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A large, detailed oil painting of a woman's face and upper shoulders. She has dark, wavy hair and is looking directly at the viewer with a neutral expression. The lighting is soft, highlighting her features against a warm, orange-brown background.

UNDER  
THE SHADOW  
OF ETNA

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GIOVANNI VERGA

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# *UNDER THE SHADOW OF ETNA*

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*GIOVANNI VERGA*



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*Under the Shadow of Etna*

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Duke Classics

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# Introduction

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Giovanni Verga was born at Catania, in Sicily, in 1840. His youth was spent in Florence and Milan. He afterwards lived in Catania again, where he had an opportunity of studying those types of the Sicilian peasantry which he introduces so effectively, and with such dramatic suggestion, into many of his stories and sketches. After experiencing grievous family losses he returned to Milan, where he now resides.

In "L'Amante di Gramigna" Verga gives, in the form of a letter to his friend, the novelist, S. Farina, a sort of brief exposition of his literary Creed. Much of the drama is left to the imagination of the reader, who sees through the lines the action hinted at in a word or a phrase. Thus, in the story just mentioned, no definite time-limit is assigned. Months elapse, but only a passing expression gives the clue to it. It is amazing how definite is the idea left in the mind. It gives all the vividness of reality.

"Cavalleria Rusticana," or "Rustic Chivalry," has been known all over the world by its operatic setting by Mascagni. "La Lupa," which is scarcely less strong and vital, has been chosen by another Italian composer, Puccini, as the subject for a two-act opera. These two, as well as "L'amante di Gramigna" and "Jeli il Pastore," illustrate the deeper passions of the Sicilian peasantry. Verga's sardonic humor is shown in "Gli Orfani." How the sordid poverty of the people stands out in the comparison between the sorrow over the dying ass, and the utterly materialistic grief at the loss of the painstaking second wife!

"La Storia dell' Asino di San Giuseppe," well illustrates the average treatment of the long-suffering long-eared mules and asses which make so picturesque a part of the scenery of Italian and Spanish countries. It is a document for the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, and well deserves to be circulated together with "Black Beauty." What pathos in the sudden transfer of the poor little beast from comparative comfort, at least from the "dolce far niente" of its foalhood, to the grim realities of life, and its steady and fatal decline through all the gamut of wretchedness and degradation, to die at last under the weight of its burdens! And what side glances on the condition of those unfortunate Sicilians who live in what ought to be the very garden and Paradise of the world, and yet are so oppressed by unregulated Nature and too well regulated taxes!

It is no land of the imagination into which we are brought by Verga; there is no fascinating glamour of the virtuous triumphing after many vicissitudes, and seeing at last the wicked adequately punished. Here it is grim reality. The poor and weak go relentlessly to the wall; innocence and humble ignorance are crushed by experienced vice, the butterfly is singed by the flame; there is little joy, little peace. The fleckless sky shines down brilliantly on wreck of home and fortune; the son must go to the army and the daughter to her shame; the father's gray hairs must be crowned with dishonor, and despair must abide in the mother's breast. But yet the stories are not wholly pessimistic, nor do they give an utterly hopeless idea of the Sicilian peasant. He shows his capabilities; the woman her fiery zeal and faithfulness, even when on the wrong track. You see that education and a little real sympathy might make a great people out of Verga's "Turiddus" and "Alfios." There are dozens of others of Verga's short sketches which would repay translation, but the little collection of Sicilian pictures here

presented is marked by quite wonderful variety and contrast. They well illustrate the author's genius  
its best.

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NATHAN HASKELL DOLE.

*"Hedgecote," Glen Road, Jamaica Plain, June 19, 1895.*

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# Note

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Some of the Italian titles applied to the characters in these stories are retained. They are untranslatable; to omit them takes away from the Sicilian flavor, which is their great charm. Thus the words *compare* (*con* and *padre*) and *comare* (*con* and *madre*), literally godfather and godmother, are used in almost the same way as "uncle" and "aunt" in our country districts, only they are applied to young as well as old; *gnà* is a contraction for *signora*, corresponding somewhat to our *mis'* for "Mrs." *Babbo* is like our "dad" or "daddie." *Massaro* is a farmer; *compagni d'armi* are district policemen, not quite the same as *gens d'armes*; *Bersegliere* is the member of a special division of the Italian army.

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# *How Peppia Loved Gramigna*

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Dear Farina, this is not a story, but the outline of a story.

It will at least have the merit of being short, and of having fact for its foundation; it is a human document, as the phrase goes nowadays:—interesting perhaps for you and for all those who study the mighty book of the heart. I will tell it just as I found it among the country paths, and in almost the same simple and picturesque words that characterize the tales of the people; and really you will prefer to find yourself facing the bare and unadulterated fact rather than being obliged to read between the lines of the book through the author's spectacles.

The simple truth of human life will always make us thoughtful; will always have the effectiveness of reality, of genuine tears, of the fevers and sensations that have inflicted the flesh. The mysterious processes whereby conflicting passions mingle, develop and mature, will long constitute the chief fascination in the study of that psychological phenomenon called the plot of a story, and which modern analysis tries to follow with scientific care, through the hidden paths of oftentimes apparently contradictory complications.

Of the one that I am going to tell you to-day I shall only narrate the starting point and the ending, and that will suffice for you, as, perchance, some day it will suffice for all.

We replace the artistic method to which we owe so many glorious masterpieces by a different method more painstaking and more recondite; we willingly sacrifice the effect of the catastrophe, of the psychological result as it was seen through an almost divine intuition by the great artists of the past, and employ instead a logical development, inexorably necessary, less unexpected, less dramatic, but not less fatalistic; we are more modest, if not more humble; but the conquests that we make with our psychological verities will not be any less useful to the art of the future. Supposing such perfection in the study of the passions should be ever attained that it would be useless to go further in the study of the interior man, will the science of the human heart, the fruit of the new art, so far and so universal, develop all the resources of the imagination that in the future the only romances written will be "Various Facts?"

I have a firm belief that the triumph of the Novel, the completest and most human of all the works of art, will increase until the affinity and cohesion of all its parts will be so perfect, that the process of its creation will remain a mystery like the development of human passions; I have a firm belief that the harmony of its forms will be so absolute, the sincerity of its reality so evident, its method and its justification so deeply rooted, that the artist's hand will remain absolutely invisible.

Then the romance will seem to portray a real event, and the work of art will apparently have come about by itself, spontaneously springing into being and maturing like a natural fact, without any point of contact with its author. It will not have preserved in its living form any stamp of the mind in which it originated, any shade of the eye that beheld it, any trace of the lips that murmured the first words thereof as the creative fiat; it will exist by its own reason, by the mere fact that it is as it should be and



must be, palpitating with life and as immutable as a statue of bronze, the author of which has had the divine courage of eclipsing himself and disappearing in his immortal work.

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A few years ago, down by the Simeto, they were giving chase to a brigand, a certain Gramigna, [1] if I am not mistaken, a name as cursed as the weed that bears it. The man had left behind him, from one end of the province to the other, the terror of his evil reputation. Carabineers, *compagni d'armi*, and cavalry-men had been on his track for two months, without ever succeeding in putting their claws on him; he was alone, but was equal to ten, and the evil plant threatened to take firm root.

Moreover the harvest-time was approaching, the crops already covered the fields, the ears bent over and were calling to the reapers, who indeed had their reaping-hooks in their hands, and yet not a single proprietor dared show his nose over the hedge of his estate, for fear of meeting Gramigna, who might be stretched out among the furrows with his carbine between his legs, ready to blow off the head of the first person who should venture to meddle with his affairs.

Thus the complaints were general. Then the prefect summoned all those gentlemen of the district—carabineers and companies of armed men and told them two words of the kind that makes men prick up their ears. The next day an earthquake in every nook and corner:—patrols, squadrons, scouts filled every ditch and behind every wall; they hunted him by day, by night, on foot, on horseback, by telegraph, as if he had been a wild beast! Gramigna eluded them every time, and replied with shots when they came too close on his track.

In the fields, in the villages, among the factories, under the signs of country taverns, wherever people met, Gramigna was the only topic of conversation,—that wild chase, that desperate flight. The carabineers' horses returned dead-tired; the soldiers threw themselves down in utter weariness on the ground when they got back to the stables; the patrols slept wherever chance offered; Gramigna alone was never tired, never slept, kept always on the wing, climbed down precipices, slipped through the harvest-fields, crept on all fours among the prickly pear-trees, [2] made his way out of danger like a wolf by means of the hidden channels of the torrents.

The chief argument of every discourse at the cross roads, before the village entrances, was the devouring thirst from which the fugitive must suffer in the immense, barren plain, under the June sun. The lazy loungers opened wide their eyes.

Peppa, one of the prettiest girls of Licodia, was expecting at that time soon to marry *compare* Finocchiaro, called "*Candela di sego*" (the tallow-candle), who had landed property and a bay mule, and was a tall young man, handsome as the sun, who carried the standard of Santa Margherita without bending his back, as though he were a pillar.

Peppa's mother shed tears of delight over the good fortune that had befallen her daughter, and spent her time in looking over and over the bride's effects in the trunk, all white linen and of the nice quality, like a queen's, and earrings that would hang down to the shoulders and gold rings for all the ten fingers of both hands; more money than Santa Margherita could have ever had—and so they were to have been married on Santa Margherita's day, which would fall in June, after the hay had been harvested.

"Candela di Segò," on his way back from the field, used every evening to leave his mule at Peppa's front door and go in to tell how the crops promised to be a veritable enchantment, unless Gramigna set them on fire, and the lattice over against the bed would not be large enough to hold all the grain, and that it seemed to him a thousand years off before he should carry home his bride on the crupper of his bay mule.

But Peppa one fine day said to him,—

"Let your mule have a rest, for I do not wish to get married."

The poor "Candela di Segò" was dumbfounded, and the old mother began to tear her hair when she heard that her daughter had refused the best match in the village.

"I am in love with Gramigna," said the girl, "and he is the only one whom I will marry."

"Ah!" screamed the mamma, and she stormed through the house, with her gray hair streaming so that she looked like a witch—"Ah! that demon has been here to bewitch my daughter!"

"No," replied Peppa, with her eyes flashing like a sword—"no, he has not been here."

"Where did you ever see him?"

"I never saw him. I have only heard him spoken of. But I feel something here, that burns me."

The report spread through the region, though they tried to keep it a secret. The women and girls who had envied Peppa the prosperous farming, the bay mule and the handsome youth who could bear the standard of Santa Margherita without bending his back, went around telling all sorts of unkind stories how Gramigna had been to visit her one night in the kitchen, and how he had been seen hiding under the bed. The poor mother burnt a lamp for the souls in purgatory and even the curato went to Peppa's house to touch her heart with his stole, so as to drive out that devil of a Gramigna, who had got possession of it.

But she persisted in her statement that she did not know the fellow by sight; but that she had seen him one night in a dream, and the following morning she had got up with her lips dry as if she had herself suffered from all the thirst which they reported him to be enduring.

Then the old woman shut her up in the house, so that she might not hear another word about Gramigna, and she stopped up all the cracks of the door with images of the saints.

Peppa heard all that was said in the street behind the sacred images, and she turned red and white, as if the devil had kindled all his fires in her face.

Finally she heard it said that Gramigna had been located among the prickly pear-trees of Palagonia.

"They have been firing for two hours," they said. "He has killed one carabineer and wounded more than three *compagni d'armi*. But they sent back such a hailstorm of shots that he must have been hit; there was a pool of blood where he had been."

Then Peppa made the sign of the cross before the old mother's pillow, and made her escape out of the

window.

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Gramigna was in the prickly pear-trees of Palagonia, and they were not able to find him in the stronghold of rabbits. He was ragged and covered with blood, pale after two days of fasting, burning with fever, and he had his carbine levelled. When he saw her coming, resolute, among the prickly pear bushes, in the dim light of the gloaming, he hesitated a moment whether to shoot or not:—

"What do you want?" he demanded. "What are you coming here for?"

"I am coming to stay with you," said she, looking straight at him. "Are you Gramigna?"

"Yes, I am Gramigna. If you expect to get those twenty *oncie*<sup>[3]</sup> of reward, you are mightily mistaken."

"No, I have come to stay with you," she replied.

"Go away!" said he. "You can't stay with me, and I don't want anyone with me. If you are after money I tell you you have made a mistake. I haven't any, mind you! For two days I haven't had even a morsel of bread."

"I can't go back home now," said she; "the place is all full of soldiers."

"Go away! What is that to me? Each for himself."

As she was turning away like a kicked dog, Gramigna called to her:

"Say, go and get me a jug of water, down yonder in the brook. If you want to stay with me, you must risk your skin."

Peppa went without saying a word, and when Gramigna heard the gunshots he began to laugh immoderately, and said to himself: "That was meant for me!"

But when he saw her coming back a few minutes later with the jug in her hand, pale and bleeding, he said, before he sprang forward to snatch the jug from her, and then when he had drunk till it seemed as if he had no more breath:

"You escaped, did you? How did you do it?"

"The soldiers were on the other side, and there was a thick bush on this."

"But they put a bullet through your skin. There's blood on your dress."

"Yes."

"Where were you hit?"

"In the shoulder."

"That's nothing. You can walk."

So he allowed her to stay with him. She followed him, all in rags, shoeless, suffering from the fever caused by the wound, and yet she went foraging to procure for him a jug of water or a piece of bread, and if she came back with empty hands, escaping through the gunshots, her lover, devoured by hunger and thirst, would beat her. At last one night when the moon was shining in the prickly pears, Gramigna said to her,—

"They are on us."

And he obliged her to stand with her back to the rock far in the crevice; then he fled in another direction. Among the bushes were heard the frequent reports of the musketry, and the shadows were cut here and there by quick bright flashes. Suddenly Peppa heard the sound of steps near her and saw Gramigna coming back, dragging along a broken leg. He leaned against the prickly pear bushes and reload his carbine:

"It's all over," he said to her. "Now they'll take me."

And what froze the blood in her veins more than anything else was the light that shone in his eyes, if he were a madman.

Then when he fell on the dry branches like a log of wood, the soldiers were on him in an instant.

The following day they dragged him through the village street on a cart, all in rags and covered with blood. The people who had crowded in to look at him began to laugh when they saw how small he was, how pale and ugly like a punchinello. And it was for him that Peppa had deserted *compare* Finu, the "Candela di Segò!"

The poor "Candela di Segò" went and hid from sight, as if it behoved him to be ashamed, and Peppa was led off, handcuffed by soldiers, as if she also were a thief,—she who had as much gold as San Margherita! Her poor mother was obliged to sell all the white linen stored in her trunk, and the good earrings and the rings for the ten fingers, so as to pay the lawyers who defended her daughter and bring the girl home again,—poor, ill, in shame, ugly as Gramigna, and with Gramigna's child in her arms.

But when at the end of the trial her daughter was restored to her, the poor old soul recited an "Ave Maria" in the bare and already dark jail among the soldiers of the guard; it seemed to her that they had given her back a treasure when she had nothing else in the world, and she wept like a fountain at the consolation.

Peppa on the other hand seemed to have no tears to shed any more, and said nothing, and disappeared from sight; yet the two women went out every day to get their living by their own hands. People declared that Peppa had taken up "the trade" in the woods, and went on robbing expeditions at night. The truth of the matter was that she hid herself in the kitchen like a wild beast in its lair, and it was only when her old mother was dead of her privations, and the house had to be sold, that she left it.

"See here!" said "Candela di Segò," who was as much in love with her as ever, "I could smash your head with two stones for the evil you have brought on yourself and others."

"It's true," replied Peppa, "I know it. It was God's will."

After her house and those few wretched pieces of furniture that were left to her were sold, she went away from the town by night, just as she had done before, without turning round to look at the room under which she had slept so long, and she went to do God's will in the city, with her baby boy, near the prison in which Gramigna was incarcerated. She could see nothing else besides the black grates and windows along the mighty silent façade, and the sentinels drove her away if she stopped to look where he might be. At last she was told that he had not been there for some time, that he had been taken away to the other side of the sea, manacled, and with a basket fastened over his shoulder.

She said nothing. She did not go away; for she knew not where to go, and she had nothing more to expect. She made a shift to live, doing chores for the soldiers, for the prisoners, as if she herself made a part of that black and silent building; and she felt for the carabinieri who had taken Gramigna in the thicket of prickly pears, and who had broken his leg with their shots, a sort of respectful tenderness, but it were a brute admiration of force.

On holidays, when she saw them with their plumes and their glittering epaulettes, stiff and erect in their gala uniforms, she devoured them with her eyes, and she was always at the barracks cleaning the big rooms and polishing the boots, so that they called her "The Carabinieri's dish-cloth."

Only when she saw them load their guns at nightfall and march out, two and two, with their trousers turned up, revolver in belt, and when they mounted horse under the light that made the muskets flash and heard the clattering of the horses' feet dying away in the darkness and the jingling of sabres, she always grew pale, and while she was closing the door of the stable she shivered; and when her youngster played with the other urchins on the glacis before the prison, running among the legs of the soldiers, and the urchins called him "Gramigna's son, Gramigna's son," she flew into a rage and chased them away with stones.

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# Jeli, the Shepherd

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Jeli, who had charge of the horses, was thirteen when he first became acquainted with the young gentleman, Don Alfonso. But he was so small that he did not come up to the belly of the old mare Bianca, who carried the big bell for the drove. Wherever his animals wandered for their pasturage here and there, on the mountains and down in the plain, he was always to be found erect and motionless on some eminence or squatting on some big rock.

His friend, Don Alfonso, while he was at his country seat, went to find him all the days that God sent to Tebidi, and shared with him his piece of chocolate and shepherd's barley-bread and the fruit stolen in the neighborhood.

At first Jeli called the young nobleman *eccellenza*—your excellence—as is the custom in Sicily, but after they had had one good quarrel their friendship was established on a solid basis. Jeli taught his friend how to climb up to the magpies' nests on the tip-top of the walnut-trees, higher than the campanile of Licodia, to knock down a sparrow on the wing with a stone, and to mount with one spring on the bare backs of his half-wild animals, seizing by the mane the first that came within reach without being frightened by the wrathful whinnings and the desperate leaps of the untrained colts.

Ah! the delightful gallops across the mown fields with their hair flying in the wind; the lovely April days when the wind billowed the green grass and the horses neighed in the pastures; the glorious summer noons when the whitening fields lay silent under the cloudy sky, and the crickets crackled among the clods as though the stubble were on fire; the bright wintry sky seen through the naked branches of the almond trees shivering under the north wind, and the narrow path sounding frozen under the horses' hoofs, and the larks singing on high in the warmth, in the azure; the delicious summer afternoons that passed slowly, slowly, like the clouds; the sweet odor of the hay in which they plunged their elbows, and the melancholy humming of the evening insects, and those two notes Jeli's zufolo or whistle, always the same—*ih ih!*—making one think of distant things, of the feast of Saint John, of Christmas eve, of the dawn of the *scampagnata*,<sup>[4]</sup> of all those great events of the past which seemed sad, so distant were they, and made you look up with moistened eyes as if all the stars that were kindling in heaven poured showers into your heart and made it overflow!

Jeli, himself, did not suffer from any such melancholy; he squatted on the side of the hill with puffed-out cheeks, quite intent on sounding his *ih ih!* Then he would bring together his drove by dint of shouts and stones, and drive them into the stable beyond the "poggio alla Croce."<sup>[5]</sup>

Out of breath he would mount the hillside beyond the valley, and sometimes shout to his friend Alfonso,—

"Call the dog! ohè! Call the dog!" or "Fling a good-sized stone at the bay who's got the better of me and is slowly wandering away, dallying among the bushes of the valley," or "To-morrow bring me a big needle—one of *gnà Lia's*."

He could do all sorts of things with the needle, and he had a heap of odds and ends in his canvas bag in case of need, to mend his trousers or the sleeves of his jacket; he also knew how to braid horsehair and with the clay in the valley he used to wash out his own handkerchief which he wore around his neck when it was cold. In fact, provided he had his bag with him, he needed nothing in the world whether he were in the woods of Resecone, or lost in the depths of the plain of Caltagirone. *Gnà Lia* used to say,—

"Do you see Jeli, the shepherd? He is always alone in the fields, as if he himself had been born a colt and that's why he knows how to make the cross with his two hands!" [\[6\]](#)

Indeed, it is true that Jeli needed nothing, but everybody connected with the estate would have gladly helped him in any way because he was a serviceable lad, and there was always a chance of getting something from him. *Gnà Lia* baked bread for him out of neighborly love, and he showed his gratitude by making her osier baskets for her eggs, reels of reeds, and other little things.

"Let us do as his animals do," said *gnà Lia*, "they scratch each other's backs."

At Tebidi every one had known him since he was a baby; there was no time when he wasn't seen among the tails of the horses pasturing in the "field of the *lettighiere*" and he had grown up, so to speak, under their eyes, though really no one ever saw him very much, for he was forever here and there, roaming about with his drove.

"He had rained down from heaven and the earth had taken him up," as the proverb has it; he was just one of those who have neither home nor relatives. His *mamma* was out at service at Vizzini, and he never saw her more than once a year when he went with his colts to the fair of San Giovanni; and the day that she died they came to call him—it was one Saturday evening—and on the following Monday Jeli was back with his drove, so that the *contadino* who had taken his place in looking after the horses might not lose a day's work; but the poor lad came back so upset that he kept letting the colts get into the ploughed land.

"Ohè! Jeli!" cried *massaro* Agrippino, from the threshing-floor. "You want to have a taste of the rope end, do you, you son of a dog?"

Jeli started to run after his stray colts, and drove them mechanically toward the hill; but always before his eyes he saw his *mamma* with her head done up in the white handkerchief. She would never speak to him more!

His father was a cow-herd at Ragoletti, beyond Licodia, "where the malaria could be harvested," as the peasants of that region say, meaning to signify its density; but in the malarious lands the pasturage fat and cows do not catch the fever. Jeli for that reason stayed in the fields all the year long, either at Don Ferrante's, or in the enclosure of la Commenda, or in the valley of il Jacitano, and the hunters and travellers who took cross-cut over the country saw him in this place or in that, like a dog without master.

He did not suffer from this state of things because he was accustomed to be with his horses, as they moved about leisurely nibbling the clover, and with the birds who flew around him in beavies, while the sun accomplished his daily journey, slowly, slowly, until the shadows grew long and then vanished; he had time to watch the clouds pile up on the horizon, one behind another, and imagin

them mountains and valleys; he knew how the wind blew when it brought thunder-showers, and what color the clouds were when it was going to snow. Everything had its aspect and significance, and his eyes and ears were kept on the alert all day long. In the same way when toward sunset the young herdsman began to play his alder-whistle, the brown mare would come up, lazily cropping the clover and also stand looking with great, pensive eyes.

The only place where he suffered a little from melancholy was in the desert lands of Passanitello where not a grass-blade or a shrub is to be seen, and during the hot months not a bird flies. The horses there would cluster together with drooping heads to shade one another, and during the long days of the threshing that mighty silent radiance rained down without mitigation for sixteen hours. Wherever pasturage was abundant and the horses liked to loiter, the lad busied himself with something else—he would make reed-cages for the crickets, or carved pipes and little baskets of bulrushes; with foxglove branches he could set up a shelter for himself when the North wind drove the long lines of crops through the valley, or, when the cicadæ fluttered their wings in the broiling sun over the parched stubble; he would roast acorns in the coals of his sumach fire and imagine they were chestnuts, toast his thick slice of bread when it began to grow musty, because, when he was at Passanitello in winter, the roads were so bad that sometimes a fortnight would elapse without a single soul passing.

Don Alfonso, who had been kept in cotton by his parents, envied his friend Jeli the canvas bag in which he stored his effects,—his bread, his onions, his bottle of wine, his neckerchief for cool weather, his little hoard of rags and thread and needles, his little tin food-box and his flint; he envied him especially that superb spotted mare, that animal with rough forelock and wicked eyes, swelling her indignant nostrils like a fierce mastiff when anyone tried to mount her. Sometimes she would allow Jeli to get on her back and scratch her ears; she was jealous of him, and would come smelling round to find out what he was saying.

"Let the *vajata* be," Jeli would say, "She isn't ugly, but she doesn't know you."

After Scordu from Bucchiere took away the Calabrian which he had bought at San Giovanni's Fair under agreement to keep her in the drove until vintage time, *Zaino*, the bay colt, orphaned, refused to be comforted and galloped over the mountain precipices with long, lamenting neighings, and its noise in the wind. Jeli ran behind it, calling to it with loud shouts, and the colt paused to listen with its head in the air, and its ears pricking back and forth, and switching its flanks with its tail.

"It's because they have carried off his mother, and he doesn't know what to make of it," observed the herdsman. "Now we must keep him in sight, for he would be capable of jumping over the precipice. That was the way I felt when my mamma died; I couldn't see with my eyes."

Then, after the colt began to try the clover and to make believe bite:—

"See! he is gradually beginning to forget.... But this one will be sold, too. Horses are made to be sold just as lambs are born to go to the butcher, and the clouds to bring the rain. Only the birds have nothing else to do but sing and fly all day."

These ideas did not come to him clear cut and in sequence one after the other, for it was rarely that he had anyone to talk with, and, therefore, he had no cause for haste in starting them up and disentangling them in the depths of his brain, where he was accustomed to let them sprout and grow gradually, as the twigs burgeon under the sun.



"Even the birds," he added, "have to hunt for food, and when the snow covers the ground they perish."

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Then he pondered for a moment,— "You are like the birds; but when winter comes you can sit by the fire and do nothing."

But Don Alfonso replied that he too went to school and had to study. Jeli opened his eyes wide and was all ears, while the signorino began to read, and he looked at the book and at the young master himself with a suspicious air, listening with that slight winking of the eyelids which indicates intensity of attention in beasts little accustomed to mankind.

He was delighted with the poetry that caressed his ears with the harmony of an incomprehensible song, and occasionally he frowned, drew up his chin, and made it evident that a great mental operation was taking place within him; then he nodded "yes, yes," with a crafty smile, and scratched his head. Then when the signorino started to write so as to show how many things he knew how to do, Jeli could have staid whole days watching him; and suddenly he would look round suspiciously. He could not be persuaded that the words that were said either by him or by Don Alfonso could possibly be repeated on paper, and still more—those things that had not proceeded from their mouths, and he ended with that shrewd smile.

Every new idea which knocked for entrance at his head made him suspicious; he seemed to try it with the wild diffidence of his *vajata*. But he expressed no wonder at anything in the world; he might have been told that in cities horses rode in carriages,—he would have kept on that mask of oriental indifference which is the dignity of a Sicilian peasant. It would seem as if he intrenched himself instinctively in his ignorance, as if it were the force of poverty. Every time that he remained short of arguments he would repeat,—

"I do not know at all. I am poor," with that obstinate smile that was intended to be shrewd.

He had asked his friend Alfonso to write for him the name of Mara on a piece of paper that he had found somewhere, because it was his habit to pick up whatever he saw lying about and put into his packet of odds and ends. One day, after being rather quiet and looking round anxiously, he said, very gravely,—

"I'm in love with some one."

Alfonso, though he knew how to read, opened his eyes in astonishment.

"Yes," continued Jeli, "*massaro* Agrippino's daughter Mara, who used to be here; but now they're Marineo, in that great house in the plain that you can see from the 'plain of the *lettighiere*' yonder."

"O you're going to get married, then?"

"Yes, when I'm grown up and have six *onze* a year wages. Mara knows nothing about it."

"Why, haven't you told her?"

Jeli shook his head and reflected. Then he opened his hoard and unfolded the paper which bore the written name.

"It must be that it says 'Mara'; Don Gesualdo, the *campiere*,[\[7\]](#) has read it; and *fra* Cola, when I came down here begging for beans."

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"He who knows how to write," he went on saying, "is like one who preserves words in his tinder-box and can carry them in his pocket, and even send them this way and that."

"Now what are you going to do with that piece of paper that you can't read?" asked Alfonso.

Jeli shrugged his shoulders, but kept on carefully folding his written leaf to put away in his heap of odds and ends.

He had known la Mara ever since she was a little girl. Their acquaintance had begun in a pitched battle once when they met down in the valley, both of them after blackberries. The little girl, knowing that she was "within her rights," had seized Jeli by the neck as if he were a thief. For awhile they exchanged blows on the slope—"You one, I one,"—as the cooper does on the hoops of his barrels; but when they got tired of it they gradually calmed down, though they still had each other by the hair.

"Who are you?" demanded Mara.

And when Jeli with less breeding refused to tell who he was,—

"I am Mara, the daughter of *Massaro* Agrippino, who is the keeper of all these fields here."

Jeli then let his grasp relax, and the little girl set to work to pick up the blackberries that had fallen during their struggle, now and then glancing with curiosity at her antagonist.

"Just beyond the bridge, on the edge of the orchard, there are lots of big berries," suggested the little maid, "and the hens are eating them."

Jeli meantime was creeping off stealthily, and Mara, after standing on tip-toe to watch him disappearing in the grove, turned her back and ran home as fast as her legs would carry her.

But from that day forth they began to be friends. Mara went with her hemp to spin on to the parapet of the little bridge, and Jeli would slowly drive his cattle toward the slopes of the *poggio del Bandito*. At first he kept at a distance, roving around and looking from afar, with suspicion in his face, but he kept gradually edging near, with the watchful gait of a dog used to stones. When at last he joined her, they remained long hours without speaking a word, Jeli attentively watching the intricate work of the stockings which Mara's mamma had hung round her neck, or she looking on while he carved his pretentious zig-zags on the almond sticks. Then they would separate, he going one way, she the other, without saying a word, and the little girl as soon as she was in sight of her house would start to run, kicking high her petticoat with her little red legs.

When the prickly pears were ripe they would settle down in the thick of the bushes, peeling the figs all the live-long day. They would wander together under the immemorial walnuts, and Jeli would beat so many of the walnuts that they would shower down thick as hail, and the girl would tire herself out picking them up with jubilant shouts—more than she could carry; and then she would scamper away nimbly, holding up the two corners of her apron, bobbing like a little old woman.

During the winter time, Mara dared not put her nose out of doors, it was so cold. Sometimes toward

evening could be seen the smoke of Jeli's fires of sumach wood, which he built on the *Piano d'lettighiere*, or on the *Poggio di Macca*, so as not to perish of the cold, like the tomtits which I sometimes found in the morning behind some rock, or in the shelter of a clod. The horses also found pleasure in dangling their tails around the fire, and they would cuddle close together so as to be warmer.

In March, the larks came back to the plain, the sparrows to the roofs, the leaves and the nests to the hedges. Mara took up her habit of going about with Jeli in the soft grass among the flowering bushes under the still bare trees which were just beginning to show tender points of green. Jeli would make his way through the brambles like a bloodhound, so as to discover the nests of the blackbirds which would look up to him in astonishment with their little keen eyes; the two children would carry them cuddled in their hearts, little wee rabbits just born, almost without fur, but already quick to move their long ears.

They would scour the fields in pursuit of the drove of horses, entering the plains behind the hay-gatherers, step for step with the herd, pausing every time that a mare stopped to pluck a mouthful of grass. At evening, when they got back to the bridge, they separated, he going in one direction, she in another, without saying good-by.

Thus they passed the whole summer. When the sun began to go down behind the *Poggio alla Croce* the robin red-breasts also went toward the mountain, as it grew dark, following the light among the clumps of prickly pears. The crickets and cicadæ were no longer heard, and at that hour a great melancholy spread through the air.

About that time, to Jeli's tumble-down hovel came his father, the cowherd, who had caught the malaria at Ragoleti, and could scarcely dismount from the ass which brought him. Jeli started a fire quickly and ran to "the hall" for some hen's eggs.

"Put a little straw down in front of the fire as soon as you can," said his father, "for I feel the fever returning."

The chill of the fever was so severe that *compare* Menu buried under his thick cloak, the saddle-bags of the ass and Jeli's sacks shook as the leaves do in November, in spite of the great blaze of branches which made his face white as a corpse.

The contadini of the farm came to ask him,—

"How do you think you feel, *compare* Menu?"

The poor man could only answer with a whine like a sucking puppy.

"It's a kind of malaria that kills more surely than a rifle bullet," said his friends, as they warmed their hands at the fire.

The doctor was called, but it was money thrown away, because the disease is one of those clear and evident ones which even a boy would know how to cure; unless the fever happens to be so severe that it will kill at any rate, a little quinine cures it quickly.

*Compare* Menu spent the eyes of his head for quinine but it was as good as thrown down a well.

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"Take a good dose of *ecalibbiso* tea, which does not cost anything," suggested *massaro* Agrippino "and if it doesn't work as well as quinine it doesn't ruin you by its cost."

So he took the decoction of eucaliptus, but the fever returned all the same, and even more violently. Jeli attended to his father the best he knew how. Every morning before he went off with his colts, he left him his medicine all prepared in a drinking cup, his bundle of dry branches within reach, his eggs in the hot ashes, and he came back as early as he could in the afternoon with more wood for the night and the bottle of wine and a little piece of mutton, which he had gone as far as Licodia to buy for him. The poor lad did everything as handily as a clever maiden would have done, and his father, following him with weary eyes in his operations about the hovel, sometimes smiled to think that the boy would be able to do for himself in case he were left alone in the world.

On days when the fever left him for a few hours, *compare* Menu would get up, all feeble as he was, and with his head wrapped in his handkerchief, would stagger out to the door to wait for Jeli while the sun was still warm. When Jeli dropped the bundle of wood at the door-steps, and placed the bottle and the eggs on the table, he would say to him,—

"Put the *ecalibbiso* to boiling for to-night," or, "Remember that your aunt Agata has charge of your mother's money, when I shall be no more."

Jeli would nod "yes" with his head.

"It is hopeless," said *massaro* Agrippino, every time he came to see *compare* Menu and his fever. "His blood is all diseased by this time."

*Compare* Menu listened without winking, with his face whiter than his night-cap.

He now no longer got up. Jeli began to weep when he found himself not strong enough to help him turn from one side to the other; shortly after *compare* Menu lay perfectly still. The last words that he spoke to his boy were,—

"When I am dead, go to the owner of the cows at Ragoleti and let him give you the three *onze* and the twelve *tumoli* of corn, which are my due from March till now."

"No," replied Jeli, "it's only two *onze* and a half, because you left the cows more than a month ago, and one must be fair to one's *padrone*."

"True!" agreed *compare* Menu, closing his eyes.

"Now I am quite alone in the world, like a lost colt which the wolves may eat!" said Jeli to himself when his father had been carried off to the cemetery of Licodia.

Mara had been one of those who came to see the dead man's house with that morbid curiosity which is excited by horrible things.

"Do you see how I am left?" asked Jeli, but the girl drew back so frightened that he could not induce her to step inside the house where the dead man had been.

Jeli went to receive the money due his father, and then he started off with his drove for Passanitello where the grass was already tall on the fallow-land, and the fodder was abundant; therefore, the colts remained there for some time in pasture.

Meantime Jeli had been growing into a big lad, and Mara also must be grown tall, he often thought of himself, while he played on his *zufalo*; and when he returned to Tebidi after some little time, slowly driving forward the mares through the dangerous paths of "Uncle Cosimo's Fountain," he scanned the little bridge down in the valley, and the hovel in the *Valle del Jacitano*, and the roof of "the Hall" where the pigeons were always flying.

But at that time the *padrone* had dismissed *massaro* Agrippino, and all Mara's family were just on the point of moving away.

Jeli found the girl, who had grown tall and very pretty, standing at the entrance of the yard watching the furniture and things, which they were loading on the cart. The empty room seemed to him more gloomy and smoky than ever before. The table, the commode and the images of the Virgin and of Saint John, and even the nails for hanging up the gourds for seed had left on the walls the marks where they had been for so many years.

"We are going away," said Mara, when she saw him looking around. "We are going down to Marineo where the great house stands in the plain."

Jeli took hold and helped *massaro* Agrippino and *la gnà Lia* load up the cart, and when there was nothing else to carry out of the room he went and sat down with Mara on the edge of the watering-trough.

"Even houses," he remarked, when he saw the last hamper piled on, "even houses, when anything is taken away from them, do not any longer seem the same."

"At Marineo," replied Mara, "we shall have much better rooms, mamma says, and large as the chee house."

"Now that you are going away, I shall not want to come here any more; it seems to me as if winter had come back—to see that door closed."

"At Marineo we shall find other friends, Pudda *la rossa* and the *campiere's* daughter; it will be jolly there; they have more than eighty harvesters in the season, and the bag-pipes, and they dance on the threshing-floor."

*Massaro* Agrippino and his wife had gone off with the cart. Mara ran behind them, full of joy and excitement, carrying the baskets with the pigeons. Jeli was going to accompany her as far as the little bridge; and when Mara was just on the point of disappearing down the valley he called after her "Mara! oh! Mara!"

"What do you want?" demanded Mara.

He knew not what he wanted.

"Oh! what will you do here all alone?" asked the girl.

"I shall stay with the colts."

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Mara ran skipping away, and he stood there as if rooted to the spot so as to catch the last sounds of the cart rattling over the stones.

The sun was just resting on the high rocks of the *Poggio alla Croce*, the gray crests of the olive trees were shading into the twilight and over the vast campagna far away, nothing was heard except the tinkling bell of "Bianca" in the gathering stillness.

Mara, now that she was in the midst of new faces and amid all the bustle of the grape gathering, forgot about Jeli; but he was always thinking about her, because he had nothing else to do in the long days that he spent looking at the horses' tails. There was now no special reason for him to go down into the valley beyond the bridge, and no one ever saw him any more at the farm.

Thus it was that he was for some time ignorant that Mara had become betrothed—so much water had run and run under the bridge. The only time that he saw the girl was on the day of Saint John's *Festa* when he went to the fair with his colts to sell; a festa which changed everything for him into poison and caused the bread to fall out of his mouth by reason of an accident that befell one of the *padrone*'s colts—the Lord deliver us!

On the day of the fair, the factor waited for the colts ever since dawn, walking impatiently up and down in his well-polished boots behind the groups of horses and mules that came filing in along the highway from this direction and that. It was almost time for the fair to close, and still Jeli with his animals was not in sight beyond the turn made by the highway. On the parched slopes of *Calvario* and the *Molino a vento*—the Wind-Mill Mountain—there remained only a few droves of sheep gathered in a circle, with noses drooping and weary eyes, and a few yoke of oxen with long hair—of the kind that are sold to satisfy unpaid rent, waiting motionless under the boiling sun.

Yonder toward the valley, the bell of San Giovanni's was ringing for High Mass, accompanied by the long crackling of the fireworks.

Then the fair grounds seemed to spring up, and there ran a prolonged cry among the shops of the grocers, clustered in the place called *salita dei Galli*, spreading through the country roads and seeming to return from the valley where the church stood.

"Viva San Giovanni!"

"*Santo diavolone!*" screamed the factor. "That assassin of a Jeli will make me lose the fair!"

The sheep lifted their heads in astonishment and began to bleat all at once, and the cattle also made a step or two, slowly looking around with their great, calm eyes.

The factor was in a rage because he was expected that day to pay the rent due for the large enclosure—as the contract expressed it, "when Saint John arrived under the elm;" and to make up the full sum the profits on the sale of the colts was necessary. Meantime the colts and horses and mules were coming in such numbers as the good Lord had seen fit to make, all curried and shining and adorned with tassels and cockades and bells; and they were switching their tails to while away their tedious

and turning their heads toward every one who passed, and evidently waiting for some charitable soul willing to buy them.

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"He must have gone to sleep on the way, the assassin!" yelled the factor, "and so made me lose the sale of my colts."

In reality, Jeli had travelled all night so that the colts might reach the fair fresh, and get a good position on their arrival; and he had reached the *piano del Corvo*, and the "three kings" had not yet set out but were shining over *monte Arturo*. There was a continuous procession of carts passing along the road, and people mounted on horses or mules going to the *fiesta*. Therefore, the young fellow kept his eyes open so that the colts, frightened by the unusual commotion, might not get away, but that he might keep them together along the ridge of the road behind *la bianca*, the white mare, who with the bell around her neck, always travelled straight ahead without minding anything.

From time to time, when the road ran over the crest of the hills, the bell of Saint John's could be heard in the distance, and in the darkness and silence of the plain the rumor of the *fiesta* was distinguishable and along the whole road far away, wherever there were people on foot or on horseback going to Vizzini, were heard shouts of "*Viva San Giovanni!*" And the rockets rose up high in the air and were brilliant behind the mountains of la Canzaria, like the rain of meteors in August.

"It is like Christmas Eve!" Jeli kept saying to the boy, who was helping him drive the herd. "And in every place there is feasting and light, and throughout the whole campagna you can see fireworks."

The boy was half asleep as he forced one leg after the other, and he made no response; but Jeli, who felt his blood stir within him at the sound of that bell, could not keep quiet, as if each one of the rockets that left their silent shining trails on the darkness behind the mountains burst forth from his soul.

"Mara also must be going to the *fiesta* of Saint John," he said, "because she goes every year."

And without caring because the boy made no reply,—

"Don't you know? Mara is now so big that she must be taller than her mother, and when I saw her last year I couldn't believe that it was the very same girl with whom I used to go after prickly pears and knock off the nuts."

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

"Oh Alfio, why do you sleep?" he cried, when he was through with them. "Look out that you keep *la bianca* always behind you, look out!"

"No, I am not asleep," replied Alfio, with a hoarse voice.

"Do you see *la puddara* [\[8\]](#) which stands winking down at us yonder, as if they were firing up rockets also at Santa Domenica? It is almost sunrise; we shall reach the fair in time to secure a good position. Ah! *morellino bello!* you pretty little brownie! You shall have a new halter, that you shall, with red cockades for the fair; and so shall you, *stellato!*" [\[9\]](#)

Thus he went on, talking to one and another of his colts so that they might be encouraged hearing his voice in the darkness. But it grieved him to think that the *stellato* and the *morellino* were going to be fair to be sold.

"When they are sold, they'll go off with a new master, and we shan't see them any more in the herd just as it was with Mara after she went to Marineo.

"Her father is well-to-do down there at Marineo, and when I was there, found myself, poor fellow that I was, sitting down to bread and wine and cheese, and everything good that God gives, and as if I had been the factor himself, and he has the keys to everything, and I could eat up the whole place if I had wanted. Mara scarcely knew me, it had been so long since we had seen each other, and she cried out—'Oh, look! there's Jeli the guardian of the horses, from Tebidi. He is like one who comes home from abroad, who only at the sight of the distant mountain-top is quick enough to recognize the country where he grew up.' *Gnà Lia* didn't want me to speak to her daughter with the *thee* and the *thou* because Mara had grown to be so big, and the people who don't know about things easily gossip. But Mara only laughed, and looked as if she had only just that minute been baking the bread, so rosy her face was; she was getting the dinner ready, and she was unfolding the table-cloth, and she seemed so different. 'Oh, have you forgotten Tebidi?' I asked her as soon as *gnà Lia* went out to broach a fresh cask of wine. 'No, no, I haven't forgotten' said she. 'At Tebidi there was a bell with a campanile looking like the handle of a salt-cellar, and there used to be two stone cats which stood at the entrance of the garden.' I felt all through me those things that she was saying. Mara looked at me from head and heels, with her eyes wide open, and then she said,—'How tall you've grown!' and then she began to laugh, and then she patted me on the head—here!"

In this way Jeli, the guardian of the horses, came to lose his place; for just at that instant there suddenly appeared a coach, which had given no sign of its approach, because it had been slowly climbing the steep ascent, but started off at full speed as soon as it reached the level ground at the top with a great cracking of whips and jingling of bells, as if it were carried by the devil himself. The colts, in alarm, galloped off quicker than a flash, as if there had been an earthquake, and all the shouting and cries and *ohi! ohi! ohi's!* of Jeli and the boy scarcely sufficed to collect them again around *bianca*, who in spite of her gravity had shied away desperately with the bell around her neck.

When Jeli had counted over his animals he discovered that *stellato* was missing, and he buried his hands in his hair, because at that place the road ran along side a deep ravine, and it was down in the ravine that *stellato* broke his back—a colt worth a dozen *onze*, like a dozen angels from Paradise. Weeping and shouting he went calling the colt *ahu! ahu!* It was too dark to see it. At last *stellato* replied from the bottom of the ravine with a melancholy neigh, as if it had human speech, poor creature!

"Oh, mamma mia!" cried Jeli and the boy, as they went to it. "Oh, what bad luck! mamma mia!"

The travellers on their way to the *festa*, hearing such a lamentation in the darkness, asked what they had lost, and then when they learned what had happened, went on their way.

The *stellato* remained motionless where it had fallen, with its legs in the air, and while Jeli was feeling it all over, weeping and talking to it as if he could make it understand, the poor creature



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