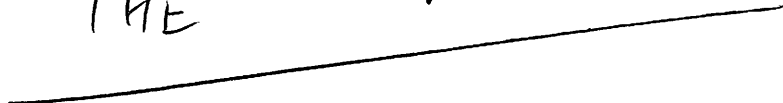


THE

VILLA



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THE VILLA.

When I arrived today I noticed that the house was cleaner than I knew it last year. This is due to the new manservant called Renato whom I saw serving at table---it surprised me--- when I came into the room from the garden. He was dressed in a white and blue striped jacket, like the silent manservant of a palazzo that has survived the war. He was the first person I saw when I got to the top of the steps. There is never much light over the dining table, and he was standing just at its edge, small, with a rather prim mouth and crusading eyes.

A great cry went up from the table, from Luciana, from Arturo, Vittoria, Angelina, Maddalena, Silvia, Nina and Michele, and I forgot the manservant at once. The little boy Dino is now eight, and he hid his head in his mother's lap when I came in, then ran halfway up the stairs in the dim light, and crouched there, watching me while I answered all their questions at table. I remember him last year as being more cruel than shy, but now the shyness seems to have grown, and ^{with it} ~~given him~~ a sort of graciousness. That is like all of them. 'Oriental barbarians', I heard ^{them} ~~someone~~ call ~~them~~ once, but somewhere each of them, even the marchese Arturo himself, whom most people find stupid and slow, has this gift of grace: there is nothing benevolent about it, but it seems civilised--- for a moment, like a sudden acknowledgement of civilisation before war breaks out. I've often looked at their hands. They are thick and extraordinarily heavy, very wide at the base, like butchers' hands---or Roman aristocrats'.

Only Luciana, the marchese's wife, is different, and she's the power of the family. Everything starts from her; she can bring light or darkness to them as she wishes. When she goes away the

family relapses into its real ugliness. They mope about the house uneasily, there is a sense of waiting for something, the servants are hostile and rebellious, there are quarrels all the time, and I think only the certainty of Luciana's return keeps them together at all. Under her cool eye, as she sits at the end of the table, they look like violent children who are allowed their say but no more. Luciana has lovely hands, and strangers are always asking ^l how she could have married the marchese and, more than that, how she could have borne living with him all this time. Usually she says quite frankly that he disgusts her, and that sleeping with him, which happens rarely, is a necessary penance for her. The spirit goes out of him when she leaves. And he seems frightened when she suggests a holiday for herself--- just two days, three days. In this he is like his two daughters, Angelina and Maddalena, who share his great hands and nervous, strained watchfulness, and like him never seem to have a moment's *real* ~~inner~~ peace, ~~harsh~~ and have no sense of art at all, like people rejected by God, wondering at all the mystery outside them and why they aren't part of it, and often hating it. All three turn to Luciana for their peace. They only find it in her, and this is why, when she goes away, even for a day, they seem panic-stricken, as if their feelings will run away with them and they have no form, nothing to fall back on but hard, brittle thoughts, about the dirty state of the kitchen, or the time of the next train in from Rome, or the fact that the beds haven't been made. They look mal^{ev}evolent, broken, rejected; and you can't address a word to them. They're brooding too deeply.

Luciana works harder than any of them and bears all the wo^rries of the household, and applies her mind nearly every hour of the waking day to keeping them all out of debt. She would

so clearly benefit from a holiday. But it seems they can't treat her with the mercy they would give to other people, they need her so badly. Especially Maddalena sulks when she goes away. ~~Two or three days ago~~ I remember last year, when Luciana went ~~away~~ to Naples for a couple ^{if} ~~or three~~ days, she wouldn't say good-morning to any of us; and Luciana had her ^{daughter's} mute, resentful eyes waiting for her when she got back.

Maddalena is called the Inglese by the family, because she is tall and thin and has never had a man. This is why, they all say, she is never gay; after a certain age virgins are never ^g gay. Her sister Angelina is much prettier, with blond hair and a neat little face. ^{Young men often} ~~She is often~~ fall ~~in~~ in love with her, so her ^{companion} is less solemn and pessimistic than Maddalena's, and she understands her mother better and is less jealous of her enjoyment. Maddalena is twenty-nine, and Angelina one or two years younger, yet neither of them goes out with young men alone. Maddalena has a long, melancholy face, not at all pretty, yet her body has cool, gentle lines, and there's an elegance about her which she could turn to beauty if the spirit hadn't been beaten out of her. There is an unfathomable dark apathy about her like the silence of the sky. I think the family made fun of her looks when she was a child and nothing could convince her that she isn't ugly and unwanted; she seems to try to cancel herself out, saying nothing and slipping up to bed early, and she is bitterly aware of Angelina's prettiness, a light which dims her even more, sending her deeper still into herself, though she doesn't really resent it. Apart perhaps from Luciana she is the only person of quality among them. She holds her own counsel. She feels hate like the others, and the same need to be cruel, but at the same time there is this brooding quietbin her, a resignation, that gives her a

certain delicacy, a sour wisdom.

The hatred in the house is bitter, sneering and murderous, so strong and sure and deep a necessity in them that nothing human could abate it. I've seen Signora Flavia, the grandmother, a small, fat woman in black, dusty, threadbare clothes down to her feet, sitting in the kitchen screaming with rage, her mouth in a kind of grin, with tears pouring down her face, stamping her feet up and down on the stone floor as she shouted, 'I'm a countess, a countess!' A lot of the hate and petty persecution in the house comes from her, and she tries to influence her son against other people, especially those whom Luciana likes and offers hospitality to. This is Signora Flavia's revenge on her daughter-in-law, whom she feels has been a bad wife. The marchese only listens to half what she says, but he has been hurt enough by his wife in the last twenty years not to hear that voice as a balm. Some people say he's too dense to have suffered, but this isn't true. It makes him more vulnerable, if anything.

Last year I remember that Signora Flavia often attacked Michele, the fourteen-year-old son who shares Luciana's grace and ease, and even her peace. He is slim, quite tall for his age, handsome in a rough way, and his hands aren't those of a butcher, or a Roman aristocrat's for that matter. I noticed very soon after I saw him for the first time how little of his father he seemed to have in him, how rebellious he was, how quick to understand, unlike the others; and also there was a tenderness in him which was quite absent in the others. He's deliberately rude to them, especially to his father, and he is always shouting, trying to cadge money or cigarettes, eating great chunks of bread and marmalade or tomatoes covered with oil, and when he walks it is with a comic roguish slouch, usually with his shirt hanging out of his trousers. Signora Flavia

complained that he was dirty at table and that his manners were nothing compared with those of his little brother Dino, which was untrue. If Dino cried Michele was always blamed, and the whole family with the exception of Luciana and Angelina would bear down on him, calling him villain and wretch. I noticed that Maddalena often lectured him in her sourly delicate way, as if for the pleasure of exercising a bit of power over somebody. But the leader of the persecution---a quite kindly persecution--- was Signora Flavia, the reason being that Michele ~~wasn't~~ ^{isn't} the marchese's son ^{at all,} but the illegitimate child of one of Luciana's love affairs---with a peasant living near by. Both Luciana and Angelina try to protect him, and for this reason he loves them both with a quiet, fierce passion. People say that the peasant wanted to have his child but the marchese insisted on keeping him, after endless arguments in which the peasant rudely banged the table and threatened violence.

The marchese has never been known to lay a finger on Michele, and ~~he~~ either he's blind to humiliation or he conceals it marvellously. He waits for things to pass over, with a natural pragmatism, and always tries to keep out of quarrels. ~~But~~ When I say to people that there may be an unusual wisdom in this, they say, 'No, it's just laziness and moral ineptitude.' All I know is that when I get indignant at table because of ~~somebody's~~ ^{Some} rudeness he's the one to make the first soothing, tactful remark. ^{A strange man:} Although lecherous thoughts seem to be in his head most of the ~~time~~ ^{day} and although he hoards photographs of ~~beautiful~~ ^{beautiful} women and pores over them for hours alone in his bedroom, sometimes projecting them on to the wall as slides, he is horrified by dirty stories at table and by any laughing about the body. He likes to take it with deadly seriousness. When Vittoria, his sister, gets a little drunk after dinner and

takes her breast out of her dress to show us what a young and tender body she still has, he turns his head away abruptly and won't join in the laughter.

When a really pretty young woman comes to the house he invites her to look at his photographs, which people say really are superb (he won't show them to men---except to the local monks who invite him over to dinner now and then to see the new ones), and which include some of the loveliest and most aristocratic women^e in the city. And he may then ask her to pose herself, which after she has heard the names of ~~the~~ some of the other women comes as an honour. If she agrees he takes a long time fixing the focus of the camera, while he is actually peering at her bosom. At table he flirts with them, sits them down next to him, pats their arms, touches their hair lightly, puts his hand on their shoulders. Usually they suffer this in silence, for after all he's the head of the house; and on their second visit they keep away from his end of the table, under Luciana's protection, which gratifies her. He asks them to come for a ride on his motor-scooter and if they agree he takes them to a long deep-green field a few kilometers south and tries to make love to them, almost always unsuccessfully. He is bald and has white, staring eyes and a rather loose mouth, and he walks with his back very straight, as he used to in the military processions when he was in the king's escort. All over the house there are photographs of him in officer's ~~uniform~~ uniform. Most women seem frightened of him, although perhaps he's the least frightening member of the family; Luciana told me that when he was young he was brutal with her in love, and that his first act disgusted her. I wonder if this is true. Never trust what a woman says about her husband if she doesn't love him---he ~~then~~ becomes the personification of ~~his~~ her disappointments.

He likes to keep on the right side of church-dogma even

~~even~~ in his lecheries, and I've heard him explain to a young woman that it would ^{be} right and good ^{for} ~~of~~ her to let him make love to her since, having been in the king's escort, when there was a king, he'd been brought close to the Vatican, and to influential monsignori, so that in a way contact with him would bring ~~them~~ ^{her} nearer to God, or at least get ~~them~~ ^{her} a plenary indulgence. ~~The~~ Last year I heard him tell a pretty girl hardly out of school, running his fingers lightly down her throat, that she shouldn't be offended if he kissed ^{her} because God, having made her a woman, intended her as an object of love for men, which put an obligation on ~~men~~ ^{him} not to behave too formally and stiffly with ~~women~~ ^{her}, especially ~~if they~~ ^{as he} ~~found her~~ ^{happened to be} beautiful, ~~was you my dear, sweet,~~ and that it was better to risk offence (seizing the girl's head and planting a kiss first on her forehead and then on her lips) than fail to ^{encourage} ~~enhance~~ a woman's beauty wherever ~~it was~~ possible.

The family laughs at this and never tries to protect the girl. And Luciana doesn't seem a scrap jealous. Only ^f she flirted would the family look up, speechlessly, watching their beloved leave them again, and the foothold of their world slip away. When someone asked her once how such ugly, restless people could ever have issued from her she said, 'It's because they were conceived without love.' Only Michele was conceived in love, however momentary. And he has her same peace, as I say, the same slight dreaming beyondness. I noticed him this morning sitting in an armchair by the hearth doing his schoolwork, and for a time the house was in utter silence. He was looking out of the french windows, lost, and the room seemed to rest in its silence; ~~and I thought~~ ^{and} I thought how none of the others could ~~ever~~ have achieved that. They walk about quickly and awkwardly, making their ^s ~~quick~~ short, quick, sharp remarks in ugly voices.

I've seen a look of tenderness in Angelina's face only once,

last year, when there were a number of people in to tea, and one of them, a smiling, aunt-like, constantly nodding and surprised woman, was talking to her closely; and Angelina fetched out a tiny, shining compact radio she'd bought some ~~month~~ months before, to show her, with its golden aerial and ~~the~~ green leather case no bigger than a woman's handbag. She plugged it in, pulled out the aerial and began turning the dials and pressing spring-buttons. And all the time she played with her shining little box and the other woman clapped her hands together and uttered aunt-like cries, there was a tender, bemused, shy look on her face as if this was all her own handiwork, something to do with her personally---with her prettiness and health even. I don't think I've ever seen her face so shy, like that of a child being praised before too many relatives; usually her face is strained about the eyes, hard, seeming to dwell on hard subjects, like how much tea there is left in the cannister after I've been at it, whether the dogs outside have been fed, whether she has time to go to the local town for another electric plug, whether the 'servants' have been stealing. Perhaps this is why the young men are seldom in love with her for long. I heard one of them say ~~indignantly~~^{bitterly,} making the rest of us roar with laughter, that she couldn't bring forth a child but white maggots! When we had a visitor last year she said he was dirty in his habits and that he used to piss out of his window (which would have been easy, as the sill ~~was~~^{is} only a foot or so above the ground), and that the Siamese cat used to smell whenever it had been in his room for long (implying he was sexually perverted); to which he said that she had a mind as big as his thumb-nail.

But she has a curiosity about people which I like. She watches them inquisitively, rather like a child, wants to know about them, is rarely envious. Perhaps that was taught her by

Luciana, for it isn't true of the marchese. She is so content to watch other people that she curls herself up in a chair sometimes and seems to cancel herself out, as if someone had ^{whispered} ~~breathed~~ in her ear that she'd better give up trying ^{any more} ~~to enter life~~ she'd never really have children, take trains alone, pay her own bills. ^{Yet} ~~and~~ this childishness ^{goes} ~~went~~ with a much more practical nature than Maddalena's.

~~Luciana~~ Luciana and I often talked about the family last year, just as if it wasn't hers: how rude they'd been to the visitor, talking about him in whispers, calling him wretch, filthy beast, pervert, parasite; and how when he came to meals they made him feel unwanted and more or less threw food at him. When I asked her once if they had much sense of other people's feelings she said, 'No, none whatsoever. ^{They only feel it if they're hurt.} ~~They only feel it if they're hurt.~~' And she added that perhaps it was best to be like that, aware only of oneself, yet relying on other people's mercy. I said, no, there was nothing lucky about that because they must be unhappy people, ~~being~~ ^{being} incapable of love. I remember she shrugged and murmured, 'Unhappy no, but neither very happy nor very sad, just on one level of ordinariness all the time.' ^e ~~Then~~ she added as she went away into the kitchen, and this surprised me, 'People may as well be dead as live like that.'

I've often seen Angelina staring at the floor, bent forward a little, smoking an American cigarette, her yellow bleached hair falling down her cheeks (in a fashion that went out years ago), a terrible darkness seeming to surround her. There is something unbearably sad about the silence of these two sisters. ^{They're} ~~They're~~ ^{regretting} ~~regretting~~ something---something which perhaps they've never known but which they feel in their mother, in a few dumb intimations, not told them in words.

In the marchese there is no sadness, just as there is little

humour. He has no ideas, even the religious ones he professes. His God was a habit he picked up over the years, as he picked up the habit of flirtation. I've never seen anything even momentar^aily reflective in his face, no dream, which is why his company tends to be suffocating. I notice that a few seconds after he has left ^{table} ~~xxxxxxx~~ to go to bed visitors sit better in their chairs and smile for the first time. He lives in a strange, bare, friendless world, the lackey of his own dark thoughts. Last year I remember Luciana leaning over towards me and saying as he opened¹ the door into the room, 'When he comes in it's like death passin^g over the table. You can see everyone go stiff and a bit afraid.' I said nothing and looked away.

Every afternoon when he comes in for lunch he calls his young^r~~est~~ son over to him and asks what he has been up to; he pats his head and kisses him, looks theatrically surprised when he is supposed to, the whites of his eyes showing and his mouth drawn down; and sometimes he pulls him on to his knee and tells him a story with grand gestures, his chin lifted up, speaking rhetorically, rolling out his r's, depicting great men, so that the child stares into his^s eyes and dares not make a movement for fear of breaking the ~~spell~~^{spell.} When Michele ^{comes} ~~comes~~ in late the marchese always bubbles over with questions, wanting to know exactly where and what^{and} why, poring over his answers with rapt, dark, tender curiosity. I remember a feast-day last year in the village, down by the fountain, where there are a few houses, a wooden village-hall and a petrol pump; a crowd collected there after lunch for games and competitions. Michele was wearing his first suit, borrowed from a rich young man, a ~~friend~~^{friend} of Angelina's, who happened to be abnormally small. The suit fitted perfectly and made him look debonair, but his white shirt was frayed at the collar and was too tight round the neck, so he took off the tie, then, since it was hot,

the jacket. He came back after dark, when the fireworks were over, and dropped straight into a chair while the marchese began asking him the usual quiet questions---shouting at him suddenly, 'Michele!', when he didn't reply. Had he been dancing? at whose house? what girls were there? did he enjoy it? had he been drinking, for he looked so tired? how many glasses had he taken? And when they boy told him, 'Two large glasses', he shrugged and said, 'Well, that's half a litre, enough for a small boy not used to it!' Then he glanced across at Luciana, with the very slightest of smiles, and murmured, 'E sbronzo', he's drunk. Michele didn't deny it, only put his head in his hands and yawned. Then, suddenly, he got up and dashed away to his bedroom, where he slept at once.

I like the way the marchese screws up his face when he asks questions, as if piecing together a world he left long ago because of its disappointments, ^{is no longer} ~~its last~~ having noble families in charge. And I noticed that when the grandmother asked him who had won the greasy-pole competition at the village he shrugged and murmured, 'Oh, some wretch...', then imitated a peasant-accent in the ugliest way possible.

I think it must be from him that Dino, the little boy, gets his wonderful mature gestures, as if he already had a place in the world. The marchese has taught him pride in himself, and I remember how one day last year the child rushed in from the kitchen after Renato the 'servant' had told him to come into lunch, and cried out with tears in his eyes, 'A servant must never speak to me like that!' The marchese forbids Luciana to lay a finger on the children, and they find it easy to confuse and browbeat him. I've often heard them shout at him, and then he grows very mild, trying to calm them down, a little afraid, because this is the defiance he has taught them himself. They have no fear of him, and when they really get beyond themselves and behave like

devils Luciana takes them into another room and closes the door, then gives them a thrashing with a cane, and promises them another one twice as hard if they tell their father about it. They fear both her and Angelina, because they get beatings from both. The possibility of a beating gives just that tough edge to life that the boys seem to need, and I've seen Dino put his bare, dirty feet on the tablecloth so that Luciana will give him a cuff. Then, after she has done it, he comes and curls up in her chair, at her back, with his arms round her ⁿneck, and often falls asleep like that, and stays there until Angelina puts him on her shoulders and carries him to bed. The marchese is a loving outsider to them all, and they tell him every sort of lie, sometimes in connivance with Luciana, knowing how credulous he is.

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Last night the little boy and I were the only ones at table for dinner, and all the time he played the padrone, talking to me with great politeness, asking if I was enjoying the spaghetti, calling out to the servants in a loud, commanding voice, his little chin pushed forward, and making them come to my side of the table, to ask if I wanted a second helping. And they obeyed him. Towards the end of ^ethe dinner he called out to Nella, Renato's wife, a small, really animal creature with a man's voice, and when she came to the table she leaned over him and said quietly, her teeth gritted together, 'Remember you're nine and a half, nine and a half', but nevertheless she gave him exactly the number of stuffed tomatoes he asked for, with some olive oil and sauce. He sat so authoritatively in his chair, his back quite straight, his eyes clear and black, never ^{once} looking up at her, ~~but taking her~~ ^{but taking her} obedience for granted, ~~giving his orders~~ ^{giving his orders} ~~to the all in front of~~ ^{to the all in front of}

of everything, has known everything from brutality to the lightest infatuation.

The other day Luciana came into my room at sundown, after I had opened my shutters to let in the cool air, and leaned out of the window, looking at the peach trees, with the garden lying in an uncustomary stillness, and said, 'I love my house, you know...'. It's true, these silent pauses make one love the house.

I remember last night tenderly, how the pillow felt against my back, how ~~and~~ I and the book in my hand and the silence and the slight wind that went through the bushes just below my window, bringing in gusts of music and laughter, were all one dream.

The marchese's attitude towards me has changed ~~great deal~~ since last year, and I'm sure this is due to Luciana's subtle persuasions. He no longer watches me as he used to, and he even tells me confidences about other people, ~~sometimes~~ especially about young women, which would have been impossible before. I think he believed last year that I was making love either to his wife, who is nearly twenty years older than me, or to Angelina, which at least was feasible. I remember how he used to follow me about the house and how he would always call down to Luciana if she and I stayed up late talking together. He hated to hear us talk in whispers, in the silence of the house, and God knows what went through his head. Now we stay up talking until the early hours and he never once calls down to her that she must get some sleep, that she'll be fit for nothing in the morning, that it isn't right, it isn't right! Somehow she convinced him of the silliness of his fears, and apart from that he has seen me with girls in town, ~~xxxxxxx~~ and hears that I'm attracted to this one and not to that, and so forth.

During the day I am always given Angelina's room to work in, and this was the same last year. It always pained him then,

that I should be going into the women's quarters with my young manhood and using their dressing-table as a desk, and sleeping on their bed after lunch. I worked hard last year and went out very little, which gave him more opportunity to imagine me up to no good. I remember one evening reading something aloud to myself, alone in her room, and realising after a time that I could be heard outside. Angelina was late in from work that evening, and I heard him walk along the corridor and pause outside my door, listening. He apparently didn't know that she was still out of the house. I stopped reading aloud, then decided to find out if he really had been listening. I got up and went across to the lavatory, which is opposite her door. His bedroom is at the end of the corridor, and as I passed across I glanced to my right and saw him standing there, buttoning his shirt in the mirror and at the same time staring down the corridor. I locked the lavatory door, then heard him walk down to Angelina's room, enter it, ^{and} ~~then~~ leave again, ~~and~~ ^{ing} go back to his bedroom. After a time I came out and returned to the room, closing the door, ^{and} ~~when~~ heard him walk down the corridor once again and look this time in the lavatory, presumably to see if I and his daughter had gone in there together. By now he was bewildered, and felt himself in the middle of a plot. He suddenly pushed the door of my room open, imitated a look of surprise at finding me there and then began fiddling uselessly with some cases on the floor. I'm sure he wanted to look under the bed but lacked the neck.

Last year I thought him a sort of monster, creating a world in his own image, but now I know this isn't true, and that his belief in ^{other people's} ~~lechery~~ ~~and~~ ~~in~~ ~~lechery~~ is a kind of hope. At lunch last Sunday he was talking to me about a young woman they know who lives in Rome with her mother, and said she was 'very Roman indeed', that is to say, 'Intelligent, passionate and

cunning~~ff~~: no one knew how many men she'd had, she was always so secret in her comings and goings, she was charming to everyone and gave the impression of sweetness and good will, but she could embrace one man on Monday and another on Tuesday, without remembering either; she could make love once out of whim and then look rather lost and innocent when the man suggested it a second time.

Last night his sister Vottoria suddenly announced that she wanted to sleep downstairs, and he whispered in my hearing that it was only because she wanted me to seduce her, though she is over sixty. I repeated this to Luciana this morning incredulously, and she said with a little smile that the marchese was probably quite right.

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The young woman he spoke about, 'intelligent, passionate and cunning', came last Sunday. She is tall with dark hair in natural rings, and though her face is full of movement, quick and smiling, her eyes seem strangely trapped ~~in misery~~ ~~to move for misery~~. She keeps her own counsel, seems very much alone. Sometimes she can hardly bring herself to open her mouth--- ~~she seems~~ ^{some} out of misery, like a person dragging herself ~~out of a black marsh~~. So she provides the family with opportunities to hurt her. She offers no resistance; they seem to smell suffering in other people; they want to draw a little more blood, their faces sullen, heavy, pouting, like people in a plot, their pleasures deathly. ~~From~~ Silvia, a fat, pale young woman who lives in the house behind the vineyard, and who has neither a lover nor work, wants a little excitement; ~~and~~ ^{and} the people who visit us provide it; having a good brain, clear and shrewd, she will make the spark for any malice that the others need.

17.

Maria has just aborted a child, Luciana told me, and nobody must know.

She usually comes in to tea in the afternoon, and is virtually one of the family, providing the sting of wit and shrewd observation. Her voice is ~~xxx~~ harsh, and when she speaks against people it has a special cutting tone; she seems to be taking revenge for everything life has refused her. I heard her say the other day that Maria---the 'intelligent, passionate and cunning' girl---wasn't at all beautiful to her mind: she had a loose mouth, too large and open, and her hips were too wide; she said it as though ~~she was~~ killing her, with a swift, hungry sound. And Signora Flavia says that while Maria is a person of distinction, yet she is perhaps a little too sweet. And other people say, 'Oh, Maria is too artificial in the way she speaks!'

I enjoy being with Luciana and Maria alone, just the three of us; we can speak to each other intimately, each of us having a painful secret, so that ^{there is} ~~we have~~ ^{for any of us} nothing to lose. Sometimes h.p. Luciana and I take the bus to Rome and go to Maria's flat, where she lives with her mother, and we sit behind ~~xxxxx~~ closed shutters in the hot half-darkness in the afternoon, with yellow, slight, gleaming lines showing through the shutter-slats, while Maria's mother pads softly across the stone kitchen floor, bringing cool drinks, going to the refrigerator; and when it's cool and the sun has gone down behind the curved, smooth block of flats close by, leaving the space between in shadow, we sit out on the verandah in canvas chairs, at the foot of the steps leading up to the kitchen, everything about us of stone or cement, ~~they~~ cut off from the rest of the city, a great static island like a memorial, with occasional square lawns, excellently cut and small, with here and there young trees. The moment you enter this stone world of flats through a gate, along a special road, there is a new coolness and quiet, and the noises of the main street close by fall back.

It is so different from this house where the noise starts

soon after dawn with someone rushing down the stairs like a ton of coals or with Dino's deafening cries or with the radio turned on suddenly at full strength, as if in vengeful enjoyment. Or ^{esle} Nella the maid shouts to her own son to 'Come in, you vagabond!!' in that deep, dry beast-voice of hers. If you've slept well it's all right but if your dreams have been heavy ~~and~~ ^{with} ~~the~~ ^{the} past these noises are like a fresh assault, to keep the wounds open all day.

Maria told me a few days ago that she could hardly bear talking to the marchese, hated it when he touched her. And when I said that he'd called her 'intelligent, passionate and cunning' she replied that he only spoke like this to give the impression of intuitive gifts, which he lacked; he ~~had~~ ^{had} ~~only~~ heard someone else use those words about her, and decided to use them ^{himself} when ~~an~~ ^{a chance} ~~opport-~~ ~~unity~~ came. She said he created a complicated world for himself--- a world where there were secret assignations all the time and every- thing was plot and subterfuge, and ^{where} the reality was the opposite of appearance, so that having created ^{the} a mystery ~~for himself~~ he had to penetrate it; ^{then he} ~~and~~ congratulated himself on his cleverness. He does it like a conjuror's trick and at first you don't realise that the world he has made is completely false. ~~the~~

for himself

He calls her cunning, she says, because he can't allow himself to believe that, ^{though} ~~being~~ a ~~typical~~ 'Roman woman', she ~~is~~ simply un- happy ~~and not the materialisation of his~~ ~~honorous~~ ~~dreams~~. I notice that he doesn't search her body with his eyes as he does the other women: instead, he puts the whole of her life---which he thinks he knows about---into the laboratory of his desires; he turns her into a daydream.

Sometimes he will look at a woman with his eyes screwed up anxiously, as if on some ^{urgent} ~~painstaking~~ investigation; he has to verify every detail. He seems to murder women inwardly---even

painstaking

his own wife, to keep her as an object of pleasure; they mustn't have quite human lives.

His work, which is a few hours every day at the customs house in Rome, at ^{an} the 'office' but in fact waving the heavy trucks in and out of the main gate, and examining the drivers' passes, doesn't mean a thing to him. He goes to the cinema sometimes, rides his little scooter into the village to drink a coffee. I've never seen him read a newspaper. He only quickens, and becomes really fluent and at his ease, when women are ~~mentioned~~ ^{here;} and also when the Roman aristocracy is ~~being talked about~~ ^{mentioned} there all his graciousness comes out.

Last night he came with us to Maria's flat and I watched him talking to her on the ~~verandah~~ ^{verandah} as it grew darker and the lights in the flat-windows behind us went up one after another and our voices became more muffled in the ~~darkness~~ ^{warm, twinkling dusk.} He told her that ~~he was attracted by~~ ^{attracted him,} everything in her ~~by~~ ^{her} voice, the erect way she sat in a chair, her calm and still eyes, her long, dreamy walk, but he realised ~~that~~ ^{he hadn't a} he ~~had no~~ ^{chance,} ~~of making love to her~~ ^{being---} compared with her---an old man (he is fifty-nine), and perhaps not her kind 'mentally'. He also talked about the ~~boy~~ ^{boy} who threw her over a short time ago, called Franco. That boy, he said, was never in love; this was what chiefly worried him about Franco (they ~~were~~ ^{are} related), that he seemed incapable of love. Maria said to this quietly that he ^{the marchese,} might simply ~~be blind to~~ ^{not know} Franco's real nature, but he shook his head pleasantly and cried, 'No, I've known Franco from a child, he's been in my house---why, every day for three years or so at one time!' He was in a much better position to judge the boy than most people, certainly more than ~~those---~~ ^{those---} with a glittering side-glance at her---who fell in love with him. The fact was, he said, that the boy got tired of his girls after he'd slept with

them once or twice (a deliberate thrust at her, to see if ~~it~~ ^{this} was true), ~~or how~~ to which Maria said that this meant nothing, only that he didn't love most of the girls he went with.

But does Maria know the whole of the story, I wonder?

After the marchese had left the dark terrace I tried to find out. Perhaps she knows. She knows at least that Franco is in love. She said, 'The marchese must be even blinder than I thought!' But I said, 'No'---glancing at her---'the cleverest people are often blind in these things, when it touches themselves---while the washerwomen and the milkmen know the facts.' She didn't reply to this, so I have no way of telling whether she understands everything. I kept quiet, and we talked about something else.

Strange how often the name Franco comes up. He has put ~~quite~~ a spell on ^{them} ~~people~~ with his gaiety. He is tall and lively, with rather fair hair and good teeth, not at all handsome but graceful and kindly; full of the sun. He jokes about, ~~and~~ then falls into a quiet mood, unpredictably, and I notice how attentive he is of ~~the~~ others, ~~people~~, never letting them dwindle into sadness if he can help it. Franco is twenty-two now, and at ^{the} ~~this~~ moment ^{he's} ~~is~~ far away in the north, working on a farm. Luciana, Vittoria (his mother) and the marchese all talk about him at length, and especially when Maria is with us: they think they're easing her pain, and perhaps they're right. I remember the marchese telling her one afternoon last week, when most of the others were out of the room, how Franco ~~sometimes~~ used, ~~for apparently no reason,~~ to go into his room suddenly, throw himself on the bed and burst into tears. This worried and disturbed the marchese.

But doesn't he realise that he caused the tears, ~~partly~~ ^{partly} ~~the~~ ^{the} marchese ~~know~~ ^{Does he really} know everything; is he trying to protect his own honour by seeming not to ~~know~~ [?] Yet what honour can he think he has, at this

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point? He's a marchese at a time when there are no titles. He has trained people to give him that name by hard persistence day after day; that is some achievement after two world wars, to be called marchese without it seeming ridiculous; you have to admire him for it.

I wonder if he knows everything and suffers, watching the divining eyes of the people close to him---people like me, who know the situation? Once or twice last year he gave little indications that he knew. I wonder?

I remember Franco coming down from the north last year, very bronzed and clean-looking, and what terrible quarrels this caused between the marchese and Luciana. On the evening before he went back I remember Franco was sitting with her on the terrace overlooking the gravel path, where the trees move softly at night, and I remember how, as it got later, the marchese came downstairs again in his pyjamas and snapped at her---she must come to bed, this kind of life was ridiculous, it was already past midnight! She looked like a young girl in the half-darkness. She simply nodded to him, ~~and her heart was quiet~~ ^{and} ~~she was unmoved, by any~~ ^{thing he said,} and there was about her that ruthlessness and obstinacy of a wife in love with someone else. Franco simply looked the other way, into the darkness of the garden, while the marchese talked. They had both hoped he would be asleep by now.

Franco had the bedroom near the kitchen, on the ground floor, while all the other bedrooms were upstairs, and if the Count had fallen asleep they would both have gone there and locked the door.

I noticed that whenever Franco was in town with me, drinking at one of the ~~bars~~ ^{cafés,} or in a party of people, he was lighter, less thoughtful, as if he'd ~~re-entered~~ ^{come back} the world ~~after~~ ^{after} a too-terrible happiness, ~~perhaps.~~ ^{perhaps.} The other day Luciana showed me ~~one of his~~ ^{one of his} letters ~~in which he said that everywhere he went with her, the~~

smallest café, a ^{restaurant} ~~social room~~ in Naples where they'd sat and watched the beach far below, the roads they drove along, the hotel bedrooms at night, the stations where they met and said goodbye, became remarkable ~~for him and for her~~ for him, under a special light, primevally brilliant, ~~wordless~~, and if he ever saw these places again, without her, they would still be under that light, as if she'd baptised them for him.

And she wrote in reply that she never felt shame ^{with him,} ~~in his~~ presence, they could do anything to each other without sensing the forbidden; that she couldn't live an hour without thinking about him and dreaming him back. Only when they talked to each other did they find real rest, and compared with that all the other talk they did was irksome. Their first moment of meeting again was always unbearably ecstatic.

She asked me if he was such a strong, golden presence for me as well, for example when we were all at table? And I said, 'Yes, he has so much light in him, like the sun.' But she pressed the question harder, leaning forward with strained eyes like a young girl, and asked, did this presence cancel out the rest of the world for me as it did for her, did I find the same solace in his talk, did other people, especially other girls, feel exactly what she felt, except that she was happy enough to possess him? This made me smile, and I said, yes, it's true he has light in him, but these are your feelings, ~~because~~ ^{she} you're in love with him.

It began by accident and ^{she} hadn't meant it to continue. She was joking with him, sitting on his bed after everybody else was upstairs, and when she ruffled his hair he pulled her towards him suddenly, still her nephew, and then, swiftly, in a kind of sleep where the house and its clucking people had slipped away, they embraced each other; and it was like the first primeval love of dreams. They left each other ashamed and awed. Next morn-

ing she told him he'd been wicked to ^{even} think of doing such a thing, and they must both forget ~~about~~ it as soon as possible. At lunch, at a table of ten or twelve people, she told everyone how Franco seemed to prefer older women, and she watched him blush painfully; he thought she'd deserted him, deserted her own act. But that night, when everyone ^{was in} ~~had gone to~~ bed, they went to the same bedroom by the kitchen, and their love was this time wilder, because they were rebelling against their own ^{Shame,} ~~commands,~~ and against a world which could ^{never} ~~not~~ come up to their dreams. From that time on she never scolded him again, never tried to stop herself. And she began to think of him every hour of the day. Being away from him was now a pain; though apparently no one else noticed this.

At that time Franco had actually been living in the house, with Vittoria, his mother; he was a frailer and more sheltered person then than he is now. He had no work and would sit for hours in the room overlooking the gravel path, playing with the radio, reading.

One day he came to her and said he could bear it no longer, he was so much in love. He didn't say at first with whom, and she was confident as she looked up at him and smiled that it was herself. But, without moving ~~from his position~~ / from his position, he told her that it was her daughter Angelina, and ~~then~~ he must marry her.)

She wanted to scream something, but sat there watching him, her mouth a little open, hardly daring to breathe; and it was clear from his eyes that he had no idea of her pain. Instead, he stood in front of her like a son.

And she hadn't even noticed him and Angelina together. They'd taken walks together, they'd been to the cinema but never once had that thought crossed her mind. She suddenly felt her age, the difference of years between them. For weeks after this she suffered the kind of loneliness---crying alone at night in her room,

awake the whole night, and the next night again, in a delirium of grief---which we all hope will never come again after youth.

She spent hours on her bed upstairs listening for a noise, her door open, knowing that he and Angelina were below. She lay smoking cigarette after cigarette, starting whenever she heard the murmur of a voice or heard her daughter cough, thinking it was a passionate cry, or when the divan creaked, its springs clanging quietly together. And she would only rest, closing her eyes for the first time, when Angelina came into the bedroom and lay down at her side, and she heard his door close downstairs. For months now Luciana no longer slept with her husband.

She and Angelina said little to each other during those days. She thought her daughter knew what she was suffering, but couldn't be sure. She asked her suddenly once, was she really in love with Franco (as a mother would ask the question), but Angelina shrugged ^{and} ~~her shoulders~~ ^{ed,} pouted ^{and} and said she didn't know. At any rate, Angelina didn't marry Franco. It wasn't mentioned again. I think she felt the will of her mother drawing her back, ~~the way~~ without knowing quite what was happening; she couldn't face the separation from her mother that marriage would involve, and perhaps Luciana worked on this. And she couldn't bear her silent disapproval. Nobody in the family was proof against that. So she slowly gave way, as a bull in the ring, with the sword deep in his neck and the picadors drawing closer, in the heat and deafening cries, turns slowly round, his head lower and lower, and gives in, slips down on the sand and doesn't move again. Luciana had the sword, and plunged it in quickly, her eyes closed---this was the daughter she adored and slept with every night.

A few weeks later Angelina came to her and said that she was no longer interested in Franco, and made a face as if to say that

she was disgusted. This meant for Luciana that he'd tried to make love to her and failed; she was deliriously happy. She took it to be a miracle, and she and Franco made love ~~with~~ again with the same easy wildness as at first. On his side, he seemed to have recovered from Angelina; ~~he~~ no longer described her loveliness at length to Luciana, nor did he say again that he wanted to marry her.

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Angelina clearly wants children, and perhaps a husband; but she would have the first without the second. She ~~is always~~ ^{is} feeling ^{all the time;} ill; she suffers these peculiar spasms of spite and hatred, which make her shoulders slope more than usual, her eyes dim and mean; her voice becomes a murmur, she ^{looks like} ~~seems~~ a fierce beast caught ^{in a cage.} ~~She is strong~~ When her anger is up she can be cruel with her hands. I've seen her pull Dino's hair with all her strength, and in a moment of bitterness twist the cat's tail; and most of her joking takes the form of horseplay. Last night, at a small party held in Nina's house behind the vineyard, she pulled a chair back just as I was about to sit down after a dance and I landed on the floor; she hit a young man ^{in the} ~~on his~~ back ^{with} a terrific blow while he was gazing out of the window, watching the moon come up; she was constantly ^{pinching} ~~pulling~~ people, ~~at arms~~, burning their bare arms ever so slightly with the tip of her cigarette while they talked. When she does this people look away in embarrassment; Luciana asks her why she has to be 'bad' like this. Angelina's ~~gaily~~ horseplay was once gaiety, but it isn't now.

Every day she goes to a huge locomotive factory south of Rome and works in the office just behind the assembly-room. The noise is continuous and deafening, but when ~~ever~~ I ask her about it she says

she finds it comforting; in fact, after three years she couldn't do without it. She comes back to the house silent and tired in the evenings, proud of having a grown-up job: she sits down without speaking, sighing like an old woman, not answering Luciana's solicitous questions, shrugging and yawning, and her face ~~becomes~~^{is} as ugly as a pretty face can be. If I happen to be talking to Luciana, quietly and easily as we do, she will cut across the conversation with 'Did you think to order butter today?' or 'Why was Dino dipping about in the pool, you know he comes in with his feet covered in mud, and then Nella complains---!'

Her work at the locomotive factory is a ^{kind of} daily ^{homage} ~~contribution~~ to law and order and respectability, ^{to} all the things she ~~misses~~^{misses} at home. I suppose this is how people whose work has no ~~personal~~ meaning can walk the streets with their heads up: we have a shamed sense of being different from Everyone Else when we're young, dirtier perhaps, and when we get a job like Everyone Else it seems like a proud new status when it's really nothing at all.

But now and then Angelina talks to me quietly too, reminiscing: about the island of Ponza---she seems as fascinated as her little brother; about how your feet show blue when you put them in the water, how glorious it is to approach the island through a rough sea, with the boat riding out of the waves and then nosing down again, and how, if you stand on the tallest rock, you can see the whole land and the limitless sea all round it, green and blue and touched with foamy white; and how there is one child on the island, a boy who serves at table, with a proud and angelic face; ~~at a time~~^{at him} you have to look ^{at him} all the time because he moves so slowly and perfectly, like a ^{little god,} ~~chosen creature,~~ with a smile that ^{makes} ~~cancel out~~ the lives we lead ^{seem ridiculous,} Or she tells me about a journey she made south once, when she saw Ischia and wanted to live there, how she

loves islands, how if she married she would want to take her husband away and be alone with him, separate from the world, on ~~just such~~ ^{like these} islands... She never talks about people in this quiet, dreaming way. ~~her eyes for the first time looking right beyond the world:~~ she doesn't really trust people, nor can she believe easily that they're as clean-living and decent as she is. At the factory she goes to the canteen as little as possible, while the other office-workers go down in a great ^{gang} ~~party~~ every afternoon.

I noticed at the party the other evening, when she was tired and perhaps a bit ashamed of her horseplay, she sat at the edge of the room watching the rest of us, half-smiling, lost in our movements and expressions ~~cancelling herself out~~ as if she'd suddenly turned into an old woman with golden hair. I noticed her eyes especially, how dreaming they were, as if to say, 'Ah, I belonged to life once...'

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This morning I was woken soon after dawn by Nella's terrible shouting: you seldom wake up peacefully here, never in silence. But silence when it does fall over the house is moving and glorious, like the proclamation of something you've forgotten and thought was impossible again.

The trouble was started by Michele. He came down the stairs imitating a ton of coals as usual and, ^{just to} ~~piling~~ ^{his feet were} ~~with~~ Pelion on Ossa, ^{and dirty} ~~dirty~~ bare ^{feet} just as Nella was scrubbing the tiled floor. She asked him not to tread where she'd already worked. He asked her wasn't she paid for her work, and this infuriated her, coming from a fourteen-year-old boy. She ^{started} ~~began~~ shouting at the top of her voice, and this was where I regained consciousness. She

put her voice right next to my door: even when she is saying kindly and amusing things they sound like the foulest insults, and when she ~~raises~~ shouts you feel like a man being punished for a crime ~~he didn't know~~ ^{never} he'd ~~had~~ committed.

All day there are quarrels, shouting, the slamming of doors, the calling of names and screamed curses. So ~~seldom~~ ^{rarely} does silence fall---and at any moment it may be broken with deliberate murderous enjoyment---that every day teaches you a better appreciation of it. It may be Dino sliding down the bannister of the stairs, making a precipitous rumbling noise that fills the whole house as he turns the corner into the straight, or Michele pushes ^{ing} open a door with his foot, making it slam against the wall, or the marchese arrives ^{ing} suddenly on his motor-scooter and stalks ^{ing} into the ~~big~~ ^{with his big feet,} room peering about. Nothing can be predicted. Nella may be polite and quiet and even amusing now, doing her work willingly, looking after everyone, and then, not a minute later, she'll be screaming her head off and taking her own son by his neck, in a firm grip, and giving him great smacks across the face, or decrying the house for being dirty and degenerate and a sink of vice, and for paying her too little.

Sometimes the mornings open marvellously, with ~~Angelina~~ ^{Luciana} bringing a cup of steaming black coffee into my room as the sun comes through the shutters on to the light tiled floor, and the house is silent after the children have left for school, and the daughters and the marchese have left for work; then breakfast is prepared and laid for me at a corner of the table in the big room, and ~~she~~ ^{she} ~~Angelina~~ sits with me smoking and talking while I ~~eat~~ ^{eat}.

This morning, after Nella's shouting had stopped, I found there was no coffee, no tea, no bread. There was filth everywhere, the child Dino was whimpering in a corner, and even Angelina's room, which is a refuge for me, was full of Nella's

brushing and scrubbing things, with the bedclothes all over the floor. Luciana had gone to town. I walked about the house cursing them all, finding suddenly that I'd become part of the family--- ~~its~~ ^{part of} its hatred. Perhaps my face had begun to wear the same dark, mean and yet strangely ardent look, ~~as they had~~. I blamed Luciana with all the others---for the chaos, the filth, the way you had to scratch for food. Then I saw the bus from the village stop at the end of the path and ~~Luciana~~ ^{she} step ^{ped} down. And at once a cool stream of the gentlest good will, ~~like sudden mountain-air~~, seemed to flow into the garden, like a ~~sudden~~ mountain breeze from the peaks ~~behind~~ ^{beyond} the misty, sweating vineyards, that look blue and light-brown and sometimes grey in the distance, ~~and seem to be waiting for God to step down on them~~. I grew quiet and ~~watched~~ ^{watched} her walking neatly down the gravel path, her hair grey at the sides, her eyes sharp and black; she was distant like ~~some~~ ^{one} in a picture. The rooms felt easy again, Dino stopped whining. I went to the kitchen to meet her and she made me tea, the best China blend, and gave me her special morning dish of bread and and garlic, parsley and basil chopped tomatoes soaked with oil, ~~and parsley and basil chopped~~ over them.

'You must be so hungry,' she said.

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The lunch today was ~~quieter~~ ^{quieter} than any I've known here on a Sunday, when there are usually ~~vistors~~ ^{vistors}, and cars draw up outside the front porch and there are incessant hand-shakings and cries of welcome ~~to~~ (simulated, to hide bitter family feuds); the dogs bark, people run up and down the steps, the children are excited, the radio is switched on, the cats--- five of them, including a slim, elegant Siamese---creep under

people's legs or jump on ~~to~~ the table and steal the salami or lick the butter. But ~~yesterday~~ today the only visitors were Rosa and Flora, who are really members of ~~of~~ the family, ~~and~~ being ^{Francis's} ~~Vittoria's children~~ ~~Francis's~~ sisters; ~~some~~ ^{some} gentle and easy and as they live in Rome they have ^{none} ~~no~~ mark of the hard village ⁱⁿ ~~on~~ them; ~~they~~ ^{they} seem gentle and easy compared with the others.

Neither the marchese nor Angelina were there---that is, the two most nerve-wracking elements were missing. It has occurred to me lately that he's really shy of people and makes a special harsh effort to get across to them; he is always the first up to bed in the afternoon, leaving everyone else at table, perhaps knowing in his mysterious and blind-seeming way that they can talk and smile better without him. As for Angelina, she takes command of all the practical things at table, smacking Dino's knees when he won't sit properly in his chair, shouting across at Michele in her ^{rough,} ~~rough,~~ housewife's voice to eat decently and not to snatch the bread, calling out to Nella to bring in the next course, remarking on the taste of this and that, with sudden ^e surreptitious glances under her brow. With her at table there is more discipline ^u but less peace.

Today Luciana was in charge, governing our spirits. Only in Dino did there remain a trace of the ugly, cruel will, but Vittoria's daughters were so gentle with him that he started to find himself amusing, a grown-up wit, and after he'd got us all laughing he even ate decently, to keep his position of equality ^e with the ~~people~~. The table felt quite adrift from the village. Then everyone went away quietly to sleep. The house fell into an afternoon silence, with the sun at its hottest glowing hour, the curtains over the french windows stirring and billowing out with the slow, cool breeze from the sea. When everybody had gone Maddalena put the radio on quietly, and after the first notes

I came out to listen. It was Cavaradossi's aria on the battlements of Sant Angelo, from Tosca, and Maddalena made it louder as I sat down, realising I'd come to listen. There was a snatch of music, like something from another world--- where I might never be again---and then Nella's shouting started with a double vengeful force, like a reminder. The dishes clattered together in the kitchen, the loose valves of the radio made the voice and orchestra a blur whenever there was a crescendo or the pitch rose.

And later that day, as if it had been arranged to coincide with the absence of the marchese and Angelina---or perhaps they'd left the house in a huff, after they'd heard he was coming--- Franco appeared from the north for ten days' holiday. The first two or three days were sweltering and sullen, but with a strange ecstatic excitement in the air. The furniture and the garden outside looked mysterious, and Luciana went round the house with glowing eyes. The marchese and Angelina came back, glum and mute, and Angelina hardly greeted Franco. The marchese was gentle and pleasant with him, ^{watching} ~~watching~~ him from under his eyebrows, with a trace of admiration. Slowly the gloom entered Luciana, too, as the time for him to go back drew nearer. Her eyes glowed no longer. She seemed to know something. Suddenly, two or three days before ^e he was due to leave, he was gone.

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Luciana came to me in the afternoon, drooping and weak, with a cold she'd caught from Franco, and asked me, couldn't I find her a job in Rome somewhere, anything to stop her thinking about him? That day was sad and nervous, full of rain and low, thick clouds. In the evening she and Vittoria and I were sitting by the radio, at a little table where we sometimes ^{have} coffee in the afternoon, with a candle alight in the middle because the electricity was failing, due to the storms outside. The house was

extraordinarily silent, the windows were tight shut against the dead, sultry air. Vittoria had been weeping all day because her son had 'neglected' her all the time he was home---never once asked her to come to the city, never stayed in the house with her: all because Luciana claimed him every minute. She sat in her chair sewing coloured designs on to canvas squares as always, her head bent forward, a cigarette in the corner of her ^u mouth, a ~~win~~ glass of wine at her side, sighing every now and then, 'Oh, Dio, Dio!', a tear rolling down her cheek which she never brushed away so that Luciana would see it. And all the while Luciana and I were talking in English, which she couldn't understand. Luciana asked me if it seemed to me that Franco still loved her, if I thought that such love could ever die, if it looked to me as if it was dying now... Her eyes had a dark, condemned look as she followed my ~~words~~ answers, ~~not wanting~~ bending forward to listen, not wanting to miss my verdict, though I said hardly anything; her face was paler than I'd ever seen it before, thinner, her jaw very pointed, the slimness of her cheeks making her eyes look more pained and wide-open. But whenever I said, 'You're unhappy', she shook her head and said, 'NO!' The fact is that this was Franco's last visit. Vittoria is to move away, to a place of her own, perhaps with her daughters, and in future Franco will go to them on his holidays. But Luciana couldn't bring herself to tell me yet.

For some reason the index finger of her right hand ~~has swollen~~ ^{swelled} up and looks ^{it} like ~~blood-poisoning~~ ^{blood-poisoning}. She ~~says~~ ^{said} that when she ~~is~~ ^{was} rested and happy she ~~is~~ ^{was} never ill, that if her body went wrong it was because of the way she felt inside.

Angelina seems to resent her mother's last burst of passion with Franco more than her own loss of him. The marchese is still mute. The passion rang through the house in the few days that Franco was here: the whole house was ecstatic, under its weight.

Nothing else seemed to go on. And everyone seemed powerless against it. They gazed into each other's eyes for hours on end, it seemed. At table they never addressed a ^word to other people. Its sheer force seemed to bow other people, and remove their power of complaint and criticism. It even seemed to fascinate them. Nobody really wanted to stop it, even Vittoria who sat ~~and~~ in her chair and cried all the time. The marchese was gentle and wan as I've never known him before.

Gradually Dino makes his claims on Luciana again. Michele has a fight in the village, over a girl: the marchese has to go down and settle ~~it~~ it. Maria calls and there seems to be a slight glow of triumph in her eyes as she looks at Luciana. There is another little dinner-party, with drinks, at the house behind the vineyard, with Luciana and Angelina as guests. The marchese continues to sleep alone. And Angelina and her mother sleep together as before. It is decided to get rid of Renato and his wife, to economise. Soon the grapes will be gathered, and the wine made in the courtyard at the back. Signora Flavaⁱ has been away all this time, staying in Rome with Vittoria's two daughters: she had to be kept out of it, while the passion was loose. She comes back looking dry and remote: she is so old that the passion is one part of the story she can no longer grasp. Maddalena looks a shade more sourly wise. But then the evenings draw in. A fire is lit in the hearth. We all gather round it, drinking the first young wine, that goes straight to your head. And slowly we're captive again in our little dramas, and the house waits for another year, and other victims, to un^fold.
