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CORLEONE: A TALE OF SICILY

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CHAPTER I

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'If you never mean to marry, you might as well turn priest, too,' said Ippolito Saracinesca to his elder brother, Orsino, with a laugh.

'Why?' asked Orsino, without a smile. 'It would be as sensible to say that a man who had never seen some particular thing, about which he has heard much, might as well put out his eyes.'

The young priest laughed again, took up the cigar he had laid upon the edge of the piano, puffed at it till it burned freely, and then struck two or three chords of a modulation. A sheet of ruled paper on which several staves of music were roughly jotted down in pencil stood on the rack of the instrument.

Orsino stretched out his long legs, leaned back in his low chair, and stared at the old gilded rosettes in the square divisions of the carved ceiling. He was a discontented man, and knew it, which made his discontent a matter for self-reproach, especially as it was quite clear to him that the cause of it lay in himself.

He had made two great mistakes at the beginning of life, when barely of age, and though neither of them had ultimately produced any serious material consequences, they had affected his naturally melancholic temper and had brought out his inherited hardness of disposition. At the time of the great building speculations in Rome, several years earlier, he had foolishly involved himself with his father's old enemy, Ugo del Ferice, and had found himself at

last altogether in the latter's power, though not in reality his debtor. At the same time, he had fallen very much in love with a young widow, who, loving him very sincerely in her turn, but believing, for many reasons, that if she married him she would be doing him an irreparable injury, had sacrificed herself by marrying Del Ferice instead, selling herself to the banker for Orsino's release, without the latter's knowledge. When it was all over, Orsino had found himself a disappointed man at an age when most young fellows are little more than inexperienced boys, and the serious disposition which he inherited from his mother made it impossible for him to throw off the impression received, and claim the youth, so to speak, which was still his.

Since that time, he had been attracted by women, but never charmed; and those that attracted him were for the most part not marriageable, any more than the few things which sometimes interested and amused him were in any sense profitable. He spent a good deal of money in a careless way, for his father was generous; but his rather bitter experience when he had attempted to occupy himself with business had made him cool and clear-headed, so that he never did anything at all ruinous. The hot temper which he had inherited from his father and grandfather now rarely, if ever, showed itself, and it seemed as though nothing could break through the quiet indifference which had become a second outward nature to him. He had travelled much, of late years, and when he made an effort his conversation was not uninteresting, though the habit of looking at both sides of every question made it cold and unenthusiastic. Perhaps it was a hopeful sign that he

generally had a definite opinion as to which of two views he preferred, though he would not take any trouble to convince others that he was right.

In his own family, he liked the company of Ippolito best. The latter was about two years younger than he, and very different from him in almost every way. Orsino was tall, strongly built, extremely dark; Ippolito was of medium height, delicately made, and almost fair by comparison. Orsino had lean brown hands, well knit at the base, and broad at the knuckles; Ippolito's were slender and white, and rather nervous, with blue veins at the joints, the tips of the fingers pointed, the thumb unusually delicate and long, the nails naturally polished. The elder brother's face, with its large and energetic lines, its gravely indifferent expression and dusky olive hue, contrasted at every point with the features of the young priest, soft in outline, modelled in wax rather than chiselled in bronze, pale and a little transparent, instead of swarthy,—feminine, perhaps, in the best sense of the word, as it can be applied to a man. Ippolito had the clear, soft brown eyes which very gifted people so often have, especially musicians and painters of more talent than power. But about the fine, even, and rather pale lips there was the unmistakable stamp of the ascetic temperament, together with an equally sure indication of a witty humour which could be keen, but would rather be gentle. Ippolito was said to resemble his mother's mother, and was notably different in appearance and manner from the rest of the numerous family to which he belonged.

He was a priest by vocation rather than by choice. Had he chosen deliberately a profession congenial to his gifts, he

would certainly have devoted himself altogether to music, though he would probably never have become famous as a composer; for he lacked the rough creative power which hews out great conceptions, though he possessed in a high degree the taste and skill which can lightly and lovingly and wisely impart fine detail to the broad beauty of a well-planned whole. But by vocation he was a priest, and the strength of the conviction of his conscience left the gifts of his artistic intelligence no power to choose. He was a churchman with all his soul, and a musician with all his heart.

Between the two brothers there was that sort of close friendship which sometimes exists between persons who are too wholly different to understand each other, but whose non-understanding is a constant stimulant of interest on both sides. In the midst of the large and peaceable patriarchal establishment in which they lived, and in which each member made for himself or herself an existence which had in it a certain subdued individuality, Orsino and Ippolito were particularly associated, and the priest, when he was at home, was generally to be found in his elder brother's sitting-room, and kept a good many of his possessions there.

It was a big room, with an old carved and gilded ceiling, three tall windows opening to the floor, two doors, a marble fireplace, a thick old carpet, and a great deal of furniture of many old and new designs, arranged with no regard to anything except usefulness, since Orsino was not afflicted with artistic tastes, nor with any undue appreciation of useless objects. Ippolito's short grand piano occupied a

prominent position near the middle window, and not far from it was Orsino's deep chair, beside which stood a low table covered with books and reviews. For, like most discontented and disappointed people who have no real object in life, Orsino Saracinesca read a good deal, and hankered after interest in fiction because he found none in reality. Ippolito, on the contrary, read little, and thought much.

After Orsino had answered his remark about marriage, the priest busied himself for some time with his music, while his brother stared at the ceiling in silence, listening to the modulations and the fragments of tentative melody and experimental harmony, without in the least understanding what the younger man was trying to express. He was fond of any musical sound, in an undefined way, as most Italians are, and he knew by experience that if he let Ippolito alone something pleasant to hear would before long be evolved. But Ippolito stopped suddenly and turned half round on the piano stool, with a quick movement habitual to him. He leaned forward towards Orsino, tapping the ends of his fingers lightly against one another, as his wrists rested on his knees.

'It is absurd to suppose that in all Rome, or in all Europe, for that matter, there is nobody whom you would be willing to marry.'

'Quite absurd, I suppose,' answered Orsino, not looking at his brother.

'Then you have not really looked about you for a wife. That is clear.'

'Perfectly clear. I do not argue the point. Why should I? There is plenty of time, and besides, there is no reason in the world why I should ever marry at all, any more than you. There are our two younger brothers. Let them take wives and continue the name.'

'Most people think that marriage may be regarded as a means of happiness,' observed Ippolito.

'Most people are imbeciles,' answered Orsino gloomily.

Ippolito laughed, watching his brother's face, but he said nothing in reply.

'As a general rule,' Orsino continued presently, 'talking is a question of height and not of intelligence. The shorter men and women are, the more they talk; the taller they are, the more silent they are, in nine cases out of ten. Of course there are exceptions, but you can generally tell at a glance whether any particular person is a great talker. Brains are certainly not measurable by inches. Therefore conversation has nothing to do with brains. Therefore most people are fools.'

'Do you call that an argument?' asked the priest, still smiling.

'No. It is an observation.'

'And what do you deduce from it?'

'From it, and from a great many other things, I deduce and conclude that what we call society is a degrading farce. It encourages talking, when no one has anything to say. It encourages marriage, without love. It sets up fashion against taste, taste against sense, and sense against heart. It is a machinery for promoting emotion among the unfeeling. It is a—'

Orsino stopped, hesitating.

'Is it anything else?' asked Ippolito mildly.

'It is a hell on earth.'

'That is exactly what most of the prophets and saints have said since David,' remarked the priest, moving again in order to find his half-smoked cigar, and then carefully relighting it. 'Since that is your opinion, why not take orders? You might become a prophet or a saint, you know. The first step towards sanctity is to despise the pomps and vanities of this wicked world. You seem to have taken the first step at a jump, with both feet. And it is the first step that costs the most, they say. Courage! You may go far.'

'I am thinking of going further before long,' said Orsino gravely, as though his brother had spoken in earnest. 'At all events, I mean to get away from all this,' he added, as though correcting himself.

'Do you mean to travel again?' inquired Ippolito.

'I mean to find something to do. Provided it is respectable, I do not care what it is. If I had talent, like you, I would be a musician, but I would not be an amateur, or I would be an artist, or a literary man. But I have no talent for anything except building tenement houses, and I shall not try that again. I would even be an actor, if I had the gift. Perhaps I should make a good farmer, but our father will not trust me now, for he is afraid that I should make ruinous experiments if he gave me the management of an estate. This is certainly not the time for experiments. Half the people we know are ruined, and the country is almost bankrupt. I do not wish to try experiments. I would work,

and they tell me to marry. You cannot understand. You are only an amateur yourself, after all, Ippolito.'

'An amateur musician—yes.'

'No. You are an amateur priest. You support your sensitive soul on a sort of religious ambrosia, with a good deal of musical nectar. Your ideal is to be Cardinal-Protector of the Arts. You are clever and astonishingly good by nature, and you deserve no credit for either. That is probably why I like you. I hate people who deserve credit, because I deserve none myself. But you do not take your clerical profession seriously, and you are an amateur, a dilettante of the altar. If you do not have distractions about the vestments you wear when you are saying mass, it is because you have an intimate, unconscious artistic conviction that they are beautiful and becoming to you. But if the choir responded a flat "Amen" to your "per omnia sæcula sæculorum," it would set your teeth on edge and upset your devout intention at the beginning of the Preface. Do you think that a professional musician would be disturbed in conducting a great orchestra by the fact that his coat collar did not fit?'

Ippolito smiled good humouredly, but did not answer.

'Very well,' continued Orsino at once, 'you are only an amateur priest. It does not matter, since you are happy. You get through life very well. You do not even pretend that you do any real work. Your vocation, as you call it, was a liking for the state of priesthood, not for the work of a priest. Now I do not care about any state in particular, but I want work of some sort, at any cost. I was never happy but once, during that time when I worked with Contini and got into

trouble. I preferred it to this existence, even when we got into Del Ferice's clutches. Anything rather than this.'

'I thought you had grown indifferent,' said Ippolito.

'Indifferent? Yes, I am indifferent—as a machine is indifferent when the fire is out and there is no steam. But if the thing could think, it would want work, as I do. It would not be satisfied to rust to pieces. You ought to know a little theology. Are we put into the world with a purpose, or not? Is there an intention in our existence, or is there not? Am I to live through another forty or fifty years of total inactivity because I happen to be born rich, and in a position—well, a position which is really about as enviable as that of a fly in a pot of honey? We are stuck in our traditions, just as the fly is in the honey—'

'I like them,' said Ippolito quietly.

'I know you do. So does our father. They suit you both. Our father is really a very intelligent man, but too much happiness and too much money have paralysed him. His existence seems to have been a condition of perpetual adoration of our mother.'

'He has made her happy. That is worth something.'

'She has made him happy. They have made each other happy. They have devoured a lifetime of happiness together in secret, as though it were their lawful prey. As they never wanted anything else, they never found out that the honey of traditions is sticky, and that they could not move if they would.'

'They are fond of us—'

'Of course. We have none of us done anything very bad. We are a part of their happiness. We are also a part of their

dulness; for they are dull, and their happiness makes us dull too.'

'What an idea!'

'It is true. What have we accomplished, any of us four brothers? What shall we ever accomplish? We are ornaments on the architecture of our father's and mother's happiness. It is rather a negative mission in life, you must admit. I am glad that they are happy, but I should like to be something more than a gargoyle on their temple.'

'Then marry, and have a temple of your own!' laughed Ippolito. 'And gargoyles of your own, too.'

'But I do not want that sort of happiness. Marriage is not a profession. It is not a career.

'No. At least you might not turn a dilettante husband, as you say that I am an amateur priest.' Ippolito laughed again.

Orsino laughed dryly, but did not answer, not being in a humour for jesting. He leaned back in his chair again, and looked at the carved ceiling and thought of what it meant, for it was one of those ceilings which are only to be found in old Roman palaces, and belong intimately to the existence which those old dwellings suggest. Orsino thought of the grim dark walls outside, of the forbidding gateway, of the heavily barred windows on the lower story, of the dark street at the back of the palace, and the mediævalism of it all was as repugnant to him as the atmosphere of a prison.

He had never understood his father nor his grandfather, who both seemed born for such an existence, and who certainly thrived in it; for the old Prince was over ninety years of age, and his son, Sant' Ilario, though now between fifty and sixty, was to all intents and purposes still a young

man. Orsino was perhaps as strong as either of them. But he did not believe that he could last as long. In the midst of an enforced idleness he felt the movement of the age about him, and he said to himself that he was in the race of which they were only spectators, and that he was born in times when it was impossible to stand still. It is true that, like many young men of to-day, he took movement for progress and change for improvement, and he had no very profound understanding of the condition of his own or of other countries. But the movement and the change are facts from which no one can escape who has had a modern education.

Giovanni Saracinesca, Orsino's father, known as Prince of Sant' Ilario, since the old Prince Saracinesca was still living, had not had a modern education, and his mother had died when he was a mere child. Brought up by men, among men, he had reached manhood early, in close daily association with his father and with a strong natural admiration for him, though with an equally strong sense of personal independence.

Orsino's youth had been different. He was not an only son as Sant' Ilario had been, but the eldest of four brothers, and he had been brought up by his mother as well as by his father and grandfather. There had been less room for his character to develop freely, since the great old house had been gradually filled by a large family. At the same time there had also been less room for old-fashioned prejudices and traditions than formerly, and a good deal less respect for them, as there had been, too, a much more lively consciousness of the outer world's movements. The taking of Rome in 1870 was the death-blow of mediævalism; and

the passing away of King Victor Emmanuel and of Pope Pius the Ninth was the end of Italian romanticism, if one may use the expression to designate all that concatenation of big and little events which make up the thrilling story of the struggle for Italian unity. After the struggle for unity, began the struggle for life,—more desperate, more dangerous, but immeasurably less romantic. There is all the difference which lies between banking and fighting.

And Orsino was aware of qualities and feelings and opinions in his father and mother which he did not possess, but which excited in him a sort of envy of what he regarded as their simplicity. Each seemed to have wanted but one thing in life since he could remember them, and that was the other's love, in possessing which each was satisfied and happy. Times might change as they would, popes might die, kings might be crowned, parties might wrangle in political strife, and the whole country might live through its perilous joys of sudden prosperity and turn sour again in the ferment that follows failure,—it was all the same to Giovanni and Corona. As Orsino had told his brother, they had devoured a lifetime of happiness together in secret. He would have added that they had left none for others, and in a sense it might have been true. But he preferred not to say it, even to Ippolito; for it would have sounded bitter, whereas Orsino believed himself to be only indifferent.

Proud men and women hide their griefs and sufferings, when they have any. But there are some who are so very proud that they will hide their happiness also, as though it might lose some of its strength if anyone else could see it, or as if it could be spoiled by the light like a photograph not

yet fixed. People sometimes call that instinct the selfishness of love, but it is more like a sort of respect for love itself which is certainly not vulgar, as all selfishness is.

It was not probable that either Giovanni or Corona should change in this respect, nor, indeed, in any other, for they had never been changeable or capricious people, and time had made solid their lives. To each other they were as they had always been, but to others Giovanni was a man advanced in middle life and the beautiful Corona Saracinesca was a rose of yesterday.

She could never be anything but beautiful, even if she should live to extreme old age; but those who had known her in her youth had begun to shake their heads sadly, lamenting the glory departed, and seeing only in recollection a vision of it, while they could not see the value of what remained nor appreciate something which had come with years. Strangers who came to Rome and saw the Princess of Sant' Ilario for the first time, gazed in silent surprise at the woman who for nearly a quarter of a century had been the most beautiful in Europe, and they wondered whether, even now, anyone could be compared with her.

The degeneration of age had not taken hold upon her. The perfect features were as calm and regular as fate, the dark skin had still its clear, warm, olive tint, which very rarely changed at all perceptibly; her splendid eyes were truthful and direct still, beneath the strong black eyebrows. There were silver threads in the magnificent hair, but they were like the lights on a raven's wing. She was straight and strong and graceful still, she had been compared to velvet and steel—slighter perhaps than in her full perfection, for

she had in her some of that good Saracen blood of the south, which seems to nourish only the stronger and the finer tissues, consuming in time all that is useless; wearing away the velvet, but leaving the steel intact almost to the very last.

There could be but one such woman in one race, and it seemed in some way natural that she should have been sisterless, and should have borne only sons. But as though nature would not be altogether defeated and stayed out of balance, the delicate feminine element had come to the surface in one of the Saracinesca men. It was too fine to be womanish, too high to be effeminate, as it showed itself in Ippolito, the priest-musician. But it was unmistakably something which was neither in the old Prince, nor in Giovanni, nor in any of the other three brothers, and it made between him and his mother a bond especially their own, which the rest acknowledged without understanding, and respected without feeling that Ippolito was preferred before them. For it was not a preference, but a stronger mutual attraction, in which there was no implied unfairness to the rest.

It is one of the hardest things in the world to explain, and yet almost everyone understands it, for it has nothing to do with language, and everything to do with feeling. We human beings need language most to explain what is most remote from our humanity, and those who talk the most of feeling are often those that feel the least. For conveying a direct impression, what is the sharpened conciseness of Euclid, or the polished eloquence of Demosthenes, what is the sledgehammer word blow of Æschylus, or the lightning

thrust of Dante's two-edged tongue, compared with a kiss, or a girl's blush, or the touch of a mother's hand—or the silent certainty of two-fold thought in one, which needs neither blush, nor touch, nor kiss to say that love is all, and all is love?

And that bond which is sometimes between mother and son is of this kind. It is not strange, either, that the father who looks on should misunderstand it, since it is the most especially human feeling which is often the least comprehensible to those who do not feel it, for the very reason that language cannot convey the impression of it to others. Nothing is less ridiculous than love, except death. Yet a man in love is very frequently ridiculous in the eyes of his friends and of the world, the more so in proportion as he shows the more plainly what he feels. Yet most of those who laugh at him have probably been in love themselves. A cynic would say that the humour of it lies in the grim certainty which others feel that it cannot last. Fear is terribly real to him who feels it, but a man who is frightened without cause is always laughable and generally contemptible. It is true that whereas we are all human and feel humanly, humanity is very hard to understand—because understanding is not feeling, any more than the knowledge of evil is temptation, or than the knowledge of good is virtue. The best description of a sunset cannot convey much to a man born blind, though it may awaken longings in him, and sharpen the edge of his old suffering upon the roughness of a new regret. And yet a description means very much more to most people than an explanation.

Sant' Ilario had long ago accepted the fact that his wife was in some mysterious way drawn to her second son, more than to the others. It would be saying too much, perhaps, to assert that Corona was glad when Ippolito took orders and the vow of celibacy. She was not an imaginative woman, nor nervous, nor in any way not normal. Nor were the Saracinesca by any means an excessively devout family, nor connected with the history of the Church, as many Roman families are. On the contrary, they had in former times generally opposed the popes when they had not been strong enough to make one of their own, and the absence of any womanly element in the great house, between the untimely death of the old Prince's wife, and Giovanni Saracinesca's marriage with the Duchessa d'Astrardente nearly thirty years later, had certainly not favoured a tendency to devotional practices. When young Ippolito made up his mind to be a priest, the aged head of the family growled out a few not very edifying remarks in his long white beard. Even ten years earlier, he might have gone into a rage about it, which might have endangered his life, for he had a terrible temper; but he was near the end, now, and it would have taken more than that to rouse him. As for Giovanni, he was not especially pleased either, for he had never been fond of priests, and he assuredly did not care to have any in the family. Yet, in spite of this prejudice, there seemed to him to be a certain fitness in the event, against which it would be useless to argue, and after a little discussion with his wife, he accepted it as more or less inevitable.

But Corona was satisfied, if not glad, and what she felt was very like gladness, for, without reasoning at all, she knew that she should be jealous of any woman who came between her and Ippolito. She had never been able to think of a possible wife for him—as she often thought of wives for her other sons—without a sharp thrust of pain which could not be anything but jealousy. It was not exactly like what she should have felt, or fancied that she should have felt, if Giovanni had been momentarily attracted by some other woman. But it was not at all like anything else in the world.

She did not know how far Ippolito was aware of this, but she knew beyond doubt that he was instinctively drawn to her, as she was to him. She had that intuitive certainty, which women know so well, that in a moment of danger he would think first of her, precisely as her husband would. Such instincts are, perhaps, but shadowy inklings of the gray primeval past, when women and children knew to whom they must look for protection against man and beast; but they are known to us all in connection with those we love best, though they may never cross our thoughts when we are alone.

There was between her and Ippolito a sort of constant mutual echoing of thought and feeling; that sort of sympathy which, between people of sensitive and unhealthy organisation, leads to those things, not easily explained, to which the name of telepathy has lately been attached as a tentative definition. But these two were not unhealthy, nor morbidly sensitive, nor otherwise different from normal human beings. Corona had never been ill in her life, and if Ippolito had been thought delicate in his boyhood, it was by

contrast with the rest of a family remarkable for most uncommon health and strength.

All this has seemed necessary in order to explain the events which at this time took place in the Saracinesca household. Nothing unusual had occurred in the family for many years, excepting Orsino's rather foolish and most unlucky attempt to occupy himself in business at the time of the great building speculation, and his first love affair, to which reference was made in the beginning of this somewhat explanatory chapter.

CHAPTER II

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When the notorious Prince of Corleone died without much ceremony in a small second-class hotel in Nice, and was buried with no ceremony at all worth mentioning, at the expense of the hotel keeper, his titles and what was left of his lands and other belongings went to his brother's children, since his brother was dead also. The Corleone people were never long-lived, nor had their alliances as a rule conduced to long life in others, who had been their wives and husbands. Superstitious persons said that there was upon the whole family the curse of a priest whom they had caused to be shot as a spy in order to save themselves during the wars of Napoleon in Italy. It was even said that they saw, or thought they saw, this priest when they were about to die. But as priests are plentiful in the south of Italy, it might very well be that their vision was not a vision at all, but simply some quite harmless living ecclesiastic who chanced to be passing at the time. It is true that they were said to notice always a small red hole in his forehead and another in his left cheek, but this also might have been only an effect of imagination. Nevertheless they were unfortunate, as a race, and several of them had come to violent or otherwise untimely ends within the century.

The name, Corleone, was only a title, and the town from which it was taken had long ago passed into other hands. The family name was Pagliuca d'Oriani. As often happens in Italy, they went by whichever one of the three names

happened to be most familiar to the speaker who mentioned them.

At the time of the Prince's death there were living his brother's widow and four children, consisting of three sons and one daughter; and there was another branch of the family, calling themselves Pagliuca di Bauso, with whom this history is not at present concerned.

The widowed lady was known in Sicily as Donna Maria Carolina Pagliuca. Her eldest son was Tebaldo, to whom came from his uncle the title, Prince of Corleone; and his two brothers were named Francesco and Ferdinando. Their sister, a girl seventeen years of age, was Vittoria, and was the youngest.

In the ordinary course of events, being of the south, the three sons as well as their father and mother would have each borne a distinctive title. Corleone, however, had begun life by quarrelling with his younger brother; and when the latter had died, and the property had been divided according to the code introduced after the annexation of Naples and Sicily, he had absolutely refused to allow his brother any title whatsoever. He could not prevent the division of the lands, of which, however, he had by far the larger share; but he could keep the titles, with which the law of succession does not concern itself, and he did so out of spite. Moreover, he injured and defrauded his brother by every means in his power, which was at that time considerable; and the result was that the said brother and his family became very poor indeed, and retired to live in a somewhat barbarous region of Sicily, very much in the manner of farmers and very little in the style of gentlefolks.

He died of the cholera when his eldest son, Tebaldo, was barely of age, and Vittoria was a little girl at a convent in Palermo.

The three young men lived almost in the surroundings of Sicilian peasants, but with the pride and more than the ordinary vanity of a race of nobles. There might not have been much difference had their uncle been generous to them, instead of at once transferring and continuing to them his hatred of their father. But as they were placed, and with their characters, the result was inevitable. They grew up to be at once idle and vindictive, grasping and improvident, half cunning and half fierce, physically brave and morally mean. The many faults and the few virtues were not evenly distributed among them, it is true, for each had some greater or less share of them all. Tebaldo was the most cunning, Francesco the most licentious, Ferdinando was the boldest and the most rash of them all,—perhaps the best, or, at all events, the least bad.

The house which remained to them, with a little land around it, was known as Camaldoli to the peasants and the people of the neighbourhood, though its original name had been Torre del Druso—the Tower of the Druse, or of the fiend, as one chooses to interpret it. It was a good-sized, rambling, half-fortified old monastery, looking down from a gentle elevation in the high valley on one side, and having a deep gorge at the back, through which a torrent tumbled along over dark stones during three-quarters of the year. There was a sort of rampart above this chasm, and at one end rose a square tower with ruined crenellations, built of almost black tufo. It was evidently this tower which had

given the place its more ancient name, before the monks had built their white plastered building against it and the rampart, with the little church in the inner court. The village of Santa Vittoria was about three-quarters of a mile distant, hidden by the spur of the hill, and separated from Camaldoli by a barren stretch of burnt lava and scoriæ, which had descended long ago from some lower crater of the volcano.

Far above all, Etna's enormous cone rose against the dark blue eastern sky like a monstrous, streaked sugar loaf. On each side of the great burnt strip between Santa Vittoria and Camaldoli, the woods and fields stretched north and south towards Messina and Catania, and westwards beyond the valley rose a great range of mountains covered high with forests of chestnut trees. No houses were visible from Camaldoli, nor any shed nor hut which could have served for a human habitation, for it was a wild and lonely country.

The three brothers lived with their mother at Camaldoli, and were served in a rough fashion by three men and four women, almost all of whom were expected to do almost anything, from stable work to cooking and waiting at table. There was a sort of slovenly abundance of coarse food and drink, but there was little else, and many a well-to-do peasant lived better than the sister-in-law and the nephews of Prince Corleone. Donna Maria Carolina scarcely ever left the house in winter or summer. She had been married from a convent, a mere child, had enjoyed a brief taste of luxury and something of happiness at the beginning of life, and had spent the years of subsequent poverty between spasmodic attempts to make gentlemen of her wild sons, bitter outbursts of regret for her marriage, and an apathetic

indifference such as only comes upon women of southern races when placed in such hopeless situations as hers. She was a thin, dark woman, with traces of beauty, dressed generally in shabby black, but strangely fond of cheap and tasteless ornaments, which contrasted horribly with her worn-out mourning. As her sons grew up they acquired the habit of contradicting everything she said. Sometimes she argued her point, whatever it might be, and generally in total ignorance of the subject. Her arguments frequently ended in a passionate appeal to the justice of Heaven, and the right feeling of the saints, though the matter under discussion might not be more important than the planting of a cabbage, or the dressing of a dish of greens. Or else, as sometimes happened, she silently bent her brows, while her once handsome mouth curled scornfully, and from her scarcely parted lips one word came in an injured and dramatic tone.

'Villani!' she would exclaim.

The word may be translated 'boors,' and the three boys did not like it, for it is an outrageous insult from a man to a man. But it is worth noting that such rudeness to their mother did not go beyond flat contradiction in argument, and when she called her sons boors, they bore it in silence, and generally went away without a retort. There are no Italians without some traces of manners and of that submission to parents which belonged to the old patriarchal system of the Romans. It must be remembered, too, so far as this and the rest of their behaviour may be concerned, that although their father died when they were young, he had lived long enough to give them something, though not

much, in the way of education, chiefly by the help of the parish priest of Santa Vittoria, and to teach them the rudimentary outward manners of young gentlemen. And these they were quite able to assume when they pleased. He had succeeded in having them taught at least enough to pass the very easy examination which entitles young men to serve but a year and a few weeks in the army, instead of the regular term; and he had taken first Tebaldo, then Tebaldo and Francesco, and then all three in successive years to Messina and Palermo for a fortnight at a time, so that they were not wholly ignorant of the world beyond Camaldoli, Santa Vittoria, and the one or two larger towns which lay within a day's ride of their remote abode.

It must not be forgotten, either, in order to understand how the brothers were able afterwards to make a tolerably decent appearance in Rome, that Italians have great powers of social adaptation; and, secondly, that the line between the nobility and the people is very clearly drawn in most parts of the country, especially in the matter of manners and speech, so that what little the young men learned from their father and mother belonged distinctively to their own class and to no other. Even had they been outwardly less polished than they really knew how to appear, their name alone would have admitted them to society, though society might have treated them coolly after a nearer acquaintance.

Vittoria, their sister, remained at the convent in Palermo after their father's death. He, poor man, seeing that his house did not promise to be a very fit place for a young girl, and especially not for one delicately organised as his daughter seemed to be, had placed her with the nuns while

still a young child; and under the circumstances this was by far the wisest thing he could do. The nuns were ladies, and the convent was relatively rich. Possibly these facts had too much weight with Pagliuca, or perhaps he honestly believed that he should be able to pay regularly for Vittoria's education and living. Indeed, so long as he lived he managed to send small sums of money from time to time, and even after his death Donna Maria Carolina twice remitted a little money to the nuns. But after that nothing more was sent for a long time. Fortunately for herself, Vittoria was extremely unlike her turbulent brothers and her disappointed mother, and by the time she was ten years old she was the idol of the religious household in which she had been placed. Even had she been very different, of low birth, and of bad temper, the nuns would have kept her, and would have treated her as kindly as they could, and would have done their best by her, though they would very justly have required her to do something towards earning her living under their roof when she grew older. But apart from the child's rare charm and lovable disposition, being of an old and noble name, they would have considered her unfit for menial work, though cast adrift and helpless, and they would have thought her quite as worthy of their sympathy as though she had belonged to the family of one among themselves. All this, however, was quite forgotten in their almost exaggerated affection for the child. They showed their love for her as only such women could; for though there were a dozen other daughters of nobles under their care, of ranging ages, the nuns let no one know that Vittoria was brought up by their charity after her father's death.

They gave her all she needed of the best, and they even gave her little presents which she might think had been sent from home. They told her that 'her mother desired her to have' a Book of Hours, or a writing-case, or a silk handkerchief, or any such trifles. Her mother, poor lady, doubtless did desire it, though she never said so. It was a pious and a gentle fraud, and it prevented the other girls from looking down upon her as a charity scholar, as one or two of them might have done. In dress there was no difference, of course, for they all dressed alike, and Vittoria supposed that her parents paid for her things.

She was a very lovely girl as she grew up, and exquisite in all ways, and gentle as she was exquisite. She was not dark as her brothers were, nor as her mother. It is commonly said that all the region about Palermo is Saracen, but that the ancient Greek blood survives from Messina to Catania; and the girl certainly seemed to be of a type that differed from that of her family, which had originally come from the other side of the island. Vittoria had soft brown hair and clear brown eyes of precisely the same colour as the delicate, arched eyebrows above them, a matching which always helps the harmony of any face. There was a luminous clearness, too, in the skin, which both held and gave back the light like the sheen of fine satin in shadow. There was about all her face the dream-like softness of well-defined outline which one occasionally sees in the best cut gems of the Greeks, when the precious stone itself has a golden tinge. The features were not faultless by any standard of beauty which we call perfect, but one would not have changed the faults that were there to suit rule and