

Sea and Sardinia

By

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SEA AND SARDINIA

I.

AS FAR AS PALERMO.

Comes over one an absolute necessity to move. And what is more, to move in some particular direction. A double necessity then: to get on the move, and to know whither.

Why can't one sit still? Here in Sicily it is so pleasant: the sunny Ionian sea, the changing jewel of Calabria, like a fire-opal moved in the light; Italy and the panorama of Christmas clouds, night with the dog-star laying a long, luminous gleam across the sea, as if baying at us, Orion marching above; how the dog-star Sirius looks at one, looks at one! he is the hound of heaven, green, glamorous and fierce!--and then oh regal evening star, hung westward flaring over the jagged dark precipices of tall Sicily: then Etna, that wicked witch, resting her thick white snow under heaven, and slowly, slowly rolling her orange-coloured smoke. They called her the Pillar of Heaven, the Greeks. It seems wrong at first, for she trails up in a long, magical, flexible line from the sea's edge to her blunt cone, and does not seem tall. She seems rather low, under heaven. But as one knows her better,

oh awe and wizardy! Remote under heaven, aloof, so near, yet never with us. The painters try to paint her, and the photographers to photograph her, in vain. Because why? Because the near ridges, with their olives and white houses, these are with us. Because the river-bed, and Naxos under the lemon groves, Greek Naxos deep under dark-leaved, many-fruited lemon groves, Etna's skirts and skirt-bottoms, these still are our world, our own world. Even the high villages among the oaks, on Etna. But Etna herself, Etna of the snow and secret changing winds, she is beyond a crystal wall. When I look at her, low, white, witch-like under heaven, slowly rolling her orange smoke and giving sometimes a breath of rose-red flame, then I must look away from earth, into the ether, into the low empyrean. And there, in that remote region, Etna is alone. If you would see her, you must slowly take off your eyes from the world and go a naked seer to the strange chamber of the empyrean. Pedestal of heaven! The Greeks had a sense of the magic truth of things. Thank goodness one still knows enough about them to find one's kinship at last. There are so many photographs, there are so infinitely many water-colour drawings and oil paintings which purport to render Etna. But pedestal of heaven! You must cross the invisible border. Between the foreground, which is our own, and Etna, pivot of winds in lower heaven, there is a dividing line. You must change your state of mind. A metempsychosis. It is no use thinking you can see and behold Etna and the foreground both at once. Never. One or the other. Foreground and a transcribed Etna. Or Etna, pedestal of heaven.

Why, then, must one go? Why not stay? Ah, what a mistress, this Etna!

with her strange winds prowling round her like Circe's panthers, some black, some white. With her strange, remote communications and her terrible dynamic exhalations. She makes men mad. Such terrible vibrations of wicked and beautiful electricity she throws about her, like a deadly net! Nay, sometimes, verily, one can feel a new current of her demon magnetism seize one's living tissue and change the peaceful life of one's active cells. She makes a storm in the living plasm and a new adjustment. And sometimes it is like a madness.

This timeless Grecian Etna, in her lower-heaven loveliness, so lovely, so lovely, what a torturer! Not many men can really stand her, without losing their souls. She is like Circe. Unless a man is very strong, she takes his soul away from him and leaves him not a beast, but an elemental creature, intelligent and soulless. Intelligent, almost inspired, and soulless, like the Etna Sicilians. Intelligent daimons, and humanly, according to us, the most stupid people on earth. Ach, horror! How many men, how many races, has Etna put to flight? It was she who broke the quick of the Greek soul. And after the Greeks, she gave the Romans, the Normans, the Arabs, the Spaniards, the French, the Italians, even the English, she gave them all their inspired hour and broke their souls.

Perhaps it is she one must flee from. At any rate, one must go: and at once. After having come back only at the end of October, already one must dash away. And it is only the third of January. And one cannot afford to move. Yet there you are: at the Etna bidding one goes.

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Where does one go? There is Girgenti by the south. There is Tunis at hand. Girgenti, and the sulphur spirit and the Greek guarding temples, to make one madder? Never. Neither Syracuse and the madness of its great quarries. Tunis? Africa? Not yet, not yet. Not the Arabs, not yet. Naples, Rome, Florence? No good at all. Where then?

Where then? Spain or Sardinia. Spain or Sardinia. Sardinia, which is like nowhere. Sardinia, which has no history, no date, no race, no offering. Let it be Sardinia. They say neither Romans nor Phoenicians, Greeks nor Arabs ever subdued Sardinia. It lies outside; outside the circuit of civilisation. Like the Basque lands. Sure enough, it is Italian now, with its railways and its motor-omnibuses. But there is an uncaptured Sardinia still. It lies within the net of this European civilisation, but it isn't landed yet. And the net is getting old and tattered. A good many fish are slipping through the net of the old European civilisation. Like that great whale of Russia. And probably even Sardinia. Sardinia then. Let it be Sardinia.

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There is a fortnightly boat sailing from Palermo--next Wednesday, three days ahead. Let us go, then. Away from abhorred Etna, and the Ionian sea, and these great stars in the water, and the almond trees in bud,

and the orange trees heavy with red fruit, and these maddening, exasperating, impossible Sicilians, who never knew what truth was and have long lost all notion of what a human being is. A sort of sulphureous demons. Andiamo!

But let me confess, in parenthesis, that I am not at all sure whether I don't really prefer these demons to our sanctified humanity.

Why does one create such discomfort for oneself! To have to get up in the middle of the night--half past one--to go and look at the clock. Of course this fraud of an American watch has stopped, with its impudent phosphorescent face. Half past one! Half past one, and a dark January night. Ah, well! Half past one! And an uneasy sleep till at last it is five o'clock. Then light a candle and get up.

The dreary black morning, the candle-light, the house looking night-dismal. Ah, well, one does all these things for one's pleasure. So light the charcoal fire and put the kettle on. The queen bee shivering round half dressed, fluttering her unhappy candle.

"It's fun," she says, shuddering.

"Great," say I, grim as death.

First fill the thermos with hot tea. Then fry bacon--good English bacon from Malta, a god-send, indeed--and make bacon sandwiches. Make also

sandwiches of scrambled eggs. Make also bread and butter. Also a little toast for breakfast--and more tea. But ugh, who wants to eat at this unearthly hour, especially when one is escaping from bewitched Sicily.

Fill the little bag we call the kitchenino. Methylated spirit, a small aluminium saucepan, a spirit-lamp, two spoons, two forks, a knife, two aluminium plates, salt, sugar, tea--what else? The thermos flask, the various sandwiches, four apples, and a little tin of butter. So much for the kitchenino, for myself and the queen bee. Then my knapsack and the q-b's handbag.

Under the lid of the half-cloudy night sky, far away at the rim of the Ionian sea, the first light, like metal fusing. So swallow the cup of tea and the bit of toast. Hastily wash up, so that we can find the house decent when we come back. Shut the door-windows of the upper terrace and go down. Lock the door: the upper half of the house made fast.

The sky and sea are parting like an oyster shell, with a low red gape. Looking across from the veranda at it, one shivers. Not that it is cold. The morning is not at all cold. But the ominousness of it: that long red slit between a dark sky and a dark Ionian sea, terrible old bivalve which has held life between its lips so long. And here, at this house, we are ledged so awfully above the dawn, naked to it.

Fasten the door-windows of the lower veranda. One won't fasten at all. The summer heat warped it one way, the masses of autumn rain warped it

another. Put a chair against it. Lock the last door and hide the key. Sling the knapsack on one's back, take the kitchenino in one's hand and look round. The dawn-red widening, between the purpling sea and the troubled sky. A light in the capucin convent across there. Cocks crowing and the long, howling, hiccuping, melancholy bray of an ass. "All females are dead, all females--och! och! och!--hoooo! Ahaa!--there's one left." So he ends on a moaning grunt of consolation. This is what the Arabs tell us an ass is howling when he brays.

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Very dark under the great carob tree as we go down the steps. Dark still the garden. Scent of mimosa, and then of jasmine. The lovely mimosa tree invisible. Dark the stony path. The goat whinnies out of her shed. The broken Roman tomb which lolls right over the garden track does not fall on me as I slip under its massive tilt. Ah, dark garden, dark garden, with your olives and your wine, your medlars and mulberries and many almond trees, your steep terraces ledged high up above the sea, I am leaving you, slinking out. Out between the rosemary hedges, out of the tall gate, on to the cruel steep stony road. So under the dark, big eucalyptus trees, over the stream, and up towards the village. There, I have got so far.

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It is full dawn--dawn, not morning, the sun will not have risen. The

village is nearly all dark in the red light, and asleep still. No one at the fountain by the capucin gate: too dark still. One man leading a horse round the corner of the Palazzo Corvaia. One or two dark men along the Corso. And so over the brow, down the steep cobble-stone street between the houses, and out to the naked hill front. This is the dawn-coast of Sicily. Nay, the dawn-coast of Europe. Steep, like a vast cliff, dawn-forward. A red dawn, with mingled curdling dark clouds, and some gold. It must be seven o'clock. The station down below, by the sea. And noise of a train. Yes, a train. And we still high on the steep track, winding downwards. But it is the train from Messina to Catania, half an hour before ours, which is from Catania to Messina.

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So jolt, and drop, and jolt down the old road that winds on the cliff face. Etna across there is smothered quite low, quite low in a dense puther of ink-black clouds. Playing some devilry in private, no doubt. The dawn is angry red, and yellow above, the sea takes strange colors. I hate the station, pigmy, drawn out there beside the sea. On this steep face, especially in the windless nooks, the almond blossom is already out. In little puffs and specks and stars, it looks very like bits of snow scattered by winter. Bits of snow, bits of blossom, fourth day of the year 1921. Only blossom. And Etna indescribably cloaked and secretive in her dense black clouds. She has wrapped them quite round her, quite low round her skirts.

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At last we are down. We pass the pits where men are burning lime--red-hot, round pits--and are out on the high-way. Nothing can be more depressing than an Italian high-road. From Syracuse to Airolo it is the same: horrible, dreary, slummy high-roads the moment you approach a village or any human habitation. Here there is an acrid smell of lemon juice. There is a factory for making citrate. The houses flush on the road, under the great lime-stone face of the hill, open their slummy doors, and throw out dirty water and coffee dregs. We walk over the dirty water and coffee dregs. Mules rattle past with carts. Other people are going to the station. We pass the Dazio and are there.

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Humanity is, externally, too much alike. Internally there are insuperable differences. So one sits and thinks, watching the people on the station: like a line of caricatures between oneself and the naked sea and the uneasy, clouding dawn.

You would look in vain this morning for the swarthy feline southerner of romance. It might, as far as features are concerned, be an early morning crowd waiting for the train on a north London suburb station. As far as features go. For some are fair and some colorless and none racially typical. The only one that is absolutely like a race caricature is a tall stout elderly fellow with spectacles and a short nose and a

bristling moustache, and he is the German of the comic papers of twenty years ago. But he is pure Sicilian.

They are mostly young fellows going up the line to Messina to their job: not artisans, lower middle class. And externally, so like any other clerks and shop-men, only rather more shabby, much less socially self-conscious. They are lively, they throw their arms round one another's necks, they all but kiss. One poor chap has had earache, so a black kerchief is tied round his face, and his black hat is perched above, and a comic sight he looks. No one seems to think so, however. Yet they view my arrival with a knapsack on my back with cold disapprobation, as unseemly as if I had arrived riding on a pig. I ought to be in a carriage, and the knapsack ought to be a new suit-case. I know it, but am inflexible.

That is how they are. Each one thinks he is as handsome as Adonis, and as "fetching" as Don Juan. Extraordinary! At the same time, all flesh is grass, and if a few trouser-buttons are missing or if a black hat perches above a thick black face-muffle and a long excruciated face, it is all in the course of nature. They seize the black-edged one by the arm, and in profound commiseration: "Do you suffer? Are you suffering?" they ask.

And that also is how they are. So terribly physically all over one another. They pour themselves one over the other like so much melted butter over parsnips. They catch each other under the chin, with a

tender caress of the hand, and they smile with sunny melting tenderness into each other's face. Never in the world have I seen such melting gay tenderness as between casual Sicilians on railway platforms, whether they be young lean-cheeked Sicilians or huge stout Sicilians.

There must be something curious about the proximity of a volcano. Naples and Catania alike, the men are hugely fat, with great macaroni paunches, they are expansive and in a perfect drip of casual affection and love. But the Sicilians are even more wildly exuberant and fat and all over one another than the Neapolitans. They never leave off being amorously friendly with almost everybody, emitting a relentless physical familiarity that is quite bewildering to one not brought up near a volcano.

This is more true of the middle classes than of the lower. The working men are perforce thinner and less exuberant. But they hang together in clusters, and can never be physically near enough.

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It is only thirty miles to Messina, but the train takes two hours. It winds and hurries and stops beside the lavender grey morning sea. A flock of goats trail over the beach near the lapping wave's edge, dismally. Great wide deserts of stony river-beds run down to the sea, and men on asses are picking their way across, and women are kneeling by the small stream-channel washing clothes. The lemons hang pale and

innumerable in the thick lemon groves. Lemon trees, like Italians, seem to be happiest when they are touching one another all round. Solid forests of not very tall lemon trees lie between the steep mountains and the sea, on the strip of plain. Women, vague in the orchard under-shadow, are picking the lemons, lurking as if in the undersea. There are heaps of pale yellow lemons under the trees. They look like pale, primrose-smouldering fires. Curious how like fires the heaps of lemons look, under the shadow of foliage, seeming to give off a pallid burning amid the suave, naked, greenish trunks. When there comes a cluster of orange trees, the oranges are red like coals among the darker leaves. But lemons, lemons, innumerable, speckled like innumerable tiny stars in the green firmament of leaves. So many lemons! Think of all the lemonade crystals they will be reduced to! Think of America drinking them up next summer.

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I always wonder why such vast wide river-beds of pale boulders come out of the heart of the high-rearing, dramatic stone mountains, a few miles to the sea. A few miles only: and never more than a few threading water-trickles in river-beds wide enough for the Rhine. But that is how it is. The landscape is ancient, and classic--romantic, as if it had known far-off days and fiercer rivers and more verdure. Steep, craggy, wild, the land goes up to its points and precipices, a tangle of heights. But all jammed on top of one another. And in old landscapes, as in old people, the flesh wears away, and the bones become prominent.

Rock sticks up fantastically. The jungle of peaks in this old Sicily.

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The sky is all grey. The Straits are grey. Reggio, just across the water, is white looking, under the great dark toe of Calabria, the toe of Italy. On Aspromonte there is grey cloud. It is going to rain. After such marvelous ringing blue days, it is going to rain. What luck!

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Aspromonte! Garibaldi! I could always cover my face when I see it, Aspromonte. I wish Garibaldi had been prouder. Why did he go off so humbly, with his bag of seed-corn and a flea in his ear, when His Majesty King Victor Emmanuel arrived with his little short legs on the scene. Poor Garibaldi! He wanted to be a hero and a dictator of free Sicily. Well, one can't be a dictator and humble at the same time. One must be a hero, which he was, and proud, which he wasn't. Besides people don't nowadays choose proud heroes for governors. Anything but. They prefer constitutional monarchs, who are paid servants and who know it. That is democracy. Democracy admires its own servants and nothing else. And you couldn't make a real servant even of Garibaldi. Only of His Majesty King Victor Emmanuel. So Italy chose Victor Emmanuel, and Garibaldi went off with a corn bag and a whack on the behind like a humble ass.

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It is raining--dismally, dismally raining. And this is Messina coming. Oh horrible Messina, earthquake-shattered and renewing your youth like a vast mining settlement, with rows and streets and miles of concrete shanties, squalor and a big street with shops and gaps and broken houses still, just back of the tram-lines, and a dreary squalid earthquake-hopeless port in a lovely harbor. People don't forget and don't recover. The people of Messina seem to be today what they were nearly twenty years ago, after the earthquake: people who have had a terrible shock, and for whom all life's institutions are really nothing, neither civilization nor purpose. The meaning of everything all came down with a smash in that shuddering earthquake, and nothing remains but money and the throes of some sort of sensation. Messina between the volcanoes, Etna and Stromboli, having known the death-agony's terror. I always dread coming near the awful place, yet I have found the people kind, almost feverishly so, as if they knew the awful need for kindness.

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Raining, raining hard. Clambering down on to the wet platform and walking across the wet lines to the cover. Many human beings scurrying across the wet lines, among the wet trains, to get out into the ghastly town beyond. Thank heaven one need not go out into the town. Two convicts chained together among the crowd--and two soldiers. The prisoners wear fawny homespun clothes, of cloth such as the peasants

weave, with irregularly occurring brown stripes. Rather nice handmade rough stuff. But linked together, dear God! And those horrid caps on their hairless foreheads. No hair. Probably they are going to a convict station on the Lipari islands. The people take no notice.

No, but convicts are horrible creatures: at least, the old one is, with his long, nasty face: his long, clean-shaven, horrible face, without emotions, or with emotions one cannot follow. Something cold, sightless. A sightless, ugly look. I should loathe to have to touch him. Of the other I am not so sure. He is younger, and with dark eyebrows. But a roundish, softish face, with a sort of leer. No, evil is horrible. I used to think there was no absolute evil. Now I know there is a great deal. So much that it threatens life altogether. That ghastly abstractness of criminals. They don't know any more what other people feel. Yet some horrible force drives them.

It is a great mistake to abolish the death penalty. If I were dictator, I should order the old one to be hung at once. I should have judges with sensitive, living hearts: not abstract intellects. And because the instinctive heart recognised a man as evil, I would have that man destroyed. Quickly. Because good warm life is now in danger.

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Standing on Messina station--dreary, dreary hole--and watching the winter rain and seeing the pair of convicts, I must remember again Oscar

Wilde on Reading platform, a convict. What a terrible mistake, to let oneself be martyred by a lot of canaille. A man must say his say. But noli me tangere.

Curious these people are. Up and down, up and down go a pair of officials. The young one in a black gold-laced cap talks to the elder in a scarlet gold-laced cap. And he walks, the young one, with a mad little hop, and his fingers fly as if he wanted to scatter them to the four winds of heaven, and his words go off like fireworks, with more than Sicilian speed. On and on, up and down, and his eye is dark and excited and unseeing, like the eye of a fleeing rabbit. Strange and beside itself is humanity.

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What a lot of officials! You know them by their caps. Elegant tubby little officials in kid-and-patent boots and gold-laced caps, tall long-nosed ones in more gold-laced caps, like angels in and out of the gates of heaven they thread in and out of the various doors. As far as I can see, there are three scarlet station-masters, five black-and-gold substation-masters, and a countless number of principalities and powers in more or less broken boots and official caps. They are like bees round a hive, humming in an important conversazione, and occasionally looking at some paper or other, and extracting a little official honey. But the conversazione is the affair of affairs. To an Italian official, life seems to be one long and animated conversation--the

Italian word is better--interrupted by casual trains and telephones. And besides the angels of heaven's gates, there are the mere ministers, porters, lamp-cleaners, etc. These stand in groups and talk socialism. A lamp-man slashes along, swinging a couple of lamps. Bashes one against a barrow. Smash goes the glass. Looks down as if to say, What do you mean by it? Glances over his shoulder to see if any member of the higher hierarchies is looking. Seven members of higher hierarchies are assiduously not looking. On goes the minister with the lamp, blithely. Another pane or two gone. *Vogue la galère.*

Passengers have gathered again, some in hoods, some in nothing. Youths in thin, paltry clothes stand out in the pouring rain as if they did not know it was raining. One sees their coat-shoulders soaked. And yet they do not trouble to keep under shelter. Two large station dogs run about and trot through the standing trains, just like officials. They climb up the footboard, hop into a train and hop out casually when they feel like it. Two or three port-porters, in canvas hats as big as umbrellas, literally, spreading like huge fins over their shoulders, are looking into more empty trains. More and more people appear. More and more official caps stand about. It rains and rains. The train for Palermo and the train for Syracuse are both an hour late already, coming from the port. Flea-bite. Though these are the great connections from Rome.

Loose locomotives trundle back and forth, vaguely, like black dogs running and turning back. The port is only four minutes' walk. If it were not raining so hard, we would go down, walk along the lines and get

into the waiting train down there. Anybody may please himself. There is the funnel of the great unwieldy ferry-object--she is just edging in. That means the connection from the mainland at last. But it is cold, standing here. We eat a bit of bread and butter from the kitchenino in resignation. After all, what is an hour and a half? It might just as easily be five hours, as it was the last time we came down from Rome. And the wagon-lit, booked to Syracuse, calmly left stranded in the station of Messina, to go no further. All get out and find yourselves rooms for the night in vile Messina. Syracuse or no Syracuse, Malta boat or no Malta boat. We are the Ferrovia dello Stato.

But there, why grumble. Noi Italiani siamo così buoni. Take it from their own mouth.

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Ecco! Finalmente! The crowd is quite joyful as the two express trains surge proudly in, after their half-a-mile creep. Plenty of room, for once. Though the carriage floor is a puddle, and the roof leaks. This is second class.

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Slowly, with two engines, we grunt and chuff and twist to get over the break-neck heights that shut Messina in from the north coast. The windows are opaque with steam and drops of rain. No matter--tea from the

thermos flask, to the great interest of the other two passengers who had nervously contemplated the unknown object.

"Ha!" says he with joy, seeing the hot tea come out. "It has the appearance of a bomb."

"Beautiful hot!" says she, with real admiration. All apprehension at once dissipated, peace reigns in the wet, mist-hidden compartment. We run through miles and miles of tunnel. The Italians have made wonderful roads and railways.

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If one rubs the window and looks out, lemon groves with many wet-white lemons, earthquake-broken houses, new shanties, a grey weary sea on the right hand, and on the left the dim, grey complication of steep heights from which issue stone river-beds of inordinate width, and sometimes a road, a man on a mule. Sometimes near at hand, long-haired, melancholy goats leaning sideways like tilted ships under the eaves of some scabby house. They call the house-eaves the dogs' umbrellas. In town you see the dogs trotting close under the wall out of the wet. Here the goats lean like rock, listing inwards to the plaster wall. Why look out?

Sicilian railways are all single line. Hence, the coincidenza. A coincidenza is where two trains meet in a loop. You sit in a world of rain and waiting until some silly engine with four trucks puffs

alongside. Ecco la coincidenza! Then after a brief conversazione between the two trains, diretto and merce, express and goods, the tin horn sounds and away we go, happily, towards the next coincidence. Clerks away ahead joyfully chalk up our hours of lateness on the announcement slate. All adds to the adventurous flavour of the journey, dear heart. We come to a station where we find the other diretto, the express from the other direction, awaiting our coincidental arrival. The two trains run alongside one another, like two dogs meeting in the street and snuffing one another. Every official rushes to greet every other official, as if they were all David and Jonathan meeting after a crisis. They rush into each other's arms and exchange cigarettes. And the trains can't bear to part. And the station can't bear to part with us. The officials tease themselves and us with the word pronto, meaning ready! Pronto! And again Pronto! And shrill whistles. Anywhere else a train would go off its tormented head. But no! Here only that angel's trump of an official little horn will do the business. And get them to blow that horn if you can. They can't bear to part.

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Rain, continual rain, a level grey wet sky, a level grey wet sea, a wet and misty train winding round and round the little bays, diving through tunnels. Ghosts of the unpleasant-looking Lipari islands standing a little way out to sea, heaps of shadow deposited like rubbish heaps in the universal greyness.

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Enter more passengers. An enormously large woman with an extraordinarily handsome face: an extraordinarily large man, quite young: and a diminutive servant, a little girl-child of about thirteen, with a beautiful face.--But the Juno--it is she who takes my breath away. She is quite young, in her thirties still. She has that queenly stupid beauty of a classic Hera: a pure brow with level dark brows, large, dark, bridling eyes, a straight nose, a chiselled mouth, an air of remote self-consciousness. She sends one's heart straight back to pagan days. And--and--she is simply enormous, like a house. She wears a black toque with sticking-up wings, and a black rabbit fur spread on her shoulders. She edges her way in carefully: and once seated, is terrified to rise to her feet. She sits with that motionlessness of her type, closed lips, face muted and expressionless. And she expects me to admire her: I can see that. She expects me to pay homage to her beauty: just to that: not homage to herself, but to her as a *bel pezzo*. She casts little aloof glances at me under her eyelids.

It is evident she is a country beauty become a bourgeoisie. She speaks unwillingly to the other squint-eyed passenger, a young woman who also wears a black-rabbit fur, but without pretensions.

The husband of Juno is a fresh-faced bourgeois young fellow, and he also is simply huge. His waistcoat would almost make the overcoat of the fourth passenger, the unshaven companion of the squinting young woman.

The young Jupiter wears kid gloves: a significant fact here. He, too, has pretensions. But he is quite affable with the unshaven one, and speaks Italian unaffectedly. Whereas Juno speaks the dialect with affectation.

No one takes any notice of the little maid. She has a gentle, virgin moon-face, and those lovely grey Sicilian eyes that are translucent, and into which the light sinks and becomes black sometimes, sometimes dark blue. She carries the bag and the extra coat of the huge Juno, and sits on the edge of the seat between me and the unshaven, Juno having motioned her there with a regal inclination of the head.

The little maid is rather frightened. Perhaps she is an orphan child--probably. Her nut-brown hair is smoothly parted and done in two pigtales. She wears no hat, as is proper for her class. On her shoulders one of those little knitted grey shoulder-capes that one associates with orphanages. Her stuff dress is dark grey, her boots are strong.

The smooth, moon-like, expressionless virgin face, rather pale and touching, rather frightened, of the girl-child. A perfect face from a mediaeval picture. It moves one strangely. Why? It is so unconscious, as we are conscious. Like a little muted animal it sits there, in distress. She is going to be sick. She goes into the corridor and is sick--very sick, leaning her head like a sick dog on the window-ledge. Jupiter towers above her--not unkind, and apparently feeling no repugnance. The physical convulsion of the girl does not affect him as it affects us. He

looks on unmoved, merely venturing to remark that she had eaten too much before coming on to the train. An obviously true remark. After which he comes and talks a few common-places to me. By and by the girl-child creeps in again and sits on the edge of the seat facing Juno. But no, says Juno, if she is sick she will be sick over me. So Jupiter accommodately changes places with the girl-child, who is thus next to me. She sits on the edge of the seat with folded little red hands, her face pale and expressionless. Beautiful the thin line of her nut-brown eyebrows, the dark lashes of the silent, pellucid dark eyes. Silent, motionless, like a sick animal.

But Juno tells her to wipe her splashed boots. The child gropes for a piece of paper. Juno tells her to take her pocket handkerchief. Feebly the sick girl-child wipes her boots, then leans back. But no good. She has to go in the corridor and be sick again.

After a while they all get out. Queer to see people so natural. Neither Juno nor Jupiter is in the least unkind. He even seems kind. But they are just not upset. Not half as upset as we are--the q-b wanting to administer tea, and so on. We should have to hold the child's head. They just quite naturally leave it alone to its convulsions, and are neither distressed nor repelled. It just is so.

Their naturalness seems unnatural to us. Yet I am sure it is best. Sympathy would only complicate matters, and spoil that strange, remote virginal quality. The q-b says it is largely stupidity.

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Nobody washes out the corner of the corridor, though we stop at stations long enough, and there are two more hours journey. Train officials go by and stare, passengers step over and stare, new-comers stare and step over. Somebody asks who? Nobody thinks of just throwing a pail of water. Why should they? It is all in the course of nature.--One begins to be a bit chary of this same "nature", in the south.

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Enter two fresh passengers: a black-eyed, round-faced, bright-sharp man in corduroys and with a gun, and a long-faced, fresh-colored man with thick snowy hair, and a new hat and a long black overcoat of smooth black cloth, lined with rather ancient, once expensive fur. He is extremely proud of this long black coat and ancient fur lining. Childishly proud he wraps it again over his knee, and gloats. The beady black-eyes of the hunter look round with pleased alertness. He sits facing the one in the overcoat, who looks like the last sprout of some Norman blood. The hunter in corduroys beams abroad, with beady black eyes in a round red face, curious. And the other tucks his fur-lined long coat between his legs and gloats to himself: all to himself gloating, and looking as if he were deaf. But no, he's not. He wears

muddy high-low boots.

At Termini it is already lamp-light. Business men crowd in. We get five business men: all stout, respected Palermitans. The one opposite me has whiskers, and a many-colored, patched traveling rug over his fat knees. Queer how they bring that feeling of physical intimacy with them. You are never surprised if they begin to take off their boots, or their collar-and-tie. The whole world is a sort of bedroom to them. One shrinks, but in vain.

There is some conversation between the black-eyed, beady hunter and the business men. Also the young white-haired one, the aristocrat, tries to stammer out, at great length, a few words. As far as I can gather the young one is mad--or deranged--and the other, the hunter, is his keeper. They are traveling over Europe together. There is some talk of "the Count". And the hunter says the unfortunate "has had an accident." But that is a southern gentleness presumably, a form of speech. Anyhow it is queer: and the hunter in his corduroys, with his round, ruddy face and strange black-bright eyes and thin black hair is a puzzle to me, even more than the albino, long-coated, long-faced, fresh-complexioned, queer last remnant of a baron as he is. They are both muddy from the land, and pleased in a little mad way of their own.

But it is half-past six. We are at Palermo, capital of Sicily. The hunter slings his gun over his shoulder, I my knapsack, and in the throng we all disappear, into the Via Maqueda.

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Palermo has two great streets, the Via Maqueda, and the Corso, which cross each other at right-angles. The Via Maqueda is narrow, with narrow little pavements, and is always choked with carriages and foot-passengers.

It had ceased raining. But the narrow road was paved with large, convex slabs of hard stone, inexpressibly greasy. To cross the Via Maqueda therefore was a feat. However, once accomplished, it was done. The near end of the street was rather dark, and had mostly vegetable shops. Abundance of vegetables--piles of white-and-green fennel, like celery, and great sheaves of young, purplish, sea-dust-colored artichokes, nodding their buds, piles of big radishes, scarlet and bluey purple, carrots, long strings of dried figs, mountains of big oranges, scarlet large peppers, a last slice of pumpkin, a great mass of colors and vegetable freshnesses. A mountain of black-purple cauliflowers, like niggers' heads, and a mountain of snow-white ones next to them. How the dark, greasy, night-stricken street seems to beam with these vegetables, all this fresh delicate flesh of luminous vegetables piled there in the air, and in the recesses of the windowless little caverns of the shops, and gleaming forth on the dark air, under the lamps. The q-b at once wants to buy vegetables. "Look! Look at the snow-white broccoli. Look at the huge finocchi. Why don't we get them? I must have some. Look at those great clusters of dates--ten francs a kilo, and we pay sixteen.

It's monstrous. Our place is simply monstrous."

For all that, one doesn't buy vegetables to take to Sardinia.

Cross the Corso at that decorated maelstrom and death-trap of the Quattro Canti. I, of course, am nearly knocked down and killed. Somebody is nearly knocked down and killed every two minutes. But there--the carriages are light, and the horses curiously aware creatures. They would never tread on one.

The second part of the Via Maqueda is the swell part: silks and plumes, and an infinite number of shirts and ties and cuff-links and mufflers and men's fancies. One realises here that man-drapery and man-underwear is quite as important as woman's, if not more.

I, of course, in a rage. The q-b stares at every rag and stitch, and crosses and re-crosses this infernal dark stream of a Via Maqueda, which, as I have said, is choked solid with strollers and carriages. Be it remembered that I have on my back the brown knapsack, and the q-b carries the kitchenino. This is enough to make a travelling menagerie of us. If I had my shirt sticking out behind, and if the q-b had happened merely to catch up the table-cloth and wrap it round her as she came out, all well and good. But a big brown knapsack! And a basket with thermos flask, etc! No, one could not expect such things to pass in a southern capital.

But I am case-hardened. And I am sick of shops. True, we have not been in a town for three months. But can I care for the innumerable fantasias in the drapery line? Every wretched bit of would-be-extra chic is called a fantasia. The word goes lugubriously to my bowels.

Suddenly I am aware of the q-b darting past me like a storm. Suddenly I see her pouncing on three giggling young hussies just in front--the inevitable black velveteen tam, the inevitable white curly muffler, the inevitable lower-class flappers. "Did you want something? Have you something to say? Is there something that amuses you? Oh-h! You must laugh, must you? Oh--laugh! Oh-h! Why? Why? You ask why? Haven't I heard you! Oh--you spik Ingleesh! You spik Ingleesh! Yes--why! That's why! Yes, that's why."

The three giggling young hussies shrink together as if they would all hide behind one another, after a vain uprearing and a demand why? Madam tells them why. So they uncomfortably squeeze together under the unexpected strokes of the q-b's sledge-hammer Italian and more than sledge-hammer retaliation, there full in the Via Maqueda. They edge round one another, each attempting to get back of the other, away from the looming q-b. I perceive that this rotary motion is equivalent to a standstill, so feel called upon to say something in the manly line.

"Beastly Palermo bad-manners," I say, and throw a nonchalant "Ignoranti" at the end, in a tone of dismissal.

Which does it. Off they go down-stream, still huddling and shrinking like boats that are taking sails in, and peeping to see if we are coming. Yes, my dears, we are coming.

"Why do you bother?" say I to the q-b, who is towering with rage.

"They've followed us the whole length of the street--with their sacco militario and their parlano inglese and their you spik Ingleesh, and their jeering insolence. But the English are fools. They always put up with this Italian impudence."

Which is perhaps true.--But this knapsack! It might be full of bronze-roaring geese, it would not attract more attention!

However, and however, it is seven o'clock, and the shops are beginning to shut. No more shop-gazing. Only one lovely place: raw ham, boiled ham, chickens in aspic, chicken vol-au-vents, sweet curds, curd-cheese, rustic cheese-cake, smoked sausages, beautiful fresh mortadella, huge Mediterranean red lobsters, and those lobsters without claws. "So good! So good!" We stand and cry it aloud.

But this shop too is shutting. I ask a man for the Hotel Pantechnico. And treating me in that gentle, strangely tender southern manner, he takes me and shows me. He makes me feel such a poor, frail, helpless leaf. A foreigner, you know. A bit of an imbecile, poor dear. Hold his hand and show him the way.

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To sit in the room of this young American woman, with its blue hangings, and talk and drink tea till midnight! Ah these naïve Americans--they are a good deal older and shrewder than we, once it nears the point. And they all seem to feel as if the world were coming to an end. And they are so truly generous of their hospitality, in this cold world.