VI.

TO NUORO.

These automobiles in Italy are splendid. They take the steep, looping roads so easily, they seem to run so naturally. And this one was comfortable, too.

The roads of Italy always impress me. They run undaunted over the most precipitous regions, and with curious ease. In England almost any such road, among the mountains at least, would be labelled three times dangerous and would be famous throughout the land as an impossible climb. Here it is nothing. Up and down they go, swinging about with complete sang-froid. There seems to have been no effort in their construction. They are so good, naturally, that one hardly notices what splendid gestures they represent. Of course, the surface is now often intolerably bad. And they are most of them roads which, with ten years' neglect, will become ruins. For they are cut through overhanging rock and scooped out of the sides of hills. But I think it is marvellous how the Italians have penetrated all their inaccessible regions, of which they have so many, with great high-roads: and how along these high-roads the omnibuses now keep up a perfect communication. The precipitous and craggily-involved land is threaded through and through with roads. There seems to be a passion for high-roads and for constant communication. In this the Italians have a real Roman instinct, now. For the roads are

new.

The railways too go piercing through rock for miles and miles, and nobody thinks anything of it. The coast railway of Calabria, down to Reggio, would make us stand on our heads if we had it in England. Here it is a matter of course. In the same way I always have a profound admiration for their driving--whether of a great omnibus or of a motor-car. It all seems so easy, as if the man were part of the car. There is none of that beastly grinding, uneasy feeling one has in the north. A car behaves like a smooth, live thing, sensibly.

All the peasants have a passion for a high-road. They want their land opening out, opening out. They seem to hate the ancient Italian remoteness. They all want to be able to get out at a moment's notice, to get away--quick, quick. A village which is two miles off the high-road, even if it is perched like a hawk's nest on a peak, still chafes and chafes for the great road to come to it, chafes and chafes for the daily motor-bus connection with the railway. There is no placidity, no rest in the heart of the land. There is a fever of restless irritation all the time.

And yet the permanent way of almost every railway is falling into bad disrepair, the roads are shocking. And nothing seems to be done. Is our marvellous, mechanical era going to have so short a bloom? Is the marvellous openness, the opened-out wonder of the land going to collapse quite soon, and the remote places lapse back into inaccessibility again?

Who knows! I rather hope so.

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The automobile took us rushing and winding up the hill, sometimes through cold, solid-seeming shadow, sometimes across a patch of sun. There was thin, bright ice in the ruts, and deep grey hoar-frost on the grass. I cannot tell how the sight of the grass and bushes heavy with frost, and wild--in their own primitive wildness charmed me. The slopes of the steep wild hills came down shaggy and bushy, with a few berries lingering, and the long grass-stalks sere with the frost. Again the dark valley sank below like a ravine, but shaggy, bosky, unbroken. It came upon me how I loved the sight of the blue-shadowed, tawny-tangled winter with its frosty standstill. The young oaks keep their brown leaves. And doing so, surely they are best with a thin edge of rime.

One begins to realize how old the real Italy is, how man-gripped, and how withered. England is far more wild and savage and lonely, in her country parts. Here since endless centuries man has tamed the impossible mountain side into terraces, he has quarried the rock, he has fed his sheep among the thin woods, he has cut his boughs and burnt his charcoal, he has been half domesticated even among the wildest fastnesses. This is what is so attractive about the remote places, the Abruzzi, for example. Life is so primitive, so pagan, so strangely heathen and half-savage. And yet it is human life. And the wildest country is half humanized, half brought under. It is all conscious.

Wherever one is in Italy, either one is conscious of the present, or of the mediaeval influences, or of the far, mysterious gods of the early Mediterranean. Wherever one is, the place has its conscious genus. Man has lived there and brought forth his consciousness there and in some way brought that place to consciousness, given it its expression, and, really, finished it. The expression may be Proserpine, or Pan, or even the strange "shrouded gods" of the Etruscans or the Sikels, none the less it is an expression. The land has been humanised, through and through: and we in our own tissued consciousness bear the results of this humanisation. So that for us to go to Italy and to penetrate into Italy is like a most fascinating act of self-discovery--back, back down the old ways of time. Strange and wonderful chords awake in us, and vibrate again after many hundreds of years of complete forgetfulness.

And then--and then--there is a final feeling of sterility. It is all worked out. It is all known: connu, connu!

This Sunday morning, seeing the frost among the tangled, still savage bushes of Sardinia, my soul thrilled again. This was not all known. This was not all worked out. Life was not only a process of rediscovering backwards. It is that, also: and it is that intensely. Italy has given me back I know not what of myself, but a very, very great deal. She has found for me so much that was lost: like a restored Osiris. But this morning in the omnibus I realize that, apart from the great rediscovery backwards, which one must make before one can be whole at all, there is a move forwards. There are unknown, unworked lands where the salt has

not lost its savour. But one must have perfected oneself in the great past first.

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If one travels one eats. We immediately began to munch biscuits, and the old peasant in his white, baggy breeches and black cuirass, his old face smiling wonderingly under his old stocking cap, although he was only going to Tonara, some seven or eight miles, began to peel himself a hard-boiled egg, which he got out of his parcel. With calm wastefulness he peeled away the biggest part of the white of the egg with the shell--because it came away so. The citizen of Nuoro, for such the bright-faced young man was, said to him--"But see how you waste it."--"Ha!" said the old peasant, with a reckless indifferent wave of the hand. What did he care how much he wasted, since he was en voyage and riding for the first time in his life in an automobile.

The citizen of Nuoro told us he had some sort of business in Sorgono, so he came back and forth constantly. The peasant did some work or other for him--or brought him something down from Tonara. He was a pleasant, bright-eyed young man, and he made nothing of eight hours in a motor-bus.

He told us there was still game among these hills: wild boars which were hunted in big hunts, and many hares. It was a curious and beautiful sight, he said, to see a hare at night fascinated by the flare of the

lamps of the automobile, racing ahead with its ears back, always keeping in front, inside the beam, and flying like mad, on and on ahead, till at some hill it gathered speed and melted into the dark.

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We descended into a deep, narrow valley to the road-junction and the canteen-house, then up again, up and up sharp to Tonara, our village we had seen in the sun yesterday. But we were approaching it from the back. As we swerved into the sunlight, the road took a long curve on to the open ridge between two valleys. And there in front we saw a glitter of scarlet and white. It was in slow motion. It was a far-off procession, scarlet figures of women, and a tall image moving away from us, slowly, in the Sunday morning. It was passing along the level sunlit ridge above a deep, hollow valley. A close procession of women glittering in scarlet, white and black, moving slowly in the distance beneath the grey-yellow buildings of the village on the crest, towards an isolated old church: and all along this narrow upland saddle as on a bridge of sunshine itself.

Were we not going to see any more? The bus turned again and rushed along the now level road and then veered. And there beyond, a little below, we saw the procession coming. The bus faded to a standstill, and we climbed out. Above us, old and mellowed among the smooth rocks and the bits of flat grass was the church, tanging its bell. Just in front, above, were old, half-broken houses of stone. The road came gently

winding up to us, from what was evidently two villages ledged one above the other upon the steep summit of the south slope. Far below was the south valley, with a white puff of engine steam.

And slowly chanting in the near distance, curving slowly up to us on the white road between the grass came the procession. The high morning was still. We stood all on this ridge above the world, with the deeps of silence below on the right. And in a strange, brief, staccato monody chanted the men, and in quick, light rustle of women's voices came the responses. Again the men's voices! The white was mostly men, not women. The priest in his robes, his boys near him, was leading the chanting. Immediately behind him came a small cluster of bare-headed, tall, sunburnt men, all in golden-velveteen corduroy, mountain-peasants, bowing beneath a great life-size seated image of Saint Anthony of Padua. After these a number of men in the costume, but with the white linen breeches hanging wide and loose almost to the ankles, instead of being tucked into the black gaiters. So they seemed very white beneath the back kilt frill. The black frieze body-vest was cut low, like an evening suit, and the stocking caps were variously perched. The men chanted in low, hollow, melodic tones. Then came the rustling chime of the women. And the procession crept slowly, aimlessly forward in time with the chant. The great image rode rigid, and rather foolish.

After the men was a little gap--and then the brilliant wedge of the women. They were packed two by two, close on each other's heels, chanting inadvertently when their turn came, and all in brilliant,

beautiful costume. In front were the little girl-children, two by two, immediately following the tall men in peasant black-and-white. Children, demure and conventional, in vermilion, white and green--little girl-children with long skirts of scarlet cloth down to their feet, green-banded near the bottom: with white aprons bordered with vivid green and mingled colour: having little scarlet, purple-bound, open boleros over the full white shirts: and black head-cloths folded across their little chins, just leaving the lips clear, the face framed in black. Wonderful little girl-children, perfect and demure in the stiffish, brilliant costume, with black head-dress! Stiff as Velasquez princesses! The bigger girls followed, and then the mature women, a close procession. The long vermilion skirts with their green bands at the bottom flashed a solid moving mass of colour, softly swinging, and the white aprons with their band of brilliant mingled green seemed to gleam. At the throat the full-bosomed white shirts were fastened with big studs of gold filigree, two linked filigree globes: and the great white sleeves billowed from the scarlet, purplish-and-green-edged boleros. The faces came nearer to us, framed all round in the dark cloths. All the lips still sang responses, but all the eyes watched us.

So the softly-swaying coloured body of the procession came up to us. The poppy-scarlet smooth cloth rocked in fusion, the bands and bars of emerald green seemed to burn across the red and the showy white, the dark eyes peered and stared at us from under the black snood, gazed back at us with raging curiosity, while the lips moved automatically in chant. The bus had run into the inner side of the road, and the procession had to press round it, towards the sky-line, the great valley

lying below.

The priest stared, hideous St. Anthony cockled a bit as he passed the butt end of the big grey automobile, the peasant men in gold-coloured corduroy, old, washed soft, were sweating under the load and still singing with opened lips, the loose white breeches of the men waggled as they walked on with their hands behind their backs, turning again, to look at us. The big, hard hands, folded behind black kilt-frill! The women, too, shuffled slowly past, rocking the scarlet and the bars of green, and all twisting as they sang, to look at us still more. And so the procession edged past the bus, and was trailing upwards, curved solid against the sky-line towards the old church. From behind, the geranium scarlet was intense, one saw the careful, curiously cut backs of the shapen boleros, poppy-red, edged with mauve-purple and green, and the white of the shirt just showing at the waist. The full sleeves billowed out, the black head-cloths hung down to a point. The pleated skirts swing slowly, the broad band of green accentuating the motion. Indeed that is what it must be for, this thick, rich band of jewel green, to throw the wonderful horizontal motion back and forth, back and forth, of the suave vermilion, and give that static, Demeta splendor to a peasant motion, so magnificent in colour, geranium and malachite.

All the costumes were not exactly alike. Some had more green, some had less. In some the sleeveless boleros were of a darker red, and some had poorer aprons, without such gorgeous bands at the bottom. And some were evidently old: probably thirty years old: still perfect and in keeping,

reserved for Sunday and high holidays. A few were darker, ruddier than the true vermilion. This varying of the tone intensified the beauty of the shuffling woman-host.

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When they had filed into the grey, forlorn little church on the ridge-top just above us, the bus started silently to run on to the rest-point below, whilst we climbed back up the little rock-track to the church. When we came to the side-door we found the church quite full. Level with us as we stood in the open side doorway, we saw kneeling on the bare stoneflags the little girl-children, and behind them all the women clustered kneeling upon their aprons, with hands negligently folded, filling the church to the further doorway, where the sun shone: the bigger west-end doorway. In the shadow of the whitewashed, bare church all these kneeling women with their colour and their black head-cloths looked like some thick bed of flowers, geranium, black hooded above. They all knelt on the naked, solid stone of the pavement.

There was a space in front of the geranium little girl-children, then the men in corduroys, gold-soft, with dark round heads, kneeling awkwardly in reverence; and then the queer, black cuirasses and full white sleeves of grey-headed peasant men, many bearded. Then just in front of them the priest in his white vestment, standing exposed, and just baldly beginning an address. At the side of the altar was seated large and important the modern, simpering, black-gowned Anthony of

Padua, nursing a boy-child. He looked a sort of male Madonna.

"Now," the priest was saying, "blessed Saint Anthony shows you in what way you can be Christians. It is not enough that you are not Turks. Some think they are Christians because they are not Turks. It is true you are none of you Turks. But you have still to learn how to be good Christians. And this you can learn from our blessed Saint Anthony. Saint Anthony, etc., etc...."

The contrast between Turks and Christians is still forceful in the Mediterranean, where the Mohammedans have left such a mark. But how the word cristiani, cristiani, spoken with a peculiar priestly unction, gets on my nerves. The voice is barren in its homily. And the women are all intensely watching the q-b and me in the doorway, their folded hands are very negligently held together.

"Come away!" say I. "Come away, and let them listen."

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We left the church crowded with its kneeling host, and dropped down past the broken houses towards the omnibus, which stood on a sort of level out-look place, a levelled terrace with a few trees, standing silent over the valley. It should be picketed with soldiers having arquebuses. And I should have welcomed a few thorough-paced infidels, as a leaven to this dreary Christianity of ours.

But it was a wonderful place. Usually, the life-level is reckoned as sea-level. But here, in the heart of Sardinia, the life-level is high as the golden-lit plateau, and the sea-level is somewhere far away, below, in the gloom, it does not signify. The life-level is high up, high and sun-sweetened and among rocks.

We stood and looked below, at the puff of steam, far down the wooded valley where we had come yesterday. There was an old, low house on this eagle-perching piazza. I would like to live there. The real village--or rather two villages, like an ear-ring and its pendant--lay still beyond, in front, ledging near the summit of the long, long, steep wooded slope, that never ended till it ran flush to the depths away below there in shadow.

And yesterday, up this slope the old peasant had come with his two brilliant daughters and the pack-pony.

And somewhere in those ledging, pearly villages in front must be my girovago and his "wife". I wish I could see their stall and drink aqua vitae with them.

"How beautiful the procession!" says the q-b to the driver.

"Ah yes--one of the most beautiful costumes of Sardinia, this of Tonara," he replied wistfully.

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The bus sets off again--minus the old peasant. We retrace our road. A woman is leading a bay pony past the church, striding with long strides, so that her maroon skirt swings like a fan, and hauling the halter rope. Apparently the geranium red costume is Sunday only, the week-day is this maroon, or puce, or madder-brown.

Quickly and easily the bus slips down the hill into the valley. Wild, narrow valleys, with trees, and brown-legged cork trees. Across the other side a black and white peasant is working alone on a tiny terrace of the hill-side, a small, solitary figure, for all the world like a magpie in the distance. These people like being alone--solitary--one sees a single creature so often isolated among the wilds. This is different from Sicily and Italy, where the people simply cannot be alone. They must be in twos and threes.

But it is Sunday morning, and the worker is exceptional. Along the road we pass various pedestrians, men in their black sheepskins, boys in their soldiers' remains. They are trudging from one village to another, across the wild valleys. And there is a sense of Sunday morning freedom, of roving, as in an English countryside. Only the one old peasant works alone: and a goatherd watching his long-haired, white goats.

Beautiful the goats are: and so swift. They fly like white shadows along

the road from us, then dart down-hill. I see one standing on a bough of an oak-tree, right in the tree, an enormous white tree-creature complacently munching up aloft, then rearing on her hind legs, so lengthy, and putting her slim paws far away on an upper, forward branch.

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Whenever we come to a village we stop and get down, and our little conductor disappears into the post-office for the post-bag. This last is usually a limp affair, containing about three letters. The people crowd round--and many of them in very ragged costume. They look poor, and not attractive: perhaps a bit degenerate. It would seem as if the Italian instinct to get into rapid touch with the world were the healthy instinct after all. For in these isolated villages, which have been since time began far from any life-centre, there is an almost sordid look on the faces of the people. We must remember that the motor-bus is a great innovation. It has been running for five weeks only. I wonder for how many months it will continue.

For I am sure it cannot pay. Our first-class tickets cost, I believe, about twenty-seven francs each. The second class costs about three-quarters the first. Some parts of the journey we were very few passengers. The distance covered is so great, the population so thin, that even granted the passion for getting out of their own villages, which possesses all people now, still the bus cannot earn much more than an average of two hundred to three hundred francs a day. Which, with two

men's wages, and petrol at its enormous price, and the cost of wear-and-tear, cannot possibly pay.

I asked the driver. He did not tell me what his wages were: I did not ask him. But he said the company paid for the keep and lodging for himself and mate at the stopping-places. This being Sunday, fewer people were travelling: a statement hard to believe. Once he had carried fifty people all the way from Tonara to Nuoro. Once! But it was in vain he protested. Ah well, he said, the bus carried the post, and the government paid a subsidy of so many thousands of lire a year: a goodly number. Apparently then the government was the loser, as usual. And there are hundreds, if not thousands of these omnibuses running the lonely districts of Italy and Sicily--Sardinia had a network of systems. They are splendid--and they are perhaps an absolute necessity for a nervous restless population which simply cannot keep still, and which finds some relief in being whirled about even on the autovie, as the bus-system is called.

The autovie are run by private companies, only subsidised by the government.

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On we rush, through the morning--and at length see a large village, high on the summit beyond, stony on the high upland. But it has a magical look, as these tiny summit-cities have from the distance. They recall to

me always my childish visions of Jerusalem, high against the air, and seeming to sparkle, and built in sharp cubes.

It is curious what a difference there is between the high, fresh, proud villages and the valley villages. Those that crown the world have a bright, flashing air, as Tonara had. Those that lie down below, infolded in the shadow, have a gloomy, sordid feeling and a repellent population, like Sorgono and other places at which we had halted. The judgment may be all wrong: but this was the impression I got.

We were now at the highest point of the journey. The men we saw on the road were in their sheepskins, and some were even walking with their faces shawl-muffled. Glancing back, we saw up the valley clefts the snow of Gennargentu once more, a white mantle on broad shoulders, the very core of Sardinia. The bus slid to a standstill in a high valley, beside a stream where the road from Fonni joined ours. There was waiting a youth with a bicycle. I would like to go to Fonni. They say it is the highest village in Sardinia.

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In front, on the broad summit, reared the towers of Gavoi. This was the half-way halt, where the buses had their coincidenza, and where we would stay for an hour and eat. We wound up and up the looping road, and at last entered the village. Women came to the doors to look. They were wearing the dark madder-brown costume. Men were hastening, smoking their

pipes, towards our stopping place.

We saw the other bus--a little crowd of people--and we drew up at last. We were tired and hungry. We were at the door of the inn, and we entered quickly. And in an instant, what a difference! At the clean little bar, men were drinking cheerfully. A side door led into the common room. And how charming it was. In a very wide chimney, white and stone-clean, with a lovely shallow curve above, was burning a fire of long, clean-split faggots, laid horizontally on the dogs. A clean, clear bright fire, with odd little chairs in front, very low, for us to sit on. The funny, low little chairs seem a specialty of this region.

The floor of this room was paved with round dark pebbles, beautifully clean. On the walls hung brilliant copper fans, glittering against the whitewash. And under the long, horizontal window that looked on the street was a stone slab with sockets for little charcoal fires. The curve of the chimney arch was wide and shallow, the curve above the window was still wider, and of a similar delicate shallowness, the white roof rose delicately vaulted. With the glitter of copper, the expanse of dark, rose-coloured, pebbled floor, the space, the few low, clean-gleaming faggots, it was really beautiful. We sat and warmed ourselves, welcomed by a plump hostess and a pleasant daughter, both in madder-brown dress and full white shirt. People strayed in and out, through the various doors. The houses are built without any plan at all, the rooms just happening, here or there. A bitch came from an inner darkness and stood looking at the fire, then looked up at me, smiling in

her bitch-like, complacent fashion.

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But we were dying with hunger. What was there to eat?--and was it nearly ready? There was cinghiale, the pleasant, hard-cheeked girl told us, and it was nearly ready. Cinghiale being wild boar, we sniffed the air. The girl kept tramping rather fecklessly back and forth, with a plate or a serviette: and at last it was served. We went through the dark inner place, which was apparently the windowless bit left over, inside, when the hap-hazard rooms were made round about, and from thence into a large, bare, darkish pebbled room with a white table and inverted soup-plates. It was deathly cold. The window looked north over the wintry landscape of the highlands, fields, stone walls, and rocks. Ah, the cold, motionless air of the room.

But we were quite a party: the second bus-driver and his mate, a bearded traveller on the second bus, with his daughter, ourselves, the bright-faced citizen from Nuoro, and our driver. Our little dark-eyed conductor did not come. It dawned on me later he could not afford to pay for this meal, which was not included in his wage.

The Nuoro citizen conferred with our driver--who looked tired round the eyes--and made the girl produce a tin of sardines. These were opened at table with a large pocket-knife belonging to the second conductor. He was a reckless, odd, hot-foot fellow whom I liked very much. But I was

terrified at the way he carved the sardine-box with his jack-knife. However, we could eat and drink.

Then came the brodo, the broth, in a great bowl. This was boiling hot, and very, very strong. It was perfectly plain, strong meat-stock, without vegetables. But how good and invigorating it was, and what an abundance! We drank it down, and ate the good, cold bread.

Then came the boar itself. Alas, it was a bowl of hunks of dark, rather coarse boiled meat, from which the broth had been made. It was quite dry, without fat. I should have been very puzzled to know what meat it was, if I had not been told. Sad that the wild boar should have received so little culinary attention. However, we ate the hunks of hot, dry meat with bread, and were glad to get them. They were filling, at least. And there was a bowl of rather bitter green olives for a condiment.

The Nuoro citizen now produced a huge bottle of wine, which he said was finissimo, and refused to let us go on with the dark wine on the table, of which every guest was served with a bottle. So we drank up, and were replenished with the redder, lighter, finer Sorgono wine. It was very good.

The second bus-conductor also did not eat the inn meal. He produced a vast piece of bread, good, home-made bread, and at least half of a roast lamb, and a large paper of olives. This lamb he insisted on sending round the table, waving his knife and fork with dramatic gestures at

every guest, insisting that every guest should take a hunk. So one by one we all helped ourselves to the extraordinarily good cold roast lamb, and to the olives. Then the bus-conductor fell to as well. There was a mass of meat still left to him.

It is extraordinary how generous and, from the inside, well-bred these men were. To be sure the second conductor waved his knife and fork and made bitter faces if one of us took only a little bit of the lamb. He wanted us to take more. But the essential courtesy in all of them was quite perfect, so manly and utterly simple. Just the same with the q-b. They treated her with a sensitive, manly simplicity, which one could not but be thankful for. They made none of the odious politenesses which are so detestable in well-brought-up people. They made no advances and did none of the hateful homage of the adulating male. They were quiet, and kind, and sensitive to the natural flow of life, and quite without airs.
I liked them extremely. Men who can be quietly kind and simple to a woman, without wanting to show off or to make an impression, they are men still. They were neither humble nor conceited. They did not show off. And oh God, what a blessed relief, to be with people who don't bother to show off. We sat at that table quietly and naturally as if we were by ourselves, and talked or listened to their talk, just as it happened. When we did not want to talk, they took no notice of us. And that I call good manners. Middle-class, showing off people would have found them uncouth. I found them almost the only really well-bred people I have met. They did not show off in any way at all, not even a show of simplicity. They knew that in the beginning and in the end a man stands

alone, his soul is alone in itself, and all attributes are nothing--and this curious final knowledge preserved them in simplicity.

When we had had coffee and were going out, I found our own conductor in a little chair by the fire. He was looking a bit pathetic. I had enough sense to give him a coffee, which brightened him. But it was not till afterwards, putting things together, that I realized he had wanted to be with us all at table, but that his conductor's wages probably did not allow him to spend the money. My bill for the dinner was about fifteen francs, for the two of us.

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In the bus again, we were quite crowded. A peasant girl in Nuoro costume sat facing me, and a dark-bearded, middle-aged man in a brown velveteen suit was next me and glowering at her. He was evidently her husband. I did not like him: one of the jealous, carping sort. She, in her way, was handsome: but a bit of a devil as well, in all probability. There were two village women become fine, in town dress and black silk scarves over their heads, fancying themselves. Then there was a wild scuffle, and three bouncing village lasses were pushed in, laughing and wild with excitement. There were wild farewells, and the bus rolled out of Gavoi between the desolate mountain fields and the rocks, on a sort of table-land. We rolled on for a mile or so: then stopped, and the excited lasses got down. I gathered they had been given a little ride for a Sunday treat. Delighted they were. And they set off, with other

bare-headed women in costume, along a bare path between flat, out-cropping rocks and cold fields.

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The girl facing me was a study. She was not more than twenty years old I should say: or was she? Did the delicate and fine complication of lines against her eyes mean thirty-five? But anyhow she was the wife of the velveteen man. He was thick-set and had white hairs in his coarse black beard, and little, irritable brown eyes under his irritable brows. He watched her all the time. Perhaps, she was after all a young, new girl-wife. She sat with that expressionless look of one who is watched and who appears not to know it. She had her back to the engine.

She wore her black head-cloth from her brow and her hair was taken tight back from her rather hard, broad, well-shaped forehead. Her dark eyebrows were very finely drawn above her large, dark-grey, pellucid eyes, but they were drawn with a peculiar obstinate and irritating lift. Her nose was straight and small, her mouth well-shut. And her big, rather hostile eyes had a withheld look in them, obstinate. Yet, being newly wed and probably newly-awakened, her eyes looked sometimes at me with a provoking look, curious as to what I was in the husband line, challenging rather defiantly with her new secrets, obstinate in opposition to the male authority, and yet intrigued by the very fact that one was man. The velveteen husband--his velveteens too had gone soft and gold-faded, yet somehow they made him look ugly, common--he

watched her with his irritable, yellow-brown eyes, and seemed to fume in his stiff beard.

She wore the costume: the full-gathered shirt fastened at the throat with the two gold filigree globes, a little dark, braided, stiff bolero just fastened at the waist, leaving a pretty pattern of white breast, and a dark maroon skirt. As the bus rushed along she turned somewhat pale, with the obstinate pinched look of a woman who is in opposition to her man. At length she flung him a few words which I did not catch--and her forehead seemed to go harder, as she drooped her lashes occasionally over her wide, alert, obstinate, rather treacherous eyes. She must have been a difficult piece of goods to deal with. And she sat with her knees touching mine, rocking against mine as the bus swayed.

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We came to a village on the road: the landscape had now become wider, much more open. At the inn door the bus stopped, and the velveteen husband and the girl got down. It was cold--but in a minute I got down too. The bus conductor came to me and asked anxiously if the q-b were ill. The q-b said no, why? Because there was a signora whom the motion of the bus made ill. This was the girl.

There was a crowd and a great row at this inn. In the second dark room, which was bare of furniture, a man sat in a corner playing an accordion. Men in the close breeches were dancing together. Then they fell to

wrestling wildly, crashing about among the others, with shouts and yells. Men in the black-and-white, but untidy, with the wide white drawers left hanging out over the black gaiters, surged here and there. All were rowdy with drink. This again was rather a squalid inn but roaring with violent, crude male life.

The Nuoro citizen said that here was very good wine, and we must try it. I did not want it, but he insisted. So we drank little glasses of merely moderate red wine. The sky had gone all grey with the afternoon curd-clouds. It was very cold and raw. Wine is no joy, cold, dead wine, in such an atmosphere.

The Nuoro citizen insisted on paying. He would let me pay, he said, when he came to England. In him, and in our bus men, the famous Sardinian hospitality and generosity still lingers.

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When the bus ran on again the q-b told the peasant girl who again had the pinched look, to change places with me and sit with her face to the engine. This the young woman did, with that rather hard assurance common to these women. But at the next stop she got down, and made the conductor come with us into the compartment, whilst she sat in front between the driver and the citizen of Nuoro. That was what she wanted all the time. Now she was all right. She had her back to the velveteen husband, she sat close between two strange young men, who were condoling

with her. And velveteens eyed her back, and his little eyes went littler and more pin-pointed, and his nose seemed to curl with irritation.

The costumes had changed again. There was again the scarlet, but no green. The green had given place to mauve and rose. The women in one cold, stony, rather humbled broken place were most brilliant. They had the geranium skirts, but their sleeveless boleros were made to curl out strangely from the waist, and they were edged with a puckered rose-pink, a broad edge, with lines of mauve and lavender. As they went up between the houses that were dark and grisly under the blank, cold sky, it is amazing how these women of vermilion and rose-pink seemed to melt into an almost impossible blare of colour. What a risky blend of colours! Yet how superb it could look, that dangerous hard assurance of these women as they strode along so blaring. I would not like to tackle one of them.

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Wider and colder the landscape grew. As we topped a hill at the end of a village, we saw a long string of wagons, each with a pair of oxen, and laden with large sacks, curving upwards in the cold, pallid Sunday afternoon. Seeing us, the procession came to a standstill at the curve of the road, and the pale oxen, the pale low wagons, the pale full sacks, all in the blenched light, each one headed by a tall man in shirt-sleeves, trailing a static procession on the hill-side, seemed like a vision: like a Doré drawing. The bus slid past, the man holding the wagon-pole, while some oxen stood like rock, some swayed their

horns. The q-b asked the velveteener what they were carrying. For a long time he took no notice of the question. Then he volunteered, in a snappy voice, that it was the government grain being distributed to the communes for bread. On Sunday afternoon too.

Oh this government corn! What a problem those sacks represent!

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The country became wider as we dropped lower. But it was bleak and treeless once more. Stones cropped up in the wide, hollow dales. Men on ponies passed forlorn across the distances. Men with bundles waited at the cross-roads to pick up the bus. We were drawing near to Nuoro. It was past three in the afternoon, cold with a blenched light. The landscape seemed bare and stony, wide, different from any before.

We came to the valley where the branch-line runs to Nuoro. I saw little pink railway-cabins at once, lonely along the valley bed. Turning sharp to the right, we ran in silence over the moor-land-seeming slopes, and saw the town beyond, clustered beyond, a little below, at the end of the long declivity, with sudden mountains rising around it. There it lay, as if at the end of the world, mountains rising sombre behind.

So, we stop at the Dazio, the town's customs hut, and velveteens has to pay for some meat and cheese he is bringing in. After which we slip into the cold high-street of Nuoro. I am thinking that this is the home of

Grazia Deledda, the novelist, and I see a barber's shop. De Ledda. And thank heaven we are at the end of the journey. It is past four o'clock.

The bus has stopped quite close to the door of the inn: Star of Italy, was it? In we go at the open door. Nobody about, free access to anywhere and everywhere, as usual: testifying again to Sardinian honesty. We peer through a doorway to the left--through a rough little room: ah, there in a dark, biggish room beyond is a white-haired old woman with a long, ivory-coloured face standing at a large table ironing. One sees only the large whiteness of the table, and the long pallid face and the querulous pale-blue eye of the tall old woman as she looks up questioning from the gloom of the inner place.

"Is there a room, Signora?"

She looks at me with a pale, cold blue eye, and shouts into the dark for somebody. Then she advances into the passage and looks us up and down, the q-b and me.

"Are you husband and wife?" she demands, challenge.

"Yes, how shouldn't we be," say I.

A tiny maid, of about thirteen, but sturdy and brisk-looking, has appeared in answer to the shout.

"Take them to number seven," says the old dame, and she turns back to her gloom, and seizes the flat iron grimly.

We follow up two flights of cold stone stairs, disheartening narrow staircase with a cold iron rail, and corridors opening off gloomily and rather disorderly. These houses give the effect, inside, of never having been properly finished, as if, long, long ago, the inmates had crowded in, pig-sty fashion, without waiting for anything to be brought into order, and there it had been left, dreary and chaotic.

Thumbelina, the little maid, threw open the door of number seven with eclat. And we both exclaimed: "How fine!" It seemed to us palatial. Two good, thick white beds, a table, a chest of drawers, two mats on the tiled floor, and gorgeous oleographs on the wall--and two good wash-bowls side by side--and all perfectly clean and nice. What were we coming to! We felt we ought to be impressed.

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We pulled open the latticed window doors, and looked down on the street: the only street. And it was a river of noisy life. A band was playing, rather terribly, round the corner at the end, and up and down the street jigged endless numbers of maskers in their Carnival costume, with girls and young women strolling arm-in-arm to participate. And how frisky they all were, how bubbly and unself-conscious!

The maskers were nearly all women--the street was full of women: so we thought at first. Then we saw, looking closer, that most of the women were young men, dressed up. All the maskers were young men, and most of these young men, of course, were masquerading as women. As a rule they did not wear face-masks, only little dominoes of black cloth or green cloth or white cloth coming down to the mouth. Which is much better. For the old modelled half-masks with the lace frill, the awful proboscis sticking forward white and ghastly like the beaks of corpse-birds--such as the old Venice masks--these I think are simply horrifying. And the more modern "faces" are usually only repulsive. While the simple little pink half-masks with the end of black or green or white cloth, these just form a human disguise.

It was quite a game, sorting out the real women from the false. Some were easy. They had stuffed their bosoms, and stuffed their bustles, and put on hats and very various robes, and they minced along with little jigging steps, like little dolls that dangle from elastic, and they put their heads on one side and dripped their hands, and danced up to flurry the actual young ladies, and sometimes they received a good clout on the head, when they broke into wild and violent gestures, whereat the actual young ladies scuffled wildly.

They were very lively and naïve.--But some were more difficult. Every conceivable sort of "woman" was there, broad shouldered and with rather large feet. The most usual was the semi-peasant, with a very full bosom and very full skirt and a very downright bearing. But one was a widow in

weeds, drooping on the arm of a robust daughter. And one was an ancient crone in a crochet bed-cover. And one was in an old skirt and blouse and apron, with a broom, wildly sweeping the street from end to end. He was an animated rascal. He swept with very sarcastic assiduity in front of two town-misses in fur coats, who minced very importantly along. He swept their way very humbly, facing them and going backwards, sweeping and bowing, whilst they advanced with their noses in the air. He made his great bow, and they minced past, daughters of dog-fish, pesce-carne, no doubt. Then he skipped with a bold, gambolling flurry behind them, and with a perfectly mad frenzy began to sweep after them, as if to sweep their tracks away. He swept so madly and so blindly with his besom that he swept on to their heels and their ankles. They shrieked and glowered round, but the blind sweeper saw them not. He swept and swept and pricked their thin silk ankles. And they, scarlet with indignation and rage, gave hot skips like cats on hot bricks, and fled discomfited forwards. He bowed once more after them, and started mildly and innocently to sweep the street. A pair of lovers of fifty years ago, she in a half crinoline and poke bonnet and veil, hanging on his arm came very coyly past, oh so simpering, and it took me a long time to be sure that the "girl" was a youth. An old woman in a long nightdress prowled up and down, holding out her candle and peering in the street as if for burglars. She would approach the real young women and put her candle in their faces and peer so hard, as if she suspected them of something. And they blushed and turned their faces away and protested confusedly. This old woman searched so fearfully in the face of one strapping lass in the pink and scarlet costume, who looked for all the world like a

bunch of red and rose-pink geraniums, with a bit of white,--a real peasant lass--that the latter in a panic began to beat him with her fist, furiously, quite aroused. And he made off, running comically in his long white nightdress.

There were some really beautiful dresses of rich old brocade, and some gleaming old shawls, a shimmer of lavender and silver, or of dark, rich shot colours with deep borders of white silver and primrose gold, very lovely. I believe two of them were actual women--but the q-b says no. There was a Victorian gown of thick green silk, with a creamy blotched cross-over shawl. About her we both were doubtful. There were two wistful, drooping-lily sisters, all in white, with big feet. And there was a very successful tall miss in a narrow hobble-skirt of black satin and a toque with ospreys. The way she minced and wagged her posterior and went on her toes and peered over her shoulder and kept her elbows in was an admirable caricature. Especially the curious sagging heaving movement of "bustle" region, a movement very characteristic of modern feminism, was hit off with a bit of male exaggeration which rejoiced me. At first she even took me in.

We stood outside our window, and leaned on the little balcony rail looking down at this flow of life. Directly opposite was the chemist's house: facing our window the best bedroom of the chemist, with a huge white matrimonial bed and muslin curtains. In the balcony sat the chemist's daughters, very elegant in high-heeled shoes and black hair done in the fluffy fashion with a big sweep sideways. Oh very elegant!

They eyed us a little and we eyed them. But without interest. The river of life was down below.

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It was very cold and the day was declining. We too were cold. We decided to go into the street and look for the café. In a moment we were out of doors, walking as inconspicuously as possible near the wall. Of course there was no pavement. These maskers were very gentle and whimsical, no touch of brutality at all. Now we were level with them, how odd and funny they were. One youth wore a thin white blouse and a pair of his sister's wide, calico knickers with needlework frills near the ankle, and white stockings. He walked artlessly, and looked almost pretty. Only the q-b winced with pain: not because of the knickers, but because of that awful length, coming well below the knee. Another young man was wound into a sheet, and heavens knows if he could ever get out of it. Another was involved in a complicated entanglement of white crochet antimacassars, very troublesome to contemplate. I did not like him at all, like a fish in a net. But he strode robustly about.

We came to the end of the street, where there is a wide, desolate sort of gap. Here the little band stood braying away, there was a thick crowd of people, and on a slanting place just above, a little circle where youths and men, maskers and one or two girls were dancing, so crowded together and such a small ring that they looked like a jiggly set of upright rollers all turning rickettily against one another. They were

doing a sort of intense jigging waltz. Why do they look so intense? Perhaps because they were so tight all together, like too many fish in a globe slipping through one another.

There was a café in this sort of piazza--not a piazza at all, a formless gap. But young men were drinking little drinks, and I knew it would be hopeless to ask for anything but cold drinks or black coffee: which we did not want. So we continued forwards, up the slope of the village street. These towns soon come to an end. Already we were wandering into the open. On a ledge above, a peasant family was making a huge bonfire, a tower of orange-coloured, rippling flame. Little, impish boys were throwing on more rubbish. Everybody else was in town. Why were these folk at the town-end making this fire alone?

We came to the end of the houses and looked over the road-wall at the hollow, deep, interesting valley below. Away on the other side rose a blue mountain, a steep but stumpy cone. High land reared up, dusky and dark-blue, all around. Somewhere far off the sun was setting with a bit of crimson. It was a wild, unusual landscape, of unusual shape. The hills seemed so untouched, dark-blue, virgin-wild, the hollow cradle of the valley was cultivated like a tapestry away below. And there seemed so little outlying life: nothing. No castles even. In Italy and Sicily castles perching everywhere. In Sardinia none--the remote, ungrappled hills rising darkly, standing outside of life.

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As we went back it was growing dark, and the little band was about to leave off its brass noise. But the crowd still surged, the maskers still jigged and frisked unweariedly. Oh the good old energy of the bygone days, before men became so self-conscious. Here it was still on the hop.

We found no café that looked any good. Coming to the inn, we asked if there was a fire anywhere. There wasn't. We went up to our room. The chemist-daughters had lighted up opposite, one saw their bedroom as if it were one's own. In the dusk of the street the maskers were still jigging, all the youths still joyfully being women, but a little more roughly now. Away over the house-tops the purple-red of a dying sunset. And it was very cold.

There was nothing for it but just to lie in bed. The q-b made a little tea on the spirit-lamp, and we sat in bed and sipped it. Then we covered ourselves up and lay still, to get warm. Outside the noise of the street came unabated. It grew quite dark, the lights reflected into the room. There was the sound of an accordion across the hoarseness of the many voices and movements in the street: and then a solid, strong singing of men's voices, singing a soldier song.

"Quando torniamo in casa nostra--"

We got up to look. Under the small electric lights the narrow, cobbled street was still running with a river of people, but fewer maskers. Two

maskers beating loudly at a heavy closed door. They beat and beat. At last the door opens a crack. They rush to try to get in--but in vain. It had shut the moment it saw them, they are foiled, on they go down the street. The town is full of men, many peasants come in from the outlying parts, the black and white costume now showing in the streets.

We retire to bed again out of the cold. Comes a knock, and Thumbelina bursts in, in the darkness.

"Siamo qua!" says the q-b.

Thumbelina dashes at the window-doors and shuts them and shuts the casement. Then she dashes to my bedhead and turns on the light, looking down at me as if I were a rabbit in the grass. Then she flings a can of water against the wash-bowls--cold water, icy, alas. After which, small and explosive, she explodes her way out of the room again, and leaves us in the glaring light, having replied that it is now a little after six o'clock, and dinner is half past seven.

So we lie in bed, warm and in peace, but hungry, waiting for half past seven.

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When the q-b can stand it no more she flounces up, though the clock from the Campanile has struck seven only a few minutes before. Dashing

downstairs to reconnoitre, she is back in a breath to say that people are eating their heads off in the long dining room. In the next breath we are downstairs too.

The room was brightly lighted, and at many white tables sat diners, all men. It was quite city-like. Everyone was in convivial mood. The q-b spied men opposite having chicken and salad--and she had hopes. But they were brief. When the soup came, the girl announced that there was only bistecca: which meant a bit of fried cow. So it did: a quite, quite small bit of fried beef, a few potatoes and a bit of cauliflower. Really, it was not enough for a child of twelve. But that was the end of it. A few mandarini--tangerine oranges--rolled on a plate for dessert. And there's the long and short of these infernal dinners. Was there any cheese? No, there was no cheese. So we merely masticated bread.

There came in three peasants in the black and white costume, and sat at the middle table. They kept on their stocking caps. And queer they looked, coming in with slow, deliberate tread of these elderly men, and sitting rather remote, with a gap of solitude around them. The peculiar ancient loneliness of the Sardinian hills clings to them, and something stiff, static, pre-world.

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All the men at our end of the room were citizens--employees of some sort--and they were all acquaintances. A large dog, very large indeed,

with a great muzzle, padded slowly from table to table, and looked at us with big wistful topaz eyes. When the meal was almost over our bus-driver and conductor came in--looking faint with hunger and cold and fatigue. They were quartered at this house. They had eaten nothing since the boar-broth at Gavoi.

In a very short time they were through their portions: and was there nothing else? Nothing! But they were half starved. They ordered two eggs each, in padella. I ordered coffee--and asked them to come and take it with us, and a brandy. So they came when their eggs were finished.

A diversion was now created at the other side of the room. The red wine, which is good in Sardinia, had been drunk freely. Directly facing us sat a rather stout man with pleasant blue eyes and a nicely shaped head: dressed like any other town man on a Sunday. The dog had waddled up to him and sat down statuesque in front of him. And the fat man, being mellow, began to play with the big, gentle, brindled animal. He took a piece of bread and held it before the dog's nose--and the dog tried to take it. But the man, like a boy now he was ripe with wine, put the mastiff back with a restraining finger, and told him not to snatch. Then he proceeded with a little conversation with the animal. The dog again tried to snatch, gently, and again the man started, saved the bread, and startled the dog, which backed and gave a sharp, sad yelp, as if to say: "Why do you tease me!"

"Now," said the man, "you are not to snatch. Come here. Come here. Vieni

qua!" And he held up the piece of bread. The animal came near. "Now," said the man, "I put this bread on your nose, and you don't move, un--Ha!!"

The dog had tried to snatch the bread, the man had shouted and jerked it away, the animal had recoiled and given another expostulating yelp.

The game continued. All the room was watching, smiling. The dog did not understand at all. It came forward again, troubled. The man held the bread near its nose, and held up a warning finger. The beast dropped its head mournfully, cocking up its eye at the bread with varied feelings.

"Now--!" said the man, "not until I say three--Uno--due--" the dog could bear it no longer, the man in jerking let go the bread and yelled at the top of his voice--"e tre!" The dog gulped the piece of bread with a resigned pleasure, and the man pretended it had all happened properly on the word "three."

So he started again. "Vieni qua! Vieni qua!" The dog, which had backed away with the bread, came hesitating, cringing forward, dropping its hind-quarters in doubt, as dogs do, advancing towards the new nugget of bread. The man preached it a little sermon.

"You sit there and look at this bread. I sit here and look at you, and I hold this bread. And you stop still, and I stop still, while I count

three. Now then--uno--" the dog couldn't bear these numerals, with their awful slowness. He snatched desperately. The man yelled and lost the bread, the dog, gulping, turned to creep away.

Then it began again.

"Come here! Come here! Didn't I tell thee I would count three? Già! I said I would count three. Not one, but three. And to count three you need three numbers. Ha! Steady! Three numbers. Uno--due E TRE!" The last syllables were yelled so that the room rang again. The dog gave a mournful howl of excitement, missed the bread, groped for it, and fled.

The man was red with excitement, his eyes shining. He addressed the company at large. "I had a dog," he said, "ah, a dog! And I would put a piece of bread on his nose, and say a verse. And he looked at me so!" The man put his face sideways. "And he looked at me so!" He gazed up under his brows. "And he talked to me so--o: Zieu! Zieu!--But he never moved. No, he never moved. If he sat with that bread on his nose for half an hour, and if tears ran down his face, he never moved--not till I said three! Then--ah!" The man tossed up his face, snapped the air with his mouth, and gulped an imaginary crust. "AH, that dog was trained...." The man of forty shook his head.

"Vieni qua! Come here! Tweet! Come here!"

He patted his fat knee, and the dog crept forward. The man held another

piece of bread.

"Now," he said to the dog, "listen! Listen. I am going to tell you something.

Il soldato va alla guerra--

No--no, Not yet. When I say three!

Il soldato va alla guerra
Mangia male, dorme in terra--

Listen. Be still. Quiet now. UNO--DUE--E--TRE!"

It came out in one simultaneous yell from the man, the dog in sheer bewilderment opened his jaws and let the bread go down his throat, and wagged his tail in agitated misery.

"Ah," said the man, "you are learning. Come! Come here! Come! Now then! Now you know. So! So! Look at me so!"

The stout, good-looking man of forty bent forward. His face was flushed, the veins in his neck stood out. He talked to the dog, and imitated the dog. And very well indeed he reproduced something of the big, gentle, wistful subservience of the animal. The dog was his totem--the affectionate, self-mistrustful, warm-hearted hound.

So he started the rigmarole again. We put it into English.

"Listen now. Listen! Let me tell it you--

So the soldier goes to the war!
His food is rotten, he sleeps on the floor--

"Now! Now! No, you are not keeping quiet. Now! Now!

Il soldate va alla guerra
Mangia male, dorme in terra--"

The verses, known to every Italian, were sung out in a sing-song fashion. The audience listened as one man--or as one child--the rhyme chiming in every heart. They waited with excitement for the One--Two--and Three! The last two words were always ripped out with a tearing yell. I shall never forget the force of those syllables--E TRE! But the dog made a poor show--He only gobbled the bread and was uneasy.

This game lasted us a full hour: a full hour by the clock sat the whole room in intense silence, watching the man and the dog.

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Our friends told us the man was the bus-inspector--their inspector. But

they liked him. "Un brav' uomo! Un bravo uomo! Eh si!" Perhaps they were a little uneasy, seeing him in his cups and hearing him yell so nakedly: AND THREE!

We talked rather sadly, wistfully. Young people, especially nice ones like the driver, are too sad and serious these days. The little conductor made big brown eyes at us, wistful too, and sad we were going.

For in the morning they were driving back again to Sorgono, over the old road, and we were going on, to Terranova, the port. But we promised to come back in the summer, when it was warmer. Then we should all meet again.

"Perhaps you will find us on the same course still. Who knows!" said the driver sadly.