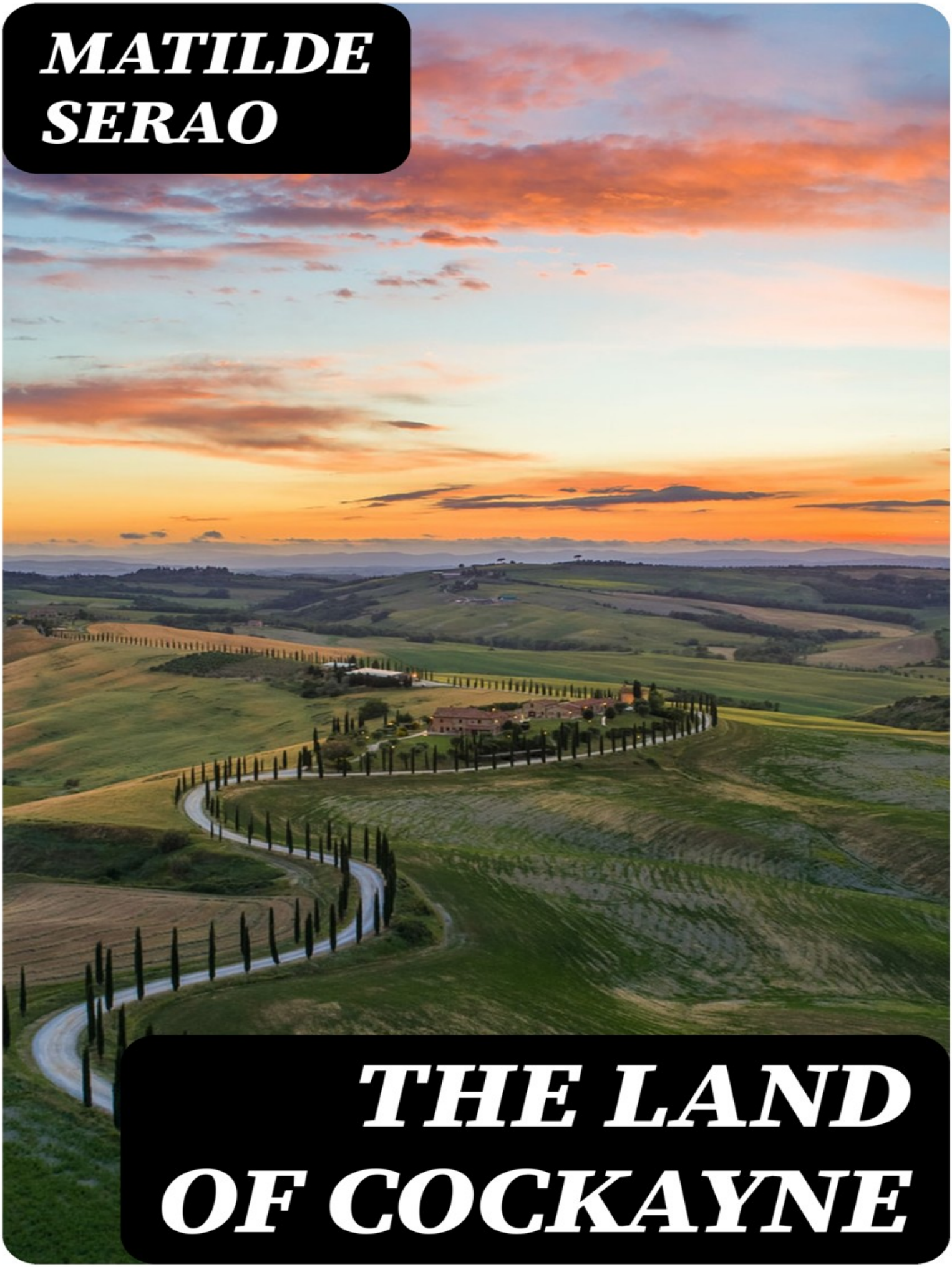
MATILDE SERAO



THE LAND OF COCKAYNE

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Matilde Serao

The Land of Cockayne

A Novel

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CHAPTER I

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THE LOTTERY DRAWING

The afternoon sun crept into the Piazzetta dei Banchi Nuovi, broadening from Cardone's, the engraver, to Cappa's, the chemist, lengthening on from there up the whole Santa Chiara Road, spreading a light of unusual gaiety over the street, which always wears, even in its most frequented hours, a frigid, claustral aspect. But the great morning traffic, of people coming from the northern districts of the town—Avvocata, Stella, San Carlo all' Arena, San Lorenzo—to go down to the lower quarters of Porto, Pendino and Mercato, or *vice versâ*, had been slowly slackening since mid-day; the coming and going of carts, carriages and pedlars had ceased; everybody seemed to be taking short cuts by the Chiostro di Santa Chiara and the Vico 1º Foglia towards Mezzocannone Alley, the Gesù Nuovo, San Giovanni Maggiore. Presently the sun's brightness lit up a street by then quite deserted. The shopkeepers on the right side of Santa Chiara—as the left side is only the high, dark enclosure wall of the Poor Clares' Convent—dealers in old dusty or wretched mean new furniture, coloured engravings, shiny oleographs, wooden and stucco saints, were at the back of their dark shops, eating over a corner of wine-stained tablecloth, with a caraffe of Marano small wine, closed by a twisted vine-leaf, standing by a big dish of macaroni. The porters, seated on the ground at the shop entrance, were eating lazily at a small loaf of bread, cut in two to hold some tasty viand—fried gourd soaked in

vinegar, parsnips in green sauce, pomegranates seasoned with vinegar, garlic and pepper. The sharp, greasy smell of the quantity of tomatoes all this macaroni was cooked in, from one end of the street to the other, mingled with the acute odour of sour vinegar and coarse spices. From some passing fruitseller, carrying a nearly empty basket of figs on his head, or pushing a barrow with purple plums, and tough spotted peaches at the bottom of the baskets, the shopkeepers, clerks and porters, lips still red from tomatoes or shining with grease, bargained for a penny-worth of fruit, to finish their meal; two workmen, in front of the Martello printing-shop, where the small visiting-card press had stopped, deeply coveted a yellow melon; and two seamstresses were waiting on a doorstep chattering, till the seller of *pizza* passed, which is the shredded rind of tomato, garlic, and wild marjoram, cooked in the oven, and sold at a farthing, a half-penny, a penny, the piece. The *pizzaiuolo* did pass, in fact, but he was carrying his wooden tray, shining with oil, under his arm, without a bit of *pizza*; he had sold everything, and was going off to eat his own meal, down to the Porto quarter, where his shop was. The two disappointed seamstresses consulted each other; one of them, a blonde, with a golden aureole round her pale gentle face, moved off with that undulating step that gives an Oriental touch to a Neapolitan woman's charm. She went up Santa Chiara Road, bending her head so as not to get the sun in her face, and went into Impresa Lane, towards the wine-seller's dark shop —which was a drinking-shop, too—almost opposite the Impresa Palace; she was going to buy something to eat for her friend and herself. The Impresa Lane had got empty,

too, after mid-day, when all go back to their houses and shops to eat, as the summer heat gets greater, and the *controra*—the time of the Neapolitan day that corresponds to the Spanish siesta—begins with food, rest and sleep for tired folk. The dressmaker, a little frightened by the darkness of the cellar, out of which came a sour smell of wine, had stopped on the threshold; blinking, she looked on the ground before going in, feeling that an open underground cave, with a black gaping mouth, was dangerous. But the shop-boy came towards her to serve her.

'Give me something to eat with my bread,' she said, swaying herself a little.

'Fried fish?'

'No.'

'A little dried cod with sauce?'

'No, no'—with disgust.

'A morsel of tripe?'

'No, no.'

'What do you want, then?' the boy asked, rather annoyed.

'I would like—I would like three-halfpence-worth of meat; we will eat it with our bread—Nannina and I,' said she, with a pretty greedy grimace.

'We don't cook meat to-day; it is Saturday. Only tripe for unbelievers on Saturday.'

'Well, give me the salt cod,' she murmured, withholding a sigh. Then she looked into the Impresa court with curiosity, while the youth disappeared into the black depths of the cellar to get the cod. A little ray of sunshine coming from the top turned the court golden; every now and then some

man or woman's form crossed it. Antonietta, the seamstress, went on staring, humming a popular dirge, slightly swaying on her hips.

'Here is the cod,' said the youth, coming back. He had put it in a small plate; there were four big bits falling into flakes, in a reddish sauce strongly seasoned with pepper, the sauce, as it waved about, leaving yellow oily marks on the edges of the gray plate.

'Here is the money,' Antonietta murmured, pulling it out of her pocket. But she stood with the plate in her hand, looking at the cod falling to pieces in the juice.

'If I were to take a *terno*,' she said, as she went on her way, holding the plate carefully, 'I should like to gratify my wish of eating meat every day.'

'Meat and macaroni,' the boy called back, laughing.

'Just so—meat and macaroni,' the seamstress shouted triumphantly, her eyes still fixed on the plate, not to let the sauce fall.

'Morning and evening,' called out the boy from the doorway.

'Morning and evening,' Antonietta answered back.

'You should apply to that youth,' the boy shouted gaily from the cellar, indicating the Impresa court with his eyes.

'I'll come back later,' said the seamstress from the corner of the street; 'I'll bring you the plate.'

Again the Impresa Lane was deserted for a long time. In winter it is much frequented at mid-day by the young students coming out of the University, who take the shortcut to the Gesù and Toledo; but it was summer—the students had their holidays. Still, every now and then, as the hour

went on, someone came round the corner from Santa Chiara or Mezzocannone, and stopped in the Impresa gateway—some with a cautious look, others feigning indifference. One of the first had been a shoeblack, with his block—a lame old dwarf, who carried it on his raised hips; he was bent in two, wrapped up in an old great-coat, green, stained and patched, a cap with no peak over his eyes.

He had put down his block under the Impresa portico, and stretched himself out on the ground, as if awaiting customers; but he forgot to beat those two dry claps with the brush on the wood to claim it. Deeply engrossed with a long list of ticket numbers in his hand, the old dwarf's yellow, distorted face was transformed by intense passion. As the hour got near, people went on passing before him, and a murmur of hoarse, strident Neapolitan voices rose in the court.

A man, a workman, stopped near the shoeblack; he might have been thirty-five, but he was wan, and his eyes were dull; his jacket was thrown over his shoulder, showing a coloured calico shirt.

'Do you want a shine?' the bootblack asked mechanically, laying down his list of numbers.

'Just so,' replied the other, grinning; '*I* want a shine. If I had another half-penny, I would have played a last ticket at Donna Caterina's to-day.'

'The *small* game?' asked the shoeblack in a whisper.

'Yes, a little for the Government and a little to Donna Caterina. They are all thieves—all thieves,' the workman afterwards added, chewing his black stump of a cigar, and shaking his head with a look of great distrust.

'You have taken a half-holiday to-day?'

'I never go there on Saturday,' said the other, giving a sickly smile. 'I go to look for Fortune; I must find her some Saturday morning!'

'When do you get your week's money?'

'Eh!' he said, shrugging his shoulders—'generally on Fridays: I have nothing to get.'

'How do you manage to gamble?'

'One can always get it for gambling. Donna Caterina's sister—she of the *small* game—lends money.'

'Does she take big interest?'

'A sou for each franc every week.'

'Not bad—not bad,' said the shoeblack, with a convinced look.

'I have seventy-five francs to give her,' said the glove-cutter. 'Every Monday there is a storm. She waits for me outside the factory door, shouting and swearing. She is really a witch, Michele. But what can I do? One day or other I will take a *terno*, and I will pay her.'

'What will you do with the rest of your winnings?' Michele asked, laughing.

'I know what I will do,' cried Gaetano, the cutter. 'In new clothes, a pheasant's feather in my cap, in a carriage with bells, we will all go to amuse ourselves at the Due Pulcinelli, at Campo di Marte.'

'Or at Figlio di Pietro, at Posellipo.'

'At Asso di coppe, at Portici.'

'Inn after inn.'

'Meat and macaroni.'

'And Monte di Procida wine.'

'Just so, one only lives once,' the glove-cutter philosophically concluded, pulling his jacket up on his shoulder.

'I don't get into debt,' the shoeblack added, after a minute's silence.

'Lucky you!'

'I would get no one to lend me a sou, anyhow. But I play everything. I have no family; I can do what I like.'

'Lucky you!' Gaetano repeated, with a troubled look.

'Three sous for a sleeping-place, five or six for food,' went on the shoeblack, 'and who says a word to me? I did not want to marry; I had a rage for gambling: it stands in place of everything.'

'May he that invented marriage be hanged!' blasphemed Gaetano, getting clay colour.

Four o'clock was approaching, and the Impresa court filled up with people. In that space of a hundred metres was a crowd of common people pressed together, chattering in a lively way or waiting in resigned silence, looking up to the first-floor at the covered balcony, where the lottery drawing was to come off. But all was shut up above, even the wooden shutters, behind the glass of the great balcony. As other people came up continually, the crowd reached to the wall of the court even. Women that were pushed back had squatted on the first steps of the stair; others, more bashful, hid under the balcony among the pillars that held it up, leaning against a shut stable door. Another woman, still young, but with a pallid, worn, fascinating face, rather strange, melancholy black eyes, hollow-rimmed, and thick black locks loose on her neck, had climbed on a stone left in

the courtyard, perhaps from the time the palace was built or restored. She looked very thin in her dyed black gown, that went in folds over her lean breast; she was swinging one foot in a broken, out-at-heel shoe, pulling up on her shoulders now and then a wretched little shawl, dyed also. She overlooked the crowd, gazing at it with downcast, sad eyes. It was almost entirely composed of poor people—cobblers who had shut up their bench in the dens they lived in, had rolled their leather aprons round their waists: in shirt-sleeves, cap over the eyes, they pondered in their minds the numbers they had played, slightly moving their lips; servants out of place, who, instead of trying for a master, used up the last shilling from the pawned winter coat, dreaming of the *terno* that from servants would make them into masters, whilst an impatient frown crossed the gray faces, where the beard, no longer shaven, grew in patches. There were hackney coachmen, who had left their cab in the care of a friend, brother, or son, waiting patiently, hands in pocket, with the stolidity of a cabman used to waiting hours for a hire; there were letters of furnished rooms, hirers of servants, who in summer, with all the strangers and students gone, sat pining in their chairs under the board that forms their whole shop, at the corners of San Sepolcro Lane, Taverna Penta, Trinità degli Spagnuoli; having played a few sous taken from their daily bread, they came to hear the lottery drawn, being unemployed—and lazy. There were hands at humble Neapolitan trades, who, leaving the factory, warehouse, or shop, giving up their hard, badly-paid work, clutching in their worn-out waistcoat pocket the five sous ticket, or bundle of numbers at the *little*

game, had come to pant over that dream that might become a reality. There were still more unlucky people—that is to say, all those who in Naples do not live by the day even, but by the hour, trying a hundred trades, good at all, but unable, unluckily, to find safe remunerative work; unfortunates without home or shelter, shamefully torn and dirty, they had given up their bread that day to play a throw. One read in their faces the double marks of fasting and extreme abasement.

Some women were noticeable among the crowd—slovenly women, of no particular age, nor beauty; servants out of place, desperate gamblers' wives, who gambled themselves, dismissed workwomen, and among them all Carmela's pale, fascinating face, the girl seated on the stone—a faded face with big, tired eyes. Later on, as the hour for the drawing got near, and the noise increased, among the few gray women's faces and torn calico dresses, discoloured from too frequent washings, quite a different woman's face showed. She was a tall, strong woman of the lower class, with a high-coloured dark face; her chestnut hair was drawn back, elaborately dressed—the fringe on her narrow forehead had even a touch of powder; and heavy earrings of uneven, round, greeny-white pearls pulled down her ears, so that she had had to secure them by a black silk string, fearing they would break the lobes; a gold necklace and a thick gold medallion hung over the white muslin vest, all embroidered and tucked with lace. She pulled up a transparent black silk crape shawl on her shoulders every now and then, to show her hands, which were covered with thick gold rings up to the second joint. Her eye was grave

and quiet, with a slight look of quiet audacity, her mouth settled and severe; but on going through the crowd, on her way to sit on the third step of the stair, to see and hear better, she kept that bend of the head, rather coquettish and mysterious, peculiar to the Neapolitan lower class, and the swaying of her body under the shawl that a Naples woman dressed in the French fashion soon loses. Still, in spite of the natural sympathy that womanly figure inspired among the crowd, there was almost a hostile murmur and something like an indignant movement. She shrugged her shoulders disdainfully, and sat alone, upright, on the third step, keeping the shawl up on her shoulders, her ring-laden hands crossed in front. The murmur went on here and there. She looked at the crowd severely twice or thrice—rather proudly. The voices ceased; the woman's eyelids fluttered, as if from gratified pride.

But, finally, over all the others—over Carmela, with her faded face and great sad eyes; over Donna Concetta, with her ringed fingers and powdered fringe, the handsome, healthy, rich Concetta, the usurer, sister to Donna Caterina, the holder of the *small* game—above the crowd in the court, entrance, and street, a woman's form stood out, drawing at least one look from the people gathered together. It was the woman on the first-floor of the Impresa Palace, sitting sideways behind the balcony railings; one saw her profile bending over the bright steel fittings of a Singer sewing-machine, lifting her head now and then, whilst her foot, coming from under a modest blue-and-white striped petticoat, beat evenly on the iron pedal, regularly rising and falling. Among the stir of voices, the conversations from one

end of the court to the other, and stamping of feet, the dull quaver of the sewing-machine was lost; but the seamstress's figure stood out in profile on the balcony's gloomy background, her hands pushing the bit of white linen under the machine needle, her foot untiringly beating the pedal, her head rising and bending over her work, with no ardour, but no weariness, evenly on. A thin, rather pink cheek was shown in profile, and a thick chestnut tress neatly arranged close to the nape of the neck, the corner of a fine mouth, and the shade of long eyelashes thrown on the cheeks, could also be seen. During the hour the crowd was pouring into the court, the young seamstress had not looked down twice, giving a short indifferent glance and lowering her head again, taking the piece of linen slowly along in her hands, so that the seam should be quite straight. Nothing distracted her from her work—neither angry voice or lively remarks, nor the noise or the increasing trampling of the crowd; she had never looked at the covered balcony, where in a short time the drawings would be called out. The people from below stared at the delicate, industrious white sewer, but she went on with her work as if not even an echo of that half-covered, half-open excitement came up to her; she seemed so far off, so reserved, so wrapped up in a quite detached, different world, that one could fancy her more a statue than a reality —more of an ideal figure than a living woman.

But all at once a long shout of satisfaction burst out from the crowd in all varieties of tone, rising to the most stridulent and going down to the deepest note: the big balcony on the terrace had opened. The people waiting in

the road tried to get in at the entrance, those standing there crushed into the court; it was quite a squeeze, all faces were raised, seized by burning curiosity and anguish. A great silence followed. Looking keenly, one could see by the moving of some woman's lips that she was praying, whilst Carmela, the girl with the attractive, worn face and very sad black eyes, played with a black string tied round her neck that had a medallion of our Lady of Sorrows and a forked bit of coral. There was universal silence of expectation and stupor. On the terrace two Royal Lottery ushers had arranged a long narrow table covered with green cloth, and three armchairs behind it for the three authorities to sit in—a Councillor of the Prefecture, the Lottery Director at Naples, and a representative of the municipality. The urn for the ninety numbers was placed on another little table. It is a big urn, made of transparent metal, lemon-shaped, with brass bands going from one end to the other, surrounding it as the meridian line goes round the earth: these shining bands make it strong without spoiling its transparency. The urn is slung in the air between two brass pegs; a metal handle by one, when touched, makes the urn twist round on its axis. The two ushers who had brought out all these things to the terrace were old, rather bent, and sleepy-looking. The three authorities, in great-coats and tall hats, seemed bored and sleepy too, sitting behind the table; the Prefecture Councillor, with his deep, black dyed moustaches, was drowsy: he looked as if he had touched them in in brown on his sleepy dark face; it was the same with the secretary, a youth with a dark beard. These folk moved slowly, like automatons, so that a common man from the crowd called

out, 'Move on! move on!' Silence again, but a great wave of emotion when the little boy who was to take the numbers out of the urn appeared on the balcony.

He was a boy dressed in the gray poor-house uniform, a poor little fellow from the *serraglio*, as the Naples folk call these deserted creatures' asylum, a poor *serragliuolo* with no father nor mother, a son of parents who from cruelty or want had deserted their offspring. Helped by one of the ushers, the little boy put on a white woollen tunic over his uniform and a white cap, because lottery superstition requires the little innocent to wear innocence's white dress. He climbed nimbly on to a stool, so as to stand as high as the urn. Below, the crowd tossed about: 'Pretty lad, pretty lad!' 'May you be blessed!' 'I commend myself to you and to St. Joseph!' 'The Virgin bless your hand!' 'Blessed, blessed!' 'Holy and old—live to be holy and old!' Everyone said something, good wishes, blessings, requests, pious invocations, prayers. The child was silent, looking from him, his little hand resting on the urn's metal net. At a little distance, leaning against the balcony rail, was another *serraglio* child, very serious, in spite of his pink cheeks and fair hair cut on the forehead. It was the little boy who was to take out the numbers next Saturday; he came to learn, to get used to the working of the urn and the people's shouts. No one cared about him—it was the one dressed in white for that day to whom all the numerous exclamations were addressed; it was the innocent little soul in white that made that crowd of distracted beings smile tenderly, that brought tears to the eyes of those who hoped in Fortune only. Some women had raised their own boys in their arms, and held

them out to the *serragliuolo*. The tender, agitated, distressed voices went on: 'He looks like a little St. John, really!' 'May you always find grace, if you do me this favour!' 'Mother's darling, how sweet he is!' Suddenly there was a diversion. One of the ushers took a number to put into the urn; he showed it unfolded to the people, called it out in a clear voice, and passed it to the three authorities, who cast a distracted eye over it. One of the three, the Prefecture Councillor, shut up the number in a round box; the second usher passed it to the white-robed child, who threw it quickly into the urn, into its small open mouth. At every number that was called out there were remarks, shrieks, grins, and laughter. The people gave each number its meaning, taken from the 'Book of Dreams,' or from the 'Smorfia,' or that popular legend that grows without books or pictures. There were shouts of laughter, coarse jokes, frightened or hopeful ejaculations—all accompanied by a dull noise, as if it was the minor chord of the tempest.

'Two.'

'A baby girl.'

'The letter.'

'Bring me out this letter, sir.'

'Five.'

'The hand.'

'... in the face of him who ill-wished me.'

'Eight.'

'That is the Virgin—the Virgin.'

But as every tenth number, enclosed within its little round gray box, was thrown into the urn by the *serragliuolo*, the second usher shut its mouth and turned the handle,

giving it a spin on its axis that made the numbers roll round, dance, and jump. From below there were cries of:

'Spin, turn it round, old man.'

'Another spin for me.'

'Give me full measure.'

The Cabalists did not speak, they did not even look at the urn spinning: the innocent babe was nothing to them, the meaning of the numbers, nor the slow lively twirl of the big urn; for them the Cabal is everything, the obscure but still transparent Cabal, great, powerful, imperious Fate that knows all, and does all, without any power, human or divine, being able to oppose it. They alone kept silence, thoughtful, absorbed, disdaining that loud popular rejoicing, wrapped up in a spiritual, mystical world, waiting with deep confidence.

'Thirteen.'

'... that means the candles.'

'... the thick candle, the torch. Let us put out the torch!'

'... put it out—put it out!' the chorus echoed.

'... twenty-two.'

'... the madman!'

'... the little silly!'

'... like you.'

'... like me.'

'... like him that plays the small game—*alla bonafficiata*.'

The people got excited. Long shivers went through the crowd; it swayed about as if it was moved by the sea. Women especially got nervous, convulsive; they clutched the babies in their arms so hard as to make them grow pale and cry. Carmela, seated on the high stone, crumpled the

Virgin's medallion and the forked coral in her hand; the usurer, Donna Concetta, forgot to pull up the black crape shawl, which fell over her heavy hips, while her lips gave a slight convulsive flutter. No one cared any more about the sewing-machine's dull quaver nor the industrious white sewer. The Naples folks' feverishness got higher and higher as the dream that was to become a reality got nearer, getting a livelier, longer sensation when a popular, a lucky number was drawn.

Thirty-three!

These are Christ's years!

His years.

'... this comes out.'

'... it will not come out.'

'... you will see that it will.'

'Thirty-nine!'

'... the hanged rogue!'

'... take him by the throat—by the throat!'

'... so I ought to see what I said.'

'... squeeze him—squeeze him!'

Unmoved, the authorities, the ushers, the boy in white, went on with their work as if all this popular noise did not reach their ears; only the other infant, new to all that extraordinary sight, looked down from the railing, stupefied, pale, with swollen red lips, as if he wanted to cry—an unconscious, amazed little soul amid the storm of deep human passion. The business on the platform went on with the greatest calm; as every new tenth number was put into the urn, the usher made it twirl longer, making the little balls jump in a lively way inside the open network. Not a

word nor a smile was exchanged up there: the fever stayed at the height of the people in the court, it did not rise to the first floor. Down there the gravest people now laughed convulsively, in a subdued way, shaking their heads as if the infection had seized them in its most violent form. The affair seemed to be hurrying to the end. Renewed shouts received seventy-five, which is Punch's number, and seventy-seven, the devil's; but loud, drawn-out applause saluted the ninetieth, the last number, partly because it was the last, also ninety is a very lucky number: it means fear, also the sea; it means the people too; it has five or six other meanings, all popular. All in the court cheered, men, women, and children, at the great ninety, which is the omega of the lottery. Then all at once, like enchantment, a great silence fell: these faces and forms all kept motionless, and the great excited crowd seemed petrified in feelings, words, gestures and expression.

The first usher, the one who called out the ninety numbers, brought a long, narrow wooden board with five empty squares to the railing, such as bookmakers use on a race-course, whilst the other gave the urn its last twirl with all ninety numbers in it. The board was turned towards the crowd. Then the Councillor rang a bell; the urn stopped; another usher put a bandage over the white-clad infant's eyes; he slowly put his little hand into the open urn and searched for a minute only, quickly drawing out a ball with a number. Whilst the ball passed from hand to hand, a deep, dull, anguished sigh came out of those petrified bosoms down there.

'Ten!' shouted the usher, putting it quickly in the first square. A murmur and agitation among the crowd; all those who had hopes of the first drawing were disappointed. Another ring of the bell; the child put in its slender hand the second time. 'Two!' shouted the usher, announcing the number taken out and putting it into the second square. Some muttered oaths mingled with the rising murmur; all those who had played the second drawing were disappointed, and those who had hoped to take four numbers, those who had played the great *terno* in one, greatly feared to come out badly, so much so that, when the lad's small hand went into the urn the third time, someone called out in anguish:

'Search well; make a good choice, child.'

'Eighty-four!' shouted the usher, calling out the number and placing it in the third space. Here an indignant yell burst out, made up of oaths, lamentations, angry cries. This third number, being bad, was decisive for the drawing and the gamblers. With eighty-four, the hopes of all those who had played the first, second, and third drawing were frustrated; all those who had played the five sequence, fourths, the two treys, or these doubled, which is the hope and joy of Naples folk, hope and desire of all desperate players, and those that only play once on chance, saw they had missed it. The *terno* is the essential word of all these longings, needs, necessities, and miseries. A chorus of curses arose against bad luck, evil fate, against the lottery and those who believe in it, against the Government, against that bad boy with such unlucky hands. '*Serragliuolo! Serragliuolo!*' was shouted from below, to insult him, and fists were shaken at

him. The little one did not turn to look; he stood motionless, with his eyes down. Some minutes passed between the third and fourth numbers; it happened so every week. The third number brought the frightful expression of the infinite popular disappointment. 'Seventy-five,' the usher said in a feebler voice, putting the number drawn in the fourth space. Among the angry voices that would not be soothed, some hisses sounded revengefully. Abuse poured on the child's head, but the greatest curses were against the lottery, where one could never win, never, where everything is arranged so that no one ever wins, especially against poor people. 'Forty-three,' the usher called out for the last time, placing the fifth and last number. A last gust of rage among the people—nothing more. In a minute all the cold lottery machinery disappeared from the terrace: the children, the three authorities, the urn with the eighty-five numbers and its pedestal, tables, chairs, and ushers, all went out of sight, the glass and shutters of the great balcony were shut in a minute; only the cruel board remained, straight against the balustrade, with its five numbers—these, these, the great misfortune and delusion!

Very slowly and unwillingly the crowd cleared out of the court. On those most excited by gambling passions the wind of desolation had blown, and overthrown them all. They felt as if their arms and legs were broken; their mouth had a bitter taste from anger. Those who that morning had played all their money, feeling no need of eating, drinking, nor smoking, feeding themselves with vivid visions of Cockaigne, dreaming for that Saturday evening, Sunday, and all the days following, quite a bellyful of fat, rich

dinners, tasting them in their imagination, held their hands feebly in their empty pockets. One could read in their desolate eyes the childish physical grief of the first pangs of hunger; and they had not, knew they could not get, bread to quiet their stomachs. Others, the maddest, fallen from the height of their hopes in a minute, experienced that long movement of mad anguish in which people will not, cannot, believe in bad luck. Their eyes had that wandering look that sees the shape of things no longer; their lips stammered incoherent words. It was these desperate fools who still kept their eyes on the board with the numbers, as if they could not yet convince themselves of the truth, and mechanically compared them with the long list of their tickets. The Cabalists, to conclude, did not go away yet; they held discussions among themselves, like so many philosophers or logicians, still wrapped up in lottery mathematics, where dwell the *figure*, the *cadenze*, the *triple*, the algebraic explanation of the *quadrato Maltese*, and Rutilio Benincasa's immortal lucubrations. But with those who went away, as with those who stayed, nailed to the spot by their excitement; those who discussed it violently, as with those who bent their heads, deadly white, courage all gone, without strength to move or think, the form of the desolation varied, but the substance of it was the same—deep, intense, making the inward fibres bleed, tending to destroy the very springs of life.

Michele, the lame shoeblack, still seated on the ground, with his black box between his crooked legs, had heard the drawing without getting up, hidden behind people who pressed around him. Now, while the crowd was slowly going

off, he hung down his head, and the yellow shade of his rickety old face got green, as if all his bile had gone to his brain.

'Have you got nothing?' asked a dull voice beside him.

He raised his gray eyes with pink lids mechanically and saw Gaetano, the glove-cutter, who showed in his chalky face the depression of disappointed hopes.

'No, nothing,' said the shoeblack shortly, lowering his eyes.

'There is nothing for me, either. If you have a few sous for a combination, old fellow, I will give them back on Monday.'

'Where could I get them? If you get hold of ten, we could make up five each,' the shoeblack muttered desperately.

'Good-bye, old fellow! Good-bye!' said the glove-cutter in a rough voice.

While Gaetano was going off under the gateway, Donna Concetta came alongside of him, slow and grave, her eyes down, the gold chain waving on her breast and ringed fingers.

'Have you won nothing, Gaetano?' she asked with a slight smile.

'I have been hit by an arrow!' shouted he, provoked to be so near the usurer, who reminded him of all his wretchedness, annoyed by her question at such a moment.

'All right—all right,' she returned coldly. 'We see each other on Monday—don't forget.'

'I don't forget; I keep you in my heart like the Virgin,' he called out, alongside of her, in a hissing voice.

She shook her head as she went off. She did not come there for her own interests, because she never gambled; nor

even to worry some of her debtors, like Gaetano. She came in her sister's interest, Donna Caterina, the holder of the *small game*, for she dared not show in public. Donna Caterina told her sister which numbers she dreaded most—that is to say, those she had played most on, for which she would have to pay the largest sums. Then Donna Concetta sent off a lad to her sister, who quickly made off, so as to pay no one. Three times already she had gone bankrupt so, with the gamblers' money in her pocket. She had fled once to Santa Maria, at Capua, once to Gragnano, once to Nocera dei Pagani, staying there two months. She had had the courage to come back and face the cheated gamblers, using audacity with some and giving a few sous to others, beginning the game again, while the robbed, cheated, and disappointed gamblers came back to her, incapable of denouncing her, seized by the fever again, or kept in awe by Donna Concetta, to whom they all owed money. So the concern went on. The money passed from one sister to another—from the one who held the bank and knew how to fail in time, to the money-lender who was daring enough to face the worst-intentioned of her debtors. Nor was her flight looked on as a crime, as cheating, by Donna Caterina and her customers; for did not the Government do the same thing, perhaps, on a larger scale? A gift of six million francs has been settled for each drawing for every *ruota* of eight: when, by a very rare combination, the winnings go above six millions, does not the Government fail too, making the entire profits smaller?

But that day there was no need for Donna Caterina to fail, to make off; the numbers drawn were so bad, perhaps

not one of her clients had won; and Donna Concetta climbed up the Chiara way very easily, not hurrying at all, knowing it was a desolate Saturday for all gambling Naples, getting ready for her battle of usury on Monday. All these unhappy creatures with broken hopes passed near her; she shook her head wisely over human aberrations, and clutched the hem of her crape shawl in her ringed fingers. A woman who was coming quickly down the street, dragging a little boy and girl behind her, and carrying a baby, touched her in passing on her way into the Impresa court, where some people were still lingering. She was very poorly dressed; her calico skirt was so frayed and dirty it filled one with pity and disgust, and she had a ravelled woollen shawl round her neck; her face was so lean and worn, her teeth so black, and hair so sparse, that the children, who were neither ragged nor dirty, looked as if they did not belong to her. The sucking child only was rather slight—it laid its head on her shoulder to sleep; but the poor thing was so agitated she did not notice it. Seeing Carmela, her sister, still seated on the high stone, her hands loose in her lap, and head sunk on the breast, all alone, as if petrified in speechless grief, she went up to her, and said:

'Carmela!'

'Good-day, Annarella,' said Carmela, starting, giving a sickly smile.

'Are you here too?' she asked in a sad, surprised tone.

'Yes, I came,' Carmela answered, with a resigned gesture.

'Have you seen my husband, Gaetano?' Annarella asked anxiously, letting the baby's head slide from her shoulder to her arm, so that it could sleep more comfortably.

Carmela raised her big eyes to her sister's face, but seeing her so dishevelled and ugly from privation and misery, so old already, so doomed to illness and death, asking the question so despairingly, she dared not tell her the truth. Yes, she had seen her brother-in-law Gaetano, the glove-cutter; she had first seen him trembling and anxious, thin, pale and downcast, but she felt too sorry for her sister, the delicate, sleeping baby, and the other two who were gazing around them, and she lied.

'I have not seen him at all.'

'He must have been here,' Annarella muttered in her rough drawl.

'I assure you he was not here, really.'

'You will not have seen him,' Annarella repeated, obstinate in her sad incredulity. 'How could he not come? He comes here every Saturday. He might not be at home with his little ones; he might not be at the glove factory, where he can earn bread; but he can't be anywhere else than here on Saturday to hear the numbers come out: here is his ruling passion and his death.'

'He plays a lot, doesn't he?' said Carmela, who had grown pale and had tears in her eyes.

'All that he can spare and more than he has got. We might live very well, without asking anything from anyone; but instead, with his *bonafficiata*, we are full of debts and mortifications; we only eat now and then, when I bring in something. These poor little things!'

Her voice was so broken with maternal agony that Carmela's tears fell, overcome by infinite pity. Now they were almost alone in the court.

'Why do you come to hear this lottery drawn?' Annarella asked, suddenly enraged against all those that play.

'What am I to do?' said the other in her sweet, broken voice. 'You know I would like to see you all happy, mother, and you, Gaetano, your babies, and my lover Raffaele—and somebody else. You know your cross is mine, that I have not an hour's peace thinking of what you suffer. So all that is over of my earnings I play: the Lord must bless me some day or other. I must get a *terno* then; then I'll give it all to you.'

'Poor sister!' said Annarella, with melancholy tenderness.

'That day must come—it must,' she whispered passionately, as if speaking to herself, as if she already saw that happy day.

'May an angel pass and say *amen*,' Annarella murmured, kissing her baby's forehead. 'Where can Gaetano be?' she went on, care coming back.

'Say truly,' begged Carmela, getting down from the stone on her way off, 'you have nothing to give the children to-day?'

'Nothing,' was the answer in that feeble voice.

'Take this half-franc, take it,' said the other, pulling it out of her pocket and giving it to her.

'God reward you.'

They looked at each other with such mutual pity that only shame of the passers-by kept them from bursting into sobs.

'Good-bye!'

'Good-bye, Carmela!'

The suffering girl kissed the baby softly. Annarella, with the languid step of a woman who has had too many children

and worked too hard, went off by the Santa Chiara cloister, pulling her two other little ones behind her. Carmela, pulling her discoloured shawl round her, dragging her down-at-heel shoes, went down towards Banchi Nuovi. It was just there a cleanly-dressed youth, his trousers tight at the knees and wide as bells over the ankle, with a neat jacket, and hat over one ear, stopped her with the look of his clear, cold, light-blue eyes, biting lips, as red as a girl's, under his fair little moustache. Stopping before she spoke to him, Carmela looked with such intense passion on the young fellow she seemed to wish to enfold him in an atmosphere of love. He did not seem to notice it.

'Well, have you won anything?' he asked in a hissing little ironical voice.

'Nothing,' said she, opening her arms desolately. She held down her head so as not to weep, looking at the point of her shoes, which had lost their varnish and showed the dirty lining through a split.

'How do you account for that?' the young fellow cried out angrily. 'A woman is always a woman!'

'Is it my fault if the numbers won't come out?' the love-lorn girl said humbly and sadly.

'You should look out for the good ones. Go to Father Illuminato that knows them, and only tells women; go to Don Pasqualino, he that the good spirits help to find out the right numbers. Get it out of your head, my girl, that I can marry a ragged one like you.'

'I know—I know!' she muttered humbly. 'Say no more about it.'