

CHAPTER XIV

THE JOURNEY ACROSS

The train began to move. Giuseppe ran alongside, holding Ciccio's hand still; the women and children were crying and waving their handkerchiefs, the other men were shouting messages, making strange, eager gestures. And Alvina sat quite still, wonderingly. And so the big, heavy train drew out, leaving the others small and dim on the platform. It was foggy, the river was a sea of yellow beneath the ponderous iron bridge. The morning was dim and dank.

The train was very full. Next to Alvina sat a trim Frenchwoman reading *L'Aiglon*. There was a terrible encumbrance of packages and luggage everywhere. Opposite her sat Ciccio, his black overcoat open over his pale-grey suit, his black hat a little over his left eye. He glanced at her from time to time, smiling constrainedly. She remained very still. They ran through Bromley and out into the open country. It was grey, with shivers of grey sunshine. On the downs there was thin snow. The air in the train was hot, heavy with the crowd and tense with excitement and uneasiness. The train seemed to rush ponderously, massively, across the Weald.

And so, through Folkestone to the sea. There was sun in the sky now, and white clouds, in the sort of hollow sky-dome above the grey

earth with its horizon walls of fog. The air was still. The sea heaved with a sucking noise inside the dock. Alvina and Ciccio sat aft on the second-class deck, their bags near them. He put a white muffler round himself, Alvina hugged herself in her beaver scarf and muff. She looked tender and beautiful in her still vagueness, and Ciccio, hovering about her, was beautiful too, his estrangement gave him a certain wistful nobility which for the moment put him beyond all class inferiority. The passengers glanced at them across the magic of estrangement.

The sea was very still. The sun was fairly high in the open sky, where white cloud-tops showed against the pale, wintry blue. Across the sea came a silver sun-track. And Alvina and Ciccio looked at the sun, which stood a little to the right of the ship's course.

"The sun!" said Ciccio, nodding towards the orb and smiling to her.

"I love it," she said.

He smiled again, silently. He was strangely moved: she did not know why.

The wind was cold over the wintry sea, though the sun's beams were warm. They rose, walked round the cabins. Other ships were at sea--destroyers and battleships, grey, low, and sinister on the water. Then a tall bright schooner glimmered far down the channel.

Some brown fishing smacks kept together. All was very still in the wintry sunshine of the Channel.

So they turned to walk to the stern of the boat. And Alvina's heart suddenly contracted. She caught Ciccio's arm, as the boat rolled gently. For there behind, behind all the sunshine, was England. England, beyond the water, rising with ash-grey, corpse-grey cliffs, and streaks of snow on the downs above. England, like a long, ash-grey coffin slowly submerging. She watched it, fascinated and terrified. It seemed to repudiate the sunshine, to remain unilluminated, long and ash-grey and dead, with streaks of snow like cerements. That was England! Her thoughts flew to Woodhouse, the grey centre of it all. Home!

Her heart died within her. Never had she felt so utterly strange and far-off. Ciccio at her side was as nothing, as spell-bound she watched, away off, behind all the sunshine and the sea, the grey, snow-streaked substance of England slowly receding and sinking, submerging. She felt she could not believe it. It was like looking at something else. What? It was like a long, ash-grey coffin, winter, slowly submerging in the sea. England?

She turned again to the sun. But clouds and veils were already weaving in the sky. The cold was beginning to soak in, moreover. She sat very still for a long time, almost an eternity. And when she looked round again there was only a bank of mist behind, beyond the

sea: a bank of mist, and a few grey, stalking ships. She must watch for the coast of France.

And there it was already, looming up grey and amorphous, patched with snow. It had a grey, heaped, sordid look in the November light. She had imagined Boulogne gay and brilliant. Whereas it was more grey and dismal than England. But not that magical, mystic, phantom look.

The ship slowly put about, and backed into the harbour. She watched the quay approach. Ciccio was gathering up the luggage. Then came the first cry one ever hears: "Porteur! Porteur! Want a porteur?" A porter in a blouse strung the luggage on his strap, and Ciccio and Alvina entered the crush for the exit and the passport inspection. There was a tense, eager, frightened crowd, and officials shouting directions in French and English. Alvina found herself at last before a table where bearded men in uniforms were splashing open the big pink sheets of the English passports: she felt strange and uneasy, that her passport was unimpressive and Italian. The official scrutinized her, and asked questions of Ciccio. Nobody asked her anything--she might have been Ciccio's shadow. So they went through to the vast, crowded cavern of a Customs house, where they found their porter waving to them in the mob. Ciccio fought in the mob while the porter whisked off Alvina to get seats in the big train. And at last she was planted once more in a seat, with Ciccio's place reserved beside her. And there she sat,

looking across the railway lines at the harbour, in the last burst of grey sunshine. Men looked at her, officials stared at her, soldiers made remarks about her. And at last, after an eternity, Ciccio came along the platform, the porter trotting behind.

They sat and ate the food they had brought, and drank wine and tea. And after weary hours the train set off through snow-patched country to Paris. Everywhere was crowded, the train was stuffy without being warm. Next to Alvina sat a large, fat, youngish Frenchman who overflowed over her in a hot fashion. Darkness began to fall. The train was very late. There were strange and frightening delays. Strange lights appeared in the sky, everybody seemed to be listening for strange noises. It was all such a whirl and confusion that Alvina lost count, relapsed into a sort of stupidity. Gleams, flashes, noises and then at last the frenzy of Paris.

It was night, a black city, and snow falling, and no train that night across to the Gare de Lyon. In a state of semi-stupefaction after all the questionings and examinings and blusterings, they were finally allowed to go straight across Paris. But this meant another wild tussle with a Paris taxi-driver, in the filtering snow. So they were deposited in the Gare de Lyon.

And the first person who rushed upon them was Geoffrey, in a rather grimy private's uniform. He had already seen some hard service, and had a wild, bewildered look. He kissed Ciccio and burst into tears

on his shoulder, there in the great turmoil of the entrance hall of the Gare de Lyon. People looked, but nobody seemed surprised. Geoffrey sobbed, and the tears came silently down Ciccio's cheeks.

"I've waited for you since five o'clock, and I've got to go back now. Ciccio! Ciccio! I wanted so badly to see you. I shall never see thee again, brother, my brother!" cried Gigi, and a sob shook him.

"Gigi! Mon Gigi. Tu as done regu ma lettre?"

"Yesterday. O Ciccio, Ciccio, I shall die without thee!"

"But no, Gigi, frère. You won't die."

"Yes, Ciccio, I shall. I know I shall."

"I say no, brother," said Ciccio. But a spasm suddenly took him, he pulled off his hat and put it over his face and sobbed into it.

"Adieu, ami! Adieu!" cried Gigi, clutching the other man's arm. Ciccio took his hat from his tear-stained face and put it on his head. Then the two men embraced.

"Toujours à toi!" said Geoffrey, with a strange, solemn salute in front of Ciccio and Alvina. Then he turned on his heel and marched rapidly out of the station, his soiled soldier's overcoat flapping

in the wind at the door. Ciccio watched him go. Then he turned and looked with haunted eyes into the eyes of Alvina. And then they hurried down the desolate platform in the darkness. Many people, Italians, largely, were camped waiting there, while bits of snow wavered down. Ciccio bought food and hired cushions. The train backed in. There was a horrible fight for seats, men scrambling through windows. Alvina got a place--but Ciccio had to stay in the corridor.

Then the long night journey through France, slow and blind. The train was now so hot that the iron plate on the floor burnt Alvina's feet. Outside she saw glimpses of snow. A fat Italian hotel-keeper put on a smoking cap, covered the light, and spread himself before Alvina. In the next carriage a child was screaming. It screamed all the night--all the way from Paris to Chambéry it screamed. The train came to sudden halts, and stood still in the snow. The hotel-keeper snored. Alvina became almost comatose, in the burning heat of the carriage. And again the train rumbled on. And again she saw glimpses of stations, glimpses of snow, through the chinks in the curtained windows. And again there was a jerk and a sudden halt, a drowsy mutter from the sleepers, somebody uncovering the light, and somebody covering it again, somebody looking out, somebody tramping down the corridor, the child screaming.

The child belonged to two poor Italians--Milanese--a shred of a thin little man, and a rather loose woman. They had five tiny children,

all boys: and the four who could stand on their feet all wore scarlet caps. The fifth was a baby. Alvina had seen a French official yelling at the poor shred of a young father on the platform.

When morning came, and the bleary people pulled the curtains, it was a clear dawn, and they were in the south of France. There was no sign of snow. The landscape was half southern, half Alpine. White houses with brownish tiles stood among almond trees and cactus. It was beautiful, and Alvina felt she had known it all before, in a happier life. The morning was graceful almost as spring. She went out in the corridor to talk to Ciccio.

He was on his feet with his back to the inner window, rolling slightly to the motion of the train. His face was pale, he had that sombre, haunted, unhappy look. Alvina, thrilled by the southern country, was smiling excitedly.

"This is my first morning abroad," she said.

"Yes," he answered.

"I love it here," she said. "Isn't this like Italy?"

He looked darkly out of the window, and shook his head.

But the sombre look remained on his face. She watched him. And her heart sank as she had never known it sink before.

"Are you thinking of Gigi?" she said.

He looked at her, with a faint, unhappy, bitter smile, but he said nothing. He seemed far off from her. A wild unhappiness beat inside her breast. She went down the corridor, away from him, to avoid this new agony, which after all was not her agony. She listened to the chatter of French and Italian in the corridor. She felt the excitement and terror of France, inside the railway carriage: and outside she saw white oxen slowly ploughing, beneath the lingering yellow poplars of the sub-Alps, she saw peasants looking up, she saw a woman holding a baby to her breast, watching the train, she saw the excited, yeasty crowds at the station. And they passed a river, and a great lake. And it all seemed bigger, nobler than England. She felt vaster influences spreading around, the Past was greater, more magnificent in these regions. For the first time the nostalgia of the vast Roman and classic world took possession of her. And she found it splendid. For the first time she opened her eyes on a continent, the Alpine core of a continent. And for the first time she realized what it was to escape from the smallish perfection of England, into the grander imperfection of a great continent.

Near Chambéry they went down for breakfast to the restaurant car. And secretly, she was very happy. Ciccio's distress made her uneasy.

But underneath she was extraordinarily relieved and glad. Ciccio did not trouble her very much. The sense of the bigness of the lands about her, the excitement of travelling with Continental people, the pleasantness of her coffee and rolls and honey, the feeling that vast events were taking place--all this stimulated her. She had brushed, as it were, the fringe of the terror of the war and the invasion. Fear was seething around her. And yet she was excited and glad. The vast world was in one of its convulsions, and she was moving amongst it. Somewhere, she believed in the convulsion, the event elated her.

The train began to climb up to Modane. How wonderful the Alps were!--what a bigness, an unbreakable power was in the mountains! Up and up the train crept, and she looked at the rocky slopes, the glistening peaks of snow in the blue heaven, the hollow valleys with fir trees and low-roofed houses. There were quarries near the railway, and men working. There was a strange mountain town, dirty-looking. And still the train climbed up and up, in the hot morning sunshine, creeping slowly round the mountain loops, so that a little brown dog from one of the cottages ran alongside the train for a long way, barking at Alvina, even running ahead of the creeping, snorting train, and barking at the people ahead. Alvina, looking out, saw the two unfamiliar engines snorting out their smoke round the bend ahead. And the morning wore away to mid-day.

Ciccio became excited as they neared Modane, the frontier station.

His eye lit up again, he pulled himself together for the entrance into Italy. Slowly the train rolled in to the dismal station. And then a confusion indescribable, of porters and masses of luggage, the unspeakable crush and crowd at the customs barriers, the more intense crowd through the passport office, all like a madness.

They were out on the platform again, they had secured their places. Ciccio wanted to have luncheon in the station restaurant. They went through the passages. And there in the dirty station gang-ways and big corridors dozens of Italians were lying on the ground, men, women, children, camping with their bundles and packages in heaps. They were either emigrants or refugees. Alvina had never seen people herd about like cattle, dumb, brute cattle. It impressed her. She could not grasp that an Italian labourer would lie down just where he was tired, in the street, on a station, in any corner, like a dog.

In the afternoon they were slipping down the Alps towards Turin. And everywhere was snow--deep, white, wonderful snow, beautiful and fresh, glistening in the afternoon light all down the mountain slopes, on the railway track, almost seeming to touch the train. And twilight was falling. And at the stations people crowded in once more.

It had been dark a long time when they reached Turin. Many people alighted from the train, many surged to get in. But Ciccio and

Alvina had seats side by side. They were becoming tired now. But they were in Italy. Once more they went down for a meal. And then the train set off again in the night for Alessandria and Genoa, Pisa and Rome.

It was night, the train ran better, there was a more easy sense in Italy. Ciccio talked a little with other travelling companions. And Alvina settled her cushion, and slept more or less till Genoa. After the long wait at Genoa she dozed off again. She woke to see the sea in the moonlight beneath her--a lovely silvery sea, coming right to the carriage. The train seemed to be tripping on the edge of the Mediterranean, round bays, and between dark rocks and under castles, a night-time fairy-land, for hours. She watched spell-bound: spell-bound by the magic of the world itself. And she thought to herself: "Whatever life may be, and whatever horror men have made of it, the world is a lovely place, a magic place, something to marvel over. The world is an amazing place."

This thought dozed her off again. Yet she had a consciousness of tunnels and hills and of broad marshes pallid under a moon and a coming dawn. And in the dawn there was Pisa. She watched the word hanging in the station in the dimness: "Pisa." Ciccio told her people were changing for Florence. It all seemed wonderful to her--wonderful. She sat and watched the black station--then she heard the sound of the child's trumpet. And it did not occur to her to connect the train's moving on with the sound of the trumpet.

But she saw the golden dawn, a golden sun coming out of level country. She loved it. She loved being in Italy. She loved the lounging carelessness of the train, she liked having Italian money, hearing the Italians round her--though they were neither as beautiful nor as melodious as she expected. She loved watching the glowing antique landscape. She read and read again: "E pericoloso sporgersi," and "E vietato fumare," and the other little magical notices on the carriages. Ciccio told her what they meant, and how to say them. And sympathetic Italians opposite at once asked him if they were married and who and what his bride was, and they gazed at her with bright, approving eyes, though she felt terribly bedraggled and travel-worn.

"You come from England? Yes! Nice contry!" said a man in a corner, leaning forward to make this display of his linguistic capacity.

"Not so nice as this," said Alvina.

"Eh?"

Alvina repeated herself.

"Not so nice? Oh? No! Fog, eh!" The fat man whisked his fingers in the air, to indicate fog in the atmosphere. "But nice contry! Very--convenient."

He sat up in triumph, having achieved this word. And the conversation once more became a spatter of Italian. The women were very interested. They looked at Alvina, at every atom of her. And she divined that they were wondering if she was already with child. Sure enough, they were asking Ciccio in Italian if she was "making him a baby." But he shook his head and did not know, just a bit constrained. So they ate slices of sausages and bread and fried rice-balls, with wonderfully greasy fingers, and they drank red wine in big throatfuls out of bottles, and they offered their fare to Ciccio and Alvina, and were charmed when she said to Ciccio she would have some bread and sausage. He picked the strips off the sausage for her with his fingers, and made her a sandwich with a roll. The women watched her bite it, and bright-eyed and pleased they said, nodding their heads--

"Buono? Buono?"

And she, who knew this word, understood, and replied:

"Yes, good! Buono!" nodding her head likewise. Which caused immense satisfaction. The women showed the whole paper of sausage slices, and nodded and beamed and said:

"Se vuole ancora--!"

And Alvina bit her wide sandwich, and smiled, and said:

"Yes, awfully nice!"

And the women looked at each other and said something, and Ciccio interposed, shaking his head. But one woman ostentatiously wiped a bottle mouth with a clean handkerchief, and offered the bottle to Alvina, saying:

"Vino buono. Vecchio! Vecchio!" nodding violently and indicating that she should drink. She looked at Ciccio, and he looked back at her, doubtingly.

"Shall I drink some?" she said.

"If you like," he replied, making an Italian gesture of indifference.

So she drank some of the wine, and it dribbled on to her chin. She was not good at managing a bottle. But she liked the feeling of warmth it gave her. She was very tired.

"Si piace? Piace?"

"Do you like it," interpreted Ciccio.

"Yes, very much. What is very much?" she asked of Ciccio.

"Molto."

"Si, molto. Of course, I knew molto, from, music," she added.

The women made noises, and smiled and nodded, and so the train pulsed on till they came to Rome. There was again, the wild scramble with luggage, a general leave taking, and then the masses of people on the station at Rome. Roma! Roma! What was it to Alvina but a name, and a crowded, excited station, and Ciccio running after the luggage, and the pair of them eating in a station restaurant?

Almost immediately after eating, they were in the train once more, with new fellow travellers, running south this time towards Naples. In a daze of increasing weariness Alvina watched the dreary, to her sordid-seeming Campagna that skirts the railway, the broken aqueduct trailing in the near distance over the stricken plain. She saw a tram-car, far out from everywhere, running up to cross the railway. She saw it was going to Frascati.

And slowly the hills approached--they passed the vines of the foothills, the reeds, and were among the mountains. Wonderful little towns perched fortified on rocks and peaks, mountains rose straight up off the level plain, like old topographical prints, rivers wandered in the wild, rocky places, it all seemed ancient and

shaggy, savage still, under all its remote civilization, this region of the Alban Mountains south of Rome. So the train clambered up and down, and went round corners.

They had not far to go now. Alvina was almost too tired to care what it would be like. They were going to Ciccio's native village. They were to stay in the house of his uncle, his mother's brother. This uncle had been a model in London. He had built a house on the land left by Ciccio's grandfather. He lived alone now, for his wife was dead and his children were abroad. Giuseppe was his son: Giuseppe of Battersea, in whose house Alvina had stayed.

This much Alvina knew. She knew that a portion of the land down at Pescocalascio belonged to Ciccio: a bit of half-savage, ancient earth that had been left to his mother by old Francesco Califano, her hard-grinding peasant father. This land remained integral in the property, and was worked by Ciccio's two uncles, Pancrazio and Giovanni. Pancrazio was the well-to-do uncle, who had been a model and had built a "villa." Giovanni was not much good. That was how Ciccio put it.

They expected Pancrazio to meet them at the station. Ciccio collected his bundles and put his hat straight and peered out of the window into the steep mountains of the afternoon. There was a town in the opening between steep hills, a town on a flat plain that ran into the mountains like a gulf. The train drew up. They had arrived.

Alvina was so tired she could hardly climb down to the platform. It was about four o'clock. Ciccio looked up and down for Pancrazio, but could not see him. So he put his luggage into a pile on the platform, told Alvina to stand by it, whilst he went off for the registered boxes. A porter came and asked her questions, of which she understood nothing. Then at last came Ciccio, shouldering one small trunk, whilst a porter followed, shouldering another. Out they trotted, leaving Alvina abandoned with the pile of hand luggage. She waited. The train drew out. Ciccio and the porter came bustling back. They took her out through the little gate, to where, in the flat desert space behind the railway, stood two great drab motor-omnibuses, and a rank of open carriages. Ciccio was handing up the handbags to the roof of one of the big post-omnibuses. When it was finished the man on the roof came down, and Ciccio gave him and the station porter each sixpence. The station-porter immediately threw his coin on the ground with a gesture of indignant contempt, spread his arms wide and expostulated violently. Ciccio expostulated back again, and they pecked at each other, verbally, like two birds. It ended by the rolling up of the burly, black moustached driver of the omnibus. Whereupon Ciccio quite amicably gave the porter two nickel twopences in addition to the sixpence, whereupon the porter quite lovingly wished him "buon' viaggio."

So Alvina was stowed into the body of the omnibus, with Ciccio at her side. They were no sooner seated than a voice was heard, in

beautifully-modulated English:

"You are here! Why how have I missed you?"

It was Pancrazio, a smallish, rather battered-looking, shabby Italian of sixty or more, with a big moustache and reddish-rimmed eyes and a deeply-lined face. He was presented to Alvina.

"How have I missed you?" he said. "I was on the station when the train came, and I did not see you."

But it was evident he had taken wine. He had no further opportunity to talk. The compartment was full of large, mountain-peasants with black hats and big cloaks and overcoats. They found Pancrazio a seat at the far end, and there he sat, with his deeply-lined, impassive face and slightly glazed eyes. He had yellow-brown eyes like Ciccio. But in the uncle the eyelids dropped in a curious, heavy way, the eyes looked dull like those of some old, rakish tom-cat, they were slightly rimmed with red. A curious person! And his English, though slow, was beautifully pronounced. He glanced at Alvina with slow, impersonal glances, not at all a stare. And he sat for the most part impassive and abstract as a Red Indian.

At the last moment a large black priest was crammed in, and the door shut behind him. Every available seat was let down and occupied. The second great post-omnibus rolled away, and then the one for Mola

followed, rolling Alvina and Ciccio over the next stage of their journey.

The sun was already slanting to the mountain tops, shadows were falling on the gulf of the plain. The omnibus charged at a great speed along a straight white road, which cut through the cultivated level straight towards the core of the mountain. By the road-side, peasant men in cloaks, peasant women in full-gathered dresses with white bodices or blouses having great full sleeves, tramped in the ridge of grass, driving cows or goats, or leading heavily-laden asses. The women had coloured kerchiefs on their heads, like the women Alvina remembered at the Sunday-School treats, who used to tell fortunes with green little love-birds. And they all tramped along towards the blue shadow of the closing-in mountains, leaving the peaks of the town behind on the left.

At a branch-road the 'bus suddenly stopped, and there it sat calmly in the road beside an icy brook, in the falling twilight. Great moth-white oxen waved past, drawing a long, low load of wood; the peasants left behind began to come up again, in picturesque groups. The icy brook tinkled, goats, pigs and cows wandered and shook their bells along the grassy borders of the road and the flat, unbroken fields, being driven slowly home. Peasants jumped out of the omnibus on to the road, to chat--and a sharp air came in. High overhead, as the sun went down, was the curious icy radiance of snow mountains, and a pinkness, while shadow deepened in the valley.

At last, after about half an hour, the youth who was conductor of the omnibus came running down the wild side-road, everybody clambered in, and away the vehicle charged, into the neck of the plain. With a growl and a rush it swooped up the first loop of the ascent. Great precipices rose on the right, the ruddiness of sunset above them. The road wound and swirled, trying to get up the pass. The omnibus pegged slowly up, then charged round a corner, swirled into another loop, and pegged heavily once more. It seemed dark between the closing-in mountains. The rocks rose very high, the road looped and swerved from one side of the wide defile to the other, the vehicle pulsed and persisted. Sometimes there was a house, sometimes a wood of oak-trees, sometimes the glimpse of a ravine, then the tall white glisten of snow above the earthly blackness. And still they went on and on, up the darkness.

Peering ahead, Alvina thought she saw the hollow between the peaks, which was the top of the pass. And every time the omnibus took a new turn, she thought it was coming out on the top of this hollow between the heights. But no--the road coiled right away again.

A wild little village came in sight. This was the destination. Again no. Only the tall, handsome mountain youth who had sat across from her, descended grumbling because the 'bus had brought him past his road, the driver having refused to pull up. Everybody expostulated with him, and he dropped into the shadow. The big priest squeezed

into his place. The 'bus wound on and on, and always towards that hollow sky-line between the high peaks.

At last they ran up between buildings nipped between high rock-faces, and out into a little market-place, the crown of the pass. The luggage was got out and lifted down. Alvina descended. There she was, in a wild centre of an old, unfinished little mountain town. The façade of a church rose from a small eminence. A white road ran to the right, where a great open valley showed faintly beyond and beneath. Low, squalid sort of buildings stood around--with some high buildings. And there were bare little trees. The stars were in the sky, the air was icy. People stood darkly, excitedly about, women with an odd, shell-pattern head-dress of gofered linen, something like a parlour-maid's cap, came and stared hard. They were hard-faced mountain women.

Pancrazio was talking to Ciccio in dialect.

"I couldn't get a cart to come down," he said in English. "But I shall find one here. Now what will you do? Put the luggage in Grazia's place while you wait?--"

They went across the open place to a sort of shop called the Post Restaurant. It was a little hole with an earthen floor and a smell of cats. Three crones were sitting over a low brass brazier, in which charcoal and ashes smouldered. Men were drinking. Ciccio

ordered coffee with rum--and the hard-faced Grazia, in her unfresh head-dress, dabbled the little dirty coffee-cups in dirty water, took the coffee-pot out of the ashes, poured in the old black boiling coffee three parts full, and slopped the cup over with rum. Then she dashed in a spoonful of sugar, to add to the pool in the saucer, and her customers were served.

However, Ciccio drank up, so Alvina did likewise, burning her lips smartly. Ciccio paid and ducked his way out.

"Now what will you buy?" asked Pancrazio.

"Buy?" said Ciccio.

"Food," said Pancrazio. "Have you brought food?"

"No," said Ciccio.

So they trailed up stony dark ways to a butcher, and got a big red slice of meat; to a baker, and got enormous flat loaves. Sugar and coffee they bought. And Pancrazio lamented in his elegant English that no butter was to be obtained. Everywhere the hard-faced women came and stared into Alvina's face, asking questions. And both Ciccio and Pancrazio answered rather coldly, with some hauteur. There was evidently not too much intimacy between the people of Pescocalascio and these semi-townfolk of Ossona. Alvina felt as if

she were in a strange, hostile country, in the darkness of the savage little mountain town.

At last they were ready. They mounted into a two-wheeled cart, Alvina and Ciccio behind, Pancrazio and the driver in front, the luggage promiscuous. The bigger things were left for the morrow. It was icy cold, with a flashing darkness. The moon would not rise till later.

And so, without any light but that of the stars, the cart went spanking and rattling downhill, down the pale road which wound down the head of the valley to the gulf of darkness below. Down in the darkness into the darkness they rattled, wildly, and without heed, the young driver making strange noises to his dim horse, cracking a whip and asking endless questions of Pancrazio.

Alvina sat close to Ciccio. He remained almost impassive. The wind was cold, the stars flashed. And they rattled down the rough, broad road under the rocks, down and down in the darkness. Ciccio sat crouching forwards, staring ahead. Alvina was aware of mountains, rocks, and stars.

"I didn't know it was so wild!" she said.

"It is not much," he said. There was a sad, plangent note in his voice. He put his hand upon her.

"You don't like it?" he said.

"I think it's lovely--wonderful," she said, dazed.

He held her passionately. But she did not feel she needed protecting. It was all wonderful and amazing to her. She could not understand why he seemed upset and in a sort of despair. To her there was magnificence in the lustrous stars and the steepnesses, magic, rather terrible and grand.

They came down to the level valley bed, and went rolling along. There was a house, and a lurid red fire burning outside against the wall, and dark figures about it.

"What is that?" she said. "What are they doing?"

"I don't know," said Ciccio. "Cosa fanno li--eh?"

"Ka--? Fanno il buga'--" said the driver.

"They are doing some washing," said Pancrazio, explanatory.

"Washing!" said Alvina.

"Boiling the clothes," said Ciccio.

On the cart rattled and bumped, in the cold night, down the high-way in the valley. Alvina could make out the darkness of the slopes. Overhead she saw the brilliance of Orion. She felt she was quite, quite lost. She had gone out of the world, over the border, into some place of mystery. She was lost to Woodhouse, to Lancaster, to England--all lost.

They passed through a darkness of woods, with a swift sound of cold water. And then suddenly the cart pulled up. Some one came out of a lighted doorway in the darkness.

"We must get down here--the cart doesn't go any further," said Pancrazio.

"Are we there?" said Alvina.

"No, it is about a mile. But we must leave the cart."

Ciccio asked questions in Italian. Alvina climbed down.

"Good-evening! Are you cold?" came a loud, raucous, American-Italian female voice. It was another relation of Ciccio's. Alvina stared and looked at the handsome, sinister, raucous-voiced young woman who stood in the light of the doorway.

"Rather cold," she said.

"Come in, and warm yourself," said the young woman.

"My sister's husband lives here," explained Pancrazio.

Alvina went through the doorway into the room. It was a sort of inn. On the earthen floor glowed a great round pan of charcoal, which looked like a flat pool of fire. Men in hats and cloaks sat at a table playing cards by the light of a small lamp, a man was pouring wine. The room seemed like a cave.

"Warm yourself," said the young woman, pointing to the flat disc of fire on the floor. She put a chair up to it, and Alvina sat down. The men in the room stared, but went on noisily with their cards. Ciccio came in with luggage. Men got up and greeted him effusively, watching Alvina between whiles as if she were some alien creature. Words of American sounded among the Italian dialect.

There seemed to be a confab of some sort, aside. Ciccio came and said to her:

"They want to know if we will stay the night here."

"I would rather go on home," she said.

He averted his face at the word home.

"You see," said Pancrazio, "I think you might be more comfortable here, than in my poor house. You see I have no woman to care for it--"

Alvina glanced round the cave of a room, at the rough fellows in their black hats. She was thinking how she would be "more comfortable" here.

"I would rather go on," she said.

"Then we will get the donkey," said Pancrazio stoically. And Alvina followed him out on to the high-road.

From a shed issued a smallish, brigand-looking fellow carrying a lantern. He had his cloak over his nose and his hat over his eyes. His legs were bundled with white rag, crossed and crossed with hide straps, and he was shod in silent skin sandals.

"This is my brother Giovanni," said Pancrazio. "He is not quite sensible." Then he broke into a loud flood of dialect.

Giovanni touched his hat to Alvina, and gave the lantern to Pancrazio. Then he disappeared, returning in a few moments with the ass. Ciccio came out with the baggage, and by the light of the

lantern the things were slung on either side of the ass, in a rather precarious heap. Pancrazio tested the rope again.

"There! Go on, and I shall come in a minute."

"Ay-er-er!" cried Giovanni at the ass, striking the flank of the beast. Then he took the leading rope and led up on the dark high-way, stalking with his dingy white legs under his muffled cloak, leading the ass. Alvina noticed the shuffle of his skin-sandalled feet, the quiet step of the ass.

She walked with Ciccio near the side of the road. He carried the lantern. The ass with its load plodded a few steps ahead. There were trees on the road-side, and a small channel of invisible but noisy water. Big rocks jutted sometimes. It was freezing, the mountain high-road was congealed. High stars flashed overhead.

"How strange it is!" said Alvina to Ciccio. "Are you glad you have come home?"

"It isn't my home," he replied, as if the word fretted him. "Yes, I like to see it again. But it isn't the place for young people to live in. You will see how you like it."

She wondered at his uneasiness. It was the same in Pancrazio. The latter now came running to catch them up.

"I think you will be tired," he said. "You ought to have stayed at my relation's house down there."

"No, I am not tired," said Alvina. "But I'm hungry."

"Well, we shall eat something when we come to my house."

They plodded in the darkness of the valley high-road. Pancrazio took the lantern and went to examine the load, hitching the ropes. A great flat loaf fell out, and rolled away, and smack came a little valise. Pancrazio broke into a flood of dialect to Giovanni, handing him the lantern. Ciccio picked up the bread and put it under his arm.

"Break me a little piece," said Alvina.

And in the darkness they both chewed bread.

After a while, Pancrazio halted with the ass just ahead, and took the lantern from Giovanni.

"We must leave the road here," he said.

And with the lantern he carefully, courteously showed Alvina a small track descending in the side of the bank, between bushes. Alvina

ventured down the steep descent, Pancrazio following showing a light. In the rear was Giovanni, making noises at the ass. They all picked their way down into the great white-bouldered bed of a mountain river. It was a wide, strange bed of dry boulders, pallid under the stars. There was a sound of a rushing river, glacial-sounding. The place seemed wild and desolate. In the distance was a darkness of bushes, along the far shore.

Pancrazio swinging the lantern, they threaded their way through the uneven boulders till they came to the river itself--not very wide, but rushing fast. A long, slender, drooping plank crossed over. Alvina crossed rather tremulous, followed by Pancrazio with the light, and Ciccio with the bread and the valise. They could hear the click of the ass and the ejaculations of Giovanni.

Pancrazio went back over the stream with the light. Alvina saw the dim ass come up, wander uneasily to the stream, plant his fore legs, and sniff the water, his nose right down.

"Er! Err!" cried Pancrazio, striking the beast on the flank.

But it only lifted its nose and turned aside. It would not take the stream. Pancrazio seized the leading rope angrily and turned upstream.

"Why were donkeys made! They are beasts without sense," his voice

floated angrily across the chill darkness.

Ciccio laughed. He and Alvina stood in the wide, stony river-bed, in the strong starlight, watching the dim figures of the ass and the men crawl upstream with the lantern.

Again the same performance, the white muzzle of the ass stooping down to sniff the water suspiciously, his hind-quarters tilted up with the load. Again the angry yells and blows from Pancrazio. And the ass seemed to be taking the water. But no! After a long deliberation he drew back. Angry language sounded through the crystal air. The group with the lantern moved again upstream, becoming smaller.

Alvina and Ciccio stood and watched. The lantern looked small up the distance. But there--a clocking, shouting, splashing sound.

"He is going over," said Ciccio.

Pancrazio came hurrying back to the plank with the lantern.

"Oh the stupid beast! I could kill him!" cried he.

"Isn't he used to the water?" said Alvina.

"Yes, he is. But he won't go except where he thinks he will go. You

might kill him before he should go."

They picked their way across the river bed, to the wild scrub and bushes of the farther side. There they waited for the ass, which came up clicking over the boulders, led by the patient Giovanni. And then they took a difficult, rocky track ascending between banks. Alvina felt the uneven scramble a great effort. But she got up. Again they waited for the ass. And then again they struck off to the right, under some trees.

A house appeared dimly.

"Is that it?" said Alvina.

"No. It belongs to me. But that is not my house. A few steps further. Now we are on my land."

They were treading a rough sort of grass-land--and still climbing. It ended in a sudden little scramble between big stones, and suddenly they were on the threshold of a quite important-looking house: but it was all dark.

"Oh!" exclaimed Pancrazio, "they have done nothing that I told them." He made queer noises of exasperation.

"What?" said Alvina.

"Neither made a fire nor anything. Wait a minute--"

The ass came up. Ciccio, Alvina, Giovanni and the ass waited in the frosty starlight under the wild house. Pancrazio disappeared round the back. Ciccio talked to Giovanni. He seemed uneasy, as if he felt depressed.

Pancrazio returned with the lantern, and opened the big door. Alvina followed him into a stone-floored, wide passage, where stood farm implements, where a little of straw and beans lay in a corner, and whence rose bare wooden stairs. So much she saw in the glimpse of lantern-light, as Pancrazio pulled the string and entered the kitchen: a dim-walled room with a vaulted roof and a great dark, open hearth, fireless: a bare room, with a little rough dark furniture: an unswept stone floor: iron-barred windows, rather small, in the deep-thickness of the wall, one-half shut with a drab shutter. It was rather like a room on the stage, gloomy, not meant to be lived in.

"I will make a light," said Pancrazio, taking a lamp from the mantel-piece, and proceeding to wind it up.

Ciccio stood behind Alvina, silent. He had put down the bread and valise on a wooden chest. She turned to him.

"It's a beautiful room," she said.

Which, with its high, vaulted roof, its dirty whitewash, its great black chimney, it really was. But Ciccio did not understand. He smiled gloomily.

The lamp was lighted. Alvina looked round in wonder.

"Now I will make a fire. You, Ciccio, will help Giovanni with the donkey," said Pancrazio, scuttling with the lantern.

Alvina looked at the room. There was a wooden settle in front of the hearth, stretching its back to the room. There was a little table under a square, recessed window, on whose sloping ledge were newspapers, scattered letters, nails and a hammer. On the table were dried beans and two maize cobs. In a corner were shelves, with two chipped enamel plates, and a small table underneath, on which stood a bucket of water with a dipper. Then there was a wooden chest, two little chairs, and a litter of faggots, cane, vine-twigs, bare maize-hubs, oak-twigs filling the corner by the hearth.

Pancrazio came scrambling in with fresh faggots.

"They have not done what I told them, the tiresome people!" he said.

"I told them to make a fire and prepare the house. You will be uncomfortable in my poor home. I have no woman, nothing, everything

is wrong--"

He broke the pieces of cane and kindled them in the hearth. Soon there was a good blaze. Ciccio came in with the bags and the food.

"I had better go upstairs and take my things off," said Alvina. "I am so hungry."

"You had better keep your coat on," said Pancrazio. "The room is cold." Which it was, ice-cold. She shuddered a little. She took off her hat and fur.

"Shall we fry some meat?" said Pancrazio.

He took a frying-pan, found lard in the wooden chest--it was the food-chest--and proceeded to fry pieces of meat in a frying-pan over the fire. Alvina wanted to lay the table. But there was no cloth.

"We will sit here, as I do, to eat," said Pancrazio. He produced two enamel plates and one soup-plate, three penny iron forks and two old knives, and a little grey, coarse salt in a wooden bowl. These he placed on the seat of the settle in front of the fire. Ciccio was silent.

The settle was dark and greasy. Alvina feared for her clothes. But she sat with her enamel plate and her impossible fork, a piece of

meat and a chunk of bread, and ate. It was difficult--but the food was good, and the fire blazed. Only there was a film of wood-smoke in the room, rather smarting. Ciccio sat on the settle beside her, and ate in large mouthfuls.

"I think it's fun," said Alvina.

He looked at her with dark, haunted, gloomy eyes. She wondered what was the matter with him.

"Don't you think it's fun?" she said, smiling.

He smiled slowly.

"You won't like it," he said.

"Why not?" she cried, in panic lest he prophesied truly.

Pancrazio scuttled in and out with the lantern. He brought wrinkled pears, and green, round grapes, and walnuts, on a white cloth, and presented them.

"I think my pears are still good," he said. "You must eat them, and excuse my uncomfortable house."

Giovanni came in with a big bowl of soup and a bottle of milk. There

was room only for three on the settle before the hearth. He pushed his chair among the litter of fire-kindling, and sat down. He had bright, bluish eyes, and a fattish face--was a man of about fifty, but had a simple, kindly, slightly imbecile face. All the men kept their hats on.

The soup was from Giovanni's cottage. It was for Pancrazio and him. But there was only one spoon. So Pancrazio ate a dozen spoonfuls, and handed the bowl to Giovanni--who protested and tried to refuse--but accepted, and ate ten spoonfuls, then handed the bowl back to his brother, with the spoon. So they finished the bowl between them. Then Pancrazio found wine--a whitish wine, not very good, for which he apologized. And he invited Alvina to coffee. Which she accepted gladly.

For though the fire was warm in front, behind was very cold. Pancrazio stuck a long pointed stick down the handle of a saucepan, and gave this utensil to Ciccio, to hold over the fire and scald the milk, whilst he put the tin coffee-pot in the ashes. He took a long iron tube or blow-pipe, which rested on two little feet at the far end. This he gave to Giovanni to blow the fire.

Giovanni was a fire-worshipper. His eyes sparkled as he took the blowing tube. He put fresh faggots behind the fire--though Pancrazio forbade him. He arranged the burning faggots. And then softly he blew a red-hot fire for the coffee.

"Basta! Basta!" said Ciccio. But Giovanni blew on, his eyes sparkling, looking to Alvina. He was making the fire beautiful for her.

There was one cup, one enamelled mug, one little bowl. This was the coffee-service. Pancrazio noisily ground the coffee. He seemed to do everything, old, stooping as he was.

At last Giovanni took his leave--the kettle which hung on the hook over the fire was boiling over. Ciccio burnt his hand lifting it off. And at last, at last Alvina could go to bed.

Pancrazio went first with the candle--then Ciccio with the black kettle--then Alvina. The men still had their hats on. Their boots tramped noisily on the bare stairs.

The bedroom was very cold. It was a fair-sized room with a concrete floor and white walls, and window-door opening on a little balcony. There were two high white beds on opposite sides of the room. The wash-stand was a little tripod thing.

The air was very cold, freezing, the stone floor was dead cold to the feet. Ciccio sat down on a chair and began to take off his boots. She went to the window. The moon had risen. There was a flood of light on dazzling white snow tops, glimmering and marvellous in

the evanescent night. She went out for a moment on to the balcony. It was a wonder-world: the moon over the snow heights, the pallid valley-bed away below; the river hoarse, and round about her, scrubby, blue-dark foothills with twiggy trees. Magical it all was--but so cold.

"You had better shut the door," said Ciccio.

She came indoors. She was dead tired, and stunned with cold, and hopelessly dirty after that journey. Ciccio had gone to bed without washing.

"Why does the bed rustle?" she asked him.

It was stuffed with dry maize-leaves, the dry sheathes from the cobs--stuffed enormously high. He rustled like a snake among dead foliage.

Alvina washed her hands. There was nothing to do with the water but throw it out of the door. Then she washed her face, thoroughly, in good hot water. What a blessed relief! She sighed as she dried herself.

"It does one good!" she sighed.

Ciccio watched her as she quickly brushed her hair. She was almost

stupefied with weariness and the cold, bruising air. Blindly she crept into the high, rustling bed. But it was made high in the middle. And it was icy cold. It shocked her almost as if she had fallen into water. She shuddered, and became semi-conscious with fatigue. The blankets were heavy, heavy. She was dazed with excitement and wonder. She felt vaguely that Ciccio was miserable, and wondered why.

She woke with a start an hour or so later. The moon was in the room. She did not know where she was. And she was frightened. And she was cold. A real terror took hold of her. Ciccio in his bed was quite still. Everything seemed electric with horror. She felt she would die instantly, everything was so terrible around her. She could not move. She felt that everything around her was horrific, extinguishing her, putting her out. Her very being was threatened. In another instant she would be transfixed.

Making a violent effort she sat up. The silence of Ciccio in his bed was as horrible as the rest of the night. She had a horror of him also. What would she do, where should she flee? She was lost--lost--lost utterly.

The knowledge sank into her like ice. Then deliberately she got out of bed and went across to him. He was horrible and frightening, but he was warm. She felt his power and his warmth invade her and extinguish her. The mad and desperate passion that was in him sent

her completely unconscious again, completely unconscious.