

## Carlo Pittore.



The first thing Jim did on getting out of Morocco was to clean the silver spoons and forks he had painted black before leaving Number Naught. ‘Only hard currency I can take out,’ he claimed, ‘Fortunately I know one or two dealers who give a very good rate of exchange for cutlery.’

The first of these was a heavily mustachioed lady in Valencia at who’s Casa de Huespedes they spent the night. She made a great motherly fuss of David who received an ample ration of the moustache and quite a bit of black silk, scent and voluminous bosoms pressed into service before they went on their way.

At the next stop,- a chateau in Provènçe, Jim disposed of another package which didn’t look like cutlery and smelled strongly as if it came from the kif hills of Ketama. Fortunately the combination of Gentleman Jim and the ancient Austin lulled even the most suspicious customs officers into doffing a benign wave. (‘Anyway your socks would probably blind the scent of any detecting dog,’ commented Jim.)

A formidable female guard of honor greeted their arrival at the Chateau. (‘Rather a matriarchal setup,’ murmured Jim guardedly.) David found himself under intense scrutiny. One old lady even examined him through lorgnettes. Fortunately at this moment a pretty girl trotted down the front steps and made the introductions for him. The major-general was Great Grandmamma; frosty haired, brittle as a poker and aged about one hundred and forty three. The Aide de Camp, Grandma looked as friendly as a prison wardress and Mamma didn’t practice smiling very often either. ‘Ma chere tante’ came goose-stepping over the gravel towards them in riding boots, spurring herself on with a crop as if to encourage her to canter down the drive and tallyhoo over the horizon.

‘Quite a formidable quartet,’ commented Jim later. ‘Makes the Early Gothic ladies of Saint Andrew’s seem almost docile. One glance from Great Grandmamma and you’re emasculated on the spot.’

‘But who are all the other women?’ In and about the house David had counted at least fifteen, all dressed severely in blue and looking as cheerful as candidates for a concentration camp. ‘Only women servants are tolerated,’ said Jim in a whisper. ‘Very Amazonian.. I’m not quite sure about the gardener. I think they’ve turned him into a sort of tame tuber.’



Nicer by far was Roselyne. She who was always laughing and teasing which quite turned David's head as well as producing all sorts of new and not at all unpleasant sensations when he thought of her.

He also enjoyed the food . Later Jim's painter friend Carlo was to exclaim, 'Eating is the most sensual thing I know.' It wasn't quite that despite a few winks from Rosalynne, partly due to the funereal atmosphere and also because at the end of each meal they all had to get down on their knees (servants as well), and pray.



'We pray to God,' announced Grandmamma, withering David with her eye. 'You see,' Jim explained later, 'Catholics are never quite sure what we believe in the C of E. You can't blame them. I don't think the C of E knows either.'

After supper the quartet settled down to bridge, (Great Grandmamam, equipped to win with a large tumbler of brandy and a pipe of Jim's ketama kif.) Meanwhile Rosalynne took David up to his room and kissed him. It was such a dazzling experience that for hours he lay thinking about it until he decided he would like more of the same and interpreting with a Moroccan eye, her freshness as an open invitation he crept down the creaking stairs to find her.

By now the house was quite silent the bridge game having long since packed up when Great Grandmamam had cheated her way to victory. Earlier Rosalynne had showed him her room and although he had to feel his way along the dark unfamiliar corridor he knew which door handle to turn .The room was dark with a musty smell of old flowers and the bed didn't seem to be quite where David remembered it, but he decided to give Rosalynne a nice surprise and taking off his trousers prepared to creep in beside her when the moon peeped through the window revealing the white hair- in- curlers of Great Grandmamma who at this moment turned over heavily to face him and started snoring like a trooper.

David was so terrified he wanted to whimper and when he finally willed his body out of paralysis and crept to the door trousers in hand he had to rush down



into the garden and run about to get the terror out of his system. When he had sufficiently out-distanced the execution eye of Great Grandmamma he was surprised to discover a light in the greenhouse and going cautiously in found the gardener sitting on a bed of sacks, a wig tilted over one eye and a dirty brassiere strapped to his overalls. He was drinking out of a teacup and didn't seem in the least surprised at David who was still clutching his trousers. 'Drink!' he commanded.



Next morning David excused himself from the probing eye of G.G.mamam at breakfast and despite the loss of Rosalyne was quite relieved when they set off south towards the border. 'Once I traveled in a train through Europe with a nun,' Jim said as they approached the Italian frontier over the Col du Lorche. 'Whenever we crossed a frontier she switched languages even in mid sentence. She traveled from Flemish to French to German and Italian. I had to leave the train at Venice but I was almost tempted to stay on just to see how much further she would keep it up.

The journey south was uneventful apart from the evening in the mountains south of Bologna when Jim asked (in English) for a 'room' and to his surprise was handed a glass of rhum instead. 'And it's the one drink I can't stand,' he complained as they drove to the next village.

'It's "camera",' David announced after consulting the dictionary. 'But if room is 'camera' what's camera?'

'Mackina,' said Jim gloomily still smarting from the ignominy of the rhum. 'In Italy everything's a machine, whether it's a typewriter or a lawnmower.'

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'Benvenuti Cari Amici' a banner of welcome strung across the archway into the village greeted their arrival late the following night. Apart from a few yapping dogs no one else did. San Mamiliano heaved to the heady snores of men and beasts. Even Carlo had retired to International Acclaim as he prowled the art galleries of his dreams finding with relief only his own works paraded on the walls.

The jangling bell echoing up from dungeon to turret roused him like a sleeping Giant to come crashing down the many flights of stairs, throwing open the door and roaring through his black beard. 'Amici, friends' and then clasp them both with bear hugs smelling of sweat and turpentine.





‘It’s all Hooker Green Number Two; ’shouted Carlo pulling back the shutters and letting in the spring while down below the dawn donkeys clattered over the cobbles to the well in the piazza ‘Mondrian would have gone mad. He couldn’t stand green.’

David’s eyes opened a little wider than the orange crack of daylight above the mountains opposite and he peered amazed in the morning. Like snow spring had fallen overnight felting the landscape in a green haze. Beyond the village tracks lay drowned in unfamiliar inflorescences; figs trees sheltered by old stone walls stood candelabraed with fat leaves, olives spread tangled heads of silvery blue, vines sprouted yellow fangs and swathes of grassy corn stood waist high in the small steep fields.

Meanwhile outside the encysted walls of this tiny village, man and beast set out to conquer yet another day. Instead of the muezzin the villagers themselves beseeched the saints to be merciful. ‘Have pity San Antonio,’ bellowed Carlo’s neighbor Amador each morning, thwacking his disobedient mule with a stick to back up the saint’s endeavors.

Later while they were eating breakfast on the terrace they could hear him disciplining the hens. He had a wonderful way with hens. First he would inspect the nest boxes and then he would lecture the unproductive hens in a voice terrible enough to loosen any egg bound inside, ‘If you don’t get straight back and lay I’ll wring your cursed necks.’ They knew he meant it too for with scarcely a cackle of complaint they rushed inside and soon afterwards their success story crowed into each dark kitchen reminding the women busily rolling out pasta or pounding dough to think of adding frittata to the daily menu.

Other cries echoed through the village the moment Carlo set foot outside the house. ‘Carlo Pittore, disegna mi disegna mi,’ shouted the small boys as Carlo laboring like a pedlar under the sweating burden of easel, canvasses, paints, wine and panini made his escape into the open countryside. The children chased after him like the Pied Piper until he gained the piazza where the more sophisticated youths called out, -‘Hey, Van Gogh.’ And Carlo clapping his hands to his ears shouted back, ‘No souvenirs yet ‘



San Mamiliano stood perched among forested mountains, its back dug into a green twilight of pine, chestnut and scraggy oak, its front looked over a veil of olive trees and vine terraces tumbling into the valley far below where three ruined castles kept stern unyielding watch on the barbarian mountains rearing up behind.





The next village claimed Albanian pirates had founded San Mamiliano. 'They are all bandits,' they said with contempt 'During the war,' stated the landlord of Bar Pamphili down on the lake, 'I ordered two thousand pine logs and left them stacked beside the track to Leazano. Next day there were only twenty left. They are all thieves.'

The village itself was entered only by a single gateway. Until recently the gate itself had closed every night at nine like a curfew while the village settled down to sleep secure with its sheep and goats oxen and donkeys. The tower of Carlo Pittore was one of four pitched around the walls. Two of the others were derelict (one half filled with rubble and said to contain treasure), and the third taken over by the church with the bells strung up on the top like a Mexican fort.

The insides of Carlo's tower looked like a losing battle between architectural necessity and Carlo's whims of fantasy. In the dungeon arrow slit windows peered through fig trees ravaged by a rain from piss-pots emptied daily out of the windows above.(Lavatories were not something the inhabitants considered necessary and it was definitely unwise to scuttle among the foundations early in the day.) Down here Carlo had built a grotto with fake stalactites and flooded it to make an icy swimming pool. Nine staircases higher he had looped together the wonderful view from the terrace with arches and knitted honeysuckle and rambler rose to clamber over it like a woodland glade sixty feet up.

'When I was young,' he admitted to David, 'I always wanted to live in a windmill.' Above the entrance was inscribed 'Casa delle Alte Speranze'(House of High Hopes) while on the far wall a giant ochre Atlas held up the ceiling ('Nothing much else does,') despite gaudy flames licking his feet, beneath which Dante cried aloud in large letters 'My friends be not cast down by my vexation for whatever plots these fiends may lay against us we will go on!'

The fiends must have inhabited Carlo's artistic ambitions. They certainly didn't live in the village which despite local jibes was a friendly place. At least the human residents were. David discovered that most of his neighbors came out of the pages of Animal Farm and until he learned his way about his friendly knock was more likely to be greeted by a grunt than a Buon Giorno.





One disgruntled mule kicked a hole from his dwelling into the back of Carlo's fireplace and eyed them beadily through the flames while beneath the summer room subsequent floors were occupied by rabbits then pigeons and finally pigs. Without question the strongest man in this village was Amadio. Both David's hands couldn't reach round his massive arms. 'You must be the strongest man in Italy,' he said.

'In Italy?' replied Amadio. 'No, in the World,' and laughed like thunder. Among the ladies, the most dominant was Nazarena who besides her other duties held the official title of 'scoppina' or sweeper. Not that she took this very seriously and when she ventured out with her broom once a month to tackle the heaps of donkey droppings the task usually fell to the first unlucky person she came upon, operating under the command of her reticent vocal instructions. Nazarena was huge hearty and big bosumed. She strode about in heavy boots singing arias while she fed her pigs or baked bread and pizza in an oven big enough to roast Shadrach, Meshack and Abednigo.

Sunny afternoons she sat on a piece of cardboard on her steps crocheting dainty lace napkins and waiting for gossip. At the Saturday night dances in different houses, where one man would play the fiddle and another an accordion, she danced herself silly but next morning would find her toiling dutifully up to the church to make her confessions whenever the bell tolled.

Along with all the other ladies of the village; Sofia, Vaisi, Binetta, Ottavia and Luigetta, Nazarena wrung the necks of her pigeons, skinned rabbits for the stewpot, bottled cauldrons of boiling tomatoes into next years sauce, thrashed the family wash to pieces on the a stone slab by the well, aired mattresses out of the windows, tossed out the bedpans, salted the slaughtered pigs into hams, strung her rafter with the creaking weight of curing sausages and salami, collected olives, laid fires, yelled at her children and embraced them at the same time and sometimes performed her secondary duties as midwife.

It was Nazarena who gave David his anti-tetanus injection when he cut himself on a rusty nail. She had been gutting a chicken at the time and paused to wipe her fingers on a filthy apron, fished a disposable syringe out of a blackened saucepan where it resided in between operations, and ordered his trousers down.

Another of Nazarena's specialties was soap.



Not so much using it although she did occasionally, but making it, which she did more frequently, boiling a cauldron of pigs fat and soda over a simmering fire in the small courtyard outside Carlo's door and beside her stable. The stench was noxious and lingering, while hovering amid these powerful fumes like some hag witch out of Macbeth she stirred the brew with relish. Nazarena offered Carlo a block of the finished product but before he used it a fly dropped on it and dissolved instantly. David was most impressed 'Golly,' said Jim. 'Good thing I didn't try it for shampoo.'

The only person Nazarena seemed afraid of was the village kleptomaniac, Paolo, a well-mannered twelve-year-old, so renowned for his slight of hand that the moment he entered the piazza everyone held onto their pockets and purses. According to Nazarena he'd had all the rings off her fingers and most of the rest of her jewelry. Hard as it was to imagine Nazarena decked out in glitter it was true that no one let Paolo a foot inside their doors and the only time he delivered Jim a parcel his pocket watch went missing. 'Fortunately only a Woolworth's model,' claimed Jim.



Paolo lived next to Natale the village alcoholic. Natale was as generous as his name implied and because his doorway opened directly opposite the archway into it tumbled all the toddling infants who snored away much of their early lives in his liberal creche until indignant mothers whisked them away in a conflicting storm of rebukes and embraces.

Natale was one of the few men who still used oxen to plough. His small fields of grain lay towards Colli but even there he spent more time sitting in the shade imbibing than in guiding and cursing the shambling beasts. Natale was rarely without his rosy smile although sometimes a reckless curiosity took precedence over good manners as when he stumbled into church during the Feast Day mass weaved up to the altar and announced with an interrogative finger, 'What the f... are you all doing?' Don Vincenzo, the local spiritual pilot smiled patiently but the visiting Jesuit priest was outraged. 'This is the house of God' he declared. 'Oh, stuff it up your backside,' said Natale taking a swig from his bottle and strolling out as casually as he came in, and challenging the whole power of the church to thunderbolt him to hell.

The church was the first challenge David met in the village. 'Are you a Christian or a protestant?' demanded Pasquale, the patriarchal philosopher who one always seemed to meet pissing on his peas outside his front door. 'It's my land,' he retorted should anyone object.



The church which inspired fear and respect was a splendid decaying monument to any religion. Hideous painted plaster saints with fingers missing beckoned along each side.

‘I wonder if they realise what improper gestures they’re making,’ murmured Jim, but Carlo wondered if the mutilations might not be intended to create sympathy with the male population who probably shared no more than a dozen fingers between them. ‘They must have been using Nazarena’s soap,’ Jim suggested.

There was the village peg-leg; a rather un-piratical figure no one spoke to. Apart from the peg he stumped about on he had a spare one that he could be frequently seen polishing on his doorstep in preparation for Sundays.

Among the population-thirty in all, ears seemed to be quite popular but eyes were frequently glass or badly crossed often causing David to assume he was being spoken to when he was not. Even his friend Amadio sported a couple of bullet holes of unknown vintage and received in unknown circumstances.

Each Sunday the whole village gathered inside the church, the women shawled and seated, the men in their working clothes standing at the back with arms folded. One by one the women got up to confess. The men never. Of the penitents Nazarena always made a grand entry, beating her not insufficient breasts for her misgivings and calling on all the disfigured saints by name to succor her. The centre of operations, the confessional, resembled a convertible wardrobe with the shelves removed. And the grille was certainly a biscuit tin lid with nail holes punched through. One could still make out bits of a highland kilt on the inside and the words Dundee Shortbread.

Saints and wardrobes apart the church’s most holy relic was a throat, the throat of San Baggio. San Mamiliano shared this particular saint with Palermo but considering the difficulties of travel in bygone centuries if Don Vincenzo had his throat securely in a bottle in Umbria David wondered what bits they had a thousand miles further south.

On his Saint’s Day (San B. was not surprisingly the patron saint of throats) the throat was produced for veneration and everyone lined up to kiss it (in its glass container). At the head of the column Don V. waited like a Red Cross aide to bless all and sundry with a dab of holy oil over their tonsils.





The piazza was the meeting point of the Village Here notices from the Commune were posted and daily the women gathered with their washing. Animals were led down to be watered and horses laden with panniers bulging olives, firewood, bales of hay and pig feed paused for a well earned drink on the way back to their stalls.



Here the village rested, argued, slept, joked, beckoned, kept watch: Old Pasquale stout and stately as a barge horse talking about hares, and only later David realized he meant women and not hunting, 'Life is too short,' he complained, all the long summer days of his years slipping like sand between his fingers.

The oldest resident was Andrea. At ninety seven he lived with his equally ancient wife beside the church and often sat outside warming his frail bones in the sunshine. In his youth he had sailed to America for one hundred and twenty three lire (not enough for a cup of coffee these days) and was in San Francisco during the earthquake. 'I was a vagabond,' he told David, his eyes growing misty as they navigated back through the years along a well worn trail to cities and women who waited benevolent and unchanging. His lips wetted as he smiled them a greeting in his mind.

The watershed of time in the memory of the village remained 'tempo di guerra'. Once Amadio produced for David a tinny recording of Mussolini's oratory and a handful of fascist youth medals, but San Mamiliano had been more than content to remain out of the limelight. When David inquired about glorious exploits they chuckled.

'You know why the besaglieri are always running while they blow their trumpets,' said Amadio. 'They are training for retreat.' He roared with laughter.

As for mention of the partisans and they laughed even more bitterly. 'We lived on chestnuts. What the Germans didn't steal the partisans did. Parasites, not patriots. The scum of Naples. The moment the Germans came they ran away. In fact we had to ask the Germans to get rid of them or else we would have died of starvation.'



Tempo di guerra was also the first time the village met any English. One day three lost soldiers sheltered there. Terrified of German reprisals the village insisted they remain hidden but out they breezed strolling around demanding eggs and bacon for breakfast. 'And we had been living on chestnuts,' roared Amadio. A legacy of these unknown English was a smattering of their native tongue. 'Son ofa beech!' roared Amadio. 'Then they were Americans,' said Jim 'No. The Americans came later. From the English I learn," bloody hell".'



Nazarena chipped in with her favorite phrase always delivered with the sweetest smile. ‘Hallo soldier, when you come back,luv.’ She had worked in the city as a nurse, she said. One nice black shawled lady greeted David each morning with an affectionate ‘fug orf,’ and he hadn’t the heart to tell her it wasn’t exactly the same as Buon Giorno.

Living in the Casa delle Alte Speranze David could hardly fail to notice the difference between the two painters, Jim and Carlo. For while Jim painted essentially as a pastime Carlo could not exist without it. He ate and he slept painting. He even had a pair of worn out boots tied above his bed with the reminder printed underneath ‘Michelangelo went to bed with his boots on.’ When he wasn’t out in the ‘campagna’ (countryside), he was working on paintings in the tower. He painted at a furious rate and when he wasn’t painting he was busily making frames, grinding out paints or boiling up a mess of rabbits skin glue to mix with chalk for a primer on his canvasses. As they cooked mostly over the open fire David viewed and sniffed all dishes with misgivings especially after Carlo put carmine red in the spaghetti sauce by mistake for ketchup.

Not that Carlo was a bad cook. He regarded cooking as another art. The trouble was that he might be studying designs by Leonardo at the same time he prepared supper. Like his painting his concoctions stimulated him to considerable excitement. ‘MMMMmmmm!’ says he tasting the pot, garlicky oil seeping down his thick beard. He has to make gestures like all Italians. A stubby finger twists into his cheek; a hand makes a patter of light kidney chops against his side. This all means that supper is very good. At least it is at this moment of preparation although whether it will be misled by mistake or burn itself to death remains to be seen.

Carlo kept much the same hours as the village, rising before dawn and settling on a hard couch not long after sunset although this was probably more because of a lack of electricity than a wish to keep affinity with the peasants. There was electricity in the village just as there was running water but Carlo hadn’t taken advantage of it. A hosepipe supplied the grotto and buckets serviced the needs of the kitchen. A plentiful supply of oil lamps and trimmed wicks kept the warren of rooms aglow if not exactly bright.

The village post only came up twice a week on a donkey and one morning after David had been down to the piazza to await it, he found Carlo ‘euphoric’ in the summer room cleaning his teeth with one hand and painting lips (Not his own) with the other.



David could scarcely believe that the leering old harridan on the canvass had started out only a few days before as the lovely young daughter of the pizzeria in Ferentillo, but Carlo was a possessive painter and couldn't set her free from his artistic clutches. Too late now. Every dab he adds ages her by ten years at least and gains her expressions that leave little doubt about her moral worthiness. Jim had originally encouraged the enterprise in anticipation of getting a few free pizzas but now he privately admitted that if her father ever saw the portrait they'd be lucky to escape the town without being 'pizza'd' themselves!



'MMmmmm,' said her proud creator. 'What do you think?'

David was a freshman to the game of diplomacy. He had only recently learned that you didn't always say what you thought, but he was still unsure how to sound dishonest honestly. He sought refuge in stuffing his mouth from the debris of food littering the table. 'I was having problems with her mouth,' admitted Carlo. 'But I think I'm getting her now.' With his palette knife he daubed more carmine red on an already carnivorous leer.

Apart from bread crusts David discovered a used tea bag (Carlo hung them on the line to dry out for a second brew), and a piece of cheese smelling strongly of sheep. Unfortunately Carlo had just decided go macrobiotic and only eat brown rice and seaweed. 'You have to balance Ying with Yang,' he had explained the previous evening, swallowing a sugared plum to counter the nasty effects of alcohol.

'Did you know Picasso took three hundred sittings painting Gertrude Stein,' claimed Carlo. 'Then he just wiped out the canvass and painted her overnight by memory. Next day she was horrified. "But I don't look like that." "You will," Picasso replied. And you know what? She did too.'

'God help all those whom Carlo immortalizes with his brush,' murmured Jim later. Fortunately Carlo specialized in self-portraits. Around the wall various hybrid versions of the unrecognized genius fixed David with beady glares.



'One Day.' roared Carlo, 'I shall be up on those walls!' any suggestion that he was already there in some abundance would have been inappropriate for Carlo had that messianic look seeking the promised land waiting for his pictures in the galleries of the Prado, Rjyksmuseum, Tate, Guggenheim.

'AaaaaAAH!' It was not for dramatic effect. Poor Carlo had just mistakenly dipped his tooth brush in his teacup of turpentine.



Spring ripened into early summer. Snails swelled under every damp stone to the delight of Nazarena who collected them in bucketfuls. Larks sang in the swooping sky, frogs gargled, cicadas chattered day long in the olive orchards and under the warm twilight fireflies pricked the dusk with sudden shooting stars.

‘High time you got up to Sensati,’ said Jim. ‘It’s limestone country and if you wait much longer the springs will all go underground. I used to go there and paint. You’ll like it. No one lives there now and the woods feel there are elves hidden behind every leaf. If you listen carefully you may even hear the pipes of Pan.’

Such sentiments were lost on Pablo who elected to go along since Carlo was busy painting the Mayor’s portrait (to enhance his chances in the forthcoming election.) Paolo didn’t believe in taking many provisions. As far as he was concerned the countryside was where food came from. Apart from a blanket apiece and a sheet of plastic they carried an old blackened cauldron that looked distinctly similar to the one in which Nazarena made soap.

Although Jim had pointed out the route from the terrace things are never quite so easy on the ground and Monte Solenne was much steeper to climb than had seemed from afar. It was evening before they reached the spring on the far side of the mountain but on the way Paolo had cornered a fine white hen outside Lorino. Tethered by a string it pecked about happily unaware where it was going. (It was equally unaware that it would not be coming back.) Sitting by the fire roasting sausages (borrowed from someone’s cellar the night before) on sticks, David watched the night for shooting stars. Outside the circle of firelight the black mountains brooded all around.

Next morning they passed through Le Cese huddled on its green hillside with a church clock always reading five minutes to two, and here Paolo’s charm gained them two bottles of wine, a handful of tomatoes and a request from their owner to look out for three horses he hadn’t seen for a month grazing up near Sensati. Out of sight of the village Paolo enriched them further from small patches of potatoes, broad beans, and onions and despite the extra weight, they started up the disused mule path through the forest encouraged by a happy sense of optimism. It was a hot and breathless trek getting up to Sensati. The climb seem never ending but finally the valley with intricate tapestry of fields and villages lay far below while ahead above a precipice of red cliffs Sensati looked as romantic and unassailable as a Morrocan fortress.





For a while now they trotted easily along over carpets of moss speckled with wild flowers and dappled by sunlight overhead, hearing first and then reaching a waterfall cascading down the mountainside among rocks and trees. This was the ideal spot to rest before they edged across the precipice and climbed among tangled undergrowth towards the village high above, buttressed by broken cliffs covered with dense brambles and wizened oaks.



In a neglected orchard they discovered the three horses of Lé Cese grazing under the trees. The only water here was a stagnant pool full of leeches but the horses approached them with friendly confidence and carried them bareback up a steep slope and along a path of their own making to a mossy glade in the forest with a stream splashing brightly over the rocks beside it.

Now practical considerations took over. They built a bivouac with bent branches plugged by wads of moss and spread the plastic inside. Hen was put out to peck and. Paolo tied three sticks into a tripod to hang the cauldron over the fire. Above the camp they could spy onto Sensati. It was difficult to realise it had been abandoned twenty years. White cattle grazed the steep pastures below the stone houses and it was easy to imagine the same sounds as San Mamiliano; snatches of song, chopping wood, dogs barking and smudges of smoke from the tiled rooftops.

When they explored the village next day they found the animals really had taken over. From open doorways cattle with swept back horns watched the human intruders and when David approached the church a black bull suddenly darted out and challenged him with fierce snorts. Beyond the village rose the peak of Castelmonte. 'One day,' Carlo had told them, 'The government is going to dig there. They say there's an ancient settlement.'



In fact the fortified ruin on the top was little more than a jumble of foundation stones with a fine view south over snowcapped mountains and north across the broad plains leading to Assisi. While they were lazing about Paolo discovered pieces of human skull. It was easy to trace these to a loosely filled in pit within what might have once been a gateway and digging with their knives they opened up the top of a tunnel where to their amazement they came on a heap of skeletons twisted in all directions.



Lying by turns in the cramped space, hair and eyes full of falling dirt they pried out a skull or two and David was patiently working on freeing a bony hand from the earth when the fingers fell apart in tiny segments revealing a coin they had been clutching through the centuries, 'Probably the fare to pay the ferryman,' said Jim later when they showed him. But now filthy from archaeology but proud of their loot they trekked back to camp too hungry to consider reprieving Hen a moment longer. Unfortunately it was not the most instant of executions. David was more concerned with not chopping off his own fingers and Paolo had to chase the half headless hen while it leaped and flapped bloody about the clearing. Then while he plucked David sharpened a spiky stick for a spit and soon dinner was sizzling over the embers. Although it was a bit scorched here and there they were too hungry to be fussy and burned their own fingers gnawing semi cooked legs and bullet hard potatoes raked from the ashes.

That night the forest prowled restless on every side and David lay wide awake with his imagination and indigestion for company until the sudden long drawn out howl of a wolf had him clutching at Paolo for reassurance. He didn't feel safe until dawn turned the black forest to grey.

As summer grew fat and lush one of the attractions of San Mamiliano was the nearby lake winding among the roots of the mountains. At one end it overflowed into the Velleno River just before this plunged over the Cascada delle Marmore more than two thousand feet into the Val Nera below.

On weekdays most of this flow was led away to feed the turbines of Terni but the remaining trickle filled deep clear pools hanging among the wooded cliffs and here David loved to go swimming and diving. Once he took Paolo and they covered themselves all over with black mud and terrified some camping tourists. Another day they found a dead horse bloated in the pool above where they had been swimming, but generally it was a superb place to go especially as there were grottos and caves to explore as well.

'Byron was so impressed by these falls that he wrote three verses on them in his Childe Harold.' Carlo told him at supper, adding, 'Apart from Shakespeare he's regarded abroad as one of the greatest English poets. Much more so here than in England. His statue in the Bhorghese gardens is about the only one that doesn't get regularly defaced. I suppose,' he added, 'that being an English lord and traveling about Italy with a double bed in his coach undoubtedly improved local appreciation of his poetry.'



'He fought for Greek independence,' protested David. 'Didn't he die at Missolonghi.'

'He certainly raised troops for battle, and defended the town in dreadful circumstances, but he died of fever aided no doubt by the doctors who insisted on bleeding him. Still it was a noble demise.' By now David was thoroughly aroused. Byron was one of his heroes and he took Jim's insults personally. 'What about the Hellespont. I suppose he didn't swim across that despite his club foot.'

Jim winked. 'He did. I'm not putting him down you know. He created a marvelous legend or someone did for him. That's much more important in the long run. It's myths that history thrives on, not facts.'

'But how can you make up what happened?'

'Easily.' Jim chuckled. 'I do it all the time.'

Two events of local interest happened about this time. Montefranco held its annual carnival and Ferentillo its elections and as Jim said there was not a lot of difference between them.

Centuries before Montefranco's Saint Bernardino had passed this way resting at a convent below the village. This brief visit had not been forgotten although Montefranco showed a rather militant way of remembering it.

The day began early with Don Vincenzo conducting a mass at the church while the rest of the population donned their medieval doublets, hoisted banners, dusted antiquated muskets, polished the horses, carried out the cannons and. started unrolling the procession downhill towards the convent. At this point Don V. seranded by the town brass band appeared in the piazza surrounded by young acolytes all tripping over their ankle length surplices.

After a dozen conflicting signals everyone started. Far ahead cannons boomed tossing up clouds of smoke and. gravel. Behind them the riflemen busy with ramrods, powder horns and flints were half pulled off their feet by their exploding muskets. The horses reared, the choir sang, Don V. prayed with the aid of battery operated loudspeaker hidden under his cotta, the brass band struck up, the various squads of banners tilted at various angles and finally bedecked with plastic flowers the Saint himself atop a tiny 'cinquacento' car propped up by men more accustomed to propping up the local bar than the local effigy. Once on the move he jerked his way down the track his halo tilted at a crazy angle followed by a rearguard of black-shawled big-bosomed ladies chanting their mantras.





This colorful bedlam continued down to the crossroads below the convent where the horses dutifully staled, earth was dug from the boundary with Arrone to show which village was mightier and then everyone retired to the shade where smart entrepreneurs sold ice cream, soft drinks, cheeses, music cassettes and plaster replicas of San Bernardino.

There was no need to attend the mass. In true Moslem style Don V had placed loudspeakers from the trees so that everyone could enjoy his sermon through a conflicting medley of popular melodies. After the service the perspiring procession wound uphill in reverse, sweaty, stinking of gunpowder, blackened with powder stains, banners flagging, urged on by the band and the religious suffragettes at the back, indomitable as only Italian ladies can be. Back to Montefranco to feast and drink, get out of their overheated hosen and get ready for the horse races in the afternoon.

Horse races took place most weekends during the summer in one village or another. Amadio maintained they were the same horses simply painted a different colour and as the owners all arrived together there was a definite reluctance to gamble until word got round who it had been decided should win. On this particular day riders and owners suddenly went on strike for more prize money which after furious arguments the Commune was compelled reluctantly to agree to pay.

The races started amid great confusion. The horses—all stallions shod in aluminum shoes for the tarmac road, reared and bucked, while the riders all tried to gain the advantage, using whips, elbows, and spurs to force their adversary into the crowd which promptly went berserk. Meanwhile the mounts are away in a stampeding clatter of hooves up the street out of the village, under the olive trees crowded with spectators and on up to the finish. This went on all afternoon pausing only, as Amadio claimed, while the horses were being re-sprayed. The Commune had the last word announcing that owing to fouls in the final and many unresolved complaints no prize money would be issued.



A free-for-all fight immediately broke out between the supporters of the owners, the supporters of the town and anyone else who felt like joining in. The Police discreetly retired to the bar until alternate diversions attracted the general attention. Meanwhile in the piazza a lady opera singer had been led out to torture Tosca accompanied—if that adequately describes the effect, by the town band. Free wine and 'broschetto' were on offer and the communist party organized games.



David made the mistake of watching preparations for the spaghetti eating contest and found himself unexpectedly pushed into the line of entrants, his hands tied behind his back and his head poised over the steaming peppery pasta. A whistle blew and gobbling commenced. Infancy in Tangiers must have helped, or the lack of lunch for suddenly his plate was empty and peering up through congealing strands of spaghetti he found he had won second prize (Five hundred lire) .



There were all the usual games and a tug of war, but the most entertaining had to be blind-folded citizens trying to smash with a long staff clay pots strung across. One held money but the rest contained such entertaining ingredients as flour, water, soot, sawdust, urine and donkey droppings. Apart from one man who went mad and tried to beat his head against a wall every one got liberally covered with filth until the crock of gold broke and the crowd went into the bar to help the winner spend the proceeds.

Ferentillo visible by its tile roofs down below in the valley was chiefly famous for its 'mummi', a crypt where in addition to several thousand skulls a whole parade of mummies in various stages of agony and torture were on parade under the optimistic sign 'Me today, you tomorrow.' There was even a Chinese couple with neat smiles and perfect teeth who died there on their honeymoon, 'Perhaps from a surfeit of earlier elections,' suggested Jim.

During the weeks preceding elections each party in turn, made the pilgrimage up the mountain to San Mamiliano to convert the unconvertible, for Don V. had already written on a blackboard in the church which names to vote for and which names would doom the voter to excommunication and all the appropriate fires of hell. No concepts of Christian Marxism for Don Vincenzo.

First to arrive was Mario the mayor and leading local Christian Democrat. He breezed in like a presidential campaigner smiling at everyone, kissing babies, getting embraced by Nazarena, shaking hands or stumps, having his pocket pinched by Paolo and trying hard to laugh when he stepped in something unfortunate. Meanwhile Mario's aides had rigged up a barrage of loudspeakers so that when he got up to speak just about every grazing donkey and idle olive tree on the mountain was blasted by his rhetoric. Mario's message was simple. A vote for him would ensure a nice distribution of grants to just about everyone in the village; roofing repairs, cattle ramps, fencing posts, planting grain What he actually said was, 'Friends, brothers, citizens. I have not come her to discuss political problems (audible sigh of relief from audience both human and other).

I have come to discuss your domestic problems. 'He then got down to listing them, or rather to listing the hand-outs concluding with, 'And for the whole village a public telephone.' By this time all the San Mamilianese were cheering their heads off and waving whatever bands and fingers they possessed.



Twenty seven political parties later came the communists. Like missionaries they seemed to sense they were in pagan territory. Don Vincenzo was not on hand to bless them and unlike Mario they made no attempt to convert the countryside. Reasonable men they spoke without the aid of microphones but their message missed the village by a long shot. 'We offer you liberty!' they announced. Mind you they offered it around with the generosity of those who don't have to foot the bill; liberty here, liberty there until

according to Jim you imagined it falling like divine ambrosia from the Red Gods on field and on factory.

The local downtrodden proletariat remained unimpressed. 'Liberty,' snorted Pasquale, 'What use is that. You can't eat it, you can't sleep with it and. we have it anyway, don't we?' The commune of Perentillo consisted of eighteen villages but the result was never in doubt. While the rest of the nation veered to the left, Ferentillo swung sharply to the right. Don Vincenzo celebrated with a barbecue outside the church and the posts for the public telephone started march their way up the mountain.

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Every summer Carlo set off south on his motorbike to paint and this year David joined him. There wasn't a lot of room with two of them on the bike. The spare space hung with a roll of canvass, paints and two dozen frames. They journeyed south sleeping in fields, wandering haphazardly across country from the Palazzo Reale at Caserto to the forgotten acropolis at Cuniae, Carlo reading his Aeniad as if it was a Michelin Guide, finding the cave of the Sybill green and still as a forgotten memory and the sacred way leading up through oak trees to the temple of Jupiter. While below spread out lazily the wine dark seas tempt them southwards.

South of Salerno they slept on a beach beyond the pine forest and sped on south into Calabria, strips of sand webbing rocky promontories flower potted with crumbling towers and tangled with wild figs and olives. Here Carlo took up summer residence in a stone hut formerly the domicile of sheep but now only of their perfume and their fleas. And here he painted.

He painted Calabria never stopping from dawn until the light lessened, working stripped to the waist in an old sun hat among the tangy myrtle until the sullen hut, half-buried beneath yellow and flaming oleander listed still further under the onslaught of his colours. Gorgeous as hot July they were seas roaring like lions in the narrow inlets, twisting trees, grinning peasants, tumbling terraces, rocks ochre and agate spilling light, laughter, shadow, surf and sand where in fact he slept each night stretched out like a piece of driftwood. Camerota lay three miles over the headlands and sometimes in the evening they walked in for supplies and to eat at Elicio's bar. Elicio, half-boy half-beast hobbled over to collect their plates muttering his hardly coherent dialect thumping Carlo possessively, handing him seashell treasures. Like a figure left over from mythology his eyes gleamed with a rare exuberance. Hunchback, web footed, greeting them from another world while below in the harbor where small boys fished for anchovies the swordfish boats came in out of the ocean's eye seeking fresh hospitality.



Even here wherever Carlo went the children followed calling for him to paint them while Elicio hobbled after shouting them away, laughing, carrying Carlo's paints. And even when David had gone away into all the adventures that lay ahead from far off sometimes the two of them would share his memory, figures in the mind's mural, tasting life like fire eaters. Carlo clapping his ears when the youths shouted 'Van Gogh,' and the small-boy voices calling, calling, 'Carlo, Carlo Pittore, disegna mi, disegna mi, disegna mi.'

