we seem nearly to get there; we feel that if only we could stay in a state of mind that is purely receptive and quiescent, the sense of it would come to us with complete comprehension. But as we get near it, some thought, like a buzzing fly, stirs in our brain, and with a jerk we are brought back to normal consciousness, with the feeling that some noise has brought us back from a dream that was infinitely more vivid and truer than the world we awake to.

So it happened to me now. I saw and heard the hissing of the wash of the steamer break on the shore, observing it and thinking about it. I saw, too, that Francis had got up and was walking along towards me, ankle-deep in the shallow water. He groped among the pebbles with his hand, and picked something up. Then he came and lay down alongside, and before he spoke I think I knew the gist of what he was going to say.

He held out to me what he had picked up. It was one of those fragments of green mottled marble, such as we often find here, washed up from the ruined pavements of the palace.

"What is it?" he said. "What is it really? God somehow, you know."

"Or you or me?" I suggested.

"Yes, of course. Either, both. But there is something, Someone, call it the Absolute or the First Cause or God, which is quite everywhere. It can't be local. That's the only explanation of All-there-is which will hold water, and it holds water and everything else. But you don't get at it by discussion and arguments, or even by thought. You've got to open the

windows and doors; let the air in. Perhaps you've got to knock down and blow up the very house of your identity, and sit on the ruins and wait. But it's the idea of that which makes me so busy in my lazy life."

The ripple of the steamer's wash died away again.

"Funny that you should have said that just now," I remarked.

"Why? Just because you had been thinking about it? I don't see that. If the wind blew here, it would be odder that it didn't blow when I was sitting over there."

"But did you know I had been thinking about it?"

"Well, it seemed likely. Let's have another swim before we dress. There's trouble coming in the sky. It's the last of the serene days for the present."

"But there was a high barometer this morning."

"There won't be when we get up to the Villa again," he said. "The sun has got the central-heating touch to-day. It's been stuffy heat for the last hour, not the heat of the fire. And look at the sky."

Certainly a curious change had taken place all over the firmament. It was as if some celestial painter had put body-colour into what had been a wash of pure blue; there was a certain white opacity mingled with the previous clarity of it. The sun itself, too, was a little veiled, and its heat, as Francis had said, seemed more like the radiation from hot-water pipes than the genial glow of an open fire. Round it at a distance of three or four of its diameters ran a pale complete halo, as of mist. Yet

what mist could live in such a burning and be unconsumed?

"Sometimes too hot the eye of heaven shines,
And often is his gold complexion dimmed,"

quoted Francis. "But here we have the two things occurring simultaneously, which Shakespeare did not mean. But what, after all, *didn't* Shakespeare mean?"

We swam out round the fat German's promontory, floated, drifting with the eastward setting current, came lazily in again, and even more lazily walked up through the narrow cobbled path to where the rickety little victoria was waiting for us on the road. The tourist boat had arrived, and clouds of dust hung in the air, where their vehicles had passed, undispersed by any breeze. The intolerable oppression of the air was increasing every moment; the horse felt himself unable to evolve even the semblance of a trot, and the driver, usually the smartest and most brisk of charioteers, sat huddled up on his box, without the energy to crack his whip or encourage his steed to a livelier pace. Usually he sits upright and sideways, with bits of local news for his passengers, and greetings for his friends on the road; to-day he had nothing beyond a grunt of salutation, and a shrug of the shoulders for the tip which he usually receives with a wave of his hat, and a white-toothed "*Tante grazie!*" The Piazza, usually a crowded cheerful sort of outdoor club at midday, was empty, but for a few exhausted individuals who sat in the strips of narrow

shadow, and the post-office clerk just chucked our letters and papers at us. The approach of Scirocco, though as yet no wind stirred, made everyone cross and irritable, and set every nerve on edge, and from the kitchen, when we arrived at the Villa, we heard sounds of shrill altercation going on between Pasqualino and Seraphina, a thing portentously unusual with those amicable souls. Pasqualino banged down the macaroni on the table, and spilt the wine and frowned and shrugged till Francis told him abruptly to mend his manners or let Seraphina serve us; on which for a moment the sunny Italian child looked out from the clouds and begged pardon, and said it was not he but the cursed Scirocco. And then, following on the cloud in the sky that had spread so quickly over the heavens, came the second cloud.

Francis had just opened the Italian paper which we had got at the post-office and gave one glance at it.

"Horrible thing!" he said. "The Archduke Ferdinand, heir to the Austrian throne, and his wife have been murdered at Serajevo. Where is Serajevo? Pass the mustard, please."

Pasqualino's myrtle wreath fell down during lunch (he told us that it had done the same thing a good deal all morning), and he, exhausted by his early rising to pick it, and the increasing tension of Scirocco, went and lay down on the bench by the cistern in the garden as soon as his ministrations were over, and after the fashion of Italians took off his coat and put it over his head, which seemed odd on this broiling and airless day. From the kitchen came the choking reverberation of snores, and looking

in, I saw Seraphina reposing augustly on the floor, with her back propped up against the kitchen dresser and her mouth wide, as if for presentation to a dentist. Francis retired to his bedroom to lie down and sleep, and, feeling like Oenone that "I alone awake," I went to my sitting-room to read the paper, and, if possible, write a letter that ought to have been sent quite a week ago.

This room is furnished exactly as I chose to furnish it; consequently it has got exactly all that I want in it, and, what is even more important, it has nothing that I don't want. There is a vast table made of chestnut wood, so big that a week's arrears can accumulate on it, and yet leave space to write, to play picquet at the corner and to have tea. (If there are any other uses for a table, I don't know them.) This table stands so that the light from the window number one falls on it, and close behind it along the wall is the spring mattress of a bed. On it lies another thick comfortable mattress; above that a stamped linen coverlet, and on that are three enormous cushions and two little ones. The debilitated author, therefore, when the fatigue of composition grows to breaking-point, can thus slide from his chair at the enormous table, and dispose the cushions so as to ensure a little repose. Opposite this couch stands a bookcase, where are those few works that are necessary to salvation, such as "Wuthering Heights," "Emma," and "The Rubáiyát," books that you can open anywhere and be instantly wafted, as on a magic carpet, to familiar scenes that never lose the challenge of novelty (for this is the reason of a book, just as it is also of a friend). After

the bookcase comes the door into my bedroom, and after that, on the wall at right angles, window number two, looking south. A chair is set against the wall just beyond it, and beyond again (coming back to window number one, which looks west) another chair, big, low and comfortable, convenient to which stands a small table, on which Pasqualino has placed a huge glass wine-flask, and has arranged in it the myrtle that was left over from his wreath. The walls of this abode of peace are whitewashed and ungarnished by pictures, the ceiling is vaulted, the tiled floor is uncarpeted, and outside window number one is a small terrace, on the walls of which stand pots of scarlet geraniums, where, when nights are too hot within, I drag a mattress, a pillow and a sheet. There are electric lamps on both tables and above the couch, and I know nothing that a mortal man can really want, which is not comprised in this brief catalogue.

I wrote the letter that should have been written a week ago, found that it didn't meet the case, and after tearing it up, lay down on the couch (completely conscious of my own duplicity of purpose) in order, so I said to myself, to think it over. But my mind was all abroad, and I thought of a hundred other things instead, of the bathe, of the garden, and wondered whether if I went into the studio and played the piano very softly, it would disturb anybody. Then I had the idea that there was someone in the studio, and found myself listening as to whether I heard steps there or not. Certainly I heard no steps, but the sense that there was someone there was rather marked. Then, simultaneously I

remembered how both Pasqualino and Seraphina had heard steps there, when the house was otherwise empty, and had gone there, both singly and together, to see if Francis or I had come in. But even as I did now, they have entered and found the studio empty. Often I have hoped that a ghost might lurk in those unexplained footfalls, but apparently the ghost cannot make itself more manifest than this.

I stood there a moment still feeling that there was somebody there, though I neither saw nor heard anything, and then went quietly along the passage, under the spur of the restlessness that some people experience before Scirocco bursts, and looked into Francis's room, the door of which was open. He lay on his bed in trousers and opened shirt, sleeping quietly. From here I could catch the sound of Seraphina's snoring, and from the window could see the head-muffled Pasqualino spread out in the shade of the awning above the garden cistern. And feeling more Oenone-ish than ever, I went back and lay down again. It was impossible in this stillness and stagnation of the oppressed air to do more than wait, as quiescently as possible, for the passing of the hours.

I was not in the least sleepy, but I had hardly lain down when the muddle and blur of sudden slumber began to steal over my brain. I thought I remembered seeing the murdered Archduke once in London, and was I wrong in recollecting that he always wore a fur-tippet over his mouth? I recognized that as nonsense, for I had never seen him at all, and fell to thinking about Francis lying there on his bed, with doors and windows open. It seemed

to me rather dangerous that he should lie there, relaxed and defenceless, for it was quite possible that Miss Machonochie, recognizing that everything was one (even as I had felt this morning on the beach) might easily prove to be Artemis, and coming in moon-wise through Francis's window might annex her Endymion. This seemed quite sensible ... or Caterina might float into the garden in similar guise, and carry off Pasqualino ... perhaps both of these love-disasters might happen, and then Seraphina and I alone would be left... I should certainly swim away to my *cache*, and live on cigarettes and seaweed, and mercury from the thermometer... I should have to break the bulb to get at it, and I thought that I was actually doing so.

It broke with a terrific crash, which completely awoke me. Another crash followed and a scream: it was the second shutter of my window that faced south being blown against the sash, and the scream was that of the pent-up wind that burst with the suddenness of lightning out of the sky. On the instant the house was full of noises, other shutters clattered and banged, my open door slammed to, as the Scirocco howled along the passage, as if making a raid to search the house. My pile of unanswered businesses rose like a snowdrift from the table, and were littered over the room; the wine flask and its myrtle overturned; a pot of geraniums on the edge of the terrace came crashing down. In a moment the whole stagnation of the world was rent to ribands, and the ribands went flying on the wings of the wind. There was no doubt about footsteps now: Pasqualino came rushing in

from the garden, Seraphina left her kitchen and bundled upstairs, and I collided with Francis as we ran into the studio to close the windows. Never have I known so surprising a pounce of the elemental forces of the world. A volcano bursting in flame and lava at one's feet, a war suddenly springing full-armed in a peaceful country, could not have shattered stillness with so unheralded an uproar.

Five minutes served to bolt and bar the southern and western aspects of the house from the quarter of the gale, and five more to repair the damage of its first assault. After that we listened with glee to its bellowing, and while Seraphina made tea, I went out of an eastern entrance to gain further acquaintance with this savage south-wester at first hand. It threw me back like a hot wave when I emerged from the sheltered side of the house into its full blast, but soon, leaning against it, I crept across the garden to the lower terrace. The olive-trees were bending to it, as if some savage, invisible fish had taken a bait they held out; twigs and branches were scurrying along the paths, and mixed with them were the petals and the buds of flowers that should have made July gay for us. A whirl of blue blossoms was squibbing off the tangle of morning-glory; even the red pillar-trunk of the stone-pine groaned as the wind drove through its umbrella of dense foliage. The sun was quite hidden; only a pale discolourment in the sky showed where it travelled, and to the south the sea was already a sheet of whipped wave-tops under this Niagara of wind. It was impossible to stand there long, and soon I let myself be

blown back up the garden and round the corner of the house into calm. Upstairs Francis was already at tea; he had picked up the sheet of the Italian paper which he had only glanced at during lunch.

"Serajevo appears to be in Servia," he said, "or Bosnia. One of those countries."

"Oh, the murder!" said I. "The garden's in an awful mess."

"I suppose so. Tea?"

JULY, 1914

For the last seven weeks not a drop of rain has fallen on the island. The great Scirocco of June brought none with it, and when that three days' hurricane was over, we returned to the wonderful calm weather that preceded it. Already nearly a month before the ordinary time the grape clusters are beginning to grow tight-skinned on the vines, and we expect an unprecedented vintage, for the Scirocco, though violent enough on the south of the island, did no damage to the northern slopes, where are the most of the vineyards. But the dearth of water is already becoming serious, for depending, as we do, on the cisterns where the rain is stored, it is full time that replenishment came to their ebbing surfaces. For the last fortnight, unable to spare water for other than household purposes, we have been obliged to maroon the garden, so to speak, on a desert island, and already many householders are buying water for purposes of ablution and cooking. Indeed, when, last night, the sprightly Pasqualino announced that there was only half a metre of water left in the second cistern (the first one we improvidently emptied in order to clean it), and that the Signori would have to have their risotto and macaroni boiled in the wine-juice, of which there promised so remarkable a supply, Seraphina, who had come upstairs for orders, told him pretty roundly that if this was meant for a joke, it was in the worst possible taste, for it was she who ordered the wine, and

was responsible for the lowness of the Signori's bills. Upon which Pasqualino sinuously retired with a deprecating smile, leaving Seraphina, flushed with victory, in possession of the field... In fact the situation is so serious, she proceeded to tell us, that the priests have arranged that the silver image of San Costanzo is to-night to be taken in procession from the cathedral, where it usually abides, down to the Marina, where an altar is to be set up for him close to the quay, and fireworks to be let off, so that he may be gratified and by making intercession cause the rain we so sorely need to fall.

Certainly that seems a very sensible idea. The islanders adore fireworks and processions, and it is only reasonable of them to endow their saints with the same amiable tastes. San Costanzo, like all sensible folk, whether saints or sinners, delights in fireworks and processions, and of course he will be pleased to do his best after that. (As a matter of fact, though I hate cynicism, I cannot help remembering that the barometer has been falling these last three days, and I wonder whether the priests who have arranged this *festa* for San Costanzo know that. I hope not.)

Seraphina's informant on these matters was not the priest, anyhow, but Teresa of the cake shop.

"And is Teresa then going down to the Marina?" I asked.

Seraphina threw open her hands and tossed back her head in emphatic denial. The Signor surely knew very well (or if he did not, Signorino Francesco did) that it was twelve years now since Teresa had gone down to the port, and never again would she set

foot on that ill-omened quay. *La povera!*.. And Seraphina stood in silence a moment, gravely shaking her head. Then she threw off the melancholy train of thought into which the mention of Teresa had led her.

"The meat comes from Naples to-morrow," she announced. "For dinner then a piece of roast meat and the fish that Nino has promised and a soup of vegetables. *Ecco!* And there will be no cooking in wine as that scamp said."

Afterwards Francis told me why Teresa of the cake shop never goes down to the Marina, though *festas* and fireworks beckon, and though San Costanzo's silver image is borne there in solemn procession, so that he may intercede for us, and cause to break up the brazen sky. It filled up in the telling the studious or basking stage of our bathe next morning.

"Fifteen years ago," he said, "when first I came to the enchanted island, Teresa Stali was the prettiest maid and the daintiest cook in all Alatri. That year I took for six months the Villa Bardi, which belonged to her father, who told me that if I was in need of a cook he could supply me with one of whom I should have no complaints. So, if I had not already got one, Teresa would do everything I needed – cook my food, look after the garden, and keep the house as bright as a Sunday brooch. Teresa, he explained, was his daughter, a good girl, and would I interview her. In answer to his loud cries of 'Teresa! Teresina!' taken up by shrill voices along the street, there came to the door a vision of tall black-haired maidenhood.

"She is strong, too," said her grinning parent, clapping her on the shoulder. 'Eh, the Signor should have seen her bump the heads of her two brothers together last week, when they threw stones at the washing she had hung up to dry. Bang! bang! they will not meddle with Teresina's washing again!"

"Of course I engaged this paragon, and never has a house been so resplendent, never were such meals offered for the refreshment of the esurient sons of men, as when Teresa was Prime Minister in the Villa Bardi. She was scarcely capable, it seemed, of walking, for her nimble feet broke into a run whenever more than a yard or two must be traversed; household work was a festival to her, and she sang as she emptied slops. Flowers, fresh every day, decked my table; you could have eaten off the floors, and each morning my shoes shone with speckless whitening. One thing alone had power to depress her, and that if by chance I went out to dine with friends, so that there was no opportunity that evening for her kitchen-magic. The antidote was that on another day someone would dine with me, so that others beside her own signor should taste the perfect fruits of her oven.

"Often, when the table was cleared in the evening, and she came to get orders for next day before going back to her father's house for the night, she would stop and talk to me, for, in that she was in my household, she was of my family, identified with my interests and I with hers. By degrees I learned her domestic history, how there was a brother doing his military service, how there were two younger boys still at home, whom Satan

continually inspired to unspeakable deeds (of which the stoning of her washing was among the milder); how her mother had taught her all she knew of cooking, how her father was the best carpenter in all South Italy, so that he had orders from Naples, from Salerno, from Rome even. And, finally, she told me about herself, how that she was engaged to Vincenzo Rhombo, of Santa Agatha, who had gone to Buenos Ayres to seek his fortune, and was finding it, too, with both hands. He had been gone for two years now, and last year he had sent her seven hundred francs to keep for him. Every year he was going to send her all he saved, and when he came home, Dio!..

"The post used to arrive about half-past eight in the morning, and was announced by sepulchral knocking on the garden door, on which Teresa, if she was brushing and tidying upstairs, flew down to take in the letters, duster in hand, or with whatever occupied her busy fingers at the moment. From there she rushed along the garden terrace to where I was breakfasting underneath the pergola, bringing me my letters. But one morning, I saw her take them in, and instead of coming to me, she sat down on the steps and remained there a long time, reading. Eventually I called to her.

"'Nothing for me, Teresa?' I asked.

"'Instantly she sprang up.

"'Pardon – a thousand pardons,' she said. 'There are two letters, and a packet, a great packet.'

"'And you have had a packet?' I asked.

"Jesu! Such a packet! May I show the Signor? Look, here is Vincenzo, his very self! And again seven hundred francs. Ah, it is Vincenzo! I can hear him laughing.'

"She laid the photograph before me, and, indeed, you could hear Vincenzo laughing. The merry handsome face was thrown back, with mouth half open.

"And such news!" she said. 'He has done better than ever this year, and has bought a piece of land, or he would have sent even more money home. And at the end – ' she turned over the sheets, 'at the end he writes in English, which he is learning. What does it mean, Signor?'

"This is what Vincenzo had written:

"My correspondence must now stopp, my Teresina, but never stopps my love for you. Across the sea come my kisses, O my Teresina, and from the Heart of your Vincenzo. I kiss my correspondence, and I put it in the envelop.'

"I translated this and turned to the dim-eyed Teresina.

"And that is better than all the money,' she said.

"Then she became suddenly conscious that she was carrying my trousers, which she was brushing when the knock of the postman came.

"Dio! What a slut is Teresina!" she exclaimed. 'Scusi, Signor.'

"I went back to England at the termination of my lease of the Villa Bardi, for interviews with stormy uncles, and the settlement of many businesses, and it was some months later that I set off on my return here, with finality in my movements. On the

way I had intended to stop half a week in Naples to take my last draught of European culture. But the sight of Alatri on the evening I arrived there, harp-shaped and swimming molten in a June sunset, proved too potent a magnet. Besides, there was reputed to be a great deal of cholera in Naples, and I have no use for cholera. So, early next morning I embarked at the Castello d'Ovo to come back to my beloved island.

"It was a morning made for such islanders as I: the heat was intense but lively, and the first thing to do on landing was to 'Mediterranizer' myself, as Nietzsche says, and bathe, wash off the stain of the mainland and of civilization, and be baptized, finally baptized, into this dreamland life. I often wonder whether dreams – "

"Stick to your story," said I. "It's about Teresa."

Francis shifted on his elbow.

"There was a bucketful of changes here," he said, "and I was disconcerted, because I expected to find everything exactly as I had left it. Alatri is the sleeping-beauty – isn't it true? – and the years pass, and you expect to see her exactly as she was in the nineties. But now they were talking of a funicular railway to connect the Marina with the town, and Giovanni the boatman had married, and they said his wife had already cured him of his habits. Oh, she brushed his hair for him, she did! And a damned American had started a lending library, and we were all going to enlarge our minds on a circulating system, and there was a bathing establishment planned, where on Sunday afternoon you

could drink your sirop to the sound of a band, and see the sluts from Naples. But it fell into the sea all right, and the posts of it are covered with barnacles. Far more important it was that Teresa had opened a cake-shop in a superb position, as you know, close to the Piazza, so that when you come in from your walk you cannot help buying a cake: the force of its suggestion is irresistible. She opened it with good money, too, the money that Vincenzo had sent her back from Buenos Ayres. The cake-shop was now proceeding famously, and it was believed that Teresa was making twenty per cent. on her outlay, which is as much as you can hope to get with safety. But it had been – the cake-shop – a prodigious risk; for a month when the island was empty it had not prospered, and Teresa's family distended their poor stomachs nightly with the cakes that were left unsold that day, for Teresa had high ideas, and would have nothing stale in her shop. She brought the unsold things home every night in a bag, for fresh every morning must be her cakes, and so the family ate the old ones and saved the money for their supper. Rich they were, many of them, and stuffed with cream.

"But after an anxious four weeks the *forestieri* began to arrive, and under their patronage, up went Teresa's cake-shop like a rocket. Customers increased and jostled; and Teresa, the daring, the audacious, took good luck on the wing, and started a tea-place on the balcony above the cake-shop, and bought four iron-legged, marble-topped tea-tables, and linen napkins, no less. She washed these incessantly, for her tea-place was always full, and

Teresa would no more have dirty napkins than she would have stale cakes. That is Teresa!

"Business expanded. One of the two young brothers (whose heads she so soundingly knocked together) she now employed in the baking of her cakes, and for the other she bought, straight off, a suit of white drill with ten thousand bone buttons, and gave him employment in bringing the tea-trays up to the customers in the balcony. She paid them both good wages, but Satan, as usual, entered into their malicious heads, and once in the height of the season they confabulated, and thought themselves indispensable, and struck for higher wages. Else they would no longer bake or hand the bakeries.

"A less supreme spirit than Teresa's might have given in, and raised their wages. Instead she hurried their departure, and no whit discouraged, she rose at four in the morning, and baked, and when afternoon came had all ready, and flew upstairs and downstairs, and never was there so good a tea as at Teresa's, nor so quickly served. In three days she had broken the fraternal strike, and the baffled brothers begged to be taken back. Then Teresa, who had been too busy to attend to them before, for she was doing their work in addition to her own, condescended to them, and told them what she really thought of them. She sat in a chair, did Teresa, and loosed her tongue. There was a blistering of paint that day on the balcony, though some said it was only the sun which had caused it...

"Two sad-faced males returned to their work next day, at

a stipend of five francs per month less than they had hitherto received. The island, which had watched the crisis with the intensest interest, loudly applauded her spirit, and told the discouraged but repentant labour-party that only a good-hearted sister would have taken them back at all. She had not even smacked them, which she was perfectly capable of doing, in spite of their increasing inches, but perhaps her tongue was even more stinging than the flat of her hand. Great was Teresa of the cake-shop!

"All this I heard, and the best news of all remained to tell, for Vincenzo was even now on his way back from Buenos Ayres. He had made a tremendous hit with the land he had bought last summer, had money enough to pay off the mortgages on his father's farm at Santa Agatha, and he and Teresa would marry at once. Then, alas! Alatri would know Teresa no more, for she would live with her husband on the mainland. Already she had been made a very decent offer for the appurtenances and goodwill of the cake-shop, which, so she told me, she was secretly inclined to accept. But according to the proper ritual of bargaining, she had, of course, refused it, and told Giorgio Stofa that when he had a sensible proposition to make to her, he might call again. Giorgio, a mean man by all accounts, had been seen going to the bank that morning, and Teresa expected him to call again very soon.

"This conversation took place in the cake-shop while all the time she bustled about, now diving into the bake-house to

stimulate the industry of Giovanni, now flying up to the balcony to see if Satan's other limb had put flowers on the marble-topped tables. Then, for a moment there was peace, and love looked out of Teresa's eyes.

"'Eh, Signor,' she said. 'Vincenzo will be home, if God wills, by the day of Corpus Domini. What a *festa!* Dio! What a *festa* will that be!'

"The serene island days began to unroll themselves again, with long swimmings, long baskings on the beach, long siestas on grilling afternoons, when the whole island lay mute till the evening coolness began, and only the cicalas chirped in the oleanders. Then, as the heat of the day declined, I would often have tea on Teresa's balcony, and on one such afternoon the great news came, and Teresa put into my hand the telegram she had just received from Naples, which told her that Vincenzo's ship had arrived, and that her lover had come back. Business necessary to transact would detain him there for a day, and for another day he must be at Santa Agatha, but on the morning of Corpus Domini he would come to Alatri, by the steamer that arrived at noon...

"'Six years since he went,' said Teresa. 'And oh, Signor, it is but as a day. We shall keep the *festa* together and see the fireworks... We shall go up into the rockets,' she cried in a sudden kindling of her tongue. 'We shall be golden rain, Vincenzo and I.'

"'And I shall stand below, oh, so far below,' said I, 'and clap

my hands, and say "Eccoli!" That is, if I approve of Vincenzo.'

"Teresa put her hands together.

"'Eh! but will Vincenzo approve of me?' she said. 'Will he think I have grown old? Six years! Oh, a long time.'

"'It is to be hoped that Vincenzo will not be a pumpkin,' I remarked. 'Give me the large sort of cake, Teresa. I will carry it up to the Villa.'

"Teresa frowned.

"'The cakes are a little heavy to-day,' she said. 'I had a careless hand. You had better take two small ones, and if you do not like them, you will send back the second. *Grazie tante, Signor.*'

"The news that Vincenzo was to arrive by the midday boat on Corpus Domini, spread through the town, and all Teresa's family and friends were down at the Marina to give him welcome. A heavy boat-load of visitors was expected, and the little pier was cleared of loungers, so that the disembarkation in small boats from the steamer might, be unimpeded. But by special permission Teresa was given access to the landing-steps, so that she might be the first to meet her lover, even as he set foot on the shore, and there, bare-headed and twinkling with all her *festa* finery, she waited for him. In the first boat-load that put off from the steamer he came, standing in the prow, and waving to her, while she stood with clasped hands and her heart eager with love. He was the first to spring ashore, leaping across to the steps before the boat had come alongside, and with a great cry, jubilant and young, he caught Teresa to him, and for a supreme

moment they stood there, clasped in each other's arms. And then he seemed to fall from her and collapsed suddenly on the quay, and lay there writhing... The cholera that was prevalent in Naples had him in his grip, and in two hours he was dead..."

Francis sat silent a little after the end of his story.

"So now you know," he said, "why for fourteen years Teresa of the cake-shop has never gone down to the Marina."

That night, when the thud and reverberation of the fireworks began down on the Marina, Francis and I went into the town to see them from above. The Piazza was deserted, for all Alatri had gone down to the port to take part in this procession and explosion in honour of San Costanzo, so that he might make intercession and send rain to the parched island, and we went out on to the broad paved platform which overlooks the Marina. This, too, seemed to be deserted, and perched on the railing that surrounds it, we watched the golden streaks of the ascending rockets, and their flowering into many-coloured fires. At this distance the reports reached the ear some seconds after their burstings; their plumes of flame had vanished before their echoes flapped in the cliffs of Monte Gennaro. The moon was not yet risen, and their splendour burned brilliantly against the dark background of the star-sown sky. By and by a whole sheaf of them went up together, and afterwards a detonating bomb showed that the exhibition was over. And then we saw that we were not alone, for in the dark at the far end of the railings a black figure was watching. She turned and came towards us, and

I saw who it was.

"You have been looking at the fireworks, Teresa?" said Francis.

"*Sissignor*. They have been very good. San Costanzo should send us rain after that. But who knows? It is God's will, after all."

"Surely. And how goes it?"

She smiled at him with that sweet patient face, out of which fourteen years ago all joy and fire died.

"The cake-shop?" she said. "Oh, it prospers. It always prospers. I am trying a new recipe to-morrow – a meringue."

"And you – you yourself?" he asked.

"I? I am always well. But often I am tired of waiting. *Pazienza!* Shall I send some of the new meringues up to the Villa, if they turn out well, Signor?"

Francis had an inexplicable longing that evening to play chess, and as he despises the sort of chess I play with the same completeness as I despise parsnips, I left him with someone less contemptible at the café, and strolled up to the Villa again alone, going along the paved way that overlooks the sea to the south. High up was hung an amazing planet, and I felt rather glad I was no astronomer, and knew not which it was, for the noblest of names would have been unworthy of that celestial jewel. As if it had been a moon, the reflection of its splendour made a golden path across the sea, and posturing in its light, I found that it actually cast a vague shadow of me against a whitewashed wall. To the east the rim of the hill, where is situated the wireless

station, was beginning to stand out very black against a dove-coloured sky, and before I had reached the steep steps that lead past the garden wall, the rim of the full moon had cut the hill-top, dimming the stars around it, and swiftly ascending, a golden bubble in the waters of the firmament, it had shot up clear of the horizon and refashioned the world again in ivory and black. All the gamut of colours was dipped anew; blues were translated into a velvety grey, so too were greens, and though the eye could see the difference, it was impossible to say what the difference was. Simply what we call blue by daylight became some kind of grey; what we call green a totally distinct kind of grey and blacker than the darkest shadow of the stone-pine was the shouting scarlet of the geraniums. No painter (pace the Whistlerians) has ever so faintly suggested the magic of moon-colouring, and small blame to him, since the tone of it cannot be rendered in pictures that are seen in the daylight. But if you take the picture of a sunny day, and look at it in moonlight, you will see, not a daylight picture, but a moonlight scene. The same thing holds with daylight scents and night-scents, and the fragrance of the verbena by the house wall was not only dimmer in quality, but different in tone. It was recognizable but different, ghost-like, disembodied without the smack of the sun in it.

I strolled about for a little, and then having (as usual) writing on hand that should have been done days before, I went reluctantly into the house. I was quite alone in it, for Seraphina had gone home, Pasqualino was down at the Marina

taking part in fireworks and *festa*, and I had left Francis in a stuffy café pondering on gambits. We had dined early by reason of the fireworks, and before going up to my sitting-room to work, I foraged for cake and wine in the kitchen, and carried these upstairs. It was very hot, and I went first into the studio, where I set the windows wide, and next into Francis's room and Pasqualino's, where I did the same. Then I came back to my own room, exactly opposite the studio, and, stripped to shirt and trousers, with door and windows wide, I sat down for an hour's writing.

There is no such incentive to constructive thought as the knowledge that, humanly speaking, interruption is impossible. Seraphina would not return till morning, while *festa* and chess would undoubtedly detain Pasqualino and Francis for the next couple of hours. I had a luxurious sense of security; should I be so fortunate as to strike the vein I was delving for, I could go on mining there without let or hindrance. Reluctant though I had been to begin, I speedily found myself delightfully engrossed in what I was doing. Probably it did not amount to much, but the illusion in the author's mind, when he tinkers away at his tale, that he is doing something vastly important, is one that is never shaken, even though he continually finds out afterwards that the masterpiece has missed fire again. While he is engaged on his scribbling (given that his pen is in an interpreting frame of mind, and records without too many stumblings the dictation his brain gives it), he is in that Jerusalem that opens its gates

of pearl only to the would-be artist, be he painter or poet or writer or sculptor. He is constructing, recording his impressions, and though (I hasten to repeat) they may be totally unworthy of record, he doesn't think so when he is engaged on them, for if he did, he would be conscious of external affairs, his mind would wander, and he would stop. Often, of course, that happens, but there are other blessed occasions when he is engulfed by his own imaginings, and absorbed in the reproduction of them.

It was so with me that night, when I sat quite alone in the silent house, knowing that none could disturb me for a couple of hours to come. Italy, even the fact that I was in Italy, vanished from my mind, and for the sake of the curious, at the risk of egoism, I may mention that I was with Mrs. Hancock in her bedroom in her horrid villa called Arundel, and looking over her jewels with her, to see what she could spare, without missing it, as a wedding present for her daughter. Engaged in that trivial pursuit, I lost conscious touch with everything else.

Quite suddenly a very ordinary noise, though as startling as the ringing of a telephone-bell at my elbow, where there was no telephone, snatched me away from my imaginings. There was a step in the studio just opposite, and I made no doubt that Francis had got home, had come upstairs without my hearing him, and no doubt thinking that I was at work, had passed into the studio. But then, looking at my watch, which lay on the table before me, I saw that it was still only half-past ten, and that I had been at work (and he at chess) for barely half an hour. But there was no reason

that I should not go on working for an hour yet, and though my sense of security from interruption was gone, I anchored myself to my page again. But something had snapped; I could not get back into Mrs. Hancock's bedroom again, and after a few feeble sentences, and a corresponding number of impatient erasures, I came to a full stop.

I sat there for some ten minutes more, vainly endeavouring to concentrate again over Mrs. Hancock's jewels, but Francis's steps were in some way strangely disturbing. They passed up the studio, paused and returned, and paused and passed up again. Then, but not till then, there came into my mind the fact that Seraphina and Pasqualino had at different times heard (or thought they heard) footsteps in the studio, and on investigation had found it empty, and I began to wonder, still rather dimly and remotely, whether these were indeed the paces of Francis up and down the room. My reasonable mind told me that they were, but the recollection of those other occasions became momentarily more vivid, and I got up to see.

The door of my room and that of the studio were exactly opposite each other, with the width of a narrow passage between them. Both doors were open, and on going into the passage I saw that the studio was dark within. It seemed odd that Francis should walk up and down, as he was still continuing to do, in the dark.

I suddenly felt an intense curiosity to know whether this was Francis walking up and down in the dark, or rather an intense desire to satisfy myself that it was not. The switch of the electric

light was just inside the door, and even as my hand fumbled for it I still heard the steps quite close to me. Next moment the studio leaped into light as I pressed the switch, and I looked eagerly up and down it. There was no one there, though half a second before I had heard the footsteps quite close to me.

I stood there a moment, not conscious of fear, though I knew that for some reason my heart was creaking in my throat, and that I felt an odd prickly sensation on my head. But my paramount feeling was curiosity as to who or what it was that went walking here, my paramount consciousness that, though I could see no one, and the steps had ceased, there was someone close to me all the time, watching me not unkindly. But beyond doubt, for all visible presence, the studio was empty, and I knew that the search which I now carried out, visiting the darker corners, and going on to the balcony outside, from which there was no external communication further, was all in vain. Whatever it was that I, like Pasqualino and Seraphina, had heard, it was not a thing that hid itself. It was there, waiting for us to perceive it, waiting for the withdrawal of the shutter that separates the unseen world from the seen. The shutter had been partly withdrawn, for I had heard it; I had also the strong sense of its presence. But I had no conception as to what it was, except that I felt it was no evil or malignant thing.

I went back to my room, and, oddly enough, directly after so curious an experience, I found myself able to concentrate on Mrs. Hancock again without the slightest difficulty, and spent an

absorbed hour. Then I heard the garden gate open, there were steps on the stairs, and a moment afterwards Francis came up. I told him what had happened, exactly as I have set it down. He asked a few slightly scornful questions, and then proceeded to tell me how he had lost his king's bishop. I could not ask scornful questions about that, but it seemed very careless of him.

The very next morning there turned up information which seems to my mind (a mind which Francis occasionally describes as credulous) to bear upon the watcher and walker in the studio, and it happened in this wise. Ten days before, the careful Seraphina had collected certain table-cloths, sheets and socks that needed darning, and with a view to having them thoroughly well done, and with, I make no doubt, another motive as well in her superstitious mind, had given the job to Donna Margherita, a very ancient lady, but nimble with her needle, to whom we are all very polite. Even Francis (though he has admirable manners with everybody) goes out of his way to be civil to Donna Margherita, and no one, who is at all prudent, will fail to give her a "Good day" if he passes her in the street. But if the wayfarer sees Donna Margherita coming in his direction, and thinks she has not yet seen him, he will, if he is prudent, turn round and walk in another direction. I have known Francis to do that on some paltry excuse (and he says I have a credulous mind!), but his real reason is that though he would not admit it, he is aware that Donna Margherita has the evil eye. Consequently we islanders must not vex her or be other than scrupulously civil to her, though we keep out of her

way if we can, and when we must pass her it is wise to make the sign of the Cross surreptitiously. We do not talk about her much, for it is as well not to get near the confines of dangerous things; but before now Pasqualino has told me of various occurrences which to his mind put it beyond all doubt that Donna Margherita has the *jettatura*. There was the affair of his uncle's fig-tree: he had been foolish and said sharp things to her because her goat strayed into his vineyard. And Donna Margherita just looked at the fig-tree which grows by his gate, and said: "You have a fine fig-tree there; there will be plenty of fruit this summer." Within a fortnight all the crop of little half-ripe figs dropped off. There was her landlord who threatened to turn her out unless her quarter's overdue rent was paid the same evening. Was it paid? Not a bit of it; but the very same day the landlord's kitchen roof fell in... There is no end to such evidence, and so when ten days ago Donna Margherita asked Seraphina if there was not any mending for her to do, it is no wonder (especially since she is so neat with her needle) that Seraphina gave her our lacerated linen.

Such is the history of Donna Margherita, and so when this morning, as we were breakfasting, her knock came at the garden door, and she entered, Francis jumped up, and called Seraphina from the kitchen to pay for the mending and give Donna Margherita a glass of wine on this hot morning. It was cool and shady under the pergola where we were breakfasting, and as the old lady had a fancy to sit down for a little after her walk, she came along and sat down with us. And, vying with

each other in courtesies, Pasqualino brought her a slice of cake, and Seraphina a glass of wine, and then hastily retired from the dangerous neighbourhood, and looked out on the interview with troubled faces from an upper window.

To judge by her dried-apple cheek, and her gnarled and knotted hands, Donna Margherita might almost number the years with which Alatri credits her, asserting that she is a hundred summers old. Eighty, at any rate, she must be, since she has good recollection of the events of more than seventy years ago, and as she sipped her wine and clinked the soldi Seraphina (grossly overpaying) had given her, she talked amiably enough about our house and her early memories of it.

"Yes, it's a fine villa that the Signori have," she said; "but I can remember it as but a farm-house before additions were made to it. The farm buildings used to lean against it on the north, where later the big room was built by the English artist; byre and cow-house were there, and when I was a little girl a strange thing happened."

She mumbled her cake a little in her toothless jaws and proceeded:

"The farm in those days belonged to Giovanni Stofa, long since dead, and there he lived alone with his son, who is long dead also. One night after the house was shut up, and they sat together before going to bed, there came a noise and a clatter from the cow-house, very curious to hear. Giovanni thought that one of the cows had convulsions and ran out of the house and round by the

kitchen, and into the shed where the two cows were stabled. And as he opened the door he was near knocked down, for both of them ran out with hoofs in the air and tails switching. Then, not knowing what should meet his eyes, he turned the lantern that he carried into the cow-house, and there standing in the middle was a *strega* (witch). But she looked at him not unkindly, and said: 'I have come to guard the house, and from henceforth I shall always guard it, walking up and down, ever walking up and down.'

"The *strega* smiled at him as she spoke, and his knees ceased to tremble, for this was no black visitant.

"Your cattle will not be frightened again,' she said. 'Look, even now they come back.'

"As she spoke, first one and then the other of the cows came into the stable again, and walked right up to where the *strega* stood, blowing hard through their nostrils. And next moment they lay down close to her, one on each side.

"You will often hear me walking about here,' said the *strega*; 'but have no fear, for I guard the house.'

"And with that there came just one puff of wind, and Giovanni's lantern flickered, and lo! when the flame was steady again there was no *strega* there."

Donna Margherita took a sip of wine after her recitation.

"And does she still walk up and down where the cow-house was?" I asked.

"Surely; but fat ears cannot hear even the thunder," quoted Donna Margherita. "And now, Signori, I will be walking. And

thanks for the soldi and the cake and the wine."

Francis got up too.

"You are active still, Donna Margherita," he said.

Donna Margherita stepped briskly down the path.

"Eh, yes, Signor," she said. "I am old but active; I can still do such a day's work as would surprise you."

Francis's eye and mine met; we were behind her, so that she could not see the exchanged glance. What was in both our minds was the affair of Pasqualino's uncle's fig-tree, for that had certainly been a surprising day's work. But after she had gone, he alluded again to the steps I had heard in the studio in a far more respectful manner. The fact is, so I made bold to tell him, that he does not like Donna Margherita's unconscious innuendo that he has fat ears.

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